

Day 1: January 23, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church is Not Enough

Your Performance Evaluation

I don't know if you have ever had a job evaluation or performance review, but it can be an intimidating experience. You've worked at a job for one year and now it's time for the annual review. Usually a job review is based on the job description agreed upon when a person is hired. The evaluation will include:

- A review of the job description.
- An evaluation of work habits, achievements, and progress.
- A discussion of the areas where growth, change, or corrections are needed.

If the evaluation is favorable, it can be a time of affirmation and a renewal of vision created. However, the evaluation can be devastating and you can be put on some type of probation, if your supervisor finds nothing to affirm. Sometimes, if there is still reason for hope and the employer wants to give the employee a chance to change, then he/she will give goals, guidelines, steps to bring about change so the person's job can be retained.

How would you like your family reviewed by an expert, or an evaluation of your friendship by a friend, or an evaluation of your personal finances by an expert, or a health evaluation by a doctor? These would all be helpful, particularly if the person doing the evaluating was known to you; had your best interests in mind; and wanted you to succeed.

Now, how would you feel about a spiritual evaluation by Jesus? Sometimes we're so busy, so overwhelmed by our life experiences and going through the motions; we don't really know how we are doing spiritually. How would we like Jesus to give us such an evaluation? How would we feel about your local church being evaluated by Jesus (Revelation 2 and 3)? Would His evaluation find you more doing church or being church; making disciples or making professional churchgoers; inward focused or outward focused; self-centered or gospel-centered?

Using a devotional format, we will perform a self-evaluation to see where we stand as the body of Christ, individually and collectively. The Apostle Paul declares that God's Word is the standard by which Believers are to live and is our constant self-evaluation resource, when he writes,

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV)

The devotional writings will to encourage, inspire, admonish, and challenge Believers, and their congregations, to grow in their understanding of the nature and purpose of the Jesus’ church. This will help us reach our purpose, renew our minds, refresh our spirits, rededicate our will, and request our needs.

First, we will read and meditate through a passage in Matthew 25, about ministering to the least, the last and the lost, and passage in 1 Corinthians 9, about the philosophy of ministry, that brings glory to God. Then we will read and meditate through the Book of James, which provides all Believers with the practical wisdom necessary for everyday living. As such, it shows us that true faith produces good works and it emphasizes the practical aspect of Christian living. This is what “Being Church” is all about.

So, join us, as we explore and grow together in a necessary understanding of what “Being Church” looks like. Prayerfully and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will commit to “Being Church.”

Loving God, Loving ALL People, changing the world, in order to make disciples of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God.

Day 2: January 24, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church is Not Enough

"Serving is My Game"

Text: Matthew 25:31-35, 40

When I was a sophomore in HS, I wanted desperately to be on the Varsity Team, for a couple of reasons. The first reason was because I wanted to be like Magic Johnson, the former basketball star for the L.A. Lakers. But secondly, I wanted to be on the Varsity Team because there were a handful of Varsity players that were apart of an exclusive basketball club.

Well unfortunately, I didn't make the Varsity that year and had to settle for being on the Junior Varsity Team; however that didn't keep me from starting my own basketball club. The name of our club was "H.I.M.G.", which was an acronym that meant "Hooping Is My Game". And for you non-basketball players, "hooping" is just a slang word for basketball. And my former club "H.I.M.G". reminds me of another club that I've been a member of for some time now. If you haven't joined my club I want to invite you to become a member today. The club is called "S.I.M.G.", which stands for "Serving is My Game". To become a member of this club there are only two requirements. #1, You must answer the call of salvation and #2, answer the call to serve.

In Matthew 25:31-40 our club leader, Coach Shepherd, has separated the players (sheep) from the non-players (goats). The sheep are the players who have answered the call of salvation and by grace Coach Shepherd has positioned us on the right side (Matt. 25:33a) of the heavenly court and unfortunately those on the left side (Matt.25:33b) of the court are those who have rejected Coach Shepherd and will never be admitted on the team.

