A FRUSTRATED OLD PREACHER

I’ll admit it! I’m a frustrated old preacher. And I’m not real sure what frustrates me the most. One thing that frustrates me is that at 73 I’m doing a lot of soul searching. I’ve made a lot of mistakes in over 45 years of ministry. Most of those mistakes involved being sucked into playing church instead of really ministering to the needy. Oh, we’ve personally ministered to convicts, addicts, prostitutes, and HIV/AIDS victims – even having many of them as overnight guests, some for months at a time. These are real people we have grown to love deeply. Some are still close friends. We even spent nearly 12 years in our ministry developing and leading a Christ-centered 12-step program for addicts and others struggling with character defects.

However, in my reflection of our life in ministry, I now wish we would have spent much more time ministering to the down-and-out instead of pampering the puny. I’m referring to the consumer Christian, the one who thinks the primary ministry of the church is to satisfy them.

To be candidly honest I have become weary of church meetings where little is accomplished when it comes to making disciples, playing politics so that some “power person” gets their way or doesn’t get their feelings hurt. I also question the time spent preparing Bible studies and sermons for people who are already over qualified to be fruit-bearing, disciple-making Christians. These are those who refuse to leave their comfort zones to minister. I guess you could say that I’m tired of playing church when we should be busy being the church.

What is playing church? I suppose it will mean different things to different people. Maybe Gordon Dahl summed it up best: “Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship.” And I also believe that Rick Warren was right on when he wrote, “Authenticity is the exact opposite of what you find in some churches. Instead of an atmosphere of honesty and humility, there is pretending, role-playing, politicking, and superficial politeness but shallow conversation. People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act as if everything is rosy in their lives. These attitudes are the death of real fellowship.”

So, what am I going to do to overcome this old preacher’s frustration? I’m not sure. To be sure I’m going to be doing a lot of praying. I realize that I am in the winter of my life and ministry and I do not want to waste a minute of it. As Keith Green put it, “It's time to quit playing church and start being the Church (Matthew 18:20.)” If that means leaving the comfort and security of a located ministry so be it. If it means staying in a located ministry but doing more and pushing harder when it comes to outreach by befriending the down and out, then so be it. If it means ministering to churches by sharing with them how to befriend the unlovely, then so be it. I just desire for God’s will to be done in my life.

Yes, I’m a frustrated old preacher. But I’m not defeated and I’m not yet dead. And at 73 I’m not close to retiring. As long as the Good Lord gives me a healthy body and mind. It is my desire to fight the good fight, finish the race laid out for me, and keep the faith by both my actions and words. God still has people who need to be extended a hand of grace, people who need to be accepted for who they are. Frustrated? Yes! Done extending grace? Not even close.

You never have to advertise a fire. Everyone comes running when there's a fire. Likewise, if your church is on fire, you will not have to advertise it. The community will already know it. Maybe Gordon Dahl summed it up best: “Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship.”

GET OUT ON THE FIELD

"Getting involved in your church by using your gifts will accelerate your spiritual growth immensely. God designed us that way. Don't head for the grandstands when you enter the kingdom of God. Head for the playing field. That's where the excitement is. That's where the action is." ~Wayne Cordeiro

The Quartz Hill football team won the CIF Championship. The head coach, Pat Degnan, told his team all year, "Its not the X's and the O, but the Jimmy's and the Joe's." In other words, plays don't win football games; players do. In the same way, church doctrines and programs do not make disciples--people do. We need to have the right relationships with the right people.

Casey Stengel, a baseball manager, said, "It’s easy to get good players. Gettin’ them to play together, that’s the hard part."

“Authenticity is the exact opposite of what you find in some churches. Instead of an atmosphere of honesty and humility, there is pretending, role-playing, politicking, and superficial politeness but shallow conversation. People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act as if everything is rosy in their lives. These attitudes are the death of real fellowship.” Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life

“Going to Church doesn't make you a Christian, any more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger.” — Keith Green

“It's time to quit playing church and start being the Church (Matthew 18:20.)” ~Keith Green~

“I repent of ever having recorded one single song, and ever having performed one concert, if my music, and more importantly, my life has not provoked you into Godly jealousy or to sell out more completely to Jesus!” — Keith Green

“No Compromise is what the whole Gospel of Jesus is all about... 'For I tell you...no man can serve two masters...' (Matt. 6:24). In a day when believers seem to be trying to please both the world and the Lord (which is an impossible thing), when people are far more concerned about offending their friends than offending God, there is only one answer...Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him!” — Keith Green, No Compromise album, 1978.

“If your heart takes more pleasure in reading novels, or watching TV, or going to the movies, or talking to friends, rather than just sitting alone with God and embracing Him, sharing His cares and His burdens, weeping and rejoicing with Him, then how are you going to handle forever and ever in His presence? You’d be bored to tears in heaven, if you’re not ecstatic about God now!!” — Keith Green

“The only music minister to whom the Lord will say, ‘Well done, thy good and faithful servant,’ is the one whose life proves what their lyrics are saying, and to whom music is the least important part of their life. Glorifying the only worthy One has to be a minister's most important goal!” — Keith Green

“Today’s church wants to be raptured from responsibility.”

“People give advice; God gives guidance.”

“Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for?”

“The Church used to be a lifeboat rescuing the perishing. Now she is a cruise ship recruiting the promising.”

“My main ambition in life is to be on the devil's most wanted list.”

"If Jesus had preached the same message that ministers preach today, He would never have been crucified."

“Entertainment is the devil's substitute for joy.”