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**I Still Believe in Saturation Evangelism
by Local Churches**

Jerry Falwell

I believe in the local church and I love my church—the Thomas Road Baptist Church. I am interested in local churches; those that preach the gospel, win sinners to Christ, raise money, and send out missionaries. I am interested in churches that capture towns and spread the gospel; for the local church is at the center of God's plan when it centers on evangelism and the Great Commission.

When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, the church at Philippi, and the church of Galatia, he was concerned about local churches. Local churches have been, and will continue to be, in existence until Jesus comes. We can find an example of God's plan to reach the world from the accounts of the local churches in the Bible.

Acts 11 is the story of the origin of one of the greatest churches of the New Testament era. (I say "one of the greatest churches" because the Book of Acts is filled with stories of great local churches.)

The Book of Acts is the only book that has not been yet completed; its message is still being implemented. It is the story of the planning of local churches, the embryonic stage of these churches, and the spiritual explosion of similar local churches from town to town and from city to city.

Church growth began in an Upper Room. One hundred twenty men and women met together and prayed in obedience to the command of Christ. After ten days, in answer to God's promise, the Spirit of God was outpoured. On that day of Pente-

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cost, 3,000 more were saved, baptized, and added to that local assembly. Three thousand added to 120 made 3,120. Then God added to that 3,120 member congregation (Acts 2:47), and the number soon came to 5,000 men, in addition to the women and children (Acts 4:4). Later they multiplied again, and eventually history and tradition tell us that before the persecution came, the church at Jerusalem numbered in excess of 100,000. If this is a valid estimate, half of a city of approximately 200,000 were professing Christians!

It is my conviction that every local church should attempt to capture its city for Christ. Every Bible-believing church ought to attempt to win its metropolitan area to Christ. It should try to win every individual to Christ, beginning at its Jerusalem (our Lynchburg), moving out to Judea (the surrounding county), and then Samaria (the state of Virginia for us), and ultimately reaching the uttermost part of the earth (worldwide missions).

A church should begin at its Jerusalem and build a powerful super-aggressive ministry to its community, then to the world. The light that shines farthest shines brightest at home.

The super-aggressive local church that is getting the job done has one goal, and one obsession: winning its city for the Lord. If your church is in the country, you should work to win every farmer in the country around you for the Lord. You should learn how to use the principle of saturation, which is preaching the gospel to every available person at every available time by every available means.

The key verse for saturation is Acts 5:28. The church at Jerusalem was accused by its enemy, the Sanhedrin, of having filled Jerusalem with its doctrine. As a matter of fact the Jerusalem church *had* filled the city with its teaching. That statement was not the propaganda of some church public relations director. It was the accusation of the enemies of the church and, *if* anything, it was an understatement.

Several years after the persecution that brought about the scattering of the great church at Jerusalem, Christians were accused of having turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). They saturated their world without a radio, a television, a microphone, a printing press, a car, or a plane. They reached their world without any of the modern means of transportation and communication that we take for granted.

Persecution came, led by Saul of Tarsus, and when that persecution reached the Christians in Jerusalem, they went every-

where preaching the Word of God and planting local churches. Some went down to Antioch; "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:19, 20). Because they were carrying out the Great Commission, "the hand of the Lord was with them . . ." (Acts 11:21). Why? Because they were preaching the Lord Jesus and they were establishing local churches ". . . and a great number believed . . ." (11:21). (This is not ministerially speaking. God does not exaggerate. "A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord," means just that.)

"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:22-24). Notice the word *added*; when God is in a church, it is never static. If God is in something, it never becomes stagnant. When God is in a church, you can tell by the attendance board; you can tell when you count the offering; you can tell by the sinners around the altar. Our goal is to have God in the church.

Barnabas got his hands into more than he could handle at Antioch, and he departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. He was trying to think of the best Bible teacher to help him in the work. When he found Paul, he brought him to Antioch where, for a whole year, they assembled themselves together with the church and the Bible, teaching many people.

The disciples were first called "Christians" in Antioch. They never were called Christians in Jerusalem, although they could have been. They had been through the fires and had paid the price; they had tasted the bitterness of serving the Lord in Jerusalem. But not until Antioch were they called Christians, because Antioch is where they got under the Word of God. They were taught the Word for one whole year by Paul, the greatest Bible teacher of the day. Since the Word of God was not fully in written form at the time, this was absolutely essential. Then, tested and taught, these "Christians" began the planting and organiza-

tion of another great local church.

The ingredients of a super-aggressive church are evangelization, presence, participation, praying, preaching, and penetration. The actual words may change and the features of any local church may change, but the principles never change. God is creative, yet he never changes. His ways are fresh and new, but they are based on eternal principles. Methods, means, and ideas may change with situations and locations, but principles will not. So God's church at Antioch got on with the work of evangelism with new approaches, because the church was in a Gentile situation, not a Jewish culture; yet the church used eternal principles.

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost departed unto Seleucia, and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister" (Acts 13:1-5).

The first ingredient we find in Acts of a super-aggressive local church is *evangelization*. The early days of the church at Antioch were much like the early days of the church at Jerusalem, or any other place—under persecution. This church was born in fire. They had to flee for their lives out of Jerusalem and they came down to Antioch out of coercion. When they came to Antioch, they preached the Word of God everywhere and many turned to the Lord. A church was born, but in the midst of adversity and affliction.

