**When the Church Stops Working**

By Andrew Root and Blair Bertrand

**Study Guide**

**What do I do with this book? In terms of the language and the stories and the illustrations used, this book is a pretty easy go. However, the concepts are tricky. They are not difficult or all that abstract. Rather, they are counter intuitive. When you encounter some thing in the book that does not make sense, or seems strange or unlikely, or just does not “click” with you, hang in there. Dwell on it. The authors are not out to give us more stuff to think about; their goal is to challenge and reorient how we think about things. This does not happen a moment. We need to ponder and discuss these ideas before we decide if they are good ideas.**

**Root and Bertrand supply a lot of stories and illustrations of their ideas. I have left those out to make this concise and focus on the ideas and argument. It is worth your time to read their stories and illustrations to help fully grasp those ideas.**

**Also, this is my take on the book. Feel free to disagree, correct, or challenge it.**

**Ch. 3:  “Stop All the Having and Just Be”**

Our faith is about death and resurrection.  Our salvation was accomplished by Jesus’s death and resurrection.  But our own spiritual transformation involves a death and resurrection as well—death to who we were and resurrection into who God callsus to be.  The story of Aziz Ansari illustrates such as death and resurrection.  He died to his old way of always living into the future, looking for more and more, an outlook that led him to treat a woman as a source of more pleasure rather than as a person.  His career flamed out but resurrected once he learned that genuinely relating to people in the present is a better way to live than using them to get more in the future.

Root and Bertrand argue that being with people completely, in the present, is what church should be about.

In our striving for more, for what is next, do we forget to live in the now?

If we diagnose the church’s problem as decline, then we buy into what is next rather than what is now.  If our goal is more—more people, more programs, more facilities, etc.—then we are doomed to fail because we never get enough of “more.”

**Acceleration and the “More:”** Because the “more” is always in front of us, we are impelled to move faster, to get busier, and treat those around us as means to accomplish “more.”  This is a secular measure of success and results in alienation from ourselves and from other human beings.  “Acceleration is a disease that promises victory over the crisis of decline but ends in spiritual disaster.” (p. 42) It only produces burn-out and depression.

**Step One in Being, Not Having: Humble Death**

The only solution to acceleration is death!  Death is our mortality; it is part of being a creature and not the creator.  We can deny it or accept it in humility.  True humility is surrender to God; it is not forced subordination, frustrated resignation, or collapse into despair.  It is powerful, not weak.  Just as we must confess that our salvation is a gift of God and not a product of our hands, so approaching our concerns about our church requires the humility to acknowledge that the solution comes from God and not from our efforts.  This is a good death.

**Step Two in Being, Not Having: Confession**

Unlike an apology, a confession builds connection others.  When we confess that our approach to the church’s challenges is acceleration—our never-ending effort to fix, improve, and increase in order to avoid the “decline” of the church—and learn to wait on God, we build connections with God and each other.  This waiting is rooted in a humility that is not a weakness or quietism.  It is powerful.

**Step Three in Being, Not Having: Gratitude**

When we confess and our confession is heard, we experience gratitude because confession and being heard restores relationships. This distinction, here, is tricky, because we tend to see apologies or confessions and a brief moment of vulnerability that we want to get past and on to the next thing, to the “more.”  That approach misses the point.  In true confession we come to God (or anyone we need to confess to) in vulnerability and then remain in the place of vulnerability because that is the place of true relationship.  Our gratitude emerges from those relationships.

**Being, Not Having, the Waiting Church:** Being vulnerable, we wait for God.  It is God’s actions we seek, not our “more”-driven innovations and solutions, things that we create and pursue.  We wait by attending to our connections, with God and each other, in the here and now, not some possible future.  And we say, “thank you.”

The job of church leaders—of the church itself—is “to tend to the connections of the community. Focus on the relationships.” (p. 50) The negative examples of the collapse of Mars-Hill church in Seattle or the Southern Baptist Conference and its sexual abuse scandals teach us that acceleration, growth at all costs, costs us our relationships.  The “now” of connection is lost to the “tomorrow” of “more.”

The logic of acceleration is always looking to tomorrow because now is never enough.  Death to “more” and “tomorrow” allows confession and connection in the here and now, not for the purpose of more tomorrow, but for its own sake.

**An Invitation to the Waiting Church:**  This waiting places no value on acceleration.  It does not look to tomorrow, and, in that sense, it faces death.  Yet, it is transformative.  It focuses on the now and waits deeply with others. Jesus called the church to this in Acts 1:4-5, “While staying with them, he [Jesus] ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to **wait** there for the promise of the Father.” “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

**Resonance: Worship and Prayer:**  We wait in the process of worship and prayer; that is how we wait with God.  We don’t manage God; we wait for God.  This resonance—“the action of seeking connections and the result of that seeking. . . It seeks not growth but depth, participation, and union. . . We wait for what is uncontrollable by attending to *this moment with these people*.” (p. 57)

**REFLECTION:**  Do the concepts of death, confession, gratitude, and waiting land with you?   Why or why not?   If not, what concepts work better for you?  What would Southminster look like if we were a “waiting church” as Root and Bertrand describe.  Is this attractive?    Read “Red Paint” case study at the end of the chapter (pp.57-59).  How would a “waiting church” deal with that situation?