



SAVING MY CHURCH !



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ReachingYouth.net

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Saving My Church!

#0 – INTRODUCTION

NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK!!

Our church sanctuary has the best sound system money can buy. The new projection system we installed not long ago, is the largest High-Definition wall-sized screen in town. Our church's rock and roll band makes the lights flicker when they play loud. Our Sunday school classes, up through primaries, are fed a full breakfast while watching video animations of popular bible characters.

The two church deacons we sent to the state church growth seminar came back with a few techniques to try, but had little confidence in their success. These were the same deacons that pressured our pastor to quit using words like sin, responsibility, lordship, conviction, confession, and repentance.

Though our pastor's name appears on the church sign out front, the real power actually comes from the the pews, yours and mine. Instead of spending heavy sums of church money, the answer involves tears, sacrifice, and dependance on scriptural truths rightly taught and trusted.

Keep reading to see how each person; age or gender, can reap the blessings of faithful service to the rest of the church family. [~]

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1 PEW METER

The utter silence was as loud as an explosion; the effect it had on me. The small group of men were discussing how we could help the pastor and how we could grow the church. One said that attendance was down and doesn't change. And then a deacon said weekly offerings were continually below expenses. One other fact we all agreed on, was that we knew very little about each person that attended... other than health issues.

We all looked at Pastor and asked how we fix this thing. Without hesitation, looking at each of us, he calmly said, “Visit the people.” What immediately followed, was that explosion of silence.

I'm sure most of us were asking ourselves, “But how does this thing get rolling?” Even a couple might be thinking visitation is the pastor's job, “Hey! Wait a minute. Visitation is mainly the pastor's job – that's what we pay him for. Besides, he's better at answering Bible questions than we are.”

But the question that lingers in our minds, is, “How do we save our church?”

Across town, beyond the tracks, Hank Beam was getting nervous, because he knew what was coming. They both leaned against the window of the little MAKIN' JESUS SMILE CHURCH, peering in, enjoying the happy singing and clapping. Hank and Henrietta were outside because it was packed inside. Every time the church sang the chorus, “If you're happy and you know it – tell your face!”, Henrietta would clap harder and sort-of prance in place. Being 6

months pregnant, she had no business bouncing around, for any reason. But Hank knew it was futile to try to calm her down.

A few moments later, gray-haired Max came limping out the front door, with his cane in one hand and his folding chair in the other. Max stayed outside the window with Hank and Henrietta. It easily warmed your heart to see first Henrietta sitting in the chair for a while, and then Max resting his war-weary bones, seated.

What you probably will never see is what the little church calls, “Dozer on Duty”. Dozer had the appearance of what his nickname suggests – a bulldozer. Dressed in his Sunday-best coveralls he would always get to church almost before any one else. He would quietly touch the end of a bench (pew, if you got them), turn his face heavenward and offer a prayer for those who'd be seated there shortly. Then he's step to the next bench and do the same. He never failed to take extra prayer time at the red ribbon.

The ribbon reserved a spot on the back bench for soldiers currently serving and those who'd paid the ultimate price. Pastor once asked Dozer about what he was doing. The answer was, “Some people call this 'prayer walking'. But the short of it is, I'm fillin' these benches with prayer before anyone sits in them. And nobodys gonna stop me, neither!” (Does your church have a Dozer on Duty?)

Dozer would tell us flat out; **visitation always starts in the pews.** This month's usher stands by the door and greets everyone, noting especially the visitors. He always watched to see if a member moves over and sits with the visitor(s). Good visitation starts in the pew with sharing a songbook, a

Bible and plenty of smiles. Miss Donna never learned to read and was far from a fancy talker, but you could always tell she was on duty. She immediately gave each visitor a friendly smile, and a bloom from her own Lilac bush. Fresh tracts and colorful church contact fliers on a table (not in a wall rack) are a must.