Let me say this simply as a word of encouragement: Anything worthwhile that has the sanction of God costs a great price. Redemption came at a great price. Building super-aggressive local churches comes at a great price. It costs to construct buildings and propagate the message of the gospel. It costs to put up local churches. Blood, sweat, tears, heartaches, and heartbreaks have gone behind any work. When you see decency, dignity, honor, and integrity, when you listen to the message and something powerful is going out, a price has been paid by someone. A

super-aggressive local church must be willing to pay the price.

There is something else about this church at Antioch. Notice the preposition *in*: “there were in the church” (Acts 13:1). You cannot build a great super-aggressive local church unless you have *presence*, unless the congregation congregates. This is the second word, i.e., presence. A great church is known by great attendance. Those who go to a football game or a baseball game will remain if it goes an extra inning or into overtime. But you let the choir sing an extra song, or the preacher speak an extra five minutes, and people complain. Why? Because they have not caught the vision. When God really gets hold of your heart, you remain for the finale. You will stay till the end because what happens at the end is usually the best part of the whole service. That is when God gets his work done. In order to build super-aggressive local churches you must have people present on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and on visitation days.

The third ingredient in a super-aggressive church is *participation*. “There were in the church of Antioch certain prophets and teachers.” Barnabas, Simeon, and others were not only church members, but they were taking an active part, participating in that ministry.

This is where training makes a difference. We always quote statistics that a certain percent of God’s people do not tithe and a certain percent do not read their Bibles, and then we quote that 95 percent of God’s people never lead a soul to Christ. Why? Because these people are not sincere? No, I think it’s because pastors and leaders are not putting forth the necessary efforts to train their people to participate in the ministry. Every local church should have an intensive training program with the purpose of preparing soul-winners.

At the beginning of the Jerusalem church, the members were all in the Upper Room. They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (the Word of God), in fellowship (church attendance), in the breaking of the bread (the Lord’s Table), and in prayer (the spiritual heartbeat of that local church). They were all witnessing. Daily, in the Temple, and in every house, they continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Then when persecution came and they were all scattered abroad, they were still teaching and preaching the Word of God. That is participation.

The fourth word is *praying*. “And when they had fasted and prayed . . .” (Acts 13:3). The super-aggressive local church is a

praying church. Nothing of eternal value is ever accomplished apart from prayer. Nothing—absolutely nothing. Today we emphasize automation and organization. I am grateful to God for all the innovations of this age. In the midst of this population explosion God has given us the means whereby we can carry out his commission to preach the gospel to every creature. But in the midst of an organized society, we must be careful that we do not become so hurried, that we do not have time to pray. The praying church is going to see miracles happen every time it opens its doors. The super-aggressive local church must have a good, sound, solid nucleus of praying people who know how to get hold of God.

The fifth word is *preaching*. “And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God” (Acts 13:5). *Preaching* is absolutely an essential ingredient in super-aggressive local church ministry

Preaching is the plan God has used over the years to build local churches. The need of the hour is not coffeehouse dialogues and sharing. I’m so tired of words like sharing, communication, relevancy, and other modern lingo. When you start using these modern terms you are acknowledging that you have failed in using the Bible terms: “. . . it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (I Corinthians 1:21). You do not have to modify preaching, upgrade it, or describe it by new terms. Just call it by what it is: *preaching*. It is not sharing, it is preaching. It is not dialogue, it is preaching. It is not talking in other tongues, dancing, walking, and yelling. It is not coffeehouse, conversational communication. It is preaching. A vital ingredient of a super-aggressive local church is powerful pulpit preaching. You show me a church that is growing and I will show you a church where there is a real, effective preacher.

The sixth word is *penetration*. “And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos . . .” (Acts 13:6). They literally went through the whole island. They *penetrated* it. They did not just hit away at the fringe or announce their meetings in the newspaper. They knocked on doors; they filled towns with their doctrine; they saturated it and they won multitudes to Christ. They used every available means to reach every available person at every available time.

Why is it that God has given us radio, television, telephones, airplanes, automobiles—all of these modern media? Because he wants us to use them to saturate our city and our world. Do you

realize that every Sunday it is possible for any preacher in America, through the miracle of the media, to preach in one sermon to more people than heard Paul in all of his life? We must follow the example of Barnabas and Paul and go through our Jerusalem and our Judea. God wants us to use everything to get the gospel out to everybody in the time that is left.

If you throw out enough gospel seed in enough directions, from enough sources, by enough people, and in enough places, you will have one perpetual harvest. For some there is sowing time; for others, cultivation time. But for the majority there will always be seed coming into harvest. "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. . ." (2 Corinthians 9:6). Five hundred years ago the printing press was invented. I think it is significant that the first thing printed was the Bible. That is why God gave a printing press to us—to get the gospel to every creature, beginning at home and then to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Let us capture our cities for Christ. I mean literally overwhelm them. Let us do it through the principle of saturation, filling the city with our doctrine. And let us do it through the two secret weapons of a Bible-believing local church: (1) contacting people and (2) contacting people, continuously. If you do that long enough, well enough, and loud enough, you are going to get everyone's attention. A pastor may not win everyone this year or the next year, but if he is willing to go to a church and invest his life he will win them one day.

Church growth comes as a result of commitment to the local church and the Great Commission. This is best accomplished by following the example of the church at Antioch, incorporating evangelization, edification, dedication, participation and saturation in our church lives and ministries. These are what make a super-aggressive church.

Writer

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