

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH NEED TODAY?

Where can people look for direction and protection today? The strange thing is that most look at things that cannot and do not bring that for which they are really looking. We as a people have about ran the gamut. We don't know where to look and it is frustrating us and we often wind up suffering despair, discouragement and depression. This seems to involve church members as well as non-members. With the promise of hope we have as Christians, why do we fall into the same traps as unbelievers do? Could it be that we have become so self sufficient that we have strayed away from the basics of our faith. These basics are our foundation. When the foundation begins to crumble everything else also begins to crumble. For the Christian Jesus Christ is our firm foundation. As long as we have built our lives on Him we can remain strong and useful. Maybe the problem might just be that America has not had a great awakening in over one hundred years. That long without a spiritual awakening takes its toll on the lives and morals of our nation. As I travel around preaching and teaching in churches it seems that often the church has become more like the world than like the Savior we say we serve. People are saying that the church today is ineffective and irrelevant. For many the church no longer has the answer for our

problems. Churches model themselves after the world rather than stick to the model of the first church in the book of Acts. Why does the world look at the church as a weak organization that has lost its purpose in the world? The purpose or mission of the church should include discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry and worship. This list is not in order of importance, but rather in alphabetical order. All of the points of purpose are important and complement each other. Only when a church incorporates all of these into its function will we see the hand of God move again in our churches. I have been studying Thom Rainer's books, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* and *High Expectations*. These two books are biblically based and sound in thought.

When the church has the mission just described and the vision of how God wants them to carry out the mission we see great things happen. This newsletter does not have the space to write about all the things required (cont. on page 3)

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DIRECTOR'S COLUMN: By Rev. Jesse Crooks

The Lad John 6:8-13

All four of the Gospels give an account of the feeding of the five thousand, but only John mentions the lad with the sack lunch. This lad is one of my favorite characters in the entire Bible. He is the one I base my ministry on. He simply gave what he had to Jesus. He did not boast or brag about what he would do with what he didn't have. He did not say, boy if I had the money I'd take this whole crowd down to Hardees for supper.

I don't believe the Lord Jesus is as interested in what we would do with what we do not have as He is in what we do with what we do have. I see the sign often, "The lord is not interested in our ability, but our availability." This lad just gave what he had.

Jesus used what the lad gave. Jesus took this little greasy sack lunch and blessed it and then He broke it. God never uses anything until He breaks it. Then He used it to feed five thousand men plus the women and children. There was about fifteen or twenty thousand all together. I gave Him my five loaves and two fish and He took it and used it beyond my greatest expectation.

I have recently discovered something new about this text. The Scripture says that they gathered twelve baskets full that remained after everybody was filled. Wonder who got all the leftovers? I believe this lad did. He went running down the road that evening carrying the twelve baskets of loaves and fish. Look mama, you know that lunch you sent with me this morning? I gave it to Jesus and look what He gave me in return. You see, Jesus not only blesses others with what we give. He always gives back more than we give. The Scripture says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over." (Luke 6:39).

Out beyond your doors is a world full of hungry people. All of them are hungry spiritually. Some of them are hungry physically. Jesus stands on the edge of this hungry world. He is moved with compassion for their needs. He is looking for people just like you and me with five loaves and two fishes that He can take and break and use to feed this multitude. Will you give Him yours? ††

Jesse †† Honored to be B RM Board Member

In These Tough Times Help Us To Be Better Stewards

About a year or two ago we asked those who receive the *Rice Paper* to let us know if they would be agreeable to receiving the *Rice Paper* by e-mail. We are sending out over eight hundred each quarter. If we could get a significant number of you to get it by e-mail we could be better stewards of the Lord's money. The last time we asked about sending them via e-mail we only got about eight or nine who responded in favor of it. We do not want to make it difficult for anyone or lose any of our friends who presently receive it. If you would like to receive the *Rice Paper* by e-mail just e-mail us at

bricemin@earthlink.net and we will begin to build the mailing list. I want to thank each of you for praying for us as we strive to minister in Jesus' Name. It is amazing to think that we have been at this ministry for twelve years now. God has blessed all the way and we praise His Name. We look forward to hearing from those of you who would like to receive it via e-mail. We will still continue to send out the rest of the newsletters via the U. S. Postal Service. May God richly bless each of you. We appreciate each of you very much. If we can ever serve your church please give us a call. †† Bill

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH NEED TODAY?

