

Caveat... Sharing my experience in a comeback church... Talking about some new things... Things you may have strong feelings about/against! But remember these things transformed a dead church in a small rural community/19,000

Numbers Matter! (Scripture Ref's)

John 4.1-38 "Jesus was directed to go out of His way to keep a divine appointment with a Samaritan woman (*these people* were generally despised by the Jews). W/o hesitation, Jesus began a conversation with her, using their shared experience as the opening point to deliver the gospel to her. His disciples walked up on the scene and wondered what He was doing. They were shocked to see Him talking with a woman like her... They didn't have the grit to say what they were thinking... so they changed the subject... to dinner... "let's eat!" Using the opportunity for their growth He began talking to them at their point of confusion saying, 'I have food that you know nothing about!' "Has someone ruined *our dinner plans with Him* by giving Him something to eat?" He took the moment a step further saying... "My sustenance is to do the will of the One who sent Me... and to finish it! Don't say to Me, there is time to spend before the focused labor of the harvest! I say to you, 'Lift up your eyes and look on the fields for they are ripe, right now! And the one who works will receive pay and gather eternal fruit... "and the reaper and the sower will rejoice together! This is where the word comes true that one sows and another reaps! I sent you to reap where you did not sow and you are partners with the sowers in this work!"

Txt Q's Will you look where I am looking? **v35** Do you see what I am seeing? **v35** Do you see Me watching you? **v36** Do you realize I am here to work with you? **v36** Can you see I am giving you the harvest as a gift? **v37,38**

Prepared for Growth? Most congregations – consider themselves to be friendly... Consider themselves open to the idea of welcoming new people... But most are so in love with each other, so *inclined* to their groups, that no one else can break in...

"Is it a small thing that you eat your fill then step on what's left... that you drink clean water then foul the rest with your feet? I will judge you because you thrust with your side, shoulder and horns for what's best – and the weak and needy are deprived and scattered... *but I will save them!*" **Ezek 34.18-22**

Our God really cares about the weak and needy, the despised and scattered sheep... and He wants us to really care too!

Txt Warnings! Hindrances to the harvest!

Preoccupation! **v8,27,31-33** Father's displeasure/"judgment" and exclusion from the adventure! A lost opportunity to touch a life!

"Oh, they don't want to be bothered..." "We don't want them to feel like we're pressuring them..."

Forewarning! People visit a church to be touched by someone/something! They will try "God" three times!

If they enter and find no warmth... If they sit and hear nothing that helps them with their life... If they fail to feel something real, they will not try again for 10 years!

Preoccupations...

Each other! Has church really devolved into *our* social hour? "Don't we have houses to meet in and phones to use?"

Familiar things/actions/habits!

Talking our talk!

Music!

Prejudice! **v9,27** Fear! What to say? How to start? Stereotyping: "Wicked" Samaritans!" Allegiance to tradition rather than Spirit! **v10,27** "We've never/how can this be God?"

Forewarning! You live in a part of the country with less than 10% Christianity... The boundaries are drawn and *Christians* are the real minority... But we know who we are up against in the seen and unseen realms... Dawkins-Harris-Dennett/Media/Apos't. Enemy who hides in shadows. And light still conquers darkness!

How willing is the congregation... To obey and go the distance? To be inconvenienced? Overcome their fears? Maintain their focus? To go outside the norm for the "near-Christian" harvest? To finance the effort?

We must get our people looking up and out, sowing into "greater community!"

Numbers Are Important! Churches are supposed to grow! Not "just" numerically... but... As long as there are unsaved people in the community where we are set... God expects growth. And He's watching the tree for height, breadth, strength, fruitfulness!

Growth Costs! Willingness to plow, water, fertilize, prune! Willingness to train, trust, partner, hire new workmen! A large embrace for change! Condition of growth! Result of growth! Responding to, planning for, the future! *Pastors*, lead your church like it's twice the size... *Leaders*, build today/for tomorrow! Risk the fear of failure for the benefits of success! ***Which one should govern your decision making process?***

Growth Costs! A creative approach to new near-Christian markets! We must stop expecting this society to come to our doors! We must come up w/ways to grab their attention/where they are! *The L, Vida house experience!*

The Church... Is ultimately a service organization! Changing from a members club to a mission group takes time, effort, struggle, expense... But if there are no "servants" there is no true service – just a cluster of people getting together...

To die you only... have to care about traditions more than truth! Have to be more concerned with order than the reality of life! have to be more concerned with looks than substance! Have to do the same old thing, or nothing...

To die you only...have to be more concerned with attrition than atrophy!

To live you only... have to stop looking, dressing, thinking, talking, acting, praying, singing, giving, counting religiously...

To live you only... have to stop living for the saved and start living for the unsaved!

Our Church... *We began the effort...* Focused out/down: "Two Gen!" Changed the door "personnel" 10 min to make a difference/3X! Utilized outsource materials. *Alpha* was the greatest lesson we ever learned! COMMUNITY! Divorce Care! Truth Project! ***And He did all the big stuff!***

Prepared for Growth? If not, God call's the shepherd to deal with the sheep... If not, move the willing shepherd to a new flock... If not, bypass the sheep and shepherd altogether and find another "pen" down the street...

Growth Costs! Sometimes people you walked w/a long time/way, walk away... Sometimes you end up with people you didn't expect in places you never thought you'd go... Sometimes life doesn't take you where you thought...

But it's not your adventure! And you signed on with Him!