

## Chapter 16 (Plug and play)

When you play a game, how do you win? I am easy to read while playing card games. In the game of hearts, the goal is to deceive the other players. The main idea is to take all the hearts or give them all away. Yet, in each round, what are you doing? Clearly, I tend to hold my cards. The other players spend their time trying to fool you while attempting to see through the bluffs. In the end, how good was I at being true to myself and false to others. What will I fake to win?

I have served at church in many ways. I do realize that certain acts of service in a church require no skill, yet they are all needed. An usher might need some type of friendliness. The greeter at the door needs to look nice enough. There is no real skill to being nice. There is however, the right person. A talented accountant might have a poker face. They are serious about numbers. Nice yes, friendly no. Who do we consider to be the face of a church?

There have been many books, articles, and studies on first impressions. For some reason a pastor's sermon is only a small part of the first impression of a church. I do believe the number one impression is found in wants. What does the person entering the church want or value the most? We are all looking for some type of confirmation in a church visit. Is it a good sermon or spiritual help? What is it that you're looking for? Could an usher or greeter change the game? What if a bad speaker or terrible music changed the focus of the seeker? Is it possible that what you came looking for is not what you found?

Yes, I come to church looking for something. I want a good preacher. I love good Bible insights. I want to know they read their Bible. My wife might look for friendliness or great musical choices. So, we enter church and look for the things we love. The last thing I care about is if the pastor's wife is fun, friendly, or nice. She is probably one of the last cogs in a church that I am looking at. Yet, both my wife and I had an opinion on a certain pastor's wife. She changed

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our opinion. Of course, we kept those views to ourselves. In true husband and wife fashion that conversation took three years to happen.

One day my wife asks me about the pastor's wife. Odd, "why are you asking me about her" I inquired? I tend to care about theological stuff. I didn't think I had an opinion of the pastor's wife. Yet, as my wife and I talked, I learned that I did indeed have an opinion. "Oh, she's ok", I lied. My wife then pressed me more. "Why is she just ok?" "What are you getting at" I inquired? Then the real conversation began about that church.

We both began to realize that one person in the church had changed our sight lines. Instead of looking for theology or great worship, we had moved our eyes to the pastor's wife. Why? To be honest she has very little personal skills. I sat in the seats before church one day in prayer. Yet, all I heard was her commanding general voice. "Pick up the tempo!"

"I want it sung a certain way!"

"Look, the sound is not professional!"

It snapped me out of my prayer time. I began to watch the worship team dither around her majestic insights to a group of volunteers. I did not realize that I had recorded the whole thing in my impressions. There was an opinion of this church forming in my heart. The words cold, militant, and unforgiving came to mind. Oh dear, my impression of this church was changing.

My wife then opened up on this pastor's wife's personal skills. She relayed another story that was eerily familiar. This pastor berated another person. She was cold towards another situation. There was something off about her. I hate picking on those in the lime light. They have enough trouble as it is. Yet, it bugged us. Why should we care? It's because the pastor and his lovely pastoral wife were dynamic duo roles in running the church. He preached and she

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facilitated. The problem was that she had no personal skills. Instead, this woman led by force, command, and directness. It might have its place on a battle field, but not in a church of volunteers.

Oddly enough, we have continued to bump into several people who had the same story. But, let's not pick on her. Instead, I want to focus on plug and play. Just because she is the pastor's wife does not mean she is good at communicating. It's not true she should be in charge of volunteers just because she is the other half of a dynamic duo. This woman would go through a wall to ask you to serve. Yet, she would also press you against a wall to do it too. My point is that she is not a bad person. No, she is in the wrong role.

It's a chess board. What do you need to win? Where on the board should I be placed to win the game? This pastor's wife was in the wrong place. Her game was to win at all costs. To sacrifice any piece to win. The problem with this is church. A church is foremost about love. It's the biggest attribute God has. God is love. Where is the love in voluntold? Where is the love in direct criticism?

The volunteer coordinator of a church must have tack, patience, and love. Call it a rant if you want. This woman also asked for money to do side projects like missions. Yet, she always says *please give above and beyond your tithe*. Two things. The first is the tithe. I serious doubt 1% of her church tithes. I've seen the numbers. Secondly, she never says thank you. Why? It's because bullying you through her position is first and foremost. Win at all costs. I do believe she loves. Yet, her individual expression of love is being used in the wrong place.

