

The Real Reason Churches Die and People Leave

Experts say that nearly 4,000 churches close every year in America and over 3,500 people leave the church every single day.

Church is boring, and many churches are dying because the power of God has vanished from the pulpit as well as the pew. Like Samson, they “know not that the Spirit of the Lord has departed” (cf. Judge 16:20). But there is hope if we once again seek God. “Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come from miles to watch you burn” (John Wesley).

We need genuine revival preaching: “Revival preaching is more concerned about an outcome than an outline. The revival preacher is more aware of his text than the time. He is bent on pleasing the Lord rather than pleasing men. His ear is tuned to hear and heed the voice of God” (Harold Vaughan). “We need more prophets in our pulpits and less puppets” (Leonard Ravenhill).

Many know about 2 Chronicles 7:14, but fail to apply it: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

God’s call is not to Hollywood, Washington, or the media, but to us. If “My people” turn back to Me I will heal and restore. We have a form of microwave Christianity. Service times are cut to just over an hour, prayer is glanced over, and worship is designed to entertain the masses. “People are bored,” they say, “so our services need to be more appealing.” You can increase attendance with slick marketing and entertaining services, but you’ll miss the heart of God. The church will be

a mile wide but only an inch deep.

To seek in the context of 2 Chronicles 7:14 means to “find what is missing.” The Hebrew word for seek, *baqash*, has a very strong meaning. Imagine losing your child in a crowded mall. Your entire heart would be engaged. How would you spend your time? Where would your energy be concentrated? Now parallel this with seeking God.

I’ve often said that one of the most difficult challenges associated with pastoring is not sermon preparation, leading a church, or taxing counseling appointments; it’s witnessing the tragic results of spiritual dehydration—watching people die spiritually with living water just steps away. Sadly, we are too busy and too self-absorbed to truly seek Him.

In today’s culture, there are countless enticements that pull us away from God. It is my firm belief that, second only to salvation, seeking God is the most important aspect of the Christian life ... to truly know God: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Very few of us ever experience this close relationship with God because it involves things such as humility, dying to self, vibrant prayer, and heart-felt worship. This isn’t meant to discourage, but to convict. Conviction is a wonderful gift from God used to turn the heart back to Him.

Let’s be honest: how many can truly say like Jeremiah, “His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (Jeremiah 20:9)? How many have truly experienced Jesus’ words in John 7:38, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water?” How many can truly relate to “times of refreshing” found in Acts 3:19?

Many have head knowledge, but they’ve never truly experienced the presence of God. Often, it’s because of ongoing and unconfessed sin. Being tempted isn’t sin—surrendering to it

is. Temptation is also an opportunity to do what is right by turning from it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 states, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

This "way of escape" is ultimately what tilts the scale toward seeking God. When we flee temptation, turn from sin, and seek God, the by-product is the filling of the Spirit. The door of temptation swings both ways—you can enter or exit. If we choose to enter, once inside, we may not see the exit sign so clearly again.

I'll close with a correspondence I received from a man before he fully sought God with all his heart, "I had become someone I never thought I would become. I was in complete darkness ... I would sleep in my clothes for as long as I could. I began wishing that I would die. The emotional pain was unbearable."

Here is his correspondence after he passionately sought God and surrendered his life to Him. "I only wish that everyone could feel the love that I experienced. I'm able to forgive others and genuinely love them. I feel like I have been re-born ... elusive peace has now been found."

How long will you waver? If God is God, follow Him (cf. 1 Kings 18:21).

Watch the sermon that may spark revival:

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