Pastor Josh could see his PEW METER was hitting maximum. Just like a thermometer tells if a person is healthy or not, every church's pew meter measures it's health. It's easy to use too. At the beginning of the service, watch to see if everyone sits in their own seat, leaving the visitors to sit by themselves. If this is what your church's pew meter indicates, you'd better find a Max, Donna, Dozer, quick – flooded with tearful bone-deep prayers. [~]

2 - RUSTY TOOLS

It was a sight to behold. Even the ladies thought the screwdrivers looked kind-of pretty. Jake was a retired airplane mechanic. He'd probably tell you that tools were his bread and butter. Pointing at that wrench over there, he'd tell you, “See that monkey wrench there? Well, with one just like that I used to help save a couple lives in my airport maintenance shop, 4 years back... I mean it! I guess up-town folks would call it an 8 inch adjustable wrench. It's actually just a store-bought, off-the-shelf tool. And this one here, I replaced the hot water pressure valve over there next to the church furnace.

Jake Benson's maintenance bench at church had all the tools arranged in their place. You'd never have to dig for the tool you needed, especially if there was a life saving something to

fix, like the ceiling tile that came loose in the nursery, last February. More than that, you couldn't find a speck of dirt or rust on any of Jake's tools... no sir. He figured God gave him the tools and the important church job of keeping things safe and secure.

No one ever found out that Jake often envisioned himself as training here on Earth, to become a maintenance man in the Tabernacle in Heaven. Maybe that's why he always had his 'tool-box Bible' opened, ready to share principles for young hearts and minds who'd come help polish his tools.

It Was Quite A Different Story Up In The Sanctuary.

The tract rack in the sanctuary holds tools even more powerful than Jake's workbench. Those tools of words and truths need just as much attention – maybe even more, in the purpose they are designed for – repairing lives. It would send very bad signals to the mind of someone looking through the variety of tracts and see most all of them have the name of the previous pastor or wrong times for services printed on them. But I agree with most folks, there seems to be something terribly wasteful in throwing away tracts that have the Gospel message and other Bible truths that are just as accurate as they were, when God breathed them.

The exciting answer to their use, is to box them up and send them to missionaries often overseas. To that end, there are many ministries that regularly ship them overseas for you. Not only that, but you can send your box of tracts to one of those state-side ministries at 'Media' postal rates, along with old Bibles, Bible lessons etc.

Creating your own tracts and first-contact brochures is a lot of

fun and puts to use talents God has put in the hearts of adults and youth in your church. Tracts should use fairly large type with simple words and not a lot of them. Include images. The first-contact brochures should include a map, image of church, service times, and contact information.

Interest can be created by having a contest that youth compete in creating a tract... maybe even put it on Facebook. [~]

3 – Kid Temperature

The youth of most every church are leaving and not returning, for a basic clear reason – the attitudes of the church are shunning them. The church and other youth ministries are cold to their needs and challenges in their present world. A church that truly cares about its future, needs to take its KID TEMPERATURE, throughout the whole building and its programs – on a regular basis too.

A - Kid Temperature Tips

In taking the kid temperature of your church, you must first see that teens most often are visual feeders. Because their reading, writing, and typing skills are not always up to par, they go for the video/audio resources. Besides... video and audio is faster, louder, and flashier. They like to create things putting their own imagination to work. It's like they want their creation to have their stamp on it; that somehow says, “Hey. I'm no dummy!” They love challenges. Boys on games, girls on multitasking conversations and being the fastest 'news' reporters of their on-line network. Today it's a gigantic phenomenon called, “Social Networking.” More specifically, boys like loud, messy, high energy, construction, and competition. The girls like feelings, fashion, communication,

and companions. Boys nor girls like lectures & sitting still.

Just as important, we must fathom the information tsunami our youth entered when they were born. This is tough for us silver-haired seniors to come to grips with. Technology can now be purchased that allows the wearer to take your picture with a blink of an eye, without you knowing it. Your cellphone and the cable companies know where you take your phone and when. When it comes to geography, the Internet can show you roads and scenery on any spot on our planet.

Machines follow commands we speak to them, and go places no man has ever gone. This means we need to be wise and caring in the type of 'kid thermometer' we use. We can't begin its use without deep caring prayer and trusting God's promises in scripture.

B - Kid Temperature – First Impressions

Our church walls should tell visitors, even before words, our hunger for spiritually nurturing our youth. Colorful posters, contest progress, upcoming events should spur the inviting of their friends to church. Even the arrangement of chairs and tables should indicate that classes are not the mechanical lecture and story agenda of each week. Classrooms should include small discovery corners where youth, even teens, can group and discuss God's handiwork in creation and their own lives.

