



“The Under-Challenged Church”

“Why Multitudes Are Going To Hell”

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Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Mark 16:15

Introduction:

I have had the privilege of being in full-time Christian service for the past 49 years. I have been a pastor, a teacher, an evangelist, church planter, and an active missionary through out all of these years. I have pastored eight fundamentally conservative Baptist Churches, three of which my wife, JoAnne, and I planted from the ground up. In all of these years, I have been extremely burdened to challenge all of our churches to get outside the four walls of the church and win multitudes to Jesus. And, I can truthfully say that although we did not accomplish everything I would have loved for us to have accomplished in these churches, I did my best to never let any of the churches become complacent and satisfied with what we had done. Why? Because billions of people are still lost and have not heard a simple presentation of the Gospel so that they can have the opportunity to at least respond, either negatively or positively , to the message of eternal salvation.

Throughout all my years as a pastor, I tried so hard to challenge our people to not only give their tithes and first fruit offerings to the local church, but I challenged them individually and collectively to give generously to missions over and beyond these regular tithes and offerings. I also encouraged our people to really get involved in mission work, both at home in our communities, and also out on the mission fields across state borders and across the seas. I tried so hard to make evangelism and missions the main priority of our churches. And beloved, I taught our people that if our churches were really going to be blessed with growth, excitement, and reaping the harvest, we had to keep the main thing the main thing; that being that we should keep a passionate heart for a lost world, instead of becoming churches with self-maintenance mentalities. I sincerely believe the reason that God gave all of our churches a lot of growth both numerically and spiritually is because Jesus loves pastors and churches that accept the great challenge to get out beyond their walls and communities and make every attempt possible to win people to Jesus on a regular basis. And, because of this, He pours out His Spirit upon these congregations, and He

gives the churches a life of excitement over seeing people come to Him. In other words, God loves those who accept the challenge to get out of the box, and by faith go to places where they have never been, and take the Gospel to people who have never heard. In order to do this, both pastors and churches have to stretch their faith muscles and count the cost of discipleship. They must be willing to brave the risks, cut the ties, prioritize their lives, and say to Jesus that our field of ministry will be the world. They must maintain the cause of Christ with a world view and a personal world vision. They will not allow themselves to become complacent and apathetic, but instead, they will live every day with a passionate heart to reach the lost world because they have the compassion of Christ in their hearts. And if they have the compassion of Christ in their hearts, then they will have on their hearts what Jesus has on His; and that is the souls of men. **Luke 19:10, says, "That Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost."**

Now, I come to the thesis of this article, and that is that after all of my years in the ministry, I have never seen so many churches that are under-challenged as I am seeing in this generation. I have given much thought and prayer to this matter, and I have come to the conclusion that these **Under-challenged Churches** are hindering and curtailing evangelism and missions around the world. We are told that almost 200,000 people die in the world every day; of which 70,000-80,000 die and go to hell. And, we are told that there are an estimated 216,000 new babies born in the world every day; the majority of which will grow up and need to be saved. Yet, we are not winning the world to Christ because we are not responding to the challenge of the Great Commission. In **Matthew 28:18-20**, we find these words, **"And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Amen.**" Also in **Mark 16:15**, we find these additional words, **"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."**

Now, I want you to stop and meditate upon these few verses of scripture. Imagine if you would that our Lord is in Galilee challenging only 12 disciples to take the Gospel to all of the entire world. There were no automobiles, airplanes, telephones, TV's, radios, computers, cell phones, nor trains. Yet, Jesus challenged these twelve men to get moving and share the Gospel message with the entire world. He did this so that everyone could

hear the message of salvation before He comes again. Therefore, if He challenged twelve men to take the Gospel to the entire known world, why are we not challenging our churches to do likewise in this modern world when we have so many tools to help us get the job done? I believe there are many simple reasons. Thus, I want to mention some of these reasons which I believe are sincerely hindering the growth of the Kingdom and successful mission work. Let me say that I have no intentions of hurting the feelings or offending any pastor or church member, but my heart is so burdened because of the **“Under-challenged churches”**, that I must address this subject very candidly. If these words sting just a little bit, then maybe God will use them to convict all of us about what we need to change and start doing to get busy winning people to Christ.

I. NOTICE SOME REASONS FOR THE UNDER-CHALLENGED CHURCH.

A. The first reason I want to mention is pastoral insecurity.

Let me mention to you that I started out pastoring my first church when I was just 20 years old. I was absolutely clueless to what a pastor should be doing, but I decided that I would give my life totally to Christ and spend each day learning. I tried to learn from as many older pastors as I could, and while still in the Bible institute, I tried to glean every thing I could from my mentors and teachers. Yet to be completely honest, I was so scared that I would make mistakes and hurt the name of Jesus that I lived most of my early years in fear and insecurity. I tried to pretend that I had it all together, but I knew within that I really needed to get my act together if I was going to gain the confidence that I needed to become a good pastor.

During these initial days of pastoral ministry, I found myself wanting to do every thing my way just to cover up how scared I was on the inside. I would listen to others speak and make suggestions, but I was so insecure that if I didn't make the suggestions, I really didn't want to consider it. As the years went by, I quickly learned that if I was going to win scores of people to Christ, I would have to challenge my churches to do more than they had ever done, and then set some large goals for reaching people. Often times we would get started, and then someone

from the old traditions would confront my efforts, then I would draw back and not push on with challenging the churches. My fears caused me to be job scared and fearful that I might lose my church, or that I would make some people mad and then lose their financial support of the church. So, when push came to shove, I would just back off and wait for a while and try it again with another later challenge. Although I am ashamed to admit this, this is the way I lived my life for several years until God moved me and my family to another state and placed me in a growing dynamic church as a church member. I then began to watch the great pastor that pastored our church, and I began to pay attention to the tremendous challenges that he gave his flock. And from this first hand experience, I then began to believe if God could do it for him, then He could do it for me.