(CONT FROM PAGE 1)

for a church to be effective evangelistically or in assimilation. Dr. Thom Rainer's research has revealed the things that work best in evangelism and assimilation. When the church awakens to its own needs and the needs of the world around us we will see that we have failed in many areas of Christian living. The book *High Expectations* will give us insight into the areas we need to improve in. One primary area that we have been very lax in is making church membership mean something. I was astonished at the number of churches in America today that do not even ask prospective members if they have had a salvation experience with Jesus Christ. Many are taking in members and are seemingly glad to get them that are not even Christians. How can churches be strong and take in unregenerate people? I have believed for a long time that we take church membership too lightly. Some few years ago I wrote a little booklet on making church membership mean something. I let a few people have a copy, but basically it has been in a box in the office. When I read the two books, written by Dr. Thom S. Rainer, previously mentioned, I began to think about how easy it is to become a church member in America today. I believe that the answer to strong and effective churches is by applying requirements for membership. If we would apply to become a member of a civic club we would find out that there are certain requirements that must be met before we could become a member. But, on the other hand in most churches all is needed is for one to say "I have" and "I want to be" and in some you do not even have to say "I have." "I have" means that at some point in my life I have accepted Christ and the "I want to" means I want to become a member. No requirements are made in order to become a member in the majority of our churches. Is there any wonder that churches are so weak and unhealthy today? Dr. Rainer's investigations revealed that the most effective evangelistic

churches and the churches that did the best job in assimilation of members were the churches that had high expectations of their members. The churches that made perspective members aware, of the expectations of members, upfront instead of after they became members did a better job of retaining them than those who did not have high expectations of members. The churches that did the very best job of evangelism and of retaining new members were the ones that required the high expectations. What were some of the required expectations? The potential candidate for membership would have to give their testimony of their becoming a Christian, be baptized, attend the church's new member classes, become an active member of Sunday School, be a regular attendee of all the services of the church including Sunday night and Wednesday night, to be faithfully obedient in biblical tithing to the church and to become involved in some ministry of the church. When these accomplished the potential member then and then only could become a member of the church. Once a church moved from just saying I want to be a member to making requirements for membership things began to happen. One thing that happened was that most of the churches lost a few members due probably to the high expectations. But after two years the churches began to show growth which resulted in growth beyond their expectations. Many doubled and tripled in membership. They also retained the members who came into the church. The churches became much healthier than those who did not require high expectations. Thus the bottom line is that churches that have high expectations of their members grow and retain members better than churches that have low expectations of their members. God has high expectations of all Christians and churches should have high expectations of all the members. What would high expectations do for your church? We may be surprised! †

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PRAYER LIST FOR OUR PRAYER PARTNERS

Pray for AMERICA. We as a nation need to come back to our roots. We were founded on biblical principles, but we have gotten away from those principles. For years the words “In God we trust” seemed to be true for the most part, but now it is difficult to get enough people to stand against the forces that are trying to have these words removed from any public viewing. Unless we can get back to realizing that we need the Lord we will never be the nation we used to be. If all Christians would stand together for our Christian heritage and oppose those forces who seek to push America down, we can make a difference in the future direction of our beloved country.

Pray for your church and pastor daily.

Pray for Christian Ministries as they struggle with the economic downturn. I know many vocational evangelists who are having to leave full time ministry and return to secular work in order to provide for their families. Pray for the Lord to touch the hearts of His people and churches that they may reach out in support of the above mentioned ministries. Now probably more than ever the message of God’s love needs to get out, but is hampered by loss of donations that help support God’s work.

Pray that churches will again begin to schedule revivals. It is almost unbelievable how many churches are not having revival meetings any more. And if there is anything our churches, and nation need today it is revival. \perp