I do believe with all my heart that this woman loves people. I know a mom who is a tyrant. Yet, she does love her kids. The problem is that she loves them more when they obey.

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Sometimes people don't care for the way people love. There are left wishing for more. Relationships should be more than expectations and responses. Maybe, there could be compromise, tactfulness, and understanding. Why not throw in a little humility too. Militant love is love, but it's a tough love to swallow.

What do you cling to the most to win? Is it the goal? Is it the tradition or concept? I knew a pastor that always said he wore his game face on Sunday. Above all else, he was in the game on Sunday. Yet, his tact during the whole week did not display love. His game face all week around the church paved the way for Sunday. Sunday became the playoffs. Certainly, he was much more captain serious (game face) than the minister of love. I believe he loves God but that does not make him a good pastor.

Plug and play is like lemmings. We line them up and expect each one of them to march right where we guide them. The problem is with God. This stupid divine being made individuals. What an idiot! How can you plug and play if were all built differently? Ok, I'm being facetious. God made us this way for a reason. Plug and play is clearly not his bag. Rumor has it that God made individuals that don't follow that well as lemmings.

Think about it. Peter is a different cat than Thomas. Paul is different than John the Baptist. Plug and play states that Paul should have remained an apostle to the Jews. Why? He was a Jew. Joseph of Arimathea should have remained a business man, yet he chose to become a Jesus follower. These guys were people of different talents and status in life that were called to be more than they were. Go figure! So, Peter is more than a fisherman. Paul is able to wear different hats. Multi-talented people created by God are made to do more than one thing.

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Seriously, plug and play is like this. Peter should have fished to feed Jesus' ministry. The prostitute at Jesus feet should have fulfilled the disciple's sexual needs. Mary Magdalene should have stuck to the kitchen. If Matthew would have stuck to taxes and money, Judas would not have got into trouble. On and on I could go placing Biblical people in better spots. Just plug and play.

So, did Jesus put Judas in the wrong spot? See, I don't think so. Possibly, he was a good money manager. Judas just let his passions get in the way. Possibly Matthew could have done a better job. However, Jesus put Judas in a place to succeed or fail. Peter did succeed on the water but failed at a fire. Peter did become the rock. Judas tried to repent. As sad as it was, putting these men in plug and play roles would have been far worse.

Imagine Judas being put in charge of the food. Would he have doled it out? Would he have had passion in that role? This man had a passion to see Jesus take back the country from the Romans. To fix the poor and destitute, not so much. The problem was that this man was a social agenda fighter. He wanted it now. I do believe he tried to push Jesus to act. To be the messiah that the Jews had waited for. The military one.

I think Jesus puts Judas in a place to grow. A place that grinded against his passions. Possibly to channel those passions in a better way. Jesus could see that Peter was the rock. Jesus probably knew John needed to see the transfiguration. Isn't his Gospel all about the Spirit? My son is good with numbers. He is good at making things work better. His best quality is making the company function correctly. He is a fixer and maintainer. However, a desk job kills him. Yet, he needs room to fly. In a way Judas and Peter needed a place to sink or swim.

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What I'm driving at is harnessing potential or getting the best out of someone. You can't do that in a plug and play system. No, what you get is drones and lemmings. Peter could only become Peter by failing. Judas was the same but realized it far too late. Matthew became much more than taxes. Even the learned Paul, destined to be one of the greatest pharisees of all time, needed humility to be his best. A church that tosses talent aside to run church in the mundane is selling God short. It's selling people short.

What is plug and play? It's placing a stern and direct woman in a role as facilitator. Wrong placement! It's placing a wonderfully kind woman at the greeting door. Right placement! There is a need for ushers. An introvert might not be the best choice. The mom with five kids might work well at home. Yet, it's burnout in the nursery on Sunday. I know a pastor that rocks theology. Yet, he sucks at running a church. You can't just plug and play. The way people are wired, use them in those places. And, those places, just might be different than your board room agenda. It's probably beyond just being an usher.

The concept of plug and play looks right. We put people in positions that need filling. It states that church runs better with 6 ushers. Yet, three of the right ushers might do a better job. It's amazing what three extrovert people could do those 6 introverts can't in a public service? I do believe that plug and play is needed. Church needs attendants, accountants, and greeters. Child care is not dumb. It's just that church has treated these roles nonchalantly. As if anyone can do them. With people and individuality, humans just don't role that way. There is a case for putting the right people in places to succeed

A call is put out for childcare. We just need one person at the 9 am service. One person responds. It's Becky and she is a musician. She desires to play worship music but is willing to sacrifice for the church. Three months later she leaves unfulfilled. Whose fault is that? Patrick, if

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we don't have daycare then we don't have families attending. True, but if Becky was used rightly, she would still be there too.