After completing my seminary work, my family and I moved back to our home state, and after several years in full-time evangelism, God placed me in some other churches where I was able to really begin to challenge the people to get out of the box and win men to Christ. Then in 1989, God placed me with a small group of exciting Christians who wanted to reach multitudes for Christ and build a dynamic ministry. Without boasting whatsoever, it was while I was at this great church that I really began challenging the church to go after the lost, and make evangelism and missions the main priority of our congregation.

Some people thought that I was totally crazy because of the way I led , and sometimes even pushed our people. Yet, God rent the heavens and over a period of eight years, God gave us a harvest of over 1,300 people getting saved, and He grew the church from 42 people to over 2,000 members. And, we were able to establish a great mission program involving ourselves in world missions which brought thousands to the Savior.

But today, as my wife and I travel over many parts of the United States and other countries, I see so many insecure pastors who simply will not challenge their churches with big challenges because they don't want to offend anyone, or possibly lose some of their financial support. But folks, I can tell you that we will

never win the multitudes to Christ by challenging our churches to get out of their comfort zones and go after these masses of people until we find personal and career security in our relationship with Jesus, rather than in a local church family or a pastoral position.

- B. The second reason I want to mention is pastors are afraid of losing control of their churches if they grow too much.

The average pastor can do a good job of ministering sufficiently to a church membership of about 200 people. If the attendance of the church grows beyond this, then the pastor is going to have to start sharing leadership responsibility with laymen and other staff members. When this happens, if a pastor is a control freak, then he will resist the growth factor in the local church so that he can keep his finger on everything that goes on. He certainly would never admit this, but in reality scores of pastors have this problem. Thus, rather than challenging others to help him grow the church and reach scores of people, he down plays the significance of growth and begins to criticize other churches that are growing in order to defend his lack of commitment to the Great Commission. This criticism usually takes the form of criticizing other churches' methodology while defending his beliefs as sacred which always results in smaller churches, because with his mindset, smaller churches are clean and pure.

These pastors who don't seem to care if their churches grow usually make excuses for not having soul winning programs and for having very little mission emphasis. In stead, they often major on Bible Conferences, Camp Meetings, Jubilees, Gospel singings, and other special events for the flock. By doing this, they placate their consciences and get a lot of attention for their programs and meetings, but only a few people are getting saved while millions die lost without Jesus Christ.

But, on the other side of this matter, there are scores of churches that have moved from genuine Bible preaching and teaching to nothing more than so called "Praise and worship" meetings which result in nothing more than emotional enter-

tainment which makes everyone feel good about himself or herself, and the pastor usually can draw big crowds but doesn't see scores of people genuinely saved and become actively involved in the local church. Much to my dismay, so many of these pastors try to control their congregation with far fetched doctrines which promise complete healing and health and wealth prosperity. So, the control factor is still a major hindrance to challenging the church to make soul winning and missions the main ministry of the church. The church services become one emotional high after another, but the church is rarely challenged to count the cost of discipleship in order for the world to get the Gospel message. What if one surrenders his life to following Jesus, and his surrender turns out to produce suffering for the cause of Christ? Is he living in sin or does he not have enough faith? I don't think so! So, pastors who try to control everything about their flocks will not challenge their flocks to go after the lost and put their lives in jeopardy in order to reach people with the Gospel. May God give us some pastors who love Jesus and souls enough to challenge their churches to get out of the four walls and go after the lost world.

C. The third reason I want to mention is that a lot of pastors are guilty of trying to build the wrong kingdom.

One day many years ago I remember talking to a devoted laymen down in the state of Florida about why it is so hard to get pastors interested in winning prisoners to Christ, and I will never forget what this dear man said. He said, "There is very little glory in working with prisoners, and many pastors are more interested in building their own kingdoms than they are the Kingdom of God". I never got away from that statement, and as much as I hate to admit it, I do believe this statement is true. Now, I don't mean to berate or criticize God's men, but after almost 49 years of dealing with pastors, I have to say that many many pastors only show interest in winning the world to Christ if it is in the process of their efforts, or if they or their church gets the glory.

Having been a pastor for many years, I know that it is very easy

to forget about the fact that there are other pastors and other churches in the same work and ministry that we are in. Yet, too very often, unless the pastor initiates the program or process, he doesn't want to support the effort just simply because someone else came up with the idea or initiated the effort. I saw this many times when I was a pastor, especially when we were trying to conduct area wide crusades and other collective meetings. So many pastors would not challenge their churches to participate in collective meetings simply because they weren't about to let some other pastor take the lead in the project. I don't know what you think, but I sincerely believe this hinges on jealousy and demonstrating the wrong motive for Christian ministry. When we are more interested in winning souls to Christ than we are in building our own kingdoms, then it really doesn't matter who gets the glory as long as Jesus does. Yet, how many of you know of pastors who only run and work in certain circles of their own kind? For instance, if they are going to work with others in trying to reach the lost, then their friends have to have attended the right schools, believe identically the same way, dress according to the same standards, and listen to exactly the same music. And to get these men to work with you and support your efforts outside of their clique is absolutely impossible.