C - Kid Temperature – M and Ms

What does it tell you when a church youth curriculum or Vacation Bible School theme is built around dinosaurs or stagecoaches? Though painful, the church must realize these two objects, among others are the farthest from the hourly thoughts of youth today. These themes are patterned around

the curriculum used half a century ago. The problem is that church youth planners are afraid to separate the MESSAGE of the gospel from the METHODS used to teach.

D - Kid Temperature – Their Smarts Are Greater

To be very honest, our youth today are smarter than we give them credit for. Church youth planners assume the 'bible stories' taught to beginners will build strong enough character, no further solid principles need to be taught. When the church tries to feed teenagers 'milk' stories, they are turned off, and leave. That's not rocket science. Invite teens to planning meetings – ask them for their ideas. Do we think the Holy Spirit only leads ADULT Christians?

E - Kid Temperature – Prayer

Imagine you are a young person in your church, listening to prayer requests, week after week, or reading the list printed in the bulletin. You continually hear requests for health issues, sometimes even of a minor nature. But NEVER do you hear of the spiritual needs of youth, their classes, projects or leaders. Include a missions bulletin board that features youth missionaries and evangelists that are teens themselves. [~]

[An excerpt from ReachingYouth.net START HERE, by the same author.]

4 – CHURCH THIEVERY

It's robbery far worse than stealing from the offering plate, to be sure. And the cause of it all, in simple terms is little more than 'scripture snacking'. More than that, this scripture snacking is a very big contributor to the decline of church attendance and service. People don't want to be a part of a long-faced fellowship. It even turns the whole thing

hypocritical. The long-faced church people sing “Victory in Jesus”, “When the Role is Called Up Yonder, I'll Be There” and wonder why visitors don't return. To youth, this is even a bigger turn-off.

It's obvious to us all, that continually snacking on foods is very unhealthy. It's also true with scripture. The down-hill spiritual slide goes from the strength scripture FEEDING(1), to scripture READING(2), and then to the unhealthy scripture SNACKING(3). The result of living each day with scriptural snacking, is that Satan has changed the meaning of JOY in our minds and stolen it from our hearts and spirit.

God's Word, scripture says a whole lot about JOY and even a special FULL JOY. I define joy as the ongoing bone-deep sense of well-being, of contentment, understanding my purpose and agenda (according to God's will for today.) To me, true joy seeks to find ways to use my God-given talents and provisions to serve others, with mercy and love, who have broken repentant hearts. Joy is nothing like the flirting with danger in fast cars and evil experiences with people who have no respect for me or their own future.

JOY is best understood, not with words, but when the Spirit of God blesses us each day as we lovingly follow His leading. A famous prophet of the Bible's Old Testament, Jeremiah, had a life far more difficult than most. But look at his words (inspired by God, of course) in chapter 15:16. See how they identify a very strong link between our dietary intake and scripture, as follows: *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.”* (did eat = internalized) Take a moment and think about the meanings of joy and rejoicing. How are they different?

Each of us prepare our minds to feed on the dinner table offerings till we're full. A precious verse referring to the purpose of scripture connects it to Christ's teachings and our spirit of joy (i.e. 'Full Joy')

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. John 15:11.

Taking a close look at all the parts of that verse is a full course meal of strength and inspiration, in itself. But certainly that's what we should always expect when we open our hearts and minds to what Jesus Christ and His inspired word says to us.

PREPARATION

Scripture snacking (that robs us of our joy), almost always happens when there's little or no PREPARATION before entering God's Word. We all know that to best enjoy a dinner meal, we begin with TABLE GRACE. For the very same reasons we should always begin feeding (not reading or snacking) on scripture with BIBLE GRACE preparation. Inviting the Holy Spirit to plant the scriptures into our heart for strength, purpose, AND JOY, is a wonderful, needed gift from God the Father to us.

