

"Divine Directions"



Each of our children were born with a number. I'm not talking about a social security number - or the little number on their hospital bracelet - but something called an APGAR score. Newborns are evaluated one minute after birth and then five minutes after birth in five critical areas. Each area is scored with a 0, 1 or 2. So, in five areas a 10 is a perfect score. 7-9 is normal. 4-6 means some medical attention is needed, and less than 4 means there are serious medical issues.

What are those five categories? APGAR is an acronym: "A" stands for activity. Does the child have appropriate muscle movement – physical activity, or is the baby sluggish? "P" stands for pulse – Does the baby have a strong and steady pulse – or it is too fast, too slow? "G" is kind of funny – it stands for Grimace. That is – does the baby respond to stimulation. Many doctors will pinch the new baby to see if it cries. Though it may be disconcerting to a new parent, robust crying is a sign of healthy life! The fourth category - "A" is for appearance. Is the baby the right color – or is the child a little too blue, or yellow? Finally "R" is for respiration – Is the child's breathing regular and easy, or labored and struggling? APGAR – It is the first test given to determine the health of a new life.

As we conclude our sermon series "Divine Directions" I would like for us to consider the new life we have here in a fledgling congregation. It is time for an APGAR test for our baby church! What are our strengths? What are areas of improvement? I am not a doctor – but I am your pastor. This assessment is not scientific, but it is prayerful. You may score the church differently than I. That is Ok. but I ask all of us to prayerfully consider where we are at as a new church.

With a birth of a child, “A” Stands for Activity. When a church is born, one also looks for activity – an active core group of dedicated people. [Acts 2:42](#) reads: **And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.** This verse shows vibrant activity on the part of a new church – a frequency of activity, intentional obedience to the apostles’ teaching, gathering corporately for fellowship, spending time at the Lord’s Table and in prayer.

How are we doing here? Well, I would definitely describe our core-group members as active and dedicated. I have never seen such a group of worker bees in my life. There are signs of life everywhere – in our worship services, our set-up team, musicians, vocalists, in the wonderful start we have in our women’s ministry, youth ministry, nursery, the development of our sound system. Nearly every day there are groups of people formally or informally gathering for the work of the ministry, fellowship and prayer – these are great signs of life and health.

Now with each part of this assessment, I would also like to give a word of challenge. There are always areas in which we can improve, or be warned of potential danger. In this area we have the potential danger of burn-out. We must prepare for a marathon and not a sprint. From the earliest days I have cautioned us on this issue and it continues to be a threat. And so I want you to hear me say this morning – for both you and I - Let’s agree together that if we find ourselves doing too much - that we will ask for help. If we need to readjust our duties and to say “no” that is OK. Everyone has a different capacity and different time availability. So let’s continue to work hard – there is no more rewarding work than work for Christ – but we must pace ourselves for a marathon, not a sprint. With a score of 0, 1 or 2. I give us a TWO – Excellent!

When the APGAR test is given to a baby, “P” is for pulse. For a new church, the pulse of its life is the pulse of prayer. Remember [Acts 2:42](#) included – **“They were continually devoting themselves to prayer.”**

Our initial focus on prayer was good. For example, a pre-launch was to develop 100 prayer partners and to send them weekly e-mails as the church progressed. The Lord blessed that effort and we sent 43-weekly e-mails to a list that grew to over 260 people. People were praying for us not only in Texas of course, but in Arizona, California, South Carolina, Connecticut, Nebraska, France and Taiwan.

We prayed for one another and the birth of our church during our Sunday night core-group meetings, and in recently months we can be encouraged that we have had great attendance to our two all-church prayer meetings. Last Wednesday we had 25 adults and kids gathered at the Foster's to pray for our church – a *Sweet Hour of Prayer*. In addition I am encouraged that other more spontaneous groups have are gathering for prayer throughout the week.

Our challenge is to continue and build on this. If we are going to be a church with spiritual power, we must be a church that prays continually - individually and corporately. One specific area we can improve is in holding regular times for corporate prayer. Our next prayer meeting is scheduled for Wednesday night August 1st. By way of our score – to remind us that we have work to do in this area, a score of 1.

G with a new baby is for grimace – for proper response when stimulated. As a new church how do we respond when poked? **That is...** Do we have a Godly attitude? Paul said “**Whatever you do, do your with heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.**” Col 3:23. On the positive side I see not only hard working people – but people with a good attitude. For example, if you come early on Sunday morning – there is serious work needed to prepare this theatre for worship – but there is an atmosphere of joy and laughter (mostly). Also, I see little signs of apathy, which can set in even in a church as young as ours. On the contrary, I encounter among us great passion, feeling, and a desire to make a difference for Christ in this community.

In terms of challenge, we must again be reminded to rest from time to time so we do not burn out. Because we care so strongly about this church, we must all seek balance, flexibility and grace with one another. So that our godly attitude goes not become a grumbling attitude. For us to keep a godly attitude – we must stay balanced. My image for us in this area is the level – We must seek to keep the bubble in the middle - balanced and being willing to adjust when things change. In terms of a score – I think that overall we have had an excellent attitude – a Score of 2!