There is the crux of plug and play. We would sacrifice Becky just to have child care. Here is my beef. Why did nobody else come forward? It comes down to the nature of plug and play. Who wants to serve in the wrong spot? Yes, there is taking one for the team. Another is taking one against who you are. That's the crux of plug and play. Ignoring the individual for the good of the team. It will only take you so far.

I was asked many years ago to serve on the sound team. I had never done it before. They trained me well, and I found out pretty quickly that I really liked it. Yet, I had my kids every second weekend. To boot, the volunteer schedule required you to do two services. I asked to be put on every other weekend to avoid having my kids sitting through two services. That was not how the schedule maker rolled. You serve when we need you. Being a Christ follower is not a privilege, it's a commitment and sacrifice they said. I quit serving on that team.

I was the right guy. The coordinator was the wrong guy. There is another side. I am a prayer warrior. I am an outreach guy. The church tried to make me play ball. To usher, do sound, and any other little job to make Sunday run. Yet, they grinded against my nature. The nature to serve the community. To reach the community. In the end my wife and I left. Yet, the church can't see it. Plug and play is like horse blinders. Just do what needs to be done. Screw the way you were made.

Take hockey for instance. There are teams and team mates. What works best to win? Should we just pick players that are good? What if they play the wrong side, in the wrong position, or with the wrong team mate? Is success on a team just plug and play?

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Antonio Brown is a football player. Good player but terrible team mate. Phillip Rivers is a great team mate yet he has won nothing. Good player or wrong team? I know that there is a struggle in professional sports over the number one draft pick. How many great kids were drafted by a terrible franchise? How many of those same kids had long careers? Plug and play does not work. Yes, players are needed, yet great coaching, smart managers, and innovative front office leaders are also needed to make them winners.

In my way of thinking there are two kinds of people. As if? We have those who fly 40,000 feet and others that prefer to cruise at 25,000 feet. Who is better? Where do they belong? Don't put someone who flies high in a low spot. An usher is not a low position, yet a highly trained business man might be better suited on the board. However, someone who is retiring just might want to cruise. Ushering is just enough to stay busy. Put people in the right spot.

Why does plug and play go wrong? At my job there was a man who was extremely terrible at communication. He was; however, extremely good at organizing. This guy was lucky that a job came up where communication is not required. He now organizes our mail routes. He's good at it too. Yet, church plug and play digs deeper than just bad placement. I fear that Christian management loves plug and play because of the word "fear."

What happens to kids who are sheltered all their lives? Some young boy or girl might decide to enter the ministry. They leave home and go to university until they receive a master's degree. At 28, they emerge from these lofty confines to lead a group of sinners. People of the real world. Plug and play equalizes fear. It takes all our gifts and talents and reduces them to (any idiot) can do the job. The newly released pastor now can facilitate those who have more experience than them. It crushes the ability to have more faith, ministry experience, and talent than the pastor. Just plug and play.

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Why do people wander from church to church? They are just trying to fit in. Its people looking for a place where they can be their best. Plug and play maintains church on Sunday. It does not challenge and grow people. Passion grows people. Sure, we can be passionate about ushering. Yet, deep passion is found in how God made you. How could that person fit their deep passion within a church? People can watch kids. Find their passion within the church structure? Not so much.

Here is one more. Let's hire someone with no theological training. Your just one of the boys. No degree or legitimate authority. What it means is that nobody with a degree or authority can rule over you. So, we create a common plug and play church program. People are being reduced to plug and play roles that don't surpass the uneducated leadership. Just serve Sunday doing the little things that need to be done. Again, I'm not belittling the little things. I am belittling talented people being underutilized in common roles. Roles anyone could do to make those in authority look superior.

It seems like I'm making an usher look low on the totem pole. You miss read me if you think that. What I'm getting at is focus and intent. Why do most churches not have significant outreach programs? Why are most churches insignificant in the community? It's all got to do with the top dog. He becomes insignificant if the church looks bigger than him or her. The pastor looks faithless sitting in his office while the rest of us bless the community without talents and gifts. The community begins to identify with the church rather than the leader. That's it in a nutshell. Plug and play is designed to keep someone on top.

