

ZONDERVAN

The Big Idea

Copyright © 2007 by Dave Ferguson

This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook.

Visit www.zondervan.com/ebooks.

This title is also available in a Zondervan audio edition.

Visit www.zondervan.fm.

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

The Library of Congress has cataloged the earlier printing as follows:

Ferguson, Dave, 1962-

The big idea : focus the message, multiply the impact / Dave Ferguson, Jon
Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett.

p. cm. — (The leadership network innovation series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-310-27241-0

1. Mission of the church. 2. Christianity and culture. 3. Church and the world.
4. Communication—Methodology. 5. Communication—Religious
aspects—Christianity. 6. Information technology—Religious aspects—Christianity.
I. Ferguson, Jon. II. Bramlett, Eric. III. Title.

BV601.8.F47 2007

253—dc22

2006025104

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers printed in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Interior design: Mark Sheeres

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	7
Introduction: Idea Overload!	9

PART 1: Little Ideas or the Big Idea?

1. No More Christians!	15
2. Communities of Transformation, Not Information.	31
3. Creating Missional Velocity	47

PART 2: What's the Big Idea?

4. The Genius of the "And"	63
5. Changing Churches One Big Idea at a Time	83

PART 3: Create Your Own Big Idea

6. Creating Your One-Year Big Idea Plan	95
7. Implementing Your Big Idea Plan	107
8. The Two Most Important Players in the Big Idea	115
9. The Big Idea Creative Team Meeting	131
10. The Big Idea Teaching Team Meeting	145
11. The Implicit Big Idea	165

PART 4: A Really Big Idea

12. Creating and Reproducing Big Idea Networks	185
--	-----

Appendix	195
Notes	197

CHAPTER 1

NO MORE CHRISTIANS!

What do you expect to happen as you read this book? Be honest now. In fact, I'm going to be honest too and put on the table what I hope I can convince you of in this opening chapter:

1. If you've been calling yourself a Christian, you should stop. Maybe not what you were expecting? It is exactly what you and the church need — forget ever being a Christian again.
2. If you have ever encouraged someone to become a Christian, you should never do that again. Seriously, I hope you will never again ask a friend, family member, coworker, or neighbor to become a Christian.

Why? Because the last thing the mission of Jesus Christ needs is more Christians.

Here is the brutal fact: 85 percent of the people in the United States call themselves Christians. Now, let's pause long enough to realize that's a whole lot of people — *247 million* people, to be exact. But how are those 85 percent doing when it comes to accomplishing Jesus' mission? Here is what research tells us about people in North America who call themselves Christians:

- Those who call themselves Christians are no more likely to give assistance to a homeless person on the street than non-Christians.

- Those who call themselves Christians are no more likely than non-Christians to correct the mistake when a cashier gives them too much change.
- A Christian is just as likely to have an elective abortion as a non-Christian.
- Christians divorce at the same rate as those who consider themselves non-Christians.
- Even though there are more big churches than ever before filled with people who proudly wear the title Christian, 50 percent of Christian churches didn't help one single person find salvation.

In fact, when the Barna Research Group did a survey involving 152 separate items comparing the general population with those

The last thing the mission of Jesus Christ needs is more Christians.

who called themselves Christians, they found virtually no difference between the two groups. They found no difference in the *attitudes* of Christians and non-Christians, and they found no difference in the *actions* of Christians and

non-Christians. If the contemporary concept of a Christian is of someone who is no different than the rest of the world, is *Christian* really the word you want to use to describe your willingness to sacrifice everything you have to see God's dream fulfilled? No way.

This absence of distinction between Christians and non-Christians is a huge problem. But it is not a difficult problem. This is a problem for which the solutions are simple, though not easy. So this book is all about one of those simple but not easy solutions for accomplishing the mission that Jesus gave to his church.

Let's start with a typical Sunday as a family returns home from church. The question posed to the children is the same every week: "So what did you learn today?" And the response is too often the

same: (Silence.) “Ummm ...” (More silence.) “Ummm ...” (Still more silence.) “Ummm ...”