The second “A” is for appearance – is the baby the right color? For us the question is are we becoming purple, green, brown and red. That is, are we beginning to accomplish our biblical purposes – Worshiping, Growing, Loving, Sharing? **Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together but encouraging one another.” Matthew 28:19-20 says, Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...** In terms of worshiping – I think we are off to a GREAT start – Our quality of worship for a brand new church is something for which I am extremely thankful. Growing Spiritually – Good start – The whole church planting experience is a classroom in Christ’s school of spiritual growth. In terms of teaching – We have our corporate worship and I am exciting about the teaching that has started in the women’s ministry group and with the youth. Loving relationships – they take time. We are doing Ok there. A definite positive – but a year from now, two years from now – we will be so much closer and connected then we are even now. Implementing small groups, that we are praying will occur in September, will help us in that area. Also, our mission’s program has been outstanding so far.

In terms of a challenge – for various reasons, we have not done as much local outreach as we originally planned. Canvassing neighborhoods, community outreach events, service projects and other ideas have been and are still being considered. I want to remind you to use that top-10 prayer

list and to keep praying for those who do not know Christ. Outreach was a major focus of our prayer meeting on Wednesday. We will talk more about this in the future. It is my heart that we do not fall into a typical Bible-church pattern of having strong teaching and weak evangelism. We must pray for both! Score 0, 1 or 2? Overall a 1. Good, but work to do.

The final letter R – for a baby is respiration – is the baby breathing well? For a new church it will be impossible for us to continue breathing well unless we prepare ourselves for risk – and by that I mean steps of faith. Hebrews 11:6 reads “**And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him, Hebrews 11:6.**”

A quote that has hung over my desk for the past four years is from pastor Andy Stanley, in his book *Visioneering*, which says, “Any vision worth pursuing will demand sacrifice and risk. You will be called upon to give up the actual good for the potential best. You will find it necessary to leave what is comfortable and familiar in order to embrace that which is uncomfortable and unfamiliar. And all the while, you will be haunted by the fear that this thing you are investing so much of yourself in may not work out at all.”

In a church plant is a faith plant – You have already left that which was familiar and we are together in unfamiliar territory. I would guess that at some time we have all thought about the fear of failure with this new enterprise – that is only normal. Church planting is risky territory.

Let me tell you a short church plant story. Go back a year ago to June-July 2006. The elders at Trinity Fellowship church set two benchmarks for Lake Cities Community Church. First, that the Lord would bring a minimum of 10 people to start the church – enough critical mass so that we could birth a small healthy church. Second was financial. That God would raise \$150,000 by the end of December 2006. That the church plant would be approached like a building program – if we

are going to build a church – the Lord would provide the resources - up front – to get us through the critical first year.

Dr. Darell Bock – an elder at Trinity – suggested that the amount raised should be put in the weekly prayer letter – and so the first number published on August 10, 2006 was \$4,571 raised with four months to go. At the beginning of September the amount increased to \$5,451.15. Three months to go. October 5th we were at \$6,726.15 with two months to go. And as we pressed into October, some people started getting nervous. If we had the people, but not the finances, would the church plant move forward? Would Trinity have to significantly change its 2007 budget to fund us? You could feel the unspoken pressure – that is the pressure of risk – of faith. At the beginning of November, we had made some progress, up to \$15,473.15, but so far short of \$150,000 it was becoming a little embarrassing to maintain that as a goal. Had we gotten it wrong? Were we shooting for the moon, when we should have been had lower sights? By the first week in December we had shot up to \$58,783. A respectable number. Maybe the \$150,000 was too large, but we can start with that – Praise God. In another week, more had come in - \$69,903 sacrificially given to start this new church. But still – less than half of what we thought God has impressed upon our hearts to raise.

But...God was not done – In the next two weeks \$80,000 more would be give given – raising the figure to \$130,000. And not only that – But Trinity Fellowship had an unexpected budget surplus and set aside an additional \$20,000 for us as a contingency. \$130,000 + \$20,000 is \$150,000. There it was. What had seemed so impossible – What had been such a risk for us and for Trinity Fellowship – was accomplished because God is good – God is faithful and God wanted this church to be born!

Are we ready for more risks? From a positive side – I see people here who are willing to take steps of faith – to try new things. To think outside the box – who agree it is OK to do things

differently. It does not have to be just like Trinity did it – or your previous church. Let's recognize that we will make mistakes and that is OK. I tell people you are my Lewis and Clark families – willing to embark upon an adventure that involves uncertainty, danger – yet great reward and promise.

Our challenge as we move forward in faith is that we would discern spiritually what God is doing. This was a key message from Dave Hart at our strategy meetings – that we do not get ahead of God's plan for us. We must not do too much too quickly, nor too little too late. Our challenge here is to have a fair amount of wisdom and faith. Our score – a 2.

CONCLUSION:

When a new baby is born – a score of 10 is a perfect birth. 7-9 is normal. In my completely unscientific, but prayerful evaluation – I submit our church's APGAR score as 8 – I believe that we have a healthy, vibrant new life – not perfect – we have much room for improvement and growth. But may we give God great glory, honor and praise for the work He has done to bring us to life!

And now that we are born – We must continue to seek Divine Direction that as sheep we would follow the voice of our shepherd, Jesus Christ. As clay, we would be fashioned into the work that the master potter has in his imagination. To His glory – Amen!