Let me illustrate this very readily. Not too very long ago, a young man that works with Gateway International Missions made 33 telephone calls to pastors trying to line up churches and meetings in order to present the work of GIMI. Out of all of these 33 pastors, only one responded positively and invited this young man to come to his church. Of course, there are many excuses that people use for saying no. For instance, if the pastor is a strong denominational man, he won't entertain anyone to come to his church and share anything about world missions or world evangelism, unless they have met the denominational litmus test. And, whether he would admit it or not, most of the time, this dear brainwashed pastor is afraid that he will fall out of the respect of his dear denominational colleagues who might provide him a step up the religious denominational ladder as he seeks to build his own kingdom.

On the other hand, there is that pastor who is so struck on himself and his self-righteous purity to the extent that he will not allow anyone to come to his church to present a work, because our mission organization or some other doesn't dot every "i" and cross every "t" just like he does. Or maybe this missionary went to the wrong school, or doesn't attend the same fellowship of churches that this pastor does. So, rather than at least giving consideration to a different ministry or missionary, this pastor condescendingly says no to any inquiry from an new mission organization or missionary. Thus, the Kingdom of God is hindered and lost souls are still lost because a pastor or pastors desire to be so pure and holy and build their own kingdom instead of entertaining the possibility that some other mission organization or missionary outside of their sphere of influence might just be the open door that God opened for them to be a part of.

So, today, I would like to ask all of you pastors and church leaders this question. "Are you more interested in building your kingdom than the Kingdom of God?" If you have to admit it is your kingdom that is more important, could I please beg you to get over it and join with those who are winning multitudes to Jesus Christ. And, please would you stop closing doors to the potential opportunities to allow others to challenge your church members to really get involved in world missions and evangelism? It is truly not about your little earthly kingdom, and neither is it about mine!

- D. The fourth reason is that many pastors are hooked on money for their churches and don't want their people giving to other ministries.

The Bible teaches that the pastor of a church is truly the under-shepherd of God for the local church. This means that the pastor is to look out for the spiritual welfare of his flock, but it does not mean that the pastor is to become the protector of all of his people's money. Yet, this is happening in so many churches today where the pastor is truly threatened when his people give to an evangelist in a revival meeting or to a really good missionary who

moves the flock to tears. This kind of behavior reveals that the pastor is insecure as I mentioned in the first point, and that he is truly fearful that he may not keep his people's money to be used for his church and their special projects. Thus, it is very evident that this selfish pastor has not learned the importance of him and his church investing in the lives of God's servants whether it be another pastor preaching in his pulpit, a traveling evangelist that God has sent to the church for a revival meeting, or a dedicated missionary family that has given up everything to take the Gospel to the lost world, even to another continent. For 49 plus years, I tried so hard to be extremely kind to guest preachers and missionaries who came to our churches. And, I have truly learned that many times God's blessings upon our church family were in direct relationship to how we took care of God's special people. I learned as a senior pastor that the more we challenged our people to invest in God's servants and missions, the more God poured out His Holy Spirit upon what we were doing. Why? Because Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost! We, too, must carry on the challenge that Jesus gave His twelve disciples! Remember, twelve men were challenged to take the Gospel to the entire world!

Before I move on, let me mention that I heartily agree with what the Bible teaches about giving tithes and offerings to and through the local church. The Bible teaches that the tithe (10%) should be given to Jesus through the local church, and not to other ministries. This can be found as storehouse tithing in Malachi, Chapter 3. The Bible also teaches in the Book of Leviticus that the first fruit offerings should be brought to the house of God to be used to take care of the priest and worship rituals. Therefore, giving to other ministries and mission work should be over and above the tithes and first fruit offerings. But, nowhere does it say that a local pastor should be the policeman controlling the money of his people. But instead, he should be helping his people lay up treasure in heaven by teaching them the importance of investing their money in the souls of men through missions, missionaries, and evangelists and all others that are winning people to Jesus. To do less is to under-challenge the church where this pastor serves, and to rob his

people of many future rewards because they have not been taught to invest in the souls of men. Selfish pastors are worse than selfish people!

E. The fifth reason is loyalty to and satisfaction with denominational missions.

Why is it that so many pastors in this generation rarely even entertain the idea of challenging their congregations to go beyond the walls of their local churches and own denominations to share the Gospel with a lost world? I personally believe it is because of a variety of reasons, or maybe I might even call them excuses.

Many pastors and churches will never consider going outside their circle of mission endeavors just because sometimes it is easier to just support your local denomination, missionaries from your school alma mater, or missionaries or preachers within your certain clan or clique. By doing this, it provides a certain level of security to the pastor and what he believes is safety for his people. Yet, to do this is to leave his church under-challenged when there are scores of mission opportunities awaiting him and his people if they will take advantage of the privileges that God has provided. No mission ministry is perfect, and neither is any pastor or body of church believers.

Loyalty to and satisfaction with one's denominational mission program, exclusive of all others, often times leads to a limited area of ministry, and a negligence of other great opportunities that God may have provided. It has been my experience through my many years of pastoral experience that most denominational mission programs have a streamlined or limited strategy of ministry approach, and thus, they will not get out of their box and join others in great opportunities to win people to Christ. It is very sad to say, but many churches and denominations will not participate in some other program they didn't think up unless they find a successful ministry, purchase the rights to it, and then make it their own so that they can get the glory for it.

