

# Compassionate hearts reach the Gulf

Dan Nelson

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Is school relevant? What about food and water? Is family relevant? There is a lot of discussion these days in churches concerning how "relevant" we are in today's culture. It is a dilemma that is cutting many ministries to the heart as they do surgery on themselves in hopes for a healthier and stronger future. I would like to contribute by sharing with you my thoughts on the relevance of the Christian church in the world today.

I have been told so many times that we are living in a post-modern culture and the church as we know it is in danger of becoming extinct as it continually loses relevance to the people with whom we share our planet. As a result, people are disconnected from church because they don't want to be preached at and need the freedom to "do church" in their own way. Pastors are encouraged to depart from "traditional" Bible teaching to become moderators of discussion groups. Worship is whatever it is defined by the individual. The diagnosis is that the church is ill and a worship service that is a free flow of "whatever" is the prescription. I am not kidding, the books, magazines, and seminars are full of this stuff.


I think that the argument for the post-modern society has enough merit to demonstrate a real need for ministries that reach out to the segment of the population that falls into this category. (Thank God for the diversity of ministries among Christians today.) But I think we, as a larger body, must be careful that we don't fall into a trap of painting with too large of a brush. People today are not cut of one cloth but are extremely diverse, sharing backgrounds that are widely mixed. As we look at our own community, there is a tremendous fabric of diversity in age, ethnicity, education, language, culture, as well as social and economic factors. I believe that the good news of Jesus Christ's and God's message to people transcends all of our differences. God's truth, by definition, doesn't need to be repackaged. God's love hits to the core of our human experience and that is why his message will never be irrelevant. History's best-selling book will endure to bring a message of hope and love to lives suffering from despair and heartbreak. Communication methods and technology will evolve yet God will continue to change lives through his timeless word as spoken by his faithful teachers (Ephesians 4, Romans 12, 1 Timothy 5). Jesus did say that he would send teachers (not moderators) and empower them himself through his Holy Spirit with the gift of teaching so that it would be him that does the work; not by human method but God himself. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

In the aftermath of our most recent American tragedy we see an example of this. We all watched stunned at the horrific devastation that Hurricane Katrina brought to the lives of people living in the Gulf Coast region. Once again, human character was defined as heroes were made and cowards were exposed. Compassionate hearts from around the globe have been reaching out and sending relief. As masses arrived in shelters, there were also individuals rising from amongst the sea of victims to be a spiritual strength to others. When outsiders were few, we saw prayer circles their temporary homestead to help others, using scriptural truths to restore hope. And for many, the good news of Jesus Christ brought light to an otherwise dark

week. Sunday morning worship services took place in shelters throughout the region led by fellow prisoners of circumstance; and scarcely a Bible amongst them. You see, as Scripture says, the Word of God is written on the tablets of their hearts. For many, this comes from years of diligence in easier times, being trained and equipped in local churches of all different styles for such a time as this. Don't talk to me about relevant. You could see the relevance on the faces of people who are in touch with an eternal Gospel. Is a shoulder to cry on relevant? As your heart breaks, you could watch the news and hear the pleas of those who so desperately need to know Jesus. It is at times like this when you must face the facts. It doesn't matter who has the "cool" church to be relevant to a society that needs hope; what matters is love. Everyone needs God.

Upon hearing about these supposed "necessary" changes in the post-modern church, I know of at least one pastor who decided to retire, feeling that a younger pastor would be more "relevant." Friends, I submit that youth alone does not bring relevance; love brings relevance. I hope to be an encouragement to anyone who might be struggling with this idea. Don't quit, we need you. The Bible says "gray hair is a crown of experience." We do need our elders and I believe you are a gift to the body of Christ. Maybe you feel you don't have the strength or stamina that you used to, that Christian music is changing too fast, or that you don't relate to the next generation because you don't surf or play electric guitar. But you have something of infinite more importance, the wisdom of the Word, through years of study and sharing God's message of love to people. This is what is really needed today; wisdom. I believe that our society lacks depth because it lacks wisdom: God's wisdom. You might not know the difference between an NFL player and an MP3 player but it doesn't really matter, what you do have is what we all need. Remember, Moses didn't even get started until he was 80 and he was definitely relevant.

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. This article was published in 2005. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.

  
CALVARY CHAPEL  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
P.O. Box 1443  
Ojai, CA 93024  
(805) 640-9498  
[www.calvaryojai.org](http://www.calvaryojai.org)

## **Sunday Worship:**

**9:00 & 10:30am**  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

## **Mid-Week Study:**

**7:00pm Thursday**  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View