

A conversation with Bob Coy

Senior Pastor,
Calvary Chapel
Fort Lauderdale





Tell me about starting Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale.



Pastor Bob: I used to work for Capitol Records in Detroit and my job was to make sure that the albums with our label were being well-promoted. Capitol went through some changes, I went through some changes, some addictive behavior, and ended up in Las Vegas. In Vegas, I was booking entertainment on the strip and ended up being the entertainment director for a casino. My younger brother, who “got religion,” was a real taste and dose of true Christian life. I had been brought up in a traditional church environment, but what my brother had was uniquely different. So while I’m doing the club scene in Vegas and living the “party life,” I’m seeing something I really want. I got on my knees in his living room almost 20 years ago and said, “Jesus, change my life, I don’t want to be the same,” and I had my life changed radically and dramatically. My brother was attending a Calvary Chapel start-up in Las Vegas, and that’s where I started to attend too. That’s where I started to grow, and it was at that church that I was given great opportunity even as a new believer. They gave me Bible study opportunities, and then finally asked me to actually join the staff.

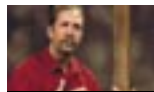
Calvary Chapel Las Vegas, Nevada, had this prayer time throughout the week where congregants would write out prayer requests and then the pastors, early in the morning, would meet with anyone who would show up and pray. My particular prayer one morning was, ‘God, there’s a family leaving Las Vegas moving to Florida – Ft. Lauderdale area – and they want to see a church like this there.’ I began to pray for this while not even aware that God was knocking on my heart to accomplish that. So as I was leaving that morning, the woman who wrote the request turned to me and said, “I’m so glad you prayed for my request, and I was thinking maybe you would be that pastor.” I know she said it in a monotone, but what I heard was reverberation. “How about you, you, you; be the pastor, pastor, pastor...” and I thought, “wow!” I went back home and told my wife, “I prayed for a Calvary Chapel start-up in Ft. Lauderdale, and Diane, it’s really a weird thing, but I feel like that’s where we’re supposed to go.” There’s a lot of Calvary Chapels up and down the west coast, but at the time, there was only one other Calvary Chapel in the entire state of Florida. We prayed on, and waited for confirmation and Bible verses that would affirm what God was leading in our hearts to do. We packed up a U-haul truck — didn’t have a group waiting for us here, didn’t have jobs, didn’t



have a place to live, just knew that God had called us here. Sure enough there were some generous folks that owned a funeral home in a really great location for our city and said we could use it at no charge. It was only two weeks later when we started Calvary Chapel Sunday morning services in a mortuary. That’s how we got things started.



What have your growth trends looked like since then?



Pastor Bob: I had assumed, as a lot of pastors do, that if you put up a Calvary Chapel sign you’ll have a church of 1,000 in just a couple of weeks. After almost two years, there were 40 people at the elementary school, and not much was happening. I called out to the church in Costa Mesa, Outreach Fellowship – that kind of oversees all the different Calvary Chapels – and I said, “Here’s what’s happening: I have only 40 or 50 people attending, it’s been two years here, I am not appreciated or respected for what I have accomplished, and I’m thinking about going back to Las Vegas.” He said, “Well, do you not want to be there?” I said, “Well, ministry is becoming a burden.” He said, “If it’s a burden, then you need to leave. Representing the work God has given you as a burden is not the Lord; His burden is light. I think you

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Every week people stand in line (which is at times all the way out the door!) to purchase tapes and videos of Pastor Bob's teaching for their reference and to share with others.

ought to leave. There are some college students here that would love and care for those people." That was not what I expected to hear and it caused me to get a little feisty in heart. I thought, "No young college student is going to come here and care for these people. These are my sheep and I'm gonna love them." And it was a strange thing, because what happened was God was testing me to find out where my heart was at. Was I just looking for a big thing? Was I just looking for the success of a ministry or did I really care about sheep? The beauty of that was that I came back to church the following week, I think, a different man, and I cared more about discipleship, I cared more about love, and cared about taking these people and really investing in their lives. I am thankful, because the church hasn't stopped growing since...not at all. If you look at our finances and our attendance, it's as if something very pivotal happened at that point.

