

Christianity—The Intentional Life

By Bob Young

A recent article from James Nored reminded that mission work is not done without an intense focus. The article caused me to think about other areas in the work of the church. Whatever we do requires intensity and intentionality. We must genuinely intend to do something, and we must pursue our intentions intensely. Without these two components, simply having more and more ministries and activities does not accomplish anything. We must set priorities and develop effective plans.

Effective ministry is not possible without an intense focus

When I began preaching, I did not realize how intense and demanding ministry would be. I did not foresee the intensity of overnight hospital visits at the bedsides of dying members. I did not see the 60 and 70 hour weeks. I did not foresee the weeks with every night taken up with ministry. I did not foresee the long hours of night study because the days were filled with people concerns, hospital visits, counseling, contact with non-Christians, and Bible studies. I did not foresee the overwhelming needs that demanded my time daily. Preachers have two choices—ignore the possibilities and live the easy life of casual relationships and activity, or commit to intentional intensity. I have a friend who calls me “the tornado from Oklahoma.”

I live life intensely. Some have identified my intensity with a Type A personality and the accompanying stresses. A few years ago when I was serving at Ohio Valley College, we had a health fair where one of the displays called for the participants to hold a rock which would indicate our stress level. Several of my faculty members called on their dean and executive vice president to participate. The rock was supposed to turn black if you were stressed; bright blue if you were genuinely unstressed. My rock turned bright blue. When my rock did not do what the faculty members expected, they exclaimed, “You mean you are not under stress?” I do not know if the exercise works, but I know the surprise of my colleagues at my results. On the contrary, my high activity comes from a different source. There is very much to do and not much time to do it. I believe a life of effective ministry is intensely focused—I believe Christians are called to serve with an intense focus.

Effective church leadership is not possible without an intense focus

Church leadership is a broad category which includes elders, preachers, deacons, teachers, and other Christians who are in leadership roles. Intensity is required in every area of church leadership. A person will not be a good Bible teacher without intensity. A deacon will not serve effectively without focusing intensely on the work he has accepted. This principle is true in every kind of spiritual leadership.

(In this section, I write primarily about elders because they are often the most visible church leaders.) Throughout my years of ministry, I have worked with many elders; I have known many other elders. Effective elders are intensely focused on their responsibility. They cry for the flock which has strayed. They spend countless nights visiting members because their conscience allows them nothing less. They never stop shepherding, despite the seeming lack of results. They are diligent students of God’s word because they are called to teach and guide. These works require intensity, because elders, as spiritual leaders, are involved in eternal

matters. There is no area of life more important. They will pay whatever price to do the work God has given them. None in the congregation sacrifices more than the effective spiritual leader. They give of their time, they give their weekends, they return early from vacations and personal trips, they give up TV shows....the list goes on and on.

Effective outreach is not possible without an intense focus

Unless we make it our intention to reach the lost, and unless we arrange our lives (and our church life) to pursue that goal intensely, nothing much happens. Effective evangelism comes from Christians whose lifestyle is one of reaching out, a lifestyle that is intentional and intense. Outreach does not happen accidentally. Outreach does happen simply because a church exists in its community. Outreach is seldom attractional; outreach does not occur because we have lots of visitors. The word outreach suggests that Christians are reaching outside the walls of the building. This kind of activity and attitude outside the church building, coupled with intense prayer, is necessary for outreach to occur.

Effective mission work is not possible without an intense focus

Effective mission work grows out of an intense desire to share the gospel and reach people for Christ. I applaud mission works focused on benevolence, but if the goal is limited to benevolent actions and never intentionally and intensely seeks the eternal salvation of those touched, that mission work is worth very little in God's eternal scheme. When we go to a foreign country to do mission work, we must see our eternal purpose and intentionally and intensely pursue that purpose. Too often, mission work sets up more churches that function just like the churches in the US function, and there is little movement toward God's eternal plan to include all people under the saving umbrella of Christ's sacrifice and Lordship. It is not enough to feed people and entertain people.

The church exists to fulfill God's purpose—through effective ministry, effective leadership, effective evangelism, and effective mission work. Most of the people you and I meet every day are lost and separated from God. Most of those we touch daily are unchurched and live lives almost entirely devoid of any spiritual life. It is not easy to hear this challenge. It is not easy to come face to face with our lack of intensity and our lack of intention to share the work of Christ rather than merely soaking up the benefits. The message of Jesus has always been a difficult message, and many turned away during Jesus' ministry. Today, some who have turned away from the message continue to sit in our churches buildings Sunday after Sunday. God calls us to take up the cross, sacrifice, and follow Jesus who came to seek and save the lost.