When we feed on scripture, with loving preparation, we begin to learn about FULL JOY, and MORE THAN CONQUERORS that steps us above Victory In Jesus. Visitors sense this joy in us & will come back to learn how they can have joy and rejoicing. [~]

[Portions of the above from ReachingYouth.net; SOS – STEWARDS OF SCRIPTURE, by the same author.]

5 - Doors and Windows

The sheriff never caught us, all the many times we climbed in the rear window of the church. Concord Community Chapel was a very old community building in rural Ohio. That window entry was something that just had to be done... and each week too! The old building had its two-holer facilities down the path. There was no insulation in the walls where the honey bees lived, and only one door.

That was part of the problem. The door lock only worked from the inside. Someone had to enter through the window and unlock the door. But when the piano playing began, everyone forgot about the cold, about our hard flat planks to sit on, and lean back against. And, the comments you've heard over the years about a proverbial church mouse... well... we had a live one.

There was no soundproof door entrance to our nursery. It was just a corner of the one room, sectioned off with boxes to keep the 'crawlers' corralled. Oh but when we'd gather around the old upright piano with many of its white key-caps missing, the spirit of unity couldn't have been stronger, and the doors and windows issues in one's life, were pushed aside. Jesus made a rich place of worship for us, at Concord Community Chapel.

I think a lot about doors... the variety of them, and what they tell me. Often a little sign will hint to us what is beyond the door, and if we should enter or not. Refrigerator doors, car doors, restroom doors, hospital doors begin an almost endless

list. You and I know we must give heed to certain doors and how we should respond to them.

I can't tell you how many times over the years, I've seen proof that God guides me along His will for my life, each day, with road blocks, open doors etc. I'm sure He does others also. The Apostle Paul had these 'closed door' instances of God leading him along.

Some of the closed doors God has put in front of me were of a health/sickness nature. This has happened so many times, I often ask myself if God is leading the person I've just learned about, in some way. Fanny Crosby, totally blind most all of her life, wrote thousands of hymns of praise to God, that we all sing today. If she were not blind, she might not have given us the rich songs that she has. We can say much the same things about the quadriplegic Joni Erickson Tadda.

While most church prayer lists get longer and include people not known by the church family, I learn much about the spiritual growth of those that participate in it. Don't get-me-wrong. We should always be reminded of those with various levels of health issues. But I believe we should not rush to ask God to make them well, without asking God to use those issues to make them and us live and worship ever closer to Him; the Great Physician.

My heart also seeks to put the names of those that are not saved and serving close to the top of the list, along with the military and missionaries.

But even above the military, missionaries, and unsaved, we ought to voice our praise for the great God that He is. This sets the tone of all our requests that follow... about those

doors and windows.

The Apostle Paul and Silas were locked behind a door of prison doors, with unspeakable filth. But God had a high purpose. In God's good timing the door was opened, that filled the jailer's mind with great fear. But in the process he and his family all believed in God and were saved.

Over the years our maturing in the Lord's will and work, we must be mindful that God is working in the lives of the healthy and those who are not. Always pray beginning with praise and finish with, "thy will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen." Then God blesses beyond our dreams and wishes. [~]

6 – Silver-Haired Gold

It's not what you think... at least it wasn't for me. I've been thinking of today's teens and young adults as one step above morons. They use the latest in communication gadgets all day long and most of the night, linking up with their acquaintances every few minutes. But then when do connect, they string a few words and abbreviations together that carry almost no meaning or value. I've even heard that some teens are so 'good' at texting, they can hold their smartphone behind their back and still send messages.

But recently, I was clued into the attraction of it all. And it really surprised me, for several reasons. To a large degree it's not the content of the message, but the 'ta-ding' of the hand-held communication door bell. Now stay with me on this...

Youth and young adults today feel like they are from another

planet. That is, it's like they speak a foreign language, because no one wants to talk to them, or even more, want to hear what they have to say about their empty world of technology.

The 'ta-ding... you've got a message' on their phone says to them, "Hey! What'cha doin? I've been thinking about you quite a bit today." The message might even ask for an opinion about the new store in town, or a video about dating. Do you see? The message prompt opens a door for the cares and comments to be shared... no matter how trivial they might seem to outsiders.

So you say, "OK. I get it. But what does this have to do with saving my church? Huh?"