Even evangelicals promote leaders to pope status. Who is the top dog? *We are the body* is sung together in the pews, but not promoted. So, the pope/pastor creates a few programs to look like they are doing something. They promote a three-word description of who we are as a body.

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Then he or she implements plug and play. Reduce everyone else into obscurity. Making it virtually impossible to challenge their passion and faith. Virtually impossible to go beyond the plans of the pastors. Why do you think my former church had a six-page set of forms to start a ministry? It's to make the hill very steep to pass them.

Plug and play is toxic to Christianity. It does not have room to let Peter walk on water. It does not have room for Martha to leave the kitchen. Who are we in Christ? What percentage of Sunday is church? What percent of church is your Christianity? You see, if we make Sunday the Superbowl, then the other six days fade into obscurity. If we make the life group more important than Bible reading then the Spirit of God is managed. Keep everyone in a place of your design, not by Gods design. Is that really Gods way?

Do you think I'm nuts? Do you think I'm way off? How to sustain your pastoral job 101. Keep people in their place. A place that you alone design. Facilitate the motto: *this is the way we have always done it*. Further to this, it pushes love away from the pastor. He becomes the facility manager. It's an easy job. A sustainable job. Plug and play puts the onus on Sunday and life's groups to love and care for the flock. The pastor only has to visit to affirm. Get his or her fingers and heart dirty, not a chance.

That is not the way of *the way*. I have struggled with the role of the church and pastor. Over the years I have been told several different ideals as to what these entities are. Let's take a small look at Jesus role. First of all, he was a feet washer. He claimed to be their servant. This man sacrificed his deity to be with the flock. Jesus sacrificed time and sleep to pray for his flock. My goodness, this Son of God sacrificed his reputation as holy to visit the lowly. Jesus was not a lofty pastor with an office deep in the back of the building surrounded by secretary security check points. He was in the mess of humanity.

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Jesus was a teacher. He never stopped teaching. Everything was teachable. Two things with this. One is that he used common starting points. That means he knew the common. Jesus was born a baby directly because he had to live that life. To know what the common looked, felt, and tasted like. He could relate. Secondly, Jesus knew his Bible. Ok, he cheated because he was the word. Yet, Jesus was not afraid to use that word either. He tried to teach us to be the word like he was the word. We have the Spirit directly because the Spirit searches the depths of God. It teaches us to understand the Bible through the Spirit. It's not rocket science. The trinity was driven to teach.

With that said, Jesus was a Spiritual beacon. The good and bad of this world were drawn to him by Spirituality. The religious wanted to know. The lost wanted to know. Even the demons wanted to know. How many people cast aside from the local synagogue wanted to know? Jesus was so much more than a facilitator. A pastoral leader. Do you really think Jesus passed off the kingdom as his even though it was? He came to share his kingdom, rather than rule from above.

What do people in church really want out of it? I'm betting the vast majority of the congregation grew up in Christian homes. Maybe I'm totally wrong. I'm betting I'm right because church has been status quo for a very long time. Just pass it down the line. If the lost got a hold of church it would probably look a lot more like Acts 2. Being grateful for being saved. Instead, church runs a mundane plug and play system to never rock the boat. It's easy to pass that on to the next generation.

However, I would like to tell you what the lost want. Especially since Jesus commanded his church to offer them the gospel. This is in no particular order or significance. The lost want honesty. Quite honestly, the world knows how to deceive and lie. Why in heaven or hell's name would I leave lies for more lies. The last thing I need is deception or half-truths. Just be honest

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with me. Yet, plug and play says we are important to God. Just do this because God is important to you. It's a half-truth because really you want us to play ball your way. Using our gifts and talents for the benefit of your church.

That looks about right. Help the church. The problem is that it only helps that particular church. It only keeps that particular pastoral employed. The real truth about church is that the body is only as good as its worst sinner. If all of us are playing at the lowest common denominator (sinner), then the risk of looking bad seems minimal.

So, a new believer is told they matter. That God made them specific and special. Yet, the lie is really, just fit in. Just fill a role. How your made? What's your passion? Um, not so much. I do believe that promoting individuals risks greater sin. Jesus band of brothers looked sinful to the religious authority. Why? Jesus put himself within the lives of prostitutes and tax collectors. He placed bumbling Peter in authority. Thomas had an opinion. Judas had attitude. Jesus risked his ministry by placing less than perfect people in roles they excelled at.