I must stop here and say that I got saved in a church which was involved very much in its denominational programs. The church was very active in supporting the denominational missions program, and truthfully, nothing else was really considered outside this denominational program. It almost seemed that to consider any other mission opportunity or ministry was almost sacrilegious. I grew up believing that if the world was ever to be won to Christ, then for sure, it would have to be done by my denomination and no one else. Yet, there was a problem! The problem was that because our church was a small country church, I never met a real live denominational missionary until I became a pastor of a local church. Thus, all of my youthful friends and I were robbed of meeting, fellowshiping, and interacting with missionaries, especially the foreign type. So, I was robbed of missionary encounters because of a denominational program. Thus, the program became almost a “golden calf” at which many church members worshipped and bowed down to, instead of a program filled with exciting missionaries who were on fire for Jesus and passionate about taking the Gospel to a lost world.

Therefore, I must challenge those who say , “We just don’t do any missions outside of our denominational program”. If this is you, my friend, then I feel sorry for you and especially your children and youth in your churches because you are robbing them of some great hands on opportunities to learn how to be missionaries. If all you have is a program to pray about and give to, you have denied many opportunities for your church members to get personally involved in missions.

Before moving on with my argument, let me just mention several other problems that I have found with large denominational mission programs. Let me just state some of these. It is much easier to support missions than to get involved personally with missions. When we are not involved in missions, we will never gain the burden nor develop the passion to take the Gospel to a lost world. Also, when there is little involvement by church leaders and local pastors in denominational mission programs, then there is also a lack of accountability for money given. Thus,

we often find huge salaries being paid to denominational leaders while these same leaders tell prospective missionaries that there is just not enough money to support them so that they can go to the field. There seems to be a double standard here.

In addition, large denominational mission programs seem to procure denominational ownership of a program rather than excite church people, especially young people, to consider missions as their life's calling. In stead, the growth of the program becomes the priority of the pastors and churches, rather than the lost world which needs to be saved. So, if any program becomes the end of our efforts, rather than winning the lost, then this program is far from a New Testament program.

Also, loyalty to and satisfaction with a denominational mission program often leads to that denominational program becoming a litmus test for any involvement in the denomination's affairs and leadership. Therefore, what started out as a good program to take the Gospel to a lost world, has now become the ticket whereby pastors and churches can participate and have influence in the denomination. My friends, I believe this is sin!

Let me also say that I am totally convinced that often times, denominational mission programs become outdated relics of success in a prior generation. Thus, most of the time in the churches is spent on trying to keep a group of ladies or men happy just by pushing a program which used to be productive and fruitful. Yet, our young people never meet a real live missionary, but they only see names and ministries listed in a prayer journal or viewed on a video. Therefore, very little excitement for becoming missionaries is ever caught by a younger generation, and no personal involvement is shared by those in the body of believers. So, when we restrict our mission ministries in our churches to just the denominational programs, we may just be under-challenging our people to get outside of the box and win the world to Christ.

F. The sixth reason is simply that a lot of pastors are just plain lazy.

This statement will probably sting a little bit, but it is so very true! A lot of pastors will not challenge their churches to really get out of the box and go to work winning their communities and the world to Christ simply because these pastors are just plain lazy. You read that right! Pastors are just plain lazy! I don't mean every pastor, but I do mean many pastors. They enjoy getting out of bed on their own schedule, working according to their own planning, and they really enjoy going fishing and going golfing several days a week. They also love to hang out with other pastors in pastoral fellowship meetings, and they love to attend conferences, conventions, and many other special meetings. And, they know if they challenge their churches to really get busy taking the Gospel to the lost world, that they will be forced to lead the way. So, rather than cause unnecessary pressure for themselves, they simply refuse to challenge their church, and thus, the church never becomes what God wants it to become, and thousands of people die lost without Jesus because of the laziness of the pastor and those whom he has trained to be like wise. Instead of soldiers for our Lord, we have become playful believers out on a picnic and a recreation trip while the lost world dies without Jesus, and Satan has a time of celebration. You don't have to worry about the gates of hell being taken down by this kind of pastor and church. Why? Because this church always stays on the defensive and not on the offensive. May God give us some devoted, hard working, Spirit-anointed, and sold-out pastors who will challenge their churches to discover their potential and become all that they can become with the help of Jesus.

G. The seventh reason for the under-challenged church is a strong belief in Calvinism by the pastors and leaders of the churches.

Let me say that I believe strongly in the Sovereignty of God, but I also believe strongly in the free will of men. I believe that God takes the initiative in every person's salvation, and unless He does, that person will never know that he is lost and in need of a Savior. But, I also believe that God loved all of humanity

enough to give us the freedom to decide whether we reject or receive His free salvation. And, after spending hours in a seminary classroom hearing the Sovereignty of God and the free will of man endlessly debated, I came to the conclusion that the question of Calvinism and free will will never be decided properly here on this side of heaven. Yet, I do know emphatically that Calvinism in this generation has become a great hindrance to pastors challenging their churches to go after the lost and win people to Christ.

I sincerely believe that Jesus has offered everyone in the entire world the privilege of coming to Christ, and if this is not so, then the Great Commission was a great mistake. And, we are wasting our time to attempt to take the message of salvation to the entire world. If only some are elected by God to be saved regardless, and then others have been created and appointed for God's eternal judgment, our efforts at preaching the Gospel to the entire world is a waste. And, I really believe that because of the major emphasis in many evangelical churches today about election and predestination, that many pastors are under-challenging their churches. This is especially true, if the pastor might be lazy as I mentioned in the previous point.