The goats are also those who have not only refused to answer the call of salvation, but also had no intentions to serve anyone but themselves (Matt. 25:41-45). But for those of us who are sheep, our Coach encourages us to make service a priority. In fact, just last week our club drove downtown and fed the homeless (Matt 25:35a, "For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat."). We also gave away over 100 bottles of water (Matt 25:35b, "I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink"). And Coach Shepherd was even able to give a homeless family a temporary place to stay until they are able to get on their feet (Matt. 25:35c, "I was a stranger and you invited Me in"). And next month our club is hosting a Coat Drive at our school and donating the coats to a Foster Home in our community (Matt. 25:36a, "Naked and you clothed Me"). And oh how I love to serve in the hospitals by visiting the sick and praying for them (Matt.25:36b, "I was sick, and you visited Me").

Good Hope Family I urge you and I beg you to please join our club of service. And Jan 27th and Jan 28th is a perfect time to do just that, as we will serve over 300 people at our first Community Empowerment Event of 2017. Will you join "S.I.M.G." today? If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, join the club by answering the call of salvation (Romans 9:10; John 3:16; John 1:12) and once you have answered the call of salvation answer the call of service. Don't be satisfied with just being on the team but get on the front lines, get dirty for Jesus and love on people. I'm so happy to be apart of a Club (a church) where "Serving Is Our Game."

Join S.I.M.G. today! You wont be disappointed, but will receive Coach Shepherd's commendation, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:40).

Day 3: January 25, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church is Not Enough

By All Means

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (NIV)

The 19th century missionary, Hudson Taylor, is considered by many as the greatest missionary since the apostle Paul. It is said that his laser-like focus on reaching the millions of lost people in China, a magnetic personality and great organizational skills, were the reasons for his great success in ministry. However, his biographer cited another reason for his success.

Early in his travels, Taylor realized that his dress and personality were a novelty to the natives, and distracted from his mission and message. After careful thought, he came up with what he thought was a logical solution: to become Chinese, to immerse himself in their culture. Other protestant missionaries considered this a “radical” departure from traditional or acceptable missionary practices. In their opinion, Christianity, clothed in western culture, was the proper way to reach the masses.

Hudson Taylor simply did what the apostle Paul had done as he evangelized the Mediterranean world. He believed that in different cultural settings he should cast aside his lifestyle preferences to minister to others for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul wrote these words:

Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whatever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it! (1 Corinthians 9:19-23, MSG)

Paul's purpose in life was to share the Gospel with the world “by all means.” And he put aside his culture, his preferences, his “world,” to experience life through the eyes of those he desired to reach for this reason: to lead them to faith in Christ, for the sake of

the Gospel. As believers, we sometimes separate ourselves from things and people we deem “worldly,” and we run the risk of losing our ability to relate to people who are in a place we once were in before we came to Christ...so heavenly minded, that we’re no earthly good.

We share the same life purpose as Paul: to *“go and make disciples of all nations”* (Matthew 28:19). Disciples are cultivated through relationship. Jesus set a great example for us in how He related to people. His disciples learned ministry by watching and imitating Him. Sinners were comfortable in His presence, and their lives were forever changed because of their encounter with Him. We can change lives as well by following Jesus’ and Paul’s examples of assimilation and servanthood.

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

Day 4: January 26, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church is Not Enough

The Evidence of Proven Faith: An Introduction to the Book of James

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. James 2:17 (NASB)

¹³ *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. James 3:13 (NASB)*

For far too long, too many people, from law enforcement officers to civilians, have been committing crimes, but have gotten off because of the lack of evidence. But now we live in a time where the crimes that people have been getting away with are now being caught on surveillance cameras and civilian cell phones. Most videos serve as legitimate evidence of guilt or innocence, because a conclusion can be made based upon solid evidence.

If we were to review a video surveillance, or cell phone video footage of your life, would there be any evidence of genuine faith? Would it show proof that you are actually being the Church? Or will you be found guilty of just doing Church?

