

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

C. B. Hedstrom

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A CHURCH FUNCTIONING FOR CHRIST, OR THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

In this last chapter of “God’s Plan for the Church” we wish to set forth some very practical plans for your consideration, which if followed will make for a real forward effort in bringing the church back to its original plan.

In order that a church may function effectively for Christ all hindrances that have clogged the channels of heaven’s blessing and obstacles that have impeded its forward march must be removed. We have dealt with this subject in a preceding chapter and need only to refresh Our memory on this important point.

As we in this chapter endeavor to suggest some very practical things that will improve our public worship, and that will make for a renewal in interest and church work in general, I can hear the many who say, “It can’t be done.”

The fact that numerous churches have tried it and found it practical makes very little difference to those who are satisfied to stay in the rut, which reminds me of the old grandmother up in the far north woods of Sweden who had never seen a locomotive and a train of cars. They told her that the railroad was now built and to come and see the puffing iron horse. She said, “There ain’t no such thing,” and reluctantly got up on the two-wheel wagon with a shawl on her shoulder and her Sunday scarf tied carefully on her head. After a long journey through the woods they arrived at the little village that at last had a railroad station. The train had already arrived and stood there taking on passengers. She went over to the big locomotive after counting the cars and asked: “Is this it? And is this iron thing going to pull all these cars? . . . It will never go, it will never go,” was her decision.

Presently the engineer received orders to go and blew the whistle. Then he turned on the steam and the wheels began to grind and the engine to chug and the train started to move. In wonderment and amazement she threw back her head and waved her arms and shouted: “It will never stop, it will never stop.” The same thing will happen when the Holy Spirit’s power comes and takes control in the church. Then it won’t be creeping along by man’s fruitless effort but by heaven’s power . . . and “it will never stop.”

As a basis for our thoughts I find no better picture than Peter and John at the gate of the temple (Acts 3). These two apostles are a beautiful type of the church; Peter with his forcefulness and power and John with his meekness and love. These elements should be in the church today.

Outside the church door is this beggar, a type of the lost man, the world. The church has given temporary relief, but that's all. Peter and John come along and they stop by that beggar and tell him frankly that "We have no silver or gold, but we have something far better. We have Jesus of Nazareth . . . and in His name you can rise and walk." And he did more than that: he stood, and walked, and leaped, and praised God.

As I look over our land today I find this same picture. Outside of our church doors are people hungry for that which the world cannot supply, and sick from sin. What are we giving them? Temporary enjoyment, beautiful ritual and church programs? We have silver and we have gold. We pride ourselves on schools, seminaries, and the great drives for money, not to mention a polished ministry, new cathedrals surrounded by well equipped gymnasiums and expensive parsonages.

At the annual conventions glowing reports are read and printed:

- Of new churches added, but no mention of the many that have been closed;
- Of the hundreds of new members added, but not of the thousands who have left;
- Of the many new and gifted pastors who have come into the fold, but no mention of the many faithful preachers left out in the cold.

Then last, but not least by any means, special stress is laid on the financial gain. Yes, my friends, silver and gold we have plenty, but not the old-time power. Oh, that we could exchange this silver and gold power for the power that possessed Peter and John! The result would be different and we would see the unusual.

In Ephesians 5:27 we read that Christ "**shall present unto himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle.**"

We know this refers to the coming glory, but nevertheless we can apply it here. While it refers to the body we can make the application to a local group of believers who are banded together for His glory. The "spots" have been cleansed at Calvary through His blood, but we must admit there are still a lot of wrinkles that have to be ironed out.

A garment is not fit to use, though washed clean, until the wrinkles are taken away, and that is done by the hot ironing process.

Here are some of the wrinkles that should be ironed out in many churches (I want to make it plain that I write of an average church, not of the large church with its thousands nor of the little group with a handful of members).

(1) *The useless announcements that often consume fifteen to twenty minutes of valuable time.*

It is sickening to come to a church and see the pastor in the act of wasting time by announcing “Brotherhood meetings,” “Ladies’ Aid affairs,” “Trustee Boards,” “Deacon Boards” and all other sorts of thin, thick and flat “boards,” not to mention flower committees, sick committees and what not. The average audience feels bored and the meeting becomes sick. No announcements should consume more than five minutes.

(2) Singing while the people gather is all wrong. The meeting begins with the first song.

If you find it difficult to break your people of the habit of coming late by kind words, then let the pastor read his text after the first song and immediately, after a special number, give his sermon. Too many song leaders tire their audience by too much singing. The singing should prepare the ground for the sermon. When that is accomplished the singing should end.

