

Belly Button Theology
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Belly buttons. Adam and Eve didn't have one. Barbara Eden couldn't show hers. Belly dancers adorn theirs, Bikinis expose them, rings pierce them, and lint collects in them. And now I'm writing about them.

Why? Because scientists just came out with a report that stated the position of a person's belly button can help people excel at certain sports. "Given two runners or swimmers of the same height, what matters most is the position of the belly-button, which is the center of gravity."

In researching the research, I discovered that the act of contemplating one's navel as a method of achieving higher meditation is called Omphaloskepsis. Who would figure? But there's more. There are researchers in the field of belly button lint. If that isn't strange enough, one won the Nobel Prize for Interdisciplinary Research in 2002 thanks to his belly button lint study.

In the womb, we were connected to our mother through this orifice which was the source of all of our nutrients and oxygen. The cutting of the cord at birth is more than symbolic, for it challenges us to survive within our own machinery. The stump that remains withers, and is called the navel, belly button, or umbilicus--all words describing the center of our physical bodies.

Think back for a moment. When was the last time you really contemplated your navel? Not just a passing thought or casual scratch to remove some wayward lint, but deep cogitation with the intention of finding more meaning in the world.

In my recent contemplation, I realized that churches and belly buttons come in basically two styles: innies and outies. Missionally thinking, outies are preferable for churches. The most critical factor determining a church's missional health is whether its energy is focused outwardly in mission or inwardly in self-preoccupation.

A growing church's energy is focused out into the community. As a congregation matures, there comes a season when increasingly more of the congregation's energy is consumed in caring for their members, maintaining their facilities and continuing their beloved

traditions. The church may still grow for a time, but eventually the ministry becomes one of maintenance more than ministry, which leads to decline and eventual collapse. People, money, resources and hope hemorrhage from the congregation until finally it is empty.

When a church starts making the missional choice of giving themselves away in service as the Lord's disciples, their energy is refocused and the congregation's lifecycle literally can begin again.

Theologically, the church exists for others. A recent survey of members of 1000 churches, however, which asked the question, "Why does the church exist?" resulted in 89% saying the church exists "to meet the needs of me and my family."

Maybe we all need to contemplate our navels a little more. Are you an innie or an outie? Is your life driven by personal preferences or drawn out of itself in common ministry to others?