So, the propagation and proliferation of the doctrine of Calvinism in this modern generation has become a great hindrance to churches getting outside the box and sharing Christ with a lost world. Truthfully, as trite as it might sound, if I believed that only some could be saved, and not all, then I would stop what I have been doing for 49 years and spend the rest of my life resting!

I will close this point by sharing a personal story from my life that happened many years ago down in the state of Florida. While I was in seminary, almost every day the professors' lectures almost always seem to head straight for Calvinism and election. I can remember many arguments and heated discussions about this subject. Also, in the midst of this seminary training, every Wednesday morning before classes, I prayed with several men that I really came to love. One of these men was really on fire for God, and he carried a tremendous burden to see people saved. He

also became pastor of a thriving church not too many miles from the seminary, and his church just continued to blossom with growth. But, after class after class, and professor after professor, I began to see this good man of God change his doctrine and he began to embrace Calvinism. As I witnessed this, I began to see him stop challenging his growing church to win people to Christ, and a couple years after we graduated from seminary, his church dropped down to about one half of the people it used to run. His infatuation with Calvinism actually killed his church, and it took away his common sense in witnessing.

Let me explain! One day while I was preaching a revival meeting for him, he and I went out in a mobile home park witnessing. We were standing in the park sharing Christ with a man who was drinking a beer, when I noticed how this man really got under conviction. As the pastor continued to share the Gospel, the man became more and more nervous and under deep conviction. Just about the time that I thought the pastor was going to draw the net and ask the man to get saved, the pastor suddenly said, "Brother Stan, we need to go". He stopped the process and we turned around and walked back to the car. When we got back into the car, I asked him why he had stopped with drawing the net. His exact words to me were, " I didn't know if he was one of the elect". That day, I came to understand how an over emphasis on the Sovereignty of God and Calvinism not only hindered one man from coming to Jesus, but it also hinders pastors from challenging churches to get outside of the four walls of the church and share Christ with a lost world. So, I genuinely believe that with the growing emphasis upon Calvinism here in America , that many pastors are using this as a reason, or maybe even as an excuse, to under-challenge their churches.

II. NOTICE SOME RESULTS OF THE UNDER-CHALLENGED CHURCH.

A. There are many ripe fields with very few reapers.

In the Gospel of **Matthew 9:37**, Jesus said these word, "**The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few**". If this was true in the days when Jesus was on this earth in an

earthly body, how much truer it is today in this age when churches are being under challenged by pastors and church leaders. All over the world, there are harvest fields that are ripe for the harvest, and literally thousands upon thousands are begging for the Gospel message. I know this is true in Brazil, in Argentina, in the Philippines, in Thailand, and in many countries in Africa. Yet, because churches are not being challenged to get out of their comfort zones and take the Gospel to the world, millions still remain lost. And, until there is a spiritual revival in our churches, things will continue to get worse. We have more of the Gospel message preached in this country of America to fewer people than anywhere in the entire world, and yet, fewer and fewer people are getting saved, and more evangelical churches are closing their doors while the cult churches and Muslim mosques are going up every where across our land. We desperately need some reapers in the fields, but pastors, they won't get there unless you become bold and start boldly challenging your churches to become bold and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And this must be done, even if it is unpopular, uncomfortable, and yes, inconvenient!

B. There are many stagnant churches with very little growth.

Webster's dictionary defines "stagnant" as "not flowing" or somewhat lifeless. This can be illustrated by a river that no longer flows or moves on down the grade. It has become dammed up or stopped by rubbish or other matter, and when this happens, the water is no longer clean, and the smell of the river becomes putrid and foul. Beloved folks, this is what we are witnessing in our churches today. We have churches that are not growing and instead, have become stopped up by the lack of vital activity such as soulwinning and missions. Instead, these churches have given way to a maintenance mentality, which means that they try hard to protect what they have. But, they fail to understand that the longer there is stagnant water, the less life there is in the river. And when the life dies, the hand of God is taken off of the church. Thus, we are witnessing stagnant, complacent, apathetic, lukewarm churches all over the land. God has already left some of these churches, and many of

the members don't even recognize that He is gone. And to coverup the lifelessness of these churches, rather than challenging the church to win people to Christ, many pastors are pushing social activity and benevolence to save face in their community and even in their denomination. While the church and denomination dies, the pastor and church go on with their glorified country club which will only be around for a few more years before those who are really seeking life will move on to other places and or other churches; good or bad! And, in order to continue to cover up the death rattles that have set in, the structure of the churches and denominations will have to be changed in order to send out good annual reports. The definition of a New Testament church will be changed from a local "called out assembly" with a trained pastor to a few new cell groups with new converts as the preachers and teachers, regardless of whether God has called these new converts to preach and teach or not. The new definition of a church may not look like the Book of Acts Church, but these thousands of new cell groups will really look good as new church plants on the annual reports! And why have these churches dwindled away? Because they have been under-challenged by passionless and lazy pastors who are contented with status quo and complacent church life. It is much more comfortable and pleasant to not rock the boat than it is to push the boat out into deeper waters to catch far larger and much greater fish. May God send us some more pastors like David Platt in Birmingham, Alabama, who are willing to possibly over challenge the churches, rather than let millions die and go to hell and our churches die in the midst of carnal entertainment and huge plush buildings and programs.

