Lost Sheep Ministries News

January 2015

The Great Commission: Matthew 28: 18 - 20 is a commission for all Christians to go, make Disciples, and teach them to OBEY all that He has commanded us. LSM is dedicated to evangelizing the lost and making Disciples of Christ that make Disciples of Christ according to II Timothy 2:2.

Notes from Brother Bob: We are excited about 2015 as our Lord takes us to the uttermost to proclaim the Gospel and equip others to proclaim the Gospel.

Our emphasis this year will be to equip student nationals with the Gospel in such a way that they will sustain the expansion of the Gospel in their schools after we return to home base. As stated in our opening declaration on each of our newsletters: The Great Commission: Matthew 28: 18 - 20 is a commission for all Christians to go, make Disciples, and teach them to OBEY all that I have commanded you. LSM is dedicated to evangelizing the lost and making disciples of Christ that make Disciples of Christ according to II Timothy 2:2.

Ethiopia:

I had an exciting opportunity to meet with Nick & Jessica Lowe, our Citymark Church missionaries to Ethiopia. Young and sold out to Jesus! I love their heart and passion. What about you? What about me? Are we serving Christ with a passion for him in our hearts?

Reflections About A Trip to Africa:

I received this email from Jimmy Stanfield and thought I would share it with you. This is from a sermon that his Pastor David preached this past Sunday at His Touch.

If you'll ask me why I went to Africa, I'll tell you I went primarily to improve on the justice of God. I didn't think it was right for anybody to go to Hell without a chance to be saved. So I went to give poor sinners a chance to go to heaven. If you'll analyze what I just told you what do you think it is? --Humanism. I was simply using the provisions of Jesus Christ as a means to improve upon human conditions of suffering and misery. When I went to Africa, I discovered that they weren't poor, ignorant, little heathen running around in the woods looking for someone to tell them how to go to heaven. That they were monsters of iniquity!!! They were living in utter and total defiance of far more knowledge of God that I ever dreamed they had!

They deserved Hell! Because they utterly refused to walk in the light of their conscience, and the light of the law written upon their heart, and the testimony of nature, and the truth they knew! When I found that out I assure you I was so angry with God that on one occasion in prayer I told Him it was a mighty little thing He'd done, sending me out there to reach these people that were waiting to be told how to go to heaven. When I got there I found out they knew about heaven, and didn't want to go there, and that they loved their sin and wanted to stay in it. I went out there motivated by humanism.
I'd seen pictures of lepers, I'd seen pictures of ulcers, I'd seen pictures of native funerals, and I didn't want my fellow human beings to suffer in Hell eternally after such a miserable existence on earth. It was there in Africa that God began to tear through the overlay of this humanism! It was that day in my bedroom with the door locked that I wrestled with God. For here was I, coming to grips with the fact that the people I thought were ignorant and wanted to know how to go to heaven and were saying "Someone come teach us", actually didn't want to take time to talk with me or anybody else. They had no interest in the Bible and no interest in Christ, and they loved their sin and wanted to continue in it. I was to that place where I felt the whole thing was a sham and a mockery, and I had been sold a bill of goods! I wanted to go home. There alone in my bedroom as I faced God honestly, it seemed to me I heard Him say, "You, will not Judge if all the earth does right! The Heathen are lost and they're going to go to Hell, not because they haven't heard the gospel. They're going to go to Hell because they are sinners, who love their sin! And because they deserve Hell. I didn't send you out there for them."

I heard as clearly as I've ever heard the echo of truth of the ages finding its' way into an open heart. I heard God say to my heart that day something like this, "I didn't send you to Africa for the sake of the heathen, I sent you to Africa for MY sake. They deserved Hell! But I love them!! And I endured the agonies of hell for them!! I sent you out there for me! Do I not deserve the reward of my suffering? Don't I deserve those for whom I died"

I was there not for the sake of the heathen. I was there for the Savior who endured the agonies of Hell for me. My eyes were opened. I was no longer working for Micah and ten shekels and a shirt. But I was serving a living God.

Do you see? Let me summarize. Christianity says, "The end of all being is the glory of God." Humanism says, "The end of all being is the happiness of man"

Thank you for sharing your heart Pastor David.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church in the USA:

This is a summary of a book by this title by Dr. Thom S. Rainer. No one wants to see a church die. And yet, far too many churches are dying. For more than twenty-five years, Dr. Thom Rainer has helped churches grow, reverse the trends of decline, and has autopsied those that have died.
Introduction

The state of churches across the USA varies due to many factors. This brief presentation is taken from a small book written by Dr. Thom Rainer who is currently President and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources. Dr. Rainer has written several books based upon statistical research of churches in the USA across denominational lines. For a more complete assessment of the state of churches, it is recommended that his book "Autopsy of a Deceased Church; 12 Ways to keep yours alive." be read in its entirety.

