

## Looking to the Future

Good afternoon and thank you for coming to this anniversary celebration. It is hard to follow John Comer's presentation. He had slide, and it was hard for me to come up with some slides of our future. You've heard plenty from me already today, so I want to make my remarks fairly brief. I have been asked to share some thoughts about the future of the church. I wish that I could have the wisdom of knowing exactly what the congregation needs to experience another 120 years of vibrant ministry.

This past Tuesday evening at the Pastoral Relations, we talked a few minutes about pastor-congregation issues, then we talked for nearly an hour about the future of our congregation. I thought, "This is great! This will help me form my thoughts for the anniversary message!" We threw out some ideas but mostly we talked about how the world is changing and the church is struggling to keep up with those changes.

I wish I could peer into a crystal ball and know what challenges we will face. Many books have been written in the past few years about the church and its future. Most of those books also describe the dismal conditions of the present church and how attendance has dropped off in over 85% of congregations. Only 1% of congregations are growing because they are winning lost people to Christ. That means the other 14% are growing because people are leaving declining churches and attending these congregation who offer something more attractive. These are dismal statistics but I don't want to talk about that. I don't think the last chapter has been written on the church of Jesus Christ.

In order to peer into the future this afternoon, I want to take you back 2000 years to the brand new church that popped up in Jerusalem as the result of the Holy Spirit descending upon the people at Pentecost. My text is one of my favorites because I think it is the key to anything we could ever accomplish as a church in the future. If you were in Sunday school this morning, you heard me introduce this text but now I want to expound on it for a few minutes.

Acts 2:42 reads: "They devoted themselves to the apostles teachings and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." In essence, we can view this as a formula for both success and for a balanced approach to congregational ministry. We know this works because in verse 47, it says, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

I. TEACHING: We discussed this point this morning during the Sunday school hour and how vital it is to the Christian life to be disciplined through learning God's plan we find in scripture. This plan teaches both the individual and the congregation about living within God's plan. As the church looks to the future, teaching scripture is what nurtures and refines the life of the believer.

II. FELLOWSHIP: The Greek word is Koinonia and means community, communion, joint participation, sharing and intimacy. This is saying that every Christian needs community and every church needs to be known for its community. The fellowship is where we live out and experience the body life of the church. The Christian life is relational which means we must learn to play well together. Paul reminds us that we are to “build each other up” (I Thes. 5:11)

III. BREAKING OF BREAD: Well, you’re doing that right now as we have gathered at the tables to enjoy a great meal. Yet it is more than that. It is a ritual and rite of Christian fellowship. Have you noticed when we have celebrations such as an anniversary, we celebrate it with food. There are two types of breaking of Bread in the Bible. One is the Lord’s Supper, The other is eating a common meal together like we are doing today. Either way, we are gathering in the presence of God and bound together in Jesus Christ.

IV. PRAYER: Finally, and I believe most importantly, the church of the future not only must teach, fellowship, and break bread – but the church that survives and thrives into the future is going to be a church of prayer. The church of the present and future must be a church that is intent on prayer. Prayerless churches have written their own epitaph. They become disconnected from their purpose.

Revival has never taken place in the history of the Christian church without it being preceded by months and years of prayer. In 1857 there was a 46 year old man named Jeremiah Lamphere who lived in New York City. Jeremiah loved the Lord tremendously, but he didn’t feel that he could do much for the Lord until he began to feel a burden for the lost and accepted an invitation from his church to be an inner city missionary. So in July of 1857 he started walking up and down the streets of New York passing out tracts and talking to people about Jesus, but he wasn’t having any success. Then God put it on his heart to try prayer.

So he printed up a bunch of tracts, and he passed them out to anyone and everyone met. He invited anyone who wanted to come to the 3rd floor of the Old North Dutch Reform Church on Fulton St. in New York City from 12 to 1 on Wednesday to pray. He passed out hundreds and hundreds of fliers and put up posters everywhere he could. Wednesday day came and at Noon nobody showed up. So Jeremiah got on his knees and started praying.

For 30 minutes he prayed by himself when finally five other people walked in. The next week 20 people came. The next week between 30 and 40 people came. They then decided to meet every day from 12:00 to 1:00 to pray for the city. Before long a few ministers started coming and they said, "We need to start this at our churches". Within six months there were over 5000 prayer groups meeting everyday in N.Y. Soon the word spread all over the country. Prayer meetings were started in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Washington D.C. In fact President Franklin Pierce started going almost every day to a noonday prayer meeting. By 1859 some 15,000 cities in America were having downtown prayer meetings everyday at noon and thousands were brought to Christ. The great thing about this revival is that there is not a famous preacher associated with it. It was all started by one man wanting to pray. See only God can start a revival.

So really, the future of Second Baptist is in God's hands. We have a history of both victories and struggles and I'm guessing our future will be much the same. But our response to the goodness and mercies of God is to function as a body that continuously seeking God's direction and purpose by prayer.