This is an age-old challenge that James addresses in his letter to the early Church. He wrote this letter to the 12 Tribes scattered abroad; those who were Jewish Christians living outside Palestine as a result of persecution (Matt. 19:28; Acts 26:7). As you read the Epistle of James, you discover that these Jewish Christians were having some of the same problems that we face today. They were having trouble exhibiting evidence of proven faith.

First, they were not responding to life's difficulties and trials very well. They were also facing temptations to sin and blaming God for being tempted. Second, some of the believers were catering to the rich. The Church members were giving special honor to those who were wealthy, but treated the poor with dishonor, because they were more concerned about how they could benefit.

Additionally Church members were competing for positions of honor in the church, particularly the position of teaching. James says those who have no control over what they say should not become teachers. Also some of them that desired to be teachers had more need to learn than teach.

Furthermore, the tongue was a serious problem, creating wars and divisions with the Church. In essence, they were exhibiting worldliness driven by selfish desires, fueling conflict among members.

When it came to wealth, the rich members were more concerned about making future plans for acquiring more wealth than they were about the will of God. They were arrogant and refused to exhibit humility.

Lastly, James cautions the Church about being greedy. Some members were hoarding wealth and failing to invest in the kingdom work in reaching the poor. These members were living lavish lifestyles while others in the community go hungry. Still others lacked in their prayer life especially in times of trouble. The Church was having trouble exhibiting evidence of proven faith.

So as we prepare to walk through the Book of James, please consider the following questions.

- When it comes to your relationship with God and others, what is the evidence of your faith?
- Are you a true Christian or a counterfeit?
- The real question is are you about being the Church, or just doing Church? Where is the evidence? Prove it!

That's the theme of the letter of James...the evidence of proven faith. And the evidence of genuine faith can only be measured by open expressions of love to God, loving others, and serving others. This is to be done in the spirit of humility that results from proven faith in knowing who God is.

What is the evidence of your faith?

Day 5: January 27, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church is Not Enough

The Importance of an Introduction

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

James 1:1 (ESV)

How many times have you skipped over introductions of letters, books or technical reports? What about when someone introduces themselves, but you barely hear their name because you are waiting to hear what is next. We skip introductions in letters or books, and we barely listen to verbal introductions from people, because there is a common assumption that an introduction is not important. We feel that the real information is not in the introduction, but in whatever follows. If this is the perspective we take regarding introductions, then we are making a big mistake. Introductions are important, because they provide a first impression, establish credibility with the listener or reader, and prepares the listener or reader for what is to follow.

The Book of James begins with an introduction that is important, because it establishes the author's (James) credibility and specifically identifies the readers. James introduces this letter to Jewish Christians by identifying himself as a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The word servant literally means "slave." It describes a person who is legally owned by someone else and whose entire livelihood and purpose is determined by their master. At the same time, the word does not convey a sense of utter humiliation; it also has a sense of devotion and pride. James wants his readers to know that his faith is in Jesus as God's anointed representative, equipped with God's authority.

James addresses his letter *to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion*. He reminds these Jewish Christians of their spiritual heritage as people of God, gathered by Jesus the Messiah. The word "Dispersion" is sometimes used as a technical term for Jews living outside their historic homeland. The tribes of Israel were scattered throughout the world by the Assyrians and Babylonians. They looked forward to being regathered as a people (Jer. 31:7-14; Ezek. 37:15-28). In this introduction, James implies the new Israel is also dispersed (away from its heavenly homeland) and oppressed, but assured of their final gathering to the Lord.

James' introduction of his letter was important because of the content that would follow related to Christian living. His introduction established his credibility and authority to speak on behalf of the Lord, addressed specifically to the Jewish Christian who faced many challenges in the world in which they lived. What important

information could you be missing when skipping or ignoring introductions? Most importantly, how are you introducing yourself to others? Remember an introduction is important, because of the vital information it contains. What could you be missing by overlooking an introduction?

The way you introduce yourself to others could determine whether they continue to listen or not.