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Melvin University
and Me

Reopening the back door

There are two important ministry paradigms for pastoral care in the American churches: Stephen Ministries and Lay Pastors Ministry. Most American churches adopt one of these, or some have both ministries at the same time. Of course, there are ministries developed by individual churches (Caring Church, TLC, so on), but these two can be represented when talking about the overall American church.

The textbook for Stephen's ministry is "Reopening the Back Door" (Kenneth Haug, founder of Stephen's ministry). As a psychologist, the pastor started to wonder, "Why do people become passive and inactive?" I translated this book into Korean and used it in our seminars several times. A characteristic of the ministry is that it has developed an excellent training textbook that currently focuses on "caring for people in crisis."

It is a kind of crisis management ministry. The training manual said that there are 33 reasons to show why people leave the church they have attended for many years. It is a useful resource for understanding such people. The main reasons were 1) lack of good relationships with each other, 2) meaningless church, and 3) hunger for belonging.

Since it is possible only through one-on-one care, it is said that an understanding of one-on-one is necessary. Each person has a different problems (33 reasons), so that is inevitable. After they left the church, the author wrote a book through the care ministry, emphasizing that people who left the church should be able to come back, for example. So he titled "Reopening the back

door." What this material contributed was to help them understand why they became passive and why they left the church, rather than kicking the back door shut while criticizing the people who were physically driven in the church and those who left.

According to statistics, about 40 percent of church members in the United States do not regularly attend church, meaning they are inactive. Of course, most churches in the world as well as in the United States have the same problem, and here in Kenya they have the same problem. The same is true of our university church. That's why they should pay more attention to those people because they are ready to leave the church soon. In fact, however, most churches are closing their back doors too early when people leave. We shouldn't do that, and always leave the back door open to give us time and room to think.

In addition, another book is "Closing the back door," which I remember Pastor Myung Myung-hoon wrote a long time ago. The back door should be closed so that people who are likely to leave the church cannot leave.

I was very interested in these two books together. One focused on those who would leave ("Close the back door") and the other on those who had just left ("Reopening the back door again"). Rev. Melvin's Lay Pastors Ministry started with caring for the marginalized in the church, but both concepts were emphasized that even those who had just left the church had to take care of both sides, so when applied to the church, both pastors and laypeople said they needed this Lay Pastors Ministry.