

Sunday Evening March 26, 2023
The Church Initiative
Matthew 9:36-38

"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." - Mat 9:35-38 KJV

In this passage we see Jesus doing two very distinct things. First, we see that he shared the gospel with the people he came in contact with. Secondly, he loved on the people he was ministering to.

The biggest problem you and I face today is not a lack of harvest. The biggest problem the church faces today is a lack of harvesters. The issue is not with the field, the issue is a lack of people to go into the fields. How many of you would agree that we live in a different world than we did ten years ago? If we are not careful, we can focus on the negative and not see the positive. Let me give you some of the challenges we face in America first, and then we will move on to some more hopeful things.

The median size of average worship attendance dropped from 130 to 65 in just 10 years. (92% of churches are smaller than 250 in average worship attendance.) For every 100 people in attendance at a church we lose attendees for the following reasons. I think some of these numbers could be moved around for our church, but this is what church answers are seeing in churches today.

1 to death

9 to moving

7 to transfer to another church in the community

15 to declining attendance frequency (culture Christianity)

If you are keeping track, that is 32 people each year that each church needs to replace, or we will see greater declines in the future. The question you may be asking is, how do we get new people in the church? Lord willing, we will be able to look at some ways to get new folks in. Before we give you the plan let me give you some more things to help you understand where we are as a nation.

Builder Generation – those born before 1946 lived during a time where 2/3 of their generation were Christians. This is 65% of that generation professed to be a Christian.

Baby Boomer – those born between 1946-1964. They had a generation who was 1/3 Christians. 33%

Gen X – those born between 1965-1979 had only 1/4 of that generation claiming to be a Christian. 25%

Millennials – those born from 1980-2000. Only 15% of that generation would claim to be a Christian. We will get back to this generation in just a bit because we see something amazing happening with this generation.

Gen Z – Those born after 2000 – they have an overall mindset that nothing in the culture in which I am living brings them satisfaction.

Let's look at these last two generations. The Millennials were 15% claiming to be Christian. We have seen over the last year or two that number begin to increase. That number is now at 19%. It is believed that this generation is the most receptive generation to the gospel that we have seen. You know what this means? We have to do more to reach that generation and the generation behind. Because we are one generation from people not knowing the Lord.

Gen Z is searching for something that is real. Something that will bring them satisfaction. This means that we have to be a good witness. We need to show them what genuine Christianity looks like. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

What I would like to present to you this evening is a game plan. A plan that focuses on prayer, distribution of the gospel, loving on people. Our church would be considered above average with the amount of people we have attending on Sunday morning. I just want you to know that. There are some who only want to look at what we

use to be and refuse to look at what we could be. There is a promised land in front of us. A land that is filled with uncertainty. A land that looks different even than it did two years ago, but we must not be fearful. We must recognize where we can get better, and be willing to change maybe how we do ministry.

Let's talk about prayer. This morning, we met at 9:15 and we prayed. We prayed for the service, but most importantly, we prayed for lost souls that we know. I would encourage you to get involved in community prayer here at the church. Do you love this church? Do you want to see it grow? Are you willing to get here just a little early to spend time praying?

The church in Acts were praying daily in the temple. They understood the importance of prayer. The church grew as a result of them praying, and then sharing the gospel. I would encourage you to get involved with prayer. Along the lines of prayer, I would like to tell you about an outreach opportunity. I believe all Sunday School teachers, deacons, and staff members should try their best to be involved in the outreach of this church.

I have printed some door hangers that simply say, we have prayed for you. What I see us doing is going out into our communities and praying over individual houses as we walk, or drive down the road. Once we have prayed for a particular house, we would leave this door hanger on their door to let them know we have prayed for them. If you get to talk to someone, that is great. You may just

want to leave the door hanger and that is fine. What would we pray for?

1. Salvation
2. Safety
3. Comfort
4. Peace
5. Church Attendance

You probably will not know the people you are praying for, but these five things should cover a lot. If you think of other things, then pray for that. It could be that the Holy Spirit is directing you to pray certain things.

We will do this at least once a month. Let me explain why doing something is crucial. We have already discussed the decline in Christianity, we have discussed the harvest is there, just no people to work it. It is important because it is our job. Let me briefly give you ways you can go into the harvest on your personal time.

We have invite cards in the back that you can pass out.

1. The gray one is one that has a video of the gospel
2. The red/blue one is one that has our welcome video
3. The blue/white one is one that allows you to pay for their meal. It says a friend of Temple Baptist Church just paid for your food.

I would encourage you to make use of them all.

Some other ways you can get involved in outreach is by attending events that we have going on and being a friendly person who will just connect with people. Some events that you can get involved in this year. Easter Egg Hunt, Family Night of Hilarity and amazement, Fun Fest Block Party, Fall festival. You may be asking how you can get involved? Just remember PIE

P – Pray/Present the Gospel

I – Invite People to Church (more on this in a minute)

E- Engage with Visitors

You may not have any children that will be coming to the Egg Hunt and that is not an excuse to be absent. In all our outreach events this year, our number one goal is to present the gospel in a clear, effective manner. You may have opportunities to share personally with someone how to be saved. If not, you can pray. You can pray that the gospel will be presented in a manner that people will understand it.

You can Invite people to church when you come to one of these events, and while you are out and about. Gospel receptivity is high: 81% of unbelievers would welcome an invitation to church (with caveats). Here are the caveats. If you say that you will walk into the building with them. Invite them and then tell them you will meet them at this time in the parking lot and will walk in with them. Tell them they can sit with you. If you want to make that number jump up a little, tell them you will take them to lunch after service. If you do these 90% of unbelievers

would be more receptive to your invitation. You can do this at the Egg Hunt and all other events that we are having. The point is, we need you involved. Once again, those in leadership positions at this church should be the ones leading in example.

I have read all the surveys that have come in, and I would encourage you to fill one out, but you all have given wonderful things to think about. If you were to look at our church as a visitor, you would see some things that simply need to be updated. We will not address all the things that the surveys have said but I will say that 25% of the surveys turned in have all mentioned things about the bathrooms needing to be updated, more signage on the road for people to know where we are, and updating some things inside our sanctuary. In the future, we will need to address some of these things.

One-year goals – Meet every Sunday Morning to pray. Hang a door hanger on every door within a 1-mile radius of our church. Make updates that we can make with the intention of making more in the future. See new people join the church. See souls saved and people disciplined.

Two-year goals – Increase our outreach efforts. New events, and ways to get the gospel out. See 64 people join the church.

Did you know that only 9% of churches are doing anything evangelistically speaking within each year? Did you also know that less 1% of churches have something

going on each month? Can we do better? I think you know the answer. Let me just say, I take responsibility for areas we have failed at. I have allowed the devil to feed me lies and I have believed them. I want to ask your forgiveness for that, and your prayers that I will not allow him to win in the future. We are seeing exciting things happening in our culture. Young people are becoming more receptive and could be the most receptive generation we have ever seen. It is time we do what our text says. I would like for you all to read the text we started out with this evening after we pray.

"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." - Mat 9:35-38 KJV

Church, I love you and now you have been sent.