Special care should be taken in the selection of proper songs for morning worship. The pastor should give this as much attention as he gives to his text. A spirit of worship should grip the people and a song of a devotional character that will add to the spirit of reverence should always be selected. For instance, Work for the night is coming does not bless a soul that has toiled all week and has found his way to the house of worship tired, worn and weary. But rather sing: Jesus calls us, o’er the tumult of our life’s wild restless sea. And oh, how Rock of ages, cleft for me tunes the soul with heaven and touches the heart of the meeting!

(3) The evening services should be evangelistic from start to finish and nothing will help bring back the old-time revival spirit like the old-time testimony and praise part of the service.

This can be held before or after the preaching, as the pastor may decide. I believe a preacher will give his message with more power after a warm testimony meeting. A preacher who has a vision and a burning desire to see souls saved will never close a Sunday night meeting without an invitation. Even when there is no response he should invite strangers as well as friends to tarry for prayer in the prayer room at the close of the meeting, no matter what the burdens or needs.

(4) The Sunday school with its various Bible classes offers the greatest opportunity for soul winning.

In fact, it is the most important missionary field in any church, and we add that many pastors would have a very slim obedience were it not for the Sunday school. Still I am here to say that it is a much neglected field.

I make this declaration after many years as Sunday school Superintendent and by constant study of conditions in the various churches I visit. Without taking too much space in this chapter to completely cover this church work and the many “wrinkles,” just let me bring to your attention only the last church I visited.

The church was fundamental; in fact it represents the average of the better churches. At the set time (9:15) not half of the members were present, so the superintendent began ten minutes late, and then they sang three lengthy songs that consumed twelve minutes and very few sang.

In fact the songs did not even fit into the spirit of worship. Then he called upon a teacher in the audience to lead in prayer and that person was not heard ten feet from where he stood, and as I tried to find who he was by looking over the audience I noticed the boys and girls looking all around as though wondering what was going on.

Then another song and this first half hour was wasted. Not much of an inspiration for assembling into classes!

After a half hour the bells called them together and the song leader had to shout to be heard as the song was announced. Then the many insignificant routine matters were taken up while the boys and girls were busy with the Sunday school papers. The officers no doubt did the best they could, but were either tactless or unfit.

There was very little display of order and I failed to note any reverence in this temple of worship on the part of the boys and girls, but rather less than they would display in the public school; and when the four hundred went for the doors it looked as though they would knock over the elder who came for the morning worship.

At the morning service there were less than a hundred people and the big majority were gray-haired saints. This condition you will find in seventy-five per cent of the churches today.

Everybody agrees that something has to be done to remedy this condition. To tell the children to stay for the morning worship would be useless and to demand the young people to come back into the church after you have let them out by dismissing the Sunday school would be ridiculous.

And why should we expect them to spend two and a half hours in church when the older people would not? Let us be reasonable.

No, my friends, this problem is not solved that way. However, there is a happy solution to this dilemma. The opposition to it will be by those who have no vision in this direction, and **“without vision the people perish.”**

In giving the outline of a “unified morning service,” let me state that this is not an “air castle” or beautiful dream. It has been tried and proven not only practical but unusually effective. Sunday schools and congregations that have tested it have never gone back to the old way. In fact it has been just the impetus needed to put new enthusiasm into the entire church program.

This order of service for the combined Sunday school and church morning worship does not include the primary department (Children under nine years of age should meet and close by themselves in the church basement or Sunday school building).

If in a foreign language church where some of the people still prefer the language of their birth, then these should gather as a large Bible class (or church) in one of the larger rooms where the pastor will preach to them or teach the lesson. But these should meet just like all other classes and take part in the “opening exercises” with the entire school.

This “order of service” for a real successful “unified” morning worship has been found very satisfactory, and although some may think it a bit ritualistic I call attention to the fact that what we lack is respect for God’s house and a little ritual will add reverence.

These “suggestions” naturally can be altered to meet the various needs, such as songs, etc., but keeping the assembly longer than an hour and a half to an hour and three-quarters is not advisable.

10:30—Opening song—Faith of our fathers living still

10:35—Responsive reading

10:37—Prayer (Followed by the Lord’s Prayer). Then, without announcing, the audience sings: Holy, holy, holy, early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee (Just the first verse)

10:40—Assembly in classes. (No class should take more than 2 minutes for record and collection)

11:10—First bell

11:15—Second bell

11:16—The choir sings (or solo)

11:18—S.S. Superintendent’s announcements

11:20—The pastor’s announcements

11:25—Offering and offertory

11:28—Special song

11:30—Morning sermon

12:00—Prayer and benediction.