Parents have tried to think of different ways to word the question for their kids, but it always comes out the same. “So what did you learn today?” It’s not the most enticing question, but it’s the question that gets asked millions of times every week during the car ride home from church. And the truth is, if our kids asked us, we might give them the same response: (Silence.) “Ummm ...” (More silence.) “Ummm ...” (Still more silence.) “Ummm ...”

We have a huge problem — the absence of distinction between Christians and non-Christians.

How is it possible that so many people, young and old, can respond with nothing but silence to such a simple question after spending an entire Sunday morning in church? Is it too little teaching? Is it too little Scripture? Is it too little application of Scripture in the teaching? What’s the problem?

Well, let’s review a typical experience at church. Is it too little or maybe too much? The average churchgoer is overloaded every week with scores of competing little ideas during just one trip to church. Let’s try to keep track.

1. Little idea from the clever message on the church sign as you pull into the church parking lot
2. Little idea from all the announcements in the church bulletin you are handed at the door
3. Little idea from the prelude music that is playing in the background as you take your seat
4. Little idea from the welcome by the worship leader
5. Little idea from the opening prayer
6. Little idea from song 1 in the worship service

7. Little idea from the Scripture reading by the worship leader
8. Little idea from song 2 in the worship service
9. Little idea from the special music
10. Little idea from the offering meditation
11. Little idea from the announcements
12. Little idea from the first point of the sermon
13. Little idea from the second point of the sermon
14. Little idea from the third point of the sermon
15. Little idea from song 3 in the worship service
16. Little idea from the closing prayer
17. Little idea from the Sunday school lesson
18. Little idea from (at least one) tangent off of the Sunday school lesson
19. Little idea from the prayer requests taken during Sunday school
20. Little idea from the newsletter handed out during Sunday school

Twenty and counting. Twenty different competing little ideas in just one trip to church. Easily! If a family has a couple of children in junior church and everyone attends his or her own Sunday school class, we could quadruple the number of little ideas. So this one family could leave with more than eighty competing little ideas from one morning at church! And if we begin to add in youth group, small group, and a midweek service, the number easily doubles again. If family members read the Bible and have quiet times with any regularity, it might double yet again. And if they listen to Christian radio in the car or watch Christian television at home, the number might double once more. It's possible that this one family is bombarded with more than one thousand little ideas every week explaining what it means to be a Christian. No wonder when the parents ask their kids, "So what did you learn?" the answer goes something like this: (Silence.) "Ummm ..." (More silence.) "Ummm ..." (Still more silence.) "Ummm ..."

MORE INFORMATION = LESS CLARITY

We have bombarded our people with too many competing little ideas, and the result is a church with more information and less clarity than perhaps ever before. But the church is not alone in its predicament. Businesses also get distracted with lots of little ideas and forget the Big Idea. Many marketplace leaders are relearning the importance of the Big Idea in regard to advertising. It was a multimillion-dollar sock-puppet ad during Super Bowl XXXIV that epitomized the absurdity of the advertising during the dot-com bubble. This same era brought us commercials with cowboys herding cats, singing chimps, and a talking duck — all great entertainment, but they didn't convey a thing about the brands they represented. Brand consultants Bill Schley and Carl Nichols Jr., in their book, *Why Johnny Can't Brand: Rediscovering the Lost Art of the Big Idea*, tell us this type of advertising is not effective branding. Schley and Nichols exhort companies to redefine their products in terms of a single, mesmerizing “Dominant Selling Idea.” They go on to explain that somewhere along the way, “Johnny” forgot the basics of revealing the Big Idea in an easy, everyday way that cements a brand as top dog in the hearts and minds of consumers without resorting to puffery and shallow glitz. What are businesses learning? That “more” results in less clarity. (And less money!)

We have bombarded our people with too many competing little ideas, and the result is a church with more information and less clarity than perhaps ever before.

Don't misunderstand — this is not a rant against entertainment or churches that are entertaining. I actually think churches should be more entertaining. But that's a rant for another book. This is a rant against churches (and businesses) that don't discipline