

Right or Wrong? Downsizing

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Many of the best casual restaurants—some local, some chains—are downsizing their menus. They're focusing on the meals they prepare best, and they're staking their reputations on these smaller menus. Can the church learn something from them?

I grew up in a Southern Baptist church in the 1960s. It was so busy, my pastor used to say: "Mary had a little lamb/It should have been a sheep!/She went and joined a Baptist church,/And died for lack of sleep!"

Faithful Baptist children like me attended Sunday school and Sunday morning worship. We returned to church at 4:45 p.m. for choir. Then came snack supper and Training Union. Next came Sunday evening worship. I got home about 8:30 Sunday night. Whew!

A busy but well rounded program

Then we had visitation Tuesday night and children's missions and prayer meeting Wednesday night.

This was the "Baptist Program." Sunday school was for evangelism and Bible study. Choir was for teaching worship. Training Union was for teaching theology, church history, evangelism and the like. Children's missions was for teaching missions. It was a great package for creating well-rounded believers.

But American family life has changed radically since then. Today, many mothers work outside the home. Organized sports have become more prevalent and time-consuming. Parents commute longer distances to work.

Despite these changes, many churches want to maintain a program suited

for the 1960s.

Many restaurants are simplifying their menus. They're recognizing they need to focus on what they do best. They also want to avoid presenting people with a paralyzing number of choices.

Mary vs. Martha

Luke 10:38-42 describes a visit Jesus had in the home of the sisters Mary and Martha. Martha worked on preparing a great meal, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to his teaching. Distracted by all the preparations, Martha burst in on Jesus while he was teaching and demanded he make Mary get up and help her. Jesus said to her: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (vs. 41-42).

Martha was doing a good thing. Mary was doing the better thing.

We want to make well-rounded Christ followers and preserve church programs with long and distinguished histories. But we can forget our main purpose—to help people develop relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does this mean we need to give up teaching missions, worship and the like? Not at all! It means we need to keep our eyes on our central task of helping people know Christ. My church is looking at combining the tasks we do, asking questions like: Why can't you learn about missions while you're learning about worship? Why can't you learn about church history while you're learning the Bible?

Sometimes, we need to end good things so we can do better ones.

Robert Prince, lead pastor

First Baptist Church

Waynesville, N.C.

If you have a comment about this column or wish to ask a question for a future column, contact Bill Tillman, consulting ethicist for "Right or Wrong?" at btillman150@gmail.com.