

# Serving with Calvin

Leading and Planning Services of  
Worship in the Reformed Church

Terry L. Johnson



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## ❧ Chapter I ❧

### Introduction

**W**e labor today in the era of the “gimmick-driven church.” In addition to the eye-popping stunts we discussed in our previous work,<sup>1</sup> mailers cross the desks of ministers on a nearly weekly basis promising slightly more mundane silver bullets which will slay the dragons of non-growth and invigorate a season of super-growth. We can recall the yellow Sunday School bus ministry, “Here’s Life America,” hand-bell choirs, Evangelism Explosion, small group discipleship, telemarketing, the seeker-friendly church, the church for the unchurched, the Toronto Blessing, the Laughing Revival, and the Brownsville Revival, each presented as a panacea that would cure what ails the church. Since the advent of the twenty-first century we’ve seen Promise Keepers, Wild at Heart, WWJD, The Prayer of Jabez, Forty

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<sup>1</sup> See *Worshipping with Calvin*, Chapter 9.

Days of Purpose, the Passion of Christ, the Florida Outpouring, Xtreme Ministries (“where Feet, Fist and Faith Collide”), the “Emergent Church,” “Deep Church,” “Secret Church,” and so on.<sup>2</sup> “The One Month to Live Challenge,” endorsed by Warren & Hybels, promises to “help your church experience exponential growth” and “double your small groups and Sunday School.”<sup>3</sup> *Synergize 2! Pastors Conference* appeals to those “who wish to double their impact and influence.”<sup>4</sup> Marketing concerns have led to churches branding themselves with increasingly unusual names: Elevation, Envision, Restoration, enCompass, Journey, The River, Tapestry, Celebration, Oasis, Crossings, Crosspointe, Sandals, Harvest, Impact, The Refinery, Mosaic, Relate Church, and Liquid Church, among many others. There is an almost compulsive desire among our contemporaries to reinvent the church and reconstruct its ministry. The “change” mantra gets politicians elected and books published. “Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing,” Screwtape tells his demon-in-training.<sup>5</sup> Contrast regularly is made between the “traditional” church (usually left undefined: traditional Southern Baptist and tradition Presbyterian are very different creatures; which do they mean?) and the new and improved alternative for new and exceptional times.<sup>6</sup> Tomorrow another cure-all will be unveiled, another

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2 Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging & Traditional* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2009); “Secret Church,” *Christianity Today*, May 2010, Vol. 54, No. 5, 40.

3 “One Month to Live Challenge” brochure.

4 Synergize2! Pastors Conference letter of 12/28/09.

5 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), 116, 118.

6 T. David Gordon complains that “My students routinely assume that I am defending Bill Gaither or Fanny Crosby when I express reluctance about praise choruses” (*Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2010], 42).



“can’t miss” program that will tip the scales. “Like a gambler looking for a winning ticket, (congregations) search for a program that will ‘turn their church around,’” Harry Reeder, pastor of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, observes.<sup>7</sup>

The seeker-churches have become great promoters of new forms of ministry. Their assumption: the old forms don’t work. For Randy Pope, the gifted founding pastor of the Perimeter Presbyterian Church and Perimeter ministries in Atlanta, small groups are the “primary method of making mature and equipped followers of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> His TEAMS (Truth, Equipping, Accountability, Mission, Supplication) are the primary place where nurture, education, and equipping take place, among other things. Rick Warren has a similar small group program at his Saddleback Church. Pope provides a survey of church history which might lead one to conclude that Perimeter Church’s structure of the church gathered (on Sundays) and scattered (in small groups on weekdays) is a breakthrough which restores the ministry pattern of the New Testament church for the first time since the days of the Apostles. Perimeter Church is “suggesting a radical change in the way church is done.”<sup>9</sup> “Radical change” is assumed to be necessary.

In addition to reaching the lost, Pope says that seeker-churches are eager “to answer the question of how to make mature followers of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> The church catholic has had some experience in

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7 Harry Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 9.

8 Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 113.

9 Ibid. 123.

10 Ibid. 123.