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Book Review: Primary Purpose: Making It Hard for People to Go to Hell From Your City by Ted Haggard

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Book Reviews

*Primary Purpose:
Making It Hard for People to Go to Hell From Your City*

Reviewed Jerry L. Graham

According to C. Peter Wagner, there are two communities in the United States that have been the most overtly affected by the intentional effort of strategic level spiritual warfare – Colorado Springs, Colorado and Hemet, California. In both cases, a single pastor can be identified as the one who was used by God to be the genesis of what later grew into a community-wide effort of local churches taking action to change the spiritual atmosphere surrounding them. In the Winter, 1996 issue of AECM's *Vision Magazine*, C. Peter Wagner wrote about Pastor Bob Beckett's role in Hemet in the article entitled "Smart Bomb Praying." The Colorado Springs story is best told in Pastor Ted Haggard's recent book, *Primary Purpose: Making It Hard for People to Go to Hell From Your City*. This important book is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

In 1985, Colorado Springs was an acknowledged center of the occult and the New Age Movement. There were over 100 active covens of witches. Only a few para-church ministries, such as the Navigators and Young Life, were located in this Colorado city which experience had led many to consider to be a veritable graveyard for pastors. It was also in 1985 that an Oral Roberts University graduate, Ted Haggard, moved to Colorado Springs leaving his position as an associate pastor with Bethany World Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Haggard had the ambitious intent of planting a church – ambitious because most church plants in Colorado Springs had failed. He began, like

many aspiring church planters, by having meetings in his home.

Today, the church that God led Ted Haggard to begin has emerged as one of the largest churches in Colorado Springs with well over 6,000 members. But New Life Church has not grown in the midst of a spiritual vacuum, nor at the expense of other surrounding churches. Colorado Springs now has over 100 churches that are growing through conversion growth. In the last ten years the number of so-called "life-giving" churches in the area has grown from 10% to fully half of the churches today. Haggard defines a life-giving church as "one that emphasizes the absolutes of Scripture and imparts the life of Christ." The average annual growth rate of these life-giving churches during the ten-year period of 1983 to 1993 was 8.5%.

The crime rate in the city dropped significantly through this time period, leading a Colorado Springs Police Department spokesman to boast that the city had become numbered among the safest cities of its size in the nation. Additionally, the number of witches covens had dwindled to no more than five. The number of para-church ministries in the city of Colorado Springs has tripled in the half-decade interval between 1989 and 1994. The life-giving churches as well as the para-church ministries all have agreed to a common goal or purpose. That "primary purpose" is simply to win the lost. Or to say it another way, to "make it hard for people to go to hell" from Colorado Springs.

Peter Wagner calls Haggard a catalyst among pastors. Pastoring one of the largest charismatic church in what has become the Mecca of the West, while at the same time serving on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals as well as the boards of the Colorado Springs Association of Evangelicals, Global Harvest Ministries, Every Home for Christ, and the Center for Christian-Jewish Dialogue, Haggard has a unique gifting and temperament which allows him to move comfortably between evangelicals and the hard-line Pentecostals and charismatics. Pastor Haggard's strong influence in the areas of church growth and evangelism has been the subject of writers from the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, U.S. News & World Report, Charisma Magazine, as well as journalists from ABC, NBC, and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Last year, Ted Haggard wrote what may become one of the most important books of the decade regarding the spiritual is-

sues behind church growth. *Primary Purpose*, subtitled *Making It Hard for People to Go To Hell From Your City*, is one of the seminal books of the 90's according to Wagner. The book is literally a manual on how to get pastors in a community to unite. However, it is not a book about church unity, but is rather a book about evangelism – about winning the lost. It is the story of how the evangelical fervency among the pastors and their congregations led to unity as a means to the end, i.e., unity became a by-product of their primary purpose rather than their initial goal.

The heart of Haggard's book is the combination of principles and lifestyles he enumerates which have made it possible for the life-giving churches in the area to work together toward achieving their primary purpose, i.e., making it hard for people to go to hell. Following those principles and lifestyles produced the significant and measurable societal shifts described in the preceding paragraphs.

The first of the principles Haggard outlines is that of agreeing to focus on the absolutes of Scripture. He draws a clear distinction between the absolutes of Scripture, or the unchanging foundations of the Christian faith, and the interpretations ("this means"), deductions ("I think"), and subjective opinions and feelings ("I prefer") which tend to be the focus of most Christians. His premise is that the Christian community self-destructs when it comes to the potential for impacting a city's spiritual climate, due to the unfortunate stressing of the differences which surround non-essential issues.

Haggard agrees that non-essentials are important, but should never be the source of a Christian's identity. They unnecessarily divide the Christian body into small, ineffective segments. Haggard's alternative as described by this first principle is to preach and teach the full menu of what the church believes while in church, but when outside the church, the leaders and members should focus on the absolutes. The result would be, as has been shown in Colorado Springs, that non-Christians hear the same basic absolutes from the total Christian community. The absolutes are what the lost need the most. After they are regenerated they can make choices regarding the non-essentials. In other words, churches should stop stressing the ways they are different, and begin to demonstrate to the community the ways that they are alike.

The second principle Pastor Haggard cites is that of promot-

ing the ministry of Christ and His Word. Here he distinguishes between the idea of comparative activities versus proactive activities. Examples of comparative activities include promotional material that compares one church or one group with another, e.g., the “best” Sunday School, the “friendliest” congregation, the “largest” choir, etc. Haggard contends that this kind of comparison mentality implies that competition exists between churches, and actually encourages saints to leave one church in order to attend another. He maintains that comparison activities teach Christians to value the wrong things.

