

January 10,2013

*Editor's I note: This is the first of a four-part series.*

"*Moneyball*," in case you haven't seen it, is about baseball. But it's also *not* about baseball. It's about culture change -- how hard culture is to change and how important it is to do just that when the world around you has already changed.

It's just that mixture of hardboiled pragmatism about a changed world -- in this case the world of baseball -- and the creative ingenuity to defy tradition that makes me think the secret to the church's future may lie in this very good movie based on an even better book.

**In brief, here's the setup: Oakland A's General manager Billy Beane wants to change the way his team approaches baseball. Why? Because baseball has become an unfair game,**

**It used to be, you see, that the key to producing excellent teams was to recruit the best young players and develop them into fixture stars, Your prospects, that is, rested in your scouts and player development program. But then something happened: more revenue starting coming from televising your games than from ticket sales and, suddenly, the larger the television market where you played the more money you. had and, thanks to free agency, the better players you could buy,**

**Which is where Billy Beane comes in. Because the A's are a small-market team, he doesn't command a payroll like teams from big-market areas like Boston or New York. So Beane decides that he and his team need to think differently, discarding the subjective criteria of the past and embracing a highly analytic approach to the game that discovers undervalued players who outperform their peers in getting on base,**

**It's not a popular move, After a11, the exemplary practices of baseball were long-standing, and the guardians of that tradition were not about to roll over to some upstart manager talking about a changed world.**

**"What's the problem?" Billy Beane keeps asking. To which his scouts reply that the problem is that they've lost their best players to richer teams. But as Beane says, that's not the problem. The problem is that the world has changed but they haven't. They're still playing by the old rules, And so Beane urges them to abandon the cherished practices that may have worked once but were not suited to the current situation.**

**Sometimes I think 'we in the church engage in a similar conversation,**

**What's the problem? someone might ask. "People don't go to church in the numbers they used to," we answer. No, that's not the problem, "People don't give money to programs like they once did." Nope, not that either. These are just symptoms,**

**And as long as you think the problem is lower attendance or giving, then the only possible response is to do what "we've always done, except do it better, 'We preach the same as we always**

did, except now we use screens and PowerPoint. Worship hasn't really changed, but now we've thrown in a drum set. What we are doing is fundamentally the same. yet we somehow expect different results.

'Why? Because the game we play has fundamentally changed, and until we face up to the fact that a lot of our most cherished practices were fashioned -- indeed, perfected -- in a world that is quickly vanishing, we will not see any different results.

The problem, in short, is that in a world of overwhelming obligations and opportunities where work knows no bounds and the culture no longer values going to church, our people need to be able to connect their faith to their daily lives themselves, not just come to church to have the pastor **do** it for them.

That means we need to question the entire model of ministry where the pastor performs the faith each Sunday to the delight of an adoring and inspired audience. Pastors need, to borrow biblical language, "to equip the saints **for** the work of ministry, **for** building up the **body** of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 12-13).

In other words, we've got to think differently.

*This post originally appeared on [David Lose's blog](#).*