

NOTES on the Len Sweet presentations at the Pastor-Mentor Conference at OCC Oct 22, 2009

These notes have been created by Gary Tiffin in attempt to capture the key points of the lectures in sequence of presentation. These notes may not appear linear or sequenced, partly because Sweet talked without notes, and sometimes was responding to the audience. Some liberty has been taken to help the reader who was not present to understand context and meaning, as these notes were created.

“The Art of Followership”

9:30 LECTURE

Key to future of the church: learn the language of our culture. 1973 was the critical crossroads when Martin Cooper invented the cell phone. This moved us from the Gutenberg (B.C. = before computers) to the Googlie (A.C. = after computers) generation. This transition far more important than recent “generational” analyses (Gen X, etc.).

The Google world communicates in images, not words as in the Gutenberg world most of us inhabit. So most churches still talk to a Google world with words, which is why we are not reaching that generation. We need image

statements more than mission (words) statements for our congregations. Images are more powerful than words – have greater power than words to control and influence us.

Matthew 28: Googlies focus on the “go” of the Great Commission, while the Gutenbergs communicate “come” to our church.

The United States is far behind the rest of the world (14th) in internet connectivity. The world (some preindustrial) have bypassed us. There are 3.3 billion cell phones in a world of 6.6 billion people. Even the poor can rent minutes on cell phones without owning them.

TV is Gutenberg: created the megachurch, couch potatoes, and Wal-Martization of the church.

Telephone poles and wires = Gutenberg world.

In a Google world you do not buy products, you buy relationships (two year contract on your cell phone!!). Cell phones are a point of contact – giving access to books(millions) as well as people. Internet access should be considered a utility as much as water and electricity – i.e., it is assumed.

MAJOR IMAGE – “Football”

Most of us are immigrants in the Google world. Not understanding and fearful, we “huddle” in an attempt to maintain the “old” country. We should think of the mission on Christ in football terms:

- **scoring touchdowns = conversions**
- **cheering for new converts as after touchdowns**
- **spending as much time on offense as possible (best way to score!!) Too often the church plays defense more than offense.**
- **The offensive mindset includes two elements**
 1. **The huddle (church seems to always be in huddle) The purpose of the huddle is not to huddle.**
 2. **Moving down the field (proactive offense)**
- **In football, if you huddle too long, you are penalized, and have to move backward. It often appears that the church likes to stop and move backwards.**
- **Some current Christian thinkers want to totally abandon the huddle and go “no huddle”. (forget buildings, formal structures, etc.) But we do need to learn the signals, plays, and coordinate --- to move down the field and score. The church has always had a huddle.**

Baptism ordains us to ministry (to Christians) but also to mission field (non-Christians) – which is

the essence of moving down the field. There really are no mission trips, because all of the Christian life is a mission trip.

The word “leader” does not appear in the NT, but the word for disciple (FOLLOWER) appears many, many times. We have made a critical category mistake: Jesus is the leader, we are the followers. The last 30 years of hundreds of books on leadership has miscast Christian leadership as a mandate centering upon us, rather than Jesus. We do not need to “cast the vision” – Jesus has already done that. We already have the vision we need.

Christianity is dying in the West. Our so called church growth (megachurches) is really a reconfiguration of dying churches.

We really have a reproduction crisis: the only way to hit a moving target (quarterback to end) is to get ahead of it. Give your receiver a lead. Therefore the church must get ahead of our culture, in order to successfully move down the field and score. We need to help give Christians a lead!

Final thought: Jesus is always ahead of his disciples in the NT: we need to catch-up and join where Jesus is working!!

11:00 LECTURE

The Bible is really stories, poems, and songs. We have divided it into verses (versitis). We should be “adverse to verse”. In a Google world we do not “verify by versify” Images and stories carry the real meaning of the Bible. Image and story is the language of our Google culture (not verses and words). This is the way Jesus taught!! - - “The Kingdom of Heaven is like . . . “ followed by a story/parable. A Google world will not listen to our 30 minute sermons, they will listen and connect with three minute stories (Biblical, too).

Insert: Jesus died on the cross in community with two other convicts. So of the three, one was good, two were bad, and one of the bad became good. They constituted the first Christian community – yes, and one-third was “bad”. So, do we have bad people in our churches? Not moving down the field if not bad people in church.

COMPARING APPLES WITH ORANGES

Apples are eaten as a whole, bite by bite. They are organically whole. This is the Google way – very holistic.

Oranges are peeled and taken apart which is the Gutenberg way. We specialize and segment, from

business to education to organization. When do we preach from the Bible (as a whole)? We specialize by particular texts or pieces. We have over dissected it as to lose its holistic meaning.