Haggard is not degrading the need to advertise and otherwise promote the local church. Indeed, New Life Church advertises extensively in the Colorado Springs area using a gamut of media ranging from television to billboards. His point is that church advertising should be proactive and focus on the absolutes of Christianity instead of focusing on the non-essentials. Christ and His work should be promoted first, and only then should any distinguishing features of a church or group be promoted. Benefits of proactive activities include encouragement of conversion growth over transfer growth, edification of other Christians to grow where they are, and the promotion of godly attitudes.

The third principle presented in the book is that of praying to raise the “water level” of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the area. By “water level,” Pastor Haggard is simply referring to the overall amount of activity by the Holy Spirit. For instance, one indication of the level of Holy Spirit activity is an increase in the number of active Christians in the area. Haggard argues that one church experiencing growth and even reaching mega-church status cannot effectively increase the presence of active Christians throughout the community as could be done if several churches in the area were growing. There must be a significant number of successful churches in order to create the societal shifts necessary to reflect the impact of the gospel. Haggard further points out that the amount of energy required to maintain a large church would be far more productively spent in efforts to raise the level of the Holy Spirit activity in the area around the church. This would result in the large church staying large, and most likely even growing larger, much easier than would be the case if they were simply focusing on the needs of their own church. The book is replete with examples of how this principle

has worked for New Life Church in Colorado Springs.

In a discussion contrasting conversion growth with transfer growth, Pastor Haggard bluntly asserts, "Transfer growth is church activity that makes no eternal difference." He further points out that the only positive impact of transfer growth is when an individual switches from a non-believing church to a life-giving church. The bottom line is that if one life-giving church grows because another is declining, there is no net difference in the social and cultural makeup of the city. Haggard contends that to focus on transfer growth is to focus internally with the result being comparative thinking and behavior. A church that emphasizes conversion growth is forced to intentionally focus on serving and encouraging the unchurched in their area. Haggard admits that some transfer growth will occur as a natural by-product of working for conversion growth, but that it should not be the focus of a church's effort.

The fourth principle set forth by Ted Haggard is that churches must learn to appreciate one another's respected interpretations. The author emphatically argues that other theological persuasions are good, rather than bad. He theorizes that since the Bible was purposely written to create the situation where the Body of Christ can only agree on the important issues, that the various expressions of the Body are a strength, designed by God, to make the overall Body more effective. Here it is important to understand that Haggard is not arguing for the often encountered ecumenical, humanistic movement that embraces all belief systems, but only variations in interpretation that are respected by orthodox, mainstream biblical scholarship. He clearly disqualifies heresy or any teaching that challenges the divinity of Christ or the integrity of the Bible as the written word of God. Since God would never expect a person or a church to do that which it is not equipped to do, it follows that God does not expect every church to reach every person. That would clearly be an impossibility. Therefore, God is only requiring each local expression of His Body to reach a specific group (or groups). This understanding leads to the exciting revelation that other churches are all co-workers, put in place by God, to reach still other groups.

The final principle is that of practicing supportive speech and actions—especially when around unbelievers. Haggard reasons that supportive speech and actions toward others negates demonic attempts to build strongholds in our minds against oth-

er members of the Body of Christ. Saying and doing good things is a spiritual weapon that can break both demonic and worldly strongholds. We in the church should not be fearful of liking people who don't agree with us on everything.

In the second half of the book, Ted Haggard changes from a discussion of the five principles which spawn church unity and solidarity against the enemy to a discussion of the seven "power points" necessary for what he calls "lifestyle warfare." Most are familiar with the concept of spiritual warfare, but the idea of lifestyle warfare is perhaps new to many. Haggard writes that in order for spiritual warfare to be effective, it must extend beyond warfare prayer in the safety and security of the church or small group and reach into one's lifestyle. In other words, to be effective, a Christian must exhibit a lifestyle characterized by telling the truth instead of lying, by staying faithful to his (or her) spouse, by protecting his (or her) children, by treating others with respect, etc. This type of behavior which all Christians claim to believe must be lived day in and day out. Living the Christian life is what Haggard calls lifestyle warfare. Since spiritual warfare has goals of stimulating the activity of the Holy Spirit and hindering the work of Satan, it is much more effective when it is accompanied by lifestyle warfare. Indeed, some of the benefits of lifestyle warfare include the fact that it provides an opportunity for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it blocks satanic opportunities, and it gives Christians the right to be heard by non-Christians.

Haggard's power points include living in the tree of life, a teaching derived from Rick Joyner's *There Were Two Trees in the Garden*, practicing forgiveness, becoming a servant, showing respect, cultivating character, and others equally powerful. This portion of the book is truly thought-provoking and action inspiring.

Pastor Haggard concludes the book with the assertion that we are the church and we are the only ones who have the message that guarantees eternal life. We are the only ones who have unlimited access to God the Father. We are the only ones with the power of the Holy Spirit and with the authority to negate the influence of demons. Indeed, we are the only ones who are able to overcome the Gates of Hell. That gives us an awesome amount of responsibility since we are *exclusively* His body, His co-workers, His ambassadors, and His friends. Since we have His nature, His will, His plan, His Spirit, His grace, His love, and His

anointing, we must exhibit behavior to the unchurched that glorifies God, attracts them to Christ, and “makes it hard for people to go to hell from your city.” This book is a must read!!!

Reviewer

Graham, Jerry L.: Address: 421 Currituck Dr., Chesapeake, VA 23322. Title: Reverend, Consultant. Rev. Graham earned his M.S. degree in industrial engineering from the University of Arkansas (1966) and worked for 25 years in engineering and marketing with Eastman Kodak Co. in Rochester, NY. He earned his M.Div. at Regent University (1992) and is presently working toward a D.Min. at Fuller Theological Seminary. Jerry is an independent consultant having worked with more than 80 churches since 1992.