



Moving the Goal Posts

Main video

There's a famous verse in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that says this:

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." It goes on to say in verse 23, "I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings."

I've been in my church for 22 years, but my church was formed back in the 1950s (1958 I think our church building was constructed) and in 1958 when our church building was completed something really interesting happened – people just came. They arrived. A new church was there and people thought it was the right thing to do to come and attend and try out church. They even just sent their kids to our kid's work.

Now, today in the UK we need to just accept that that happens somewhat less, to say the least. The game has changed, and when I use the analogy or the word "game" I don't mean that in a belittling way at all.

When my kids were younger, they went to a swimming club and learned all the different strokes, and I used to have to attend and just sit there watching them learn different strokes. One of the strokes that has always struck me as really interesting is butterfly stroke. Butterfly stroke is beautiful when done right but when you're learning it, it looks torturously difficult, and when you're watching young people learn this stroke butterfly one thought occurs to me more than anything else, which is "Why?" Why would anybody invent butterfly stroke? Like it's not as beautiful (arguably) as breast stroke, it's not as fast as front crawl, so really, if we're honest, what's the point?

So, I looked it up and the answer is really simple. Butterfly stroke was invented by one person initially and then developed further by a couple of others to win, and to win medals at breast stroke. At the time the rules for breast stroke were simply that your hands had to move in sync rather than counter sync, and your feet had to move in sync rather than counter sync as well, so butterfly complied with those rules and the people who first of all invented it, they really did start to win medals until the governing body FINA took a look at it and said, "No, that's not really breast stroke, and we need to rethink that."

My question and my application of that is this. If we are in many ways losing the game, the rules of the game have moved on, people won't just walk into our church anymore in the way that they use to, in what ways can we change what we are doing and look at doing it in more innovative and creative ways, maybe in addition to what we are currently doing? We've some answers to that in the life of our church and I'd be really interested to know what other examples of good practice, of trying something different, there are or could be within churches, Baptist churches included in the UK.



Feedback video

So, one question that possibly flows from this is, “In what way could a small group take the idea of being innovative and creative or changing the rules in order to begin to win at the game like this?”

Well, in many ways a small group is better placed to do this than a whole church. It's quite tricky to encourage a whole church to look at doing things differently but a small group can do that because small means more movable.

So maybe we need to think sometimes about whether an invitation to somebody who is not yet a believer could work within your small group?

Or certainly in my church we tend to think of small groups doing Bible study for some of the time, and prayer, and then occasionally doing social events. Maybe there's some hybrid, some combination of the two where something social (that we can invite people who are not yet believers) also has a clear spiritual element, that's still user friendly and does attract some of our friends to come along and give it a try.