Types of Churches

Healthy churches have a prominent presence in their community. There is virtually no infighting in regards to the modernization of the church. Attendance is constant, or growing. Outreach is a big part of the service the church provides to the community.

Churches that show symptoms of sickness are prone to low attendance, especially around Christmas and Easter. The focus of the sick church ministries tends to lean more in favor of existing members instead of potential members. The church spends too much to help themselves instead of using money in outreach ministries.

Churches that are very sick become so through a gradual passing of time. These churches often show a decline in attendance over time, while also suffering inner conflicts and quarrels. New members are extremely rare. The church is just seen as a building instead of a influential part of the community. Another noticeable problem is a constant switch of pastors over a relatively short amount of time.

Dying churches have very few prospects of ever recovering. Usually the grounds and building are turned over to the surrounding neighborhood, or even the local government to maintain. In the best cases, a new church receives the dying church's building as an offering.
Symptoms of a Healthy Church

Churches whose mission is to be Disciples of Christ before themselves live long healthy lives. They are doing exactly what churches are meant to do. These churches never experience infighting, keep a balanced budget which they spend wisely and serve their community first and foremost.

Members of a healthy church enjoy one another as a spiritual family. They maintain the doctrinal tenants of the Bible in unity. They are missional minded and visionary in that they see the primary purpose of their church as having a sacrificial attitude about exalting Christ by working together to take the Gospel to others in their community, region, and ultimately around the world. They do not agree that their missions responsibility can be fulfilled by paying others to do mission work for them. They are careful to not let social ministry overshadow true spiritual evangelism and follow up discipleship.

Healthy churches seriously prepare the youth that come into their influence for Christian leadership. They recognize the short-term tragedy of building their youth programs on "fun, games, pizza, and entertainment, etc." just to pack em’ in. They realize that youth, so treated, will not remain when they grow into adults and see the church as boring because it focuses on true worship, prayer, Christian disciplines and serving others.

Healthy churches do not just teach information to increase knowledge but puts into practice the Biblical truths being taught.

Healthy churches are not intimidated by the world but sees the world as their mission field to be won to Christ and discipled.

Unlike dying churches which have the constant worry of self-preservation on their minds, healthy churches focus on being disciples of Christ.
Symptoms of a Sick Church

The erosion of a church can occur gradually, to the extent that regular members are often unaware it is happening.

While a church can grow at a tremendous rate, it can often take twice as long for it to die out.

This process is so slow that members are unaware of the changes taking place in their church as a whole on a weekly basis, and they are unable to see the danger early enough to make a difference.

The symptoms of an ailing church begin being reflected in ministries and programs that she emphasizes which are designed for comfort, safety, and protection of her members. The cleanliness and appearance of her facilities and furnishings are more important than using her resources to sending her members out into the community to evangelize and make disciples.

Few new members are added and more, especially the unequipped youth and young adults, leave each year.

Being busy in and around the church facilities is reckoned as fulfillment of the member's Christian duty. Taking care of the social needs (food, clothing, shelter, rent, utility bills, etc.) instead of the spiritual needs of others generates false contentment about being obedient to Christ. *The good becomes the enemy of the best!*
How to Help a Church with Symptoms of Sickness

Recognition that the church is sick is the first step toward recovery. Attitudes of denial only prolong the illness which will only worsen.

Sick churches still have a chance to be saved through a well-controlled budget, or the beginnings of a community outreach emphasis.

Churches that become sick often lose sight of what their purpose in the community is.

Helping a church regain its sense of purpose is the first step in curing a church of its sickness.

Beginning community outreach programs, no matter how big or small, as a means of gaining a bigger impact on the community will start the recovery process.

Once the church starts reaching out and helping its community, this can lead to her healing and growth.

Four ways to help a church with symptoms of sickness:

1. Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.

2. Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved. In most of these churches, the members are involved in ministries for themselves, often to the exclusion of ministries beyond the church.

3. Take an audit of how the church spends its money. Are new budgets decreasing yet focusing on the needs of its members rather than for reaching the community?

4. Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize your community.

Serious united prayer for revival rather than casual prayer for personal benefits is essential to the recovery of a sick church.

