

*In search of...*

# Truth & Right

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## Dying Congregation?

In the book of Revelation, Jesus gives us an example of a dead congregation, Sardis. He said, "... I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). This should be something that we all should think about. Are we in a similar situation as Sardis in that we think we are alive yet the Lord finds us dead? It is important that each one of us look at the congregation that we attend and worship with to affirm that we are not part of a dead congregation.

### **1. No One Cares Why Everyone Is Leaving**

Have you ever had one of those moments when you sit down and think about why they left? Many times people make it abundantly clear why they left. However, sometimes

excuses are made by those at the congregation as to why people seem to be leaving such as: (1) promoting the concept that they were unwilling to accept the truth, or (2) they had problems here and were not fit to be members anyways, or (3) we are better off without them by which now maybe we can have some peace. However, it is a good exercise to think about those who have left and talk about why they left, otherwise, people may never pick up on things that have been going on.

### **2. No One Knows Anything They Want To Study**

As a teacher it can be very frustrating. You finish a long study on a subject, then stand before your class and ask what they would like to study next. Many times the silence

can be deafening. Why do people not have subjects in hand ready to ask about? It is a sign of the lack of personal study that is present. Individuals who study on their own will constantly be finding things that intrigue them or befuddle them. These are the things that they will bring up to be discussed in class. When there is a lack of ideas for a group study, it demonstrates a lack of personal study from the members.

### **3. Everyone Looks Back At How Good Things Used To Be**

Ah, the good ol' days. I remember them well, when everything was perfect, and all was well with the world. Now the problem is, even if that were an accurate description (which it is not), if we spend all of our time looking to the past at what we did then, we miss the present. And, while it is fine to remember the past, Christians must be more concerned about how we can make things better now. Sadly, many congregation are so hung up on how great things were 20, 30, or 40 years ago that they do nothing today except revel in the past.

### **4. Every Idea For Growth Centers On Anything Except Teaching**

Ever hear the expression, "bringing the mass in?" People in the congregation may recognize that at times, there is a problem of little to no growth and will decide that the failure of growth is due to the lack of activities for the youth, or that the congregation needs to get together more often for meals or such like. However, the truth is, when our focus leaves our true mission, Teaching, then any idea for growth is missing the mark. In addition, congregations who think that if they build gyms or family life centers, that this will draw new members, but they do not see the fact that the church is centered on Gospel teaching, not around buildings or activities.

### **5. The Foyer Empties Out 5 Minutes After The Close Of Worship.**

One of the most precious of all things is the fellowship with our fellow Christians. However, some members believe that the final amen of worship is the same as the starting gun in a race. And just like this, there off. You may even be able to hear the stampede as they make a mad dash to see who can get out the door and in their car first. Often times, you may be able to come outside just a few minutes after worship service in

the evening and only hear the sound of grasshoppers in the near distance. But on the other hand, I have attended congregations where members would spend countless hours talking with one another, even when the lights were turned off on them and the doors were locked. Perhaps, you have attended a congregation where the fellowship continued on as the conversation moved to a nearby restaurant or ice cream store. Thus, how sad it is when fellow Christians rush out the door to get away (or show up minutes before the start of services) missing on the fellowship with their brethren.

Now, these are not all the symptoms of a congregation that is dying, but these give a good determination of what is happening to a congregation. Therefore, we must be watchful, brethren, not just for what is happening everywhere else, but what is happening in our own back yard. We must fight to make sure that the congregation where we attend continues to grow and follow after the things of Christ. Otherwise we may be no better than Sardis who was told by Jesus that they were dead.

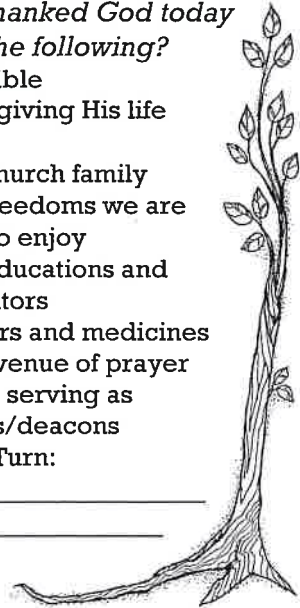
Robert Notgrass

**DEAR GOD,  
I WANNA TAKE A  
MINUTE, NOT TO ASK  
FOR ANYTHING FROM  
YOU, BUT SIMPLY TO  
SAY THANK YOU,  
FOR ALL I HAVE.**

*Have you thanked God today  
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- The freedoms we are able to enjoy
- Our educations and educators
- Doctors and medicines
- The avenue of prayer
- Those serving as elders/deacons
- Your Turn:

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# Monthly Challenges

**DIRECTIONS:** Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

## 1) MEMORIZING BIBLE FACTS

**2 Cor. 4:6** "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

It is important for Christians to have knowledge of God's Word. This month, our challenge will be to memorize some facts from the Scriptures so we can recall them at a moment's notice. Here are some things we should commit to memory:

- a) **The twelve sons of Israel-** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin
- b) **The apostles of Jesus-** Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James, Simon, Thaddaeus, Judas, Matthias, Paul
- c) **God's promises to Abraham-** The Land promise, Gen. 12:1; The National promise, Gen. 12:2; The Spiritual promise, Gen. 12:3
- c) **The organization of the Lord's Church-** Jesus is its founder & owner (Matt. 16:18) and head (Col. 1:18). As such there is no earthly headquarters (John 18:36). Local congregations are overseen by a plurality of elders (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Deacons are to serve and minister to the needs of the congregation, but do not have an authoritative role (1 Tim. 3:13).
- d) **The plan of salvation-** Believe, Heb. 11:6; Repent, 2 Pet. 3:9; Confess, Rom. 10:9; Immersion, Acts 22:16; Remain faithful, Rev. 2:10

## 2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

**2 John 7-11**

**7** "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. **8** Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. **9** Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. **10** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, **11** for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works."