I see so many young guys that are starting in ministry

We don't save people any better today than we did in the funeral home.

with the ambition and the hope of having a large church, but success is not only going to be defined by numbers. The important thing I say to guys starting out is that "we don't save people any better today than we did in the funeral home."



"In what ways do you use creativity and multimedia in your ministry?"



Pastor Bob: Some of your readers might be a little disappointed at this point, because I have a slightly different philosophy. It has to do with how we do what we do most effectively. Here's what we can do that the world will never do: preach the gospel. Week after week, month after month, the church of Jesus Christ does something that the world will never do. So we have the big screens, but I don't use on-screen

An object lesson for all to see

Physical illustrations are great... if everyone can see them. IMAG is a critical part of a good object lesson in a large sanctuary because it makes every seat a good seat to see what's going on. It's a good idea to alert the technical director ahead of time to make sure they frame the illustration well. Bob shared this excellent example as he explained how he uses creativity in ministry.

Pastor Bob: "I love object lessons where the illustration is in physical form. For example, a few weeks ago I did a series on character and we dealt with honesty and integrity. I had a plastic grocery bag, and I had pre-labeled big cans with different ingredients. I said, 'Here's your life.' And I began putting the cans in the bag. 'Here's family, and now you want a marriage, some kids...and here comes debt-' and you could clearly see that the bag was going to break - then I said, 'Now let's add some lust of the flesh and greed,' and the bag burst. The point that I made - visibly - was much more branded than it would've been had I just used the spoken word."

sermon outlines. The only reason I don't use on-screen outlines is because my ideas and concepts will continue to adjust through the course of a Saturday night and three Sunday morning services. If I follow a pattern, I'll actually be stuck. That's my own opinion, and I know a lot of guys do it a lot of different ways. Now, when it comes to dramatic presentation, I think that there is an important place for that in the body of Christ, even in a church service, even on a Sunday. What I don't want to miss is the opportunity to do the thing we can do.

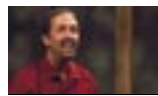
I imagine that Jesus, on more than one occasion, when he was speaking parabolically, was actually referencing something that was in physical form. (i.e. He grabs a little child and says, "Such is the kingdom...") Visuals are very, very important. I think the technical side of that enhances that, but I just want to make sure that all my brothers are making sure not to undermine the value of the word of God.

V *From a practical perspective, what are some of the most effective things you have done in making the Word of God the most important thing and enhancing it with multimedia?*



Pastor Bob: The way that I've used pictures on the screen is to help people understand. For instance, I did a series called "O Jerusalem" and it dealt with the Palestinian and Israeli issue. I had Israel up on the screen and the graphics guys overlaid Florida on it. The state of Israel as you look at the state of Florida would go from our east coast to the middle of the state. That is a little tiny piece of property. The next screen had all of the other Arab nations. Here's this little tiny thing (40 miles by 75 miles), and all these other Arab countries, and the Palestinians are saying, "Give me a place." When people can see that, that's like WOW.

V *How do you attract younger people?*

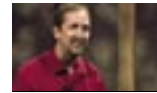


Pastor Bob: I don't think that I connect or link to the next generation as effectively as I used to. Anyone that is my age especially will come to that point where they say, "I'm not the youth guy, and I'm not going to play that game. I'm not going to dress with my pants hanging

down below belt level and my underwear showing and a chain and say, 'Dude'." There's a difference between a tasteful contemporary look and trying to be somebody you're not. I'm not trying to be somebody that I'm not. I know who I am, and I really do believe that it's identifying who you are and celebrating that that causes the next generation to look at it and say, "I respect that."



What do you think speaks to today's culture?