C. There are many satisfied pastors with very little potential.

One of the greatest fears that I have as a long time pastor is that I might stand before Jesus one day and hear Him tell me that I could have accomplished so much more than I actually did just simply because I was not courageous enough to face the risks and push the boat out into deeper waters. Or, that I had had the privilege of challenging the churches I pastored with far more opportunities than I actually did just because I was too

fearful, too satisfied, or that I was more interested in my little kingdom than I was His. What a terrible reality that would be. Yet, that is what I believe is going to happen to a lot of modern day pastors. They may experience what Moses experienced when he stood on Mt. Pisgah and got a glimpse of what could have been if he had not been disobedient to God. There is truly a good satisfaction that every pastor and church member should have as they rest in God's peace and promises, but there is also a dangerous satisfaction which causes pastors and churches to settle for far less than God has intended for them. I really believe this is what is happening today just simply because for whatever reason, pastors refuse to challenge their churches to get out of the box, brave the risks, and involve themselves in taking the Gospel to a lost and dying world. We desperately need some pastors who will buck the tide of peer opinion and launch out into the deep for a draught of fishes. And, we need terribly some pastors who will not clutter their lives with a lot of good things, and miss so much that God has in store for them and their church families. Pastors, could I please ask you if you are reaching your potential? And, maybe I should ask, "Pastors, are your churches reaching their potential for Christ, or have you and your people settled for second and third best rather than accepting the challenge to do greater things for God"? I pray that even from this article that you and your people might make a brand new commitment to accepting the challenge to do more about winning the world to Christ before it is too late!

D. There are many disobedient disciples with no treasure laid up in heaven.

It is truly a great joy to be a part of God's plan for world redemption. But what a great sorrow it would be to live our lives as believers and never win people to Christ in obedience to the Great Commission just simply because we have never been challenged by a Godly and courageous pastor to launch out into the deep and let down our nets for a huge catch of fishes spiritually speaking. And what an even greater sorrow to live our lives on this earth as recipients of God's amazing saving grace, and then never be really encouraged to take that message of

saving grace to a lost world in order to lay up eternal treasure in heaven. In **Matthew 6:19-20**, we find these words, **“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”**. In other words, we are admonished by Jesus to make it our priority to invest our lives, our talents, our treasures, and our energies in the souls of men, because in reality, this treasure is the only thing that will be eternal. My pastor in Florida many years ago used to say, “If you are going to lay up treasure in heaven, you must invest in the only thing that is going there, and that is the souls of men”.

Recently, I was reading the lyrics and refrain of an old hymn that we used to sing in my little home church when I was a boy. The hymn is, “Must I Go And Empty Handed”. The chorus of this song says, “Must I go, and empty handed? Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet Him, Must I empty handed go?” The thought of standing before Jesus at the Judgment Seat Of Christ and having no souls with which to greet Him is absolutely terrifying to me, and yet the majority of believers never win a soul to Christ in their entire life time. Yes, I know that every individual believer is accountable for his or her own Christian life, but I sincerely believe that passionate Christians with hearts to win people to Christ will never happen unless they are challenged by pastors and others to keep the main thing the main thing in their lives and in their churches.

Please read another verse of Scripture in **Luke 15:7**, where we find these words, **“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance”**. Dear beloved disciple of Christ, “Is there any joy in heaven over the souls that you have brought to the Savior”? If not, why don’t you determine to do something about this before its too late. In our next point I will challenge you to take some

practical steps to change this in your life. And, please don't remain a disobedient disciple because time is short and Jesus is soon coming again. Just remember that only the treasure we lay up in heaven will last forever!

E. There are billions of people in the world yet to be saved.

I think it goes without saying that every soul is of extreme importance to our Lord and Savior. As a matter of fact in **Luke 15:4**, Jesus said, **“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?”** Jesus distinctly cares for every lost soul in the entire world, and if we are going to be like Him, we too must care and do our best to reach souls until the very last one is saved. In **Luke 19:10**, we find these words, **“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”** Jesus' primary reason for coming down to this sin cursed earth was and is to seek those who were and still are lost until every soul possible can be saved until the hour He comes again. There are almost seven billion people in this world, and the majority of them are still lost. We are told that there are at least two billion people in the world that have never heard the simple plan of salvation just one time. Thus, the lost of the world are begging for us to take the Gospel to them, but yet, because of all of the reasons I have already listed, and even more, pastors and church leaders are not challenging their churches to get busy taking the Gospel to these multitudes of lost sinners. We must ask God to bring back the passion to the hearts of His pastors and church leaders so that every soul will have a chance to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ before he or she dies lost forever and spends eternity in a literal fiery hell where he or she will be separated from Christ endlessly.

One of my favorite Gospel songs of this generation is song by the Southern Gospel Trio, Greater Vision. The song is entitled, “Just One More Soul”. Please read the following lyrics and chorus of this song and let God speak to your heart through it as He has so many times to mine. The song goes like this:

“The preachers are weary
The singers are tired
The church as we know it
Is losing its fire.

Some are discouraged from bearing the load
But we must determine to keep pressing on.

Cause if just one more soul
Were to walk down the aisle

It would be worth every struggle
It would be worth every mile
A lifetime of labor is still worth it all
If it rescues just one more soul.

So Preachers, keep preachin’
And singers, go sing
Laymen, keep sharing
That Jesus is King

The angels have gathered, they’re surrounding the throne
And they’ll start rejoicing for just one more soul.”