Instead, we use plug and play. What gifts and talents do you have that can closely fit the jobs we have open? It's not, what we can do with what God gave us: you! I knew a lady who paints. She is the children's pastor. Sometimes they let her paint within the church sermon to express who she really is deep down inside. I knew another pastor that was really good at acting. Sometimes his sermon was a one man play. They both rocked on Sunday!

People are more than plug and play. You are dishng God if you reduce your gifts from God to plug and play. Making church a common sewer pit of the mundane. God provided you with variety because he made variety. But Patrick, we need ushers and child care. Sure, we do. I don't dispute that. Yet, to play this carousel week after week and month after month is

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blasphemy. To plan Christmas and Easter with a few seeker series thrown into September and New Year's is ludicrous. But Patrick, the stats say more people try church on specific times of the year. I'm begging you to drive your church beyond planning services. You have people within your church dying to explore their God given passion.

Hmmm... Flowers always come up in the spring and leave in the fall. Summer is usually warmer than winter. Some things happen regardless of you. People will come to church in the fall. They will attend at Christmas and Easter. Usually, people are re-evaluating their lives in January. They always have. They will next year too. Yet, the rest of the year is a series of themes and common outreach points. Around and around, we go like the earth yearly, doing church like a program or game. In the meantime, people are searching inside your church for Spiritual meaning. Are you afraid of that? Plug and play says you certainly are.

The trouble is this. We have seen this before. Grow me? Grow the church using the new gifts God has given you in "people?" No, it's called plug and play. It's creating paths to make people fit in your program. Church is not: adjust as God provides. Oh, no it's not. Imagine exploring other avenues in September. Instead of seeker services, you explore your people. Show the world what God gave you. Would that impress seekers?

Aren't Gods creation worth more than mundanely going around and round year after year? Didn't Satan ask Jesus to get with the program in the desert? *Be the king* he asked. *Use your divine will* he pleaded. *Rule from on high*, Satan begged. Yet, Jesus said that the plan was so much more than ruling. So much more than satisfying a need. Do you use the gifts of God (people) to satisfy a need at church? Do you place a self-running program in church to stay in power? To facilitate plug and play?

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Who uses a hammer to cook? Who uses a pencil to jackhammer? Let's take this one step further. I could serve as an usher. I would, gladly. Yet, why not try my passion with the lost? Why not look for ways to use that. To grow that. I am so much more than an usher. Be a life group leader. Sure, I would gladly do that. Yet, what is the role of a church body? Is it to split off during the week and reform on Sunday? Is that all a church is?

What if a new believer came into the church seeking their purpose? Do you really think it's found in child care and life groups? Is that why God made us? To play church? William Booth created the Salvation Army with the backing of his church. Charles Colson went to prison for political crimes. In prison he found Jesus. Upon his release, his church backed him to reform prison. Are those examples of plug and play?

Did either of these men attend a church? Did Billy Graham attend church? How about Mother Teresa? Where was her home church? Each one of them had a home church that let them fly at 40,000 feet beyond church walls. We can have a certain amount of plug and play at church. Yet, it's an end to a means. The means is people. It's the gifts that God gave us. Pastors are selling themselves short by playing church. By facilitating plug and play. Devising ways to grow the congregation and sustaining their job. You're selling the whole thing short.

William Carey went to India regardless of his church. How much more could he have accomplished with their backing? Imagine, Marie Enns doing more with Recuse in Cambodia if she did not have to fund raise all around the world. What would have happened if the church championed her cause? Plug and play kills the program of God. Ok, maybe that is harsh. Certainly, it tries to stifle it. I'm pleading with you. What more could a pastorate do if it invested in the talents of its people. How many more of the lost would be on fire for the lost? Saved by the lost?

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Again, it comes back to the people hub. A church hub plays a game. It recycles the calendar. A people hub makes friends and changes lives. Far more lives. It comes back to this statement. Our job is the sustainer for what we were really meant to be. We must sustain church. Yes, of course with all of our heart we must. However, we must inspire the God given passions found in his people. Explore them and you will undoubtedly explore the world for Christ through its people. Every person God has created is so much more than a plug and play church. How to reach the lost? Don't introduce them to church. Instead, introduce them to really talented and passionate Christians that are on fire for God.