Pastor Bob: I'm going to find it fascinating to be a part of the same journey that everyone else is on right now and see what happens in Christian broadcasting as we take the church to the streets and see what happens next. The men I respect, Greg Laurie, he has integrated more multimedia in his services, and I saw Mike McIntosh do a similar thing where they start their Bible study out with an interview and talk about the Bible study in a practical form before they actually deliver the Message. I think that the innovative, creative heart of tomorrow and today has got to be experienced in this house. This is the house of God, and if it's a house, we need to behave like it's a house, and I think that's why people will feel like this is not a big sanctuary. This next generation that's just started coming

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A weekend service at Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale.

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to church, they are a no-nonsense generation. If you have them stand up and sit down for no reason, they're going to go, "What is that about?" There's no respect for a, "Now let's stand." Why? Well, we've gotta give them a reason. So if there's a reason attached and you can express it to them in a way that they'll agree, then they'll participate. But they're just not going to stand up and sit down because it's a liturgy.... it's like "liturgy," what's that? "Foyer?" What's that? All of our language has to be adjusted for the next generation because they are no-nonsense.

 *Where do you draw the line between effective use of multimedia and just another performance?*



Pastor Bob: The last time I got together with a handful of guys that have churches this size, there was a point when I sat back

and looked at a couple of them, and said, "Is this really what Jesus had in mind? Is this really what we're supposed to be doing?" The beauty of God's Word is that he stayed silent on a handful of these things. I know I'm supposed to pray, and I know I'm supposed to teach the Word, I know I'm supposed to evangelize, these things I know. But for the rest of it, it's like God has given us this incredible freedom

and said, "Have some fun." I think what we end up doing is having a lot of fun, but we also have the opportunity to find out what works and doesn't work. I am interested in getting the next issue and the next issue because I'm borrowing from people like Ed Young, I'm borrowing from people like Andy Stanley, and the list is now endless.

Any church that has a really healthy platform, typically God is using that platform to say something to somebody. I can learn something from everyone who has a platform that God is using, and that's what I try to do. There's still a reason I have this platform. My senior pastor taught me to honor and value the Word of God. So if, in fact, I can do that and at the same time do some kind of multimedia thing, then I've found my thing. I like what Ed Young does, but I'm not Ed Young. I really like his hair, I like his clothes. He's a great dresser.



You're one of the biggest churches in the country already, but where do you go from here?



Pastor Bob: Well, here's a funny thing. We're large, in part, because last year 45,000 new residents came to our

county. We're a huge city. The Wal-Mart is huge. The Home Depot and Lowe's are huge. Why should the church be small? In other words, in the old days you came in to the True Value Hardware store and you knew Charlie, and you said, "Charlie, I need some bolts." Why? Because the communities were that small. Today you have this huge hardware store called Home Depot because we have all gotten bigger, the whole community has gotten bigger. When the church does the same thing, somebody says, "That's a huge church." Is it really? Maybe it's not. Our building space has 400,000 square feet, but Home Depot has 400,000 square feet and they sell lumber, so I'm really not that impressed with us. So when you say, where do you go from here, I think we have to get bigger because I think that it's not stopping. It's not pride or arrogance, it's practicality. We've got a new sanctuary on the drawing board right now, and I'm excited because there are still

The Home Depot and Lowe's are huge. Why should the church be small?

lost people in Broward County. If there's that many new residents, all I have to do is get in their way.



Is there anything on your heart that you would like to share with other pastors and church leaders?



Pastor Bob: I think that every pastor needs to carefully examine his model and make sure that his motivation has been carefully prayed over. I think that there is a tendency to see some of what pastors that have larger churches appear to enjoy and assume that once you get to a certain size, problems disappear. There are small church problems and there are big church problems, but every church has problems. I said at a pastor's conference not that long ago to a healthy group of pastors that there are certain people who will look on, even at this interview, and admire the accomplishment, but every accomplishment comes at a price. The price is the responsibility of 400 employees here, a debt service, and the need to stay holy and pure. I would imagine that I am more tempted than a lot of other people are tempted because if I fall, a lot more people will fall. ■

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