Millions and millions of lost sinners are still waiting for pastors to challenge their churches to get out of the box and brave the risks to take the Gospel to everyone who still needs to hear. We must not forget that all of us will give an account to Jesus for our faithfulness to accept His challenge to take the Gospel to a lost world, or we will have to give an account for the failure to do so. May God help us if we shirk our responsibility to obey His command. Who is still lost because you have not told him or her about Jesus and eternal life?

III. NOW, NOTICE THE REMEDY FOR THE UNDER-CHALLENGED CHURCH.

How can we remedy this terrible problem of the “Under-challenged” Church? How can we get our churches out of the four walls and on to the evangelism and mission fields? Let me try to share with you just a

few things that I believe will dramatically change this present situation and get our churches out of a maintenance mentality and into an active passionate effort to win the world to Christ before Jesus arrives.

- A. This remedy includes a renewed commitment of our pastors to passionately lead their flocks on to greater things.

When I make the above statement, someone will immediately say, “But how do we get these pastors to make this renewed commitment?” Well, the truth is that each negligent pastor must get under the genuine conviction of the Holy Spirit and see himself as complacent and apathetic, and then ask Jesus to do a renewed work in his life so that he can remove the clutter from his life and move forward to a compassionate and passionate love for souls. I have been in the ministry for 49 years, and I must say that I have never seen a day like today when so few pastors have a genuine burden for lost souls. Yet, I remember many years ago when I asked my Senior pastor in Florida how he motivated people to win so many people to Jesus (Over 1,000 baptisms per year), and he said, “I just teach them to fall in love with Jesus, and when they do, that is the only motivation they need.” Now, did you get the meaning of this statement? When we fall madly in love with Jesus, then we will automatically have a great burden for lost souls. My dear pastor friends, do you have a passionate heart for the souls of men? If not, please make a new commitment of your heart and life today so that you can sincerely challenge your people to get busy about winning the world to Christ! I assure you that your people will never become passionate about winning people to Jesus until you do!

- B. The second remedy for the under-challenged church is for every pastor to become an example in soul winning for his flock.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 11:30-** “**The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.**” Pastor, “Are you a wise person”? You aren’t if you are not winning people to Jesus. And, you must understand that your people will never have the burden to win people to Jesus until

they see you actively setting the example for them in soul winning. Now, I readily know that sometimes personal soul winning is not the easiest thing that a person will ever do, but yet, Jesus has given us the commission and we will never live in obedience to Him until we are busily engaged with carrying out this Great Commission. We can make every excuse in the book for not going, but unless we are sick and near unto death, no excuse will ever be sufficient to justify not caring for lost sinners. And, churches will never accept the challenge to get out of the box and take the Gospel to a lost world until they have a pastor that makes soul winning the main activity in his life.

Sometimes I hear people make the statement that “the primary responsibility of a believer is worship.” And, I must say that I whole heartedly agree with this, but if a person is a true worshipper of Jesus, he or she will have on his or her heart what Jesus has on His, which of course is lost sinners. Therefore, the closer we get to Jesus in personal intimacy, the greater the burden for lost souls will be. Thus, if pastors and churches don’t have a burden for the lost, it is a revelation that there is very little worship as well. This is a very serious thought, isn’t it? No worship, no soul winning! Much worship, much soul winning! These two are truly inseparable! So, pastor, what kind of example are you setting for your flock in the area of winning souls to Jesus? Your challenge to the church can only be as large as your pattern for the church! Are you part of the remedy, or are you part of the sickness?

- C. The third remedy for the under-challenged church is for every pastor and every genuinely saved church member to live daily with a world vision concept.

Now, the above statement might sound like it is too big for any body to live by, and yet, this is exactly what Jesus meant when He gave us the Great Commission. Our supreme task as believers is to take the Gospel to the entire world. And, this will never happen until we make a commitment that every day of our lives we will get out of bed each morning with a world vision concept. This means that we get up with the lost world on our hearts, we

live every day with this vision, and when we go to bed in the evening, we go to bed with souls on our hearts and in our minds. Our primary cause in all of life will be how we can be a part of God's Kingdom plan to win men and women to Christ. Then, every thing else that we do in life will be woven into the greater scheme and plan of how to share Christ with lost sinners and persuade them to receive Jesus. Our families, our jobs, our recreation, our hobbies, and everything else will revolve around winning the world to Christ. So, no excuse will be accepted to put Jesus and winning the world on the back burner of our lives! Now, I can hear some of you saying, "Pastor Stan, you have raised the bar too high." Well, listen to what Jesus said in **Luke 14:26-27- "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and his mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."** Now, do you think Jesus has raised the bar too high and demanded too much? I don't think so! The problem is that we have lowered the bar so low that we think having a world vision concept is a crazy thing. But, I beg all of us to open our eyes and get an eternal prospective on the way we live here on this earth as believers. The brevity of time and the soon coming Savior demand that we make His cause our supreme cause as well! Are you living with a world vision concept? If not, today you can be part of the remedy instead of part of the problem to the under-challenged church.

- D. The fourth remedy for the under-challenged church is that the people in the church need to accept the challenge of their pastor and follow his leadership to take the Gospel to the world.