Saving my church has a whole lot to do with connecting two groups of people that both feel left out of life... shunned.

The one group we've just been talking about; those that are starving for someone that cares enough about them to listen to the stress, struggles, and loneliness they are supposed to mature into. The other group that feels left out, sit in the back pews feeling like their silver or disappearing hair makes them outcasts. They feel mentally inferior because they don't embrace technology in all its forms.

The ironic thing about the silver haired group, is they are the BEST EQUIPPED to reach out to those generations looking for someone to just listen; not listen and then judge or give orders... just to listen. I call this kind of listening – 'love listening'. Some key words here might be caring, compassion, courtesy, creative. What usually happens though, is correction, casting blame, compounding guilt.

The silver-haired are the best equipped to love listen, for many reasons... some of which are:

- they have the most free time to connect with the youth.
- they don't have to know about computers, just listen.
- they've put the most sweat and tears into building the church, and would have the most to lose, to not help.
- their years of experience give them first hand ideas that might be tactfully shared.
- they would be the best equipped to 'lead from behind.'
- their minds are not filled with today's brainwashing.
- God's word authorizes them to lead the younger ones.
- (this just starts the list)

The ongoing manner of living of the silver-haired church members makes it rather easy to invite (or hire) youth to do odd jobs around the house, opening the door to love listen.

Give love listening a try. Your spiritual life will never be the same...

AND NEITHER WILL THEIRS !!

[~]

7 – VICTORY !

What a real thrill it would have been to be standing next to Moses as he lifted his arms toward the red sea, and the sea parted by God's power. And then watching God's people, whom Moses loved, carry the ark across and put sea-bed rocks on the shore of Canaan, as a memorial. This mighty man with outstretched arms began his life with a death sentence over his head. We all remember him being hid in the bulrushes and then 'discovered' and 'rescued'

by the Egyptian princess to be raised in a palace.

To begin putting this journey in some perspective, we need to take a closer look at a word and attitude that people today have lost the true sight of... love. Love has several levels we'll take a short look at. The word LOVE is like a wooden ruler that has been misused to mix paint, it has lost its value in being able to describe the dimensions of things. The length of a dress or the depth of a post hole can't be described. Today the word love has been tossed around and is useless for describing one's dedication or depth of sacrifice to another, or a principle. It might as well be spelled LUUV.

Here we'll measure the levels of love with a ruler that measures the amount of personal sacrifice, not inches. EROS is near to sexual lust, which TAKES from another, without regard for their feelings – like the opposite of personal sacrifice. PHILEO is like 'brotherly love' or friendship. The personal sacrifice is shallow with no tears. This is the level that many fearful soul winners are working at. AGAPE love is God-like love. With tears and greatest sacrifice for the other, God showed us the greatest love at Calvary, with the sacrifice of His own innocent Son, Jesus Christ.

In the personality of Moses, we see AGAPE love in two directions, which is always required. Moses obediently raised his arms over the Red Sea opening the gate of the often rebellious people to the promised land, Canaan. That took real forgiveness; real sacrifice. Then in Exodus 17:12, we see the tired Moses getting life-saving support (sacrifice) from Aaron and Hur, holding up his arms.

This two-directional AGAPE love is so often missing in our church leaders today. The pulpit power of today, includes

little conviction, little sacrifice, little call to repentance. The agape love and sacrifice on Calvary, and the fires of an eternal Hell preaching are replaced with messages of a PHILEO love level. We can think of sacrifice as the 'currency' of love, and tears as the 'evidence' of love. Both must be taught in relation to Calvary. No wonder verses in Revelation warn about the churches that have lost their 'first love'.

But this AGAPE love must always be two-directional. In the same way Aaron and Hur held up the tired arms of the mighty Moses, we must hold up the arms of our church leaders. So many church attenders think of church as a spectator sport, forgetting their arms-length worship is destroying the ministry to the youth of our future church.

All of this resource might be subtitled PEW POWER. That is, the life-blood of the church, AGAPE LOVE remains continual and life-changing only when church leaders keep the Calvary love in the forefront. But also, the church family sees their life-saving duty to encourage and help the pulpit message to ring with praise for God's love and conviction toward the salvation of souls, with tears and sacrifice. [~]

