

Vision Fast Foods ***No Substitute for the Real Thing***

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Millions of people buy fast food every day without giving it much thought – it’s become a routine habit. They place an order at the window or the drive-through, take the paper bag, and consume what’s inside. I take my place in this throng more often than I should, trying to rationalize my actions with comments about time, schedule, convenience, etc.

Most churches today are guilty of buying into a fast food mindset when it comes to vision. Instead of investing quality time to determine their vision, many churches substitute what author Will Mancini calls “soul fast food.”

This concept came up recently in a new learning experience by Mancini’s Auxano Group called a Vision co::Lab. The Lab I’m participating in consists of 5 churches meeting in 6 sessions through the end of the year. Here’s a closer look:

Soul Fast Food – There are four substitutes for a well-balanced diet of vision. They fuel your most faithful people; it is how they get hope for a better future. Unfortunately, they are also four sources of a malnourished membership identity. Each of these junk food categories are not bad in and of itself. They all malnourish, because they are used inappropriately as a substitute for a well-balanced diet of vision.

1. French Fried “Places”

The places of our God moments matter – but space itself has addictive features, just like your favorite fries. There are spots where we encounter God; they are important. But in the absence of a vision that transcends our favorite nooks and crannies, the space itself becomes the vision supplement. The primary use of the term *church* to connote place compounds the issue. The meaning of place reflects God’s design, starting with the Garden and ending with the New Jerusalem. Bus space is essential, not *central*, in the economy of vision.

2. Big Mac “Personalities”

Spiritual leaders matter to our people. But most pastors do not want their personality to be the primary umbilical cord connecting their members’ identity to the church. Charisma is not vision. It is a vehicle to deliver the vision. But for many churchgoers, connection to their church is connection to the pastor. The “person” of the pastor can easily become the primary connection point so that in the absence of vision, people cling to something – or someone.

3. Supersized “Programs”

Programs are important, and good methodologies for doing ministry should come and go. Unfortunately, most of them come and stay – like sour milk, they hang around long after their expiration date! For years, church leaders have struggled with how to dismount a dead horse. When the program exists in a vision vacuum, the **how** of doing the program displaces the **why** in the *heart* of the program’s leaders. Mastering the how is what makes the volunteer feel important. The problem is not the volunteer but the vision. We need the vision to raise our sight to see the **why** behind the program to begin with. Their hearts find more meaning in working *efficiently* on yesterday’s methods than in working *effectively* into the future.

4. Apple Pie “People”

Perhaps the greatest substitute for healthy membership identity is the group of people at church – whether ten or a hundred – who “know my name.” This is not to be seen as a knock on relationships! It is identifying “community without a cause” as both unbiblical and a common source of identity for the churchgoer. Want a demonstration? Suggest a change in service times – or ask a Bible Study class or small group to multiply. People don’t want you to mess with their relationships. Our familiar friends, albeit essential to church life, have become **central** to the person’s identity.

Could it be that many leaders today want their people to run a missional marathon but unknowingly feed them junk food, leaving them malnourished and unprepared for the future?

Do you want fries with that?

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