Some of you probably think that I have been a little too rough on some of our pastors in this article. And, I will confess that I meant to shake up some pastors who are lazy, complacent, apathetic, and maybe even insecure. Yet, I must mention that regardless of how great a challenge a pastor gives to his church family, the work will never get done unless there are some faithful believers who will accept the challenge and follow the example of their dear pastors to get outside the box and take

the message of salvation to the lost world. Folks, your pastor cannot do it alone! You must follow him and his vision, accept your part in the vision, and faithfully follow where the dedicated and devoted pastor goes. You must quit making excuses and help your pastor to win your communities, your cities, your state, your country, and the entire world to Christ as quickly as you can before people die and go to a devil's hell and suffer forever! What you and I believe determines what we do! Therefore, if we believe that hell is real and hot, and that lost sinners end up there, how can we nonchalantly cruise through life without a care or concern for their souls? The pastors must get busy challenging the churches more than ever before, and the people must get busy accepting the challenge and responding with cooperative obedience to follow our leaders. The lostness of souls, the reality of hell, the apathy of the modern church, the brevity of time, and the genuine love of Christ demand that we make every effort we can to bring people to Jesus under the power of the Holy Spirit.

- E. The fifth and final remedy that I want to mention for the under-challenged church is that there must be a new surrender to the call of the Great Commission to take the message of the Gospel to the entire world.

In the introduction to this article, I started off talking about our resurrected Lord giving the Great Commission to the twelve disciples to take the Gospel to the known world. I must attest the fact that they did a good job, even unto death for the cause of the Gospel. Yet, I am afraid that we are not doing a very good job with this same challenge today. Therefore, I want to plead with every person reading this article to really consider a brand new surrender to Jesus and to take His message to the remainder of the world today. We cannot live in the past and sit around in a pool of self-pity about our failures to accept the challenge, but we must repent, return, and get busy with this great task before us. We must lift up our eyes and look on the fields that are white already unto harvest. Let me share with you some great scripture found in **Matthew 9:35-38-**
“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages,

teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then said He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into His harvest.” The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few! Folks, do you get this point? The fields are white, the harvest is ready, and the reapers are few. How dare we turn a deaf ear to the millions that are begging for the Good News of Jesus Christ! It is His harvest, and the fields are His! Therefore, let us pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the fields, and may we be willing to go as one of these laborers because soon the harvest will be over and our opportunities will be lost! The Great Commission is still the Great Commission, and there must be a new surrender to carrying out this Great Commission. It will not be great for us if we don’t go, and it will not be great for those who are waiting to hear if they don’t receive the message! The remedies for the under-challenged church are to hear the call, open our eyes to the fields, and surrender. Totally surrender! Completely surrender! No reservations! No regrets! Christian missionary and martyr, Jim Elliott, said, “He is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” What about you? Have you surrendered everything to accept His challenge to take the Gospel to the world? I surely do hope so!

Conclusion:

Well, believe it or not, but we have finally come to the end of this much longer article than I had anticipated. When I started writing this article, my heart was so burdened because of the conditions of our churches in America and around the world today. Churches that could be thriving with success in winning people to Jesus are sitting complacent and apathetical just simply because they have not been challenged to get outside of the box and help take the Gospel to the lost world in obedient response to the Great Commission. In this article I have listed several of the main causes of this

“Under-challenged Church”. I just pray that you have paid much attention to how we got into such a mess in our churches, and why literally millions and millions of people are still lost without Jesus. I also pray that you have seen what must be done if we are going to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to the entire world before Jesus come again. The problem must be remedied, or I believe that a lot of pastors and churches will stand before Jesus very embarrassed because of their negligence. Beloved, where do you stand today in relation to the “Under-challenged Church”? Pastor, are you presently the pastor of a church that for whatever reason or excuse, you have never really challenged your people to get busy praying, going, giving, working, and sharing so that the whole world can receive the message of Jesus? If not, why don’t you decide “right now” to surrender yourself anew to the high call of your vocation and commit yourself to returning to your church this coming Lord’s Day and begin to challenge them to win the world to Christ. Why don’t you become the example for them to follow, and lead them to go places where they have never gone, to give more than they have ever given, and to reach more than they have ever reached before! Why don’t you open your church doors to more missionaries and ministries than you ever have before, and why don’t you teach your people to take some big sacrificial steps of faith to invest in eternity so that the entire world can hear about Jesus!

Also, church families, why don’t you “right now” surrender your lives anew to following the vision and example of your pastors and put forth the greatest effort ever before in seeing that all of the lost world hears that there is hope in Jesus Christ! Why don’t you start prayer chains to pray for missionaries and preachers who are taking the Gospel to a lost world? Why don’t you commit yourselves to giving more financially to missions and evangelism over and above your regular tithes and offerings to your local churches? Why don’t you pray about making some short term mission trips to see where God might be leading you to fit into His world scheme and plan for your life in world missions? Why don’t you beg God to give you a world vision concept so that every day is a day with a great cause and a great challenge, and one that is eternally productive for the cause of Christ? And, why don’t you set some personal goals to lead as many people to Jesus each and every year until Jesus comes or you go home? **Yes, the fields are white already unto harvest, but where are the reapers? Why don’t you this very day make the same commitment that the great Robert Moffett, the father-in-law of David Livingston, made as he was preparing to leave as a pioneer missionary in Africa. He**

stated, “I have decided that from this day forward, I will treasure nothing and cherish anything that doesn’t pertain to the Kingdom of God.” Does this sound a little heavy? Does it sound like the bar has been raised to high? Well, it might, but just remember there would never be thousands of believers in Africa today were it not for people like Robert Moffett who accepted the challenge that God gave them to surrender to and give Him everything! The world is begging for more people like Robert Moffett! Will you become one of these, or will you continue to live your carnal and cluttered life in an apathetic state, living far below His plan for you? To do so is to live and die in **an under-challenged condition!**