Churches with early symptoms of sickness should take a sabbatical from their regular, traditional operation and honestly question how their member and financial resources are being used. A deliberate return to basic Biblical mandates must be made.
Symptoms of a Very Sick Church

Most churches die out because they are determined to hold onto their traditional past. These churches refused to embrace change and as a result became sick. Some of this comes from the modernization of other churches. This can range from the installation of a bigger and better sound system, the mixing of classic hymns and modern Christian songs and even what should be worn when attending church.

Eventually, dissenters and inter-congregational politics take hold which drives more and more people away. This very sick church is thus on the edge of becoming a dying church.

It may not be instantly noticeable because of how long the process takes, but once it is discovered, recovery can take an inordinate amount of time.

Life support measures such as reducing staff, discontinued use of certain facilities, sale of no longer used equipment and furniture, rental of space to secular community organizations, etc.

How to Help a Very Sick Church

Much like churches that are showing signs of sickness, very sick churches must be reminded what their purpose in the community is. Christ did not start His church to be a safe, pleasant, no risk, social club for her members.
These churches must give up longing for how the church once was and embrace what made the church so great in the first place. Even if it means adapting the modern way other, healthier churches have survived.

Other ways to help sick churches is to stop thinking about ways to improve an old building and instead focus on the Great Commission laid before it. This is not an option!

Once a church reaches this stage of illness, recovery is extremely difficult. An honest agreement on the state-of-the-church must be made by her leadership and members before there will be any hope of recovery.

Only with spiritual blessings from God will a reversal in her sick symptoms be started. Desperate prayer for revival along with individual member's willingness to repent of any sin will bring such blessings. God will not bless sin! Unbelief and disobedience must be totally removed from the patient.

Sincere willingness of all leadership and members to forsake man-made traditions and make individual, faithful, radical changes by returning to the basics of true church life as illustrated in the Book of Acts will start a healing process.

**Symptoms of a Dying Church**

Members of a *dying church* often think of their church as being an impenetrable fortress. This can be more true than they realize. The image of the dying church being their impenetrable fortress is a sign that they do not radiate the impression of being very welcome in their community.

While the fortress crumbles from the inside, on the outside it remains steadfast. As a result, these churches stand very little chance of recovering.
Dying churches have crossed the line into obscurity in their community. People drive past it, not giving it a second thought.

The church may be pretty on the outside, as a result of dedicating its entire budget to unneeded renovations, but on the inside it's closed off and unwelcoming. These churches come about as a result of countless fights over trivial matters like the colors of draperies, or the design of stained glass windows.

She can no longer afford to maintain her property, staff, and facilities. Her once-filled sanctuary now has many empty pews during her weekly worship services. Only a few older members hang on determined to protect their traditions. Revival is no longer considered; just survival!

Her members have become an intimate, closed, lukewarm social club totally irrelevant to the community that surrounds her.

Death of a church

The heartbreaking reality is that churches die all of the time for various reasons but primarily for failure to carry out the commission for which Christ started His Church.

Once church members realize that a church has died, they can either refuse to accept it and live in denial until the hard truth hits them or they can seek another church which is healthy.

Holding onto a dead church will not bring it back!

What Should be Done with a Deceased Church

Following are some good suggestions for a church to accept death with dignity. The most respectful thing a dead church can do is to gift the vacant property to a newly formed church as a place for them to meet.
Giving up the church building is also symbolic as a modern representation of Christ giving his life for all who believe in him.

The most unacceptable thing to do is Nothing! A vacant building will soon be a target for vandalism and decay. A community eyesore rather than a community asset presents a very negative witness for Christ.

**What Should You Do?**

Whether a church is healthy, showing signs of sickness, very sick, or dying, it is important to pray for the Revival of the Church as a whole.

Healthy churches should reach out to churches with health problems rather than only investing in themselves.

Join a group of multi-denominational Christians to earnestly pray for revival of the Church. Through this, the church can continue to grow and send out disciples as a way to keep churches alive and healthy.

Don't expect God to just send revival, be willing to have the revival start in you!

Unconfessed sin in our churches is the root cause of her demise.

We must band together in Christian love and honestly seek to obey the commands and commissions of Christ. Else failure to obey will result in the Death of your church!

Failed families result in failed churches. Failed churches result in decaying, crime riddled, unsafe communities. Such communities contribute to the demise of countries.

Whereas our country was once great, we are on a slippery track to collapse from inside!

Won't you start or join a small group dedicated to regular prayer for REVIVAL?

**Tax Deductable Donations to LSM:**

Lost Sheep Ministries is a 501(c) non-profit organization. Donations may be made to LSM, 2951 Marina Bay Drive, Suite 130-144, League City, TX 77573. We are seeking funds to travel, equip, and commission others to take the Gospel of Christ to all nations.

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