

The Need Of This Hour
by Dr. Lee Roberson

II Corinthians 6:17

Since the termination of Dr. Roberson's work at Highland Park Baptist Church, he has spoken in thousands of different churches--churches large and small, rich and poor, powerful and weak.

Dr. Roberson says . . .

The need of churches is evident. We are in a decided lull throughout this nation. (Remember! There are still many great churches in our nation. I thank God for the pastors of these growing churches).

Attendance Is Suffering In Many Places. Sunday evening services are weak. Times have been changed from 7:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and, in some cases, to 5:30 p.m. The evening service has become a quiet vesper hour instead of a wide-awake, enthusiastic evangelistic hour. The lost are rarely found in the vesper hours.

Evangelism Is At A Low Ebb. Many churches are reporting a decided decrease in souls saved. (6,400 Southern Baptist churches did not report a single baptism in twelve months).

What is the greatest need of today's churches--large and small?

FIRST, LEADERSHIP.

"Everything Rises Or Falls On Leadership." Poor leadership is hindering many churches. We need God-called men in the leadership of our churches. We must have men who are conscious of His call. Yes, God-called men like Moses, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

It is a common statement in all parts of our country: "We have very few young people answering God's call for service."

This means we have fewer young people preparing for Christian service. Colleges, Bible schools, and seminaries are reporting lower numbers.

We need leadership that is consecrated--fully sold out to God--completely surrendered to Him.

We need leadership that is unselfish. It has become a common thing for people to ask, "How much?" Even church leaders, pastors, educational directors, singers, and musicians are doing so. "How much does the job pay?" "How much time do I have for my vacation?" "How much time do I get off each week for recreation?" Questions reveal the selfishness of men--even Christian leaders.

We need leadership that is progressive. "Let us go on" should be our motto. Too many are content to stand still and do nothing. There are many churches with large buildings, in heavily populated areas, but the leadership is content to do

nothing.

THE SECOND GREATEST NEED IS CONCERN.

Plain, old-fashioned concern. Jesus saw the multitude and was moved with compassion. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

In this sad, cold, metallic day it is hard to find people who care. Unconcern is common in all branches of society. But especially, we are awakened to the need for compassion in the church.

Concern begins with the pastor, but it must be reflected in every member. When the pastor cares, and the church cares, something takes place. Souls are saved, preaching has meaning, singing has life.

Without concern, the altars are empty! Without concern, missionary giving drops to a low ebb. Without concern, the services of the church are stereotyped and dead.

Concern will send us out on visitation. Concern will keep us busy telling the story, even when people are hard and unresponsive.

Concern will cause the church to purchase buses and send them to untouched areas of the community. Yes, every method will be used to win others.

Concern will cause us to speak to others. We will obey our Lord's command to witness (Acts 1:8).

Concern will build a warm friendly church.

"FRIENDLINESS"

"A Warm FRIENDLY CHURCH"

A cold, dignified, lifeless church is an abomination! God wants His churches to be warm compassionate, friendly, Spirit-filled assemblies.

I have seen them all! In my travels all over America and in many foreign countries, I have seen them, I have been in them.

Some churches are like icebergs. The song service is dead and cold. The atmosphere is depressive. The people are unresponsive.

What is wrong? Quite often it is the pastor. Again, we face the matter of leadership. If the pastor is cold, formal, and lifeless, the church will become the same way.

Sometimes it is not the pastor! I have seen pastors who yearned for a warm, friendly church, but could not bring it to pass. The people refused to change. Through the years, they had adhered to certain aspects of formality in worship and they did not want to change. They rebelled against the pastor's leadership. I was preaching in a northern city and a pastor from a nearby state came to the meetings. He asked to have lunch with me. After the meal, the pastor said, "I need your help and your advice. I have spent more than a year in my present ministry. I have done my best to awaken the people, to stir their hearts, and

move them to a concern for others, but I have failed."