Navel oranges are preferred because they are upper sweet (came from 19th c. S. America). They are sweet because the “navel” is a twin. The surviving one (our orange) sucked the life out of the twin leaving a vestige remainder. So our preference for the navel orange fits us well. It is all about us, in terms of our Gutenberg approach to individualism. So we love our books through which we never encounter the author personally. This is an anti-social approach with silent conversations with absent authors. Gutenberg print culture separates us while Google connects us.

In the same century (16th) when Gutenberg invented moveable type (printing press), Martin Luther made his famous statement at the Diet of Worms ‘ HERE I STAND’. The word “here” referred to the past (Goolies are about now), “I” is very Gutenberg in terms of individuality, and “Stand” referred to Luther’s personal view (as against a community view). Gutenberg people take stands (the cause of Christ), while Googlies are more concerned about connectedness and relationships.

New forms of connectedness: Chat rooms symbolize essence of Googlies. Churches want to take stands and deal with propositions, not relationships. Video game industry now generates twice the revenue of Hollywood(very Gutenberg). Church needs to be a relational place.

Googlies need the Gutenbergs (vice versa too). Example: the half life of most advanced education (medicine, engineering, etc) is under 6 years, which means information and data is not the essence of professional development and success. Google “wisdom” is very recent/up to date, and Goolies certainly have the wisdom of experience in the current world. Without bearings and continuity (Tiffin terms), Googlies need the idealism, hope, nerve, and optimism we traditionally have associated with the young. So Gutenbergs have turned the generational characteristics upside down!!

Major Comment: If you like what is going on at church, it likely doesn't work for the “world” or those we are supposed to be “winning to Christ”. We only have stuff at church that we like, and thus cannot connect with the Googlies at all. Our church is for us!! Not them.

2:00 LECTURE

Gutenbergs resent Google use of cell phones during lectures, church, and other “respectable” situations. Issue is texting. The cell phone is the new Bible (do you have it on your phone/blackberry?)

We are to join Jesus on the mission field – can we discern what he is already doing? We need to learn to read “signs” – Jesus had a “sign” ministry. He condemned those in Matt 16:1-4 who could not read the signs. Sign language is very essential to discerning what Jesus is doing today. Interestingly, the ear (not the eye) is the gate to the world. Eyes signify control, while ears are for receiving, which is what we must learn. Ears are the spiritual gateway.

“Semiotic” awareness is the key.

Semiotic=pertaining to signs. When we purchase a particular brand (say a car) we suddenly see our brand everywhere. Were they not there before? In semiotic awareness, we see things never seen before. If we find the Bible and/or church boring, we are experiencing semiotic breakdown. If it is boring, it is the “bland leading the bland”.

FOLLOWERSHIP

Sweet new book in 2010: Nudge:awakening each other to the God who is already there.

- Sweet disagrees with Rob Bell (Mars Hill in Seattle) who views followership as being “dusted by Jesus”, or trying to be like him. WWJD?
- “Like Jesus” is really very bad news since it is an impossible goal. Can we be like Mozart? Or Michelangelo?
- Jewish author Alan Hirsch in his concept of “Rejesus” wants us to become more like Jesus – but we should not mimic Jesus, but rather manifest him. Christ in Me is the idea. The Good News is that Jesus can live in me.
- So we can really do more than Jesus! (abolishment of slavery was not accomplished by Jesus, but by his followers) Women were not admitted to Harvard and Princeton until 1969 – we did that!!
- “If we did what Jesus did (literally), we would not be doing what Jesus did”. In effect, since we live in a different time and culture, we have to “update” what Jesus did in terms of our categories, culture, and meanings.

In the first century, to be holy meant to avoid, disdain, and separate from sinners and anything unclean. (food, menstrual, blindness, leprosy – which was any skin abnormality) Holiness = uncontaminated by the unclean. Jesus “flips it” by teaching and demonstrating that holiness = involvement with sin, sinner, and the abject. Feet were considered more filthy than one’s “arse” or

butt, but Jesus washed feet. Jesus touched lepers, so we too must get our hands dirty and wet. We are to spread the “God virus”.

In response to an audience question about the tension between justice and evangelism, Sweet responded by saying, Be careful! Justice is what is left when Jesus leaves the building. We personally do not want justice, we personally want mercy. We are to do justice, but love mercy and walk humbly. There is no mercy in justice.

Mission statements are backwards. It is not a congregational mission, but God/Christ’s mission. The question is whether or not God’s mission is going to have a church. We have to choose to be part of God’s mission.

Truth is Jesus, not a set of propositions, 5 pillars, or the Torah(613 commandments). God sent us a person, not a proposition. God sent us a redeemer and saviour, not a theological statement.

As the world becomes more global, we will have to become more tribal. There are lots of ways (tribes) to follow Jesus. God’s work is done through tribes (denominations?)

First commandment in Bible: Genesis 2;16

“eat freely”

Last commandment in Bible: Revel. 21:17

“drink freely”

This is the framework of the story of God

**Note: the notes on this page appear
miscellaneous because they were offered in the
context of discussion with the audience.**