Clearing the Hurdle of Maintenance to Multiplication

My daughter ran hurdles in high school until she face planted on one. I don’t know if it was her front foot or back foot that got caught. We weren’t there. The paramedics called us while the ambulance was on the way to the hospital. She knocked herself out and came to while in the ambulance. They allege that she said some things that sailors have been known to say while under intense pressure. You can lose your religion by stumbling over a hurdle. Many churches do.

The early church had to clear three hurdles to multiplication. The first hurdle was persecution. They were told to not speak in the name of Jesus. They cleared the hurdle and the number of disciples multiplied (Acts 4). The second hurdle was corruption. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. They literally face planted over that hurdle. But the church cleared it in the fear of God. They continued to multiply (Acts 5).

After clearing the hurdles of persecution and corruption, the early church still had to clear one more hurdle. The third hurdle to multiplication is maintenance. When the disciples multiplied, the church had to clear the hurdle of maintaining what they obtained without stopping multiplication.

When the church multiplies, resources that were once used for outreach are demanded for maintenance. The church faced this hurdle in Acts 6. “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1).

Multiplication created the need to take care of those in the church but when meeting needs becomes the focus of the church multiplication stops. Many Christians trip over this hurdle because they believe their mission is to meet needs. I can hear the need-meeters saying, “What could be more important than caring for widows?” Or they might say, “This is our opportunity to send a clear message of racial reconciliation by Hebrew Apostles serving Greek speaking widows.” This is just the kind of thing that will win the world, they think.

The Apostles thought different. They said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). “Desirable” is the New King James translation. The old King James said, “It is not reason.” Desirable is a sensitive word for a complaining age. But to say “it is not reason” means the apostles thought that you are out of your minds if you think we are leaving the gospel to serve tables.

Maybe I overstated it a little bit. But “not desirable” understates it. That’s our problem. The church understates how maintenance mode stops multiplication. In most churches (not an overstatement) the time, resources and energy of the church are spent on maintaining what is obtained and usually the complainers get the most attention.

The Apostles faced that hurdle and cleared it. Acts 6 begins with multiplication and six verses later it says, “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7). Sandwiched in between two affirmations of multiplication were the demands of maintenance. The Apostles cleared the hurdle of maintenance through delegation.

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