

## THE “CORE” WILL TELL THE STORY 9/15/99

I have a friend who recently built himself a beautiful home on the side of a hill. During one stay with him, I stood at his kitchen window and watched several mule deer amble through his yard. The house is spacious and the view is gorgeous, but there is just one problem. A short while after moving into his new house, one corner of the structure began to sink. Now I don't mean the house began to settle, I mean it sank! The basement slab cracked wide-open and he is facing some stiff repair costs in jacking and filling to save his house. If you ask him, he will laugh (yes, he's at that point now) and tell you that he should have taken core samples. Drilling for a core sample would have told him that the previous owner of the lot had dumped a lot of fill there and covered it with topsoil. You can't tell what's under the surface of a piece of property unless you check the “core.”

Churches can be a lot like my friends building lot. The surface can be healthy looking with good soil and plants and a view that promises great things for the future. A church may seem friendly and her members talented, giving us a great promise of potential service to God. But, in both cases, the truth can only be known by getting a look at the “core.” It is a core sample that will tell if the foundation for lot or congregation is bedrock or loose fill. It is the “core” that will actually tell the story of whether lot or church will be useful as time goes by.

Author, Rick Warren, breaks congregational effort down into five levels of commitment much like an archer's target. On the outside circle of the target is the “community,” the unchurched, unsaved people that live within driving distance. He progresses down towards the bulls eye of the target by naming successive groups/circles of people, i.e. the “crowd,” the “congregation,” and the “committed.” The center circle, the smallest group, and the goal of our evangelistic process in moving people out of a “community” relationship to a mature one with Christ is, you guessed it, the “core.” The “core” in any church is the smallest group because it represents the deepest level of commitment. It is the dedicated minority of leaders and workers and teachers who are committed to serving Jesus Christ by ministering to others.

“Core” people are not spectators in a congregation, they are participants. They do not attend to watch a worship service, they work and plan during the week to make the service honorable to God and edifying to others. They volunteer, pitch in, show up, give, serve, encourage, hold up, promote, talk up, pray for, minister to, invite over, hug, laugh, greet, visit, help, take up slack for, call, clean, cook for, cheer up, raise up, and otherwise lay a bedrock of Christ likeness for a congregation to build upon. “Core” people determine if a church will be useful to God, or just look that way.

The “meat” of an apple is sweet and attractive to our tastes, but it is the “core” of the apple that holds the power to multiply. New growth that extends the influence of the tree comes from the core. The core is where the real life is. The core is where the truth will be found – not on the surface.

And I say all the above just to ask the question, knowing the facts of the matter, what type of person will I (or you) be? Will we be the “core” that gives strength to the

building or loose fill that might look great on the surface but gives way when pressure is applied? Will we use our tongues, our homes, our abilities, our money, and our time for selfish pursuits of the moment or to feel superior to others? Or will we reach the level of commitment that says all these things have already been given to Christ, now how shall I use them in His service? Maybe the most needful “core sample” is not the one taken of our property. Perhaps the most needful “core sample” is the one we take of our own hearts to see what we are really hiding beneath the surface.

**Carl McMurray**