He said, "On last Sunday I preached my heart out. I gave the invitation for people to receive Christ. A lady came forward. She was in tears. She stated, 'I want to be saved.' I dealt with her and she accepted Christ. I asked her if she wanted to be baptized and unite with the church. She said, 'Yes, I do.' "I had the lady to stand and give her testimony of her faith in Christ, and her desire to be baptized. I turned to the audience and said, 'Do you rejoice in the salvation of this friend and will you receive her into our membership upon her baptism?' A few hands were raised out of the entire congregation. I knew something was wrong.

"At the close of the service, the chairman of the deacons came to me and said, 'Pastor, it is all right for this woman to get saved, but we don't want her in our church. Her reputation is bad and her presence in our church would hurt the standing of our church. We forbid you to baptize her.' " The pastor stated to me that he had pleaded with the deacon to change his mind, but he would not.

Then he asked, "What would you do in a situation of this kind?" I replied, "I would go back to the church and preach the Word of God, condemn sin, and preach and pray for a scorching hot revival that would change your people." I think he did so, but apparently the people did not change, for he soon resigned the church and later began work in another field. Every church should be warm, friendly and concerned for others. The love of Christ should be manifested in the Christian's attitude. We are sinners saved by grace and should show forth compassion to others. Greeting others in public services is important. It should be done tastefully, not crudely, not noisily. Some of the present day methods of welcoming visitors is uncomfortable to some people.

For forty years at Highland Park, we used one simple plan to welcome visitors. After a good song service, I would say, "We have many visitors with us for this hour. We welcome you to this service. In a moment I shall ask the members of our church to stand. If you are visiting with us, please remain seated. The ushers would like to place in your hands a visitor's card. We would like for you to fill this out and return it to us when the offering is taken. When our members stand, they will shake hands with the visitors near them. The choir will sing as we welcome our visitors. Every visitor is an honored guest." (Ask the members to stand. The choir sings "Some Golden Daybreak" or "Behold, He Comes" or any song of your choice. The ushers give out visitor's cards. After a verse of a song, invite the visitors to stand with you and sing a verse of a song together.)

I think it is wise to use the same order of visitor recognition in every service--Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday evening prayer service.

Keep the church warm and friendly! People need this. It helps to break down barriers. It makes the people more receptive to the message.

A THIRD NEED OF THE HOUR IS ENCOMPASSED IN THE WORD "STANDARDS."

In the Old Testament, standards were given for God's people, Israel. Definite laws and regulations were established by God. Sore punishment was given to those who failed to abide by the standards.

Standards are given in the New Testament. Christ gave many standards for us in the Sermon on the Mount. The Apostle Paul, inspired of God, placed many meaningful standards on Christian people. These standards are interspersed throughout the writings of Paul.

But, today standards are taboo with many churches and even some denominations. Moral standards are disregarded. Decency in dress is ridiculed. Purity of life and correctness of speech are scoffed at. But the Bible is clear, II Corinthians 6:17, "... Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord ..."

A FOURTH NEED OF THIS DAY IS FOR INSPIRATIONAL SERVICES.

I refer to the services in God's house.

The Bible must be the textbook for every worship hour. Strong, pungent, heart-stirring messages from the infallible Word of God is our need.

The messages must be alive and challenging. They must drive straight to the heart. They must awaken the drowsy and invigorate the aged. They must arouse young and old to new vigor and enthusiasm.

Dead, dry services need not be. The Bible is alive. Its message is life and service. On page after page, the Bible speaks to men's hearts, exhorting them, teaching them, warning them, encouraging them.

First, the theme of every service should be "Christ died for sins." Men must hear the message of salvation. They must see Christ as their only hope.

The Bible must be preached and the Holy Spirit must endue and convict. The ideal for every service is the preaching of the Word and the conviction and salvation of lost sinners.

But, there is another objective in every service and that is the strengthening of God's people. We are in a battle day by day. The world, the flesh, and the devil war against us. The worship hour is that time to receive new inspiration for life and service. My memory takes me back to many hours when God spoke to my heart and I arose to go forward and serve Him with a new zeal.

Lastly, and most importantly, the services of the church--Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening--are conducted that we might thank God for His goodness and praise Him for His gifts to us. We come together in God's house to

remember that God is "Our Father." We can pray to Our Father and we rest upon the promises of God.