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Pastors from various denominations have deplored the fact that it seems impossible to get the members out to midweek services. My answer is this: How can you expect but a handful when you have already overtaxed them with various duties in small groups? Sunday school workers’ meetings and choir rehearsals are essential, but surely not a lot of other non-essential affairs that usurp time and power. But with these barriers removed people will flock to the midweek services, where Bible teaching should be of greatest importance, and to the week-end prayer meeting. A church will never function well nor grow where these two vital forces are lacking. No church will grow strong without knowledge in the Scriptures, and a church takes in new territory as it “goes forward on its knees.”

A church that desires to function effectively for Christ should have four great events on its program each year.

These special efforts should be planned and worked out far in advance in order to get the very best possible help—servants of God who have proved themselves efficient workers in these various branches of Christian work.

Here is a suggestion that I think is worthy of careful consideration:

First quarter: An evangelistic campaign (February or March). Two weeks.
Second quarter: Missionary Conference (May). One week.
Third quarter: Young People's and S. S. Conference
(September). One week. Fourth quarter: Bible Conference (November). Ten days.

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In closing let me again emphasize that a church should be first, last and all the time a soul-saving station. The spirit of winning the lost should be the inner urge, from the pulpit down to the ushers, and even the janitor should be on fire for souls. If this be the paramount issue back of the pulpit it will soon grip the choir, the Sunday school teachers and every member. Sad, defeated and discouraged souls will soon find their way to a church that "cares for their souls."

In this connection let me quote from an article I read recently. A preacher who felt the call to win souls, called his Board together and said, "I am going to resign, for there are no souls being saved."

A good brother on the Board asked him to stay with them for the people were being edified. The pastor retorted, "Edified for what?" And then he asked, "Brother, do you believe that through you a soul was ever saved?"

The reply was "No." Then the preacher asked other members of his official board the same question and they all gave the same reply. They then agreed to resign their offices with him if there were no conversions in the near future.

The next day the man to whom the pastor addressed the first question went to his clerk and said: "Bob, you are not a Christian and I, who am a professing Christian, and also a member of the church which you attend, have never spoken to you about your soul. But, Bob, I am in earnest now, and I want you to kneel here with me for the salvation of your soul."

Bob knelt and was saved. The revival began in that church board and that first week those men won thirty souls for Christ. But it began first in the pastor's heart and soul when he became more interested in lost souls than in his beautiful sermons.

I have tried to cover a lot of ground in this chapter in order to prove what can be accomplished when the barriers are removed and the "wrinkles" ironed out. I hope I have made myself plain and that some churches may be helped. But now I can hear many who say: "It's no use, my church is so wrapped up in a church program that any effort in this direction would be futile. We'll have to be good church members and make the best of it and wait for a miracle from heaven or an earthquake from below to shake off the fetters that bind."

My friend, don't you do any such waiting. You start the earthquake and the miracle will happen. In Acts sixteen we read that "**at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God** . . . And suddenly there was a great earthquake, the prison shook, the doors opened, the fetters fell off, the jailer came under conviction and a revival started.

My friends, I see in this a picture that will fit in here.

It is midnight, everything seems so dark for God's people. There is "nothing doing in our churches."

- The old mourners' bench is not used any more.
- The "after-meetings" are a thing of the past!
- The church is fettered by a lot of machinery and programs.
- The "hallelujahs" are heard no more, and if you shout a hearty "Amen" they think you have gone fanatical.
- Everything is so cut and dried.
- The choirs are singing anthems that no one understands, not even the singers; the congregational singing doesn't thrill the heart any more.
- The old saints that used to "pray a hole in the sky" are not heard any more,
- As the pastor preaches people keep looking at the clock,
- Worst of all, months have gone since a sinner came to Christ!

Surely it is midnight. We can't deny it! But neither can we agree with many who say, "This is the sign of the times."

We are positive that God wants it to be different. I can see here a wonderful type of the old-time power of the church, the power that should exist today, and I find it in Paul and Silas. They prayed and sang.

Paul is a good type of prayer and Silas a dandy singer.

Let the church today come back to the "power of prayer" and bring back the "old-time songs," songs of praise to our Redeemer that will gladden hearts, and before you are aware of it a revival will be on; the supernatural will happen because heaven will answer with "old-time power;" the fetters that have been placed on the church life will all off and the sinners will cry out: "**What must we do to be saved?**"

- A praying church is a power-filled church;
- A praising church will function effectively for Christ,
- A soul-saving church is a *triumphant church!*

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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