Jeffrey Samson

Dr. Stanley John

People as Social and Cultural Beings

Lesson 3 Reading Summary

Studying Congregations by Nancy Ammerman breaks down the different nuances and factors that can heavily influence a church congregation, further enhancing the church's ability to make an impact on the people they serve. As soon as the first few paragraphs, Ammerman challenges her reader to consider how complex culture in society is but then develops that idea by noting how congregations are smaller societies with a religious component within a larger society. Just as our secular societies have traditions and patterns that we can predict, the church congregation also has its own subculture that is influenced by the surrounding secular culture, which is why pastors and church leadership must understand the values that the culture around them promote and dismiss. What are the backgrounds that the people they serve come from? Have they had any previous exposure to church? Did they have good experiences, bad experiences and why? Answering these and other similar questions can equip the church to reach their congregation in the most engaging way possible.

In addition to external factors, Ammerman also offers her readers a few internal factors that can influence the culture and attitude of a church congregation. One notable factor to take into consideration is the size of the church congregation. As the size of a congregation increases, achieving unity and likeness of mindset also becomes more difficult because a larger congregation increases the amount of ethnic groups and cultures that make up the congregation. With several different cultures comes many different value systems that people hold dear,

making it difficult to teach and mold people collectively. This would require more individual attention from the pastor to each church member to make sure that his teachings and communication properly interacts with their culture and ethnic background.