

INTRODUCTION

The American flags on display in foyer of his church fascinated the little boy. He asked his mother why the flags were there. She explained the flags were placed there in memory of the men who had died in the service. He looked at her and asked, "The morning service or the evening service?"

Some churches are rather "dead." I've been in some churches where it seems rigor mortis has set in. Those churches could be called the First Church of the Frigidaire—they are so cold the ushers have to use ice skates!

The church in Acts 2 was a great church—they weren't a perfect church—but they were a healthy church. If you are looking for perfect church—forget it. It doesn't exist. It's like a marriage; there is no such thing as a perfect marriage but it is possible to have a healthy marriage. Some churches today are sick and dying and some are already dead. Other churches are like Acts 2; they are healthy and alive! Do you know the difference?

Dead churches are quiet; live churches have lots of noisy kids. Dead churches are rigid and unchanging; live churches are constantly changing. Dead churches worship the "good old days;" live churches are looking to the future. Dead churches don't need much money; live churches constantly need money. Dead churches are filled with "tippers;" live churches are filled with tithers. Dead churches have empty pews and empty rooms; live churches are constantly building. Dead churches say, "We can't;" live churches say, "We can't but God can!" Dead churches fossilize; live churches evangelize. I thank God Green Acres is a live church. Mike could walk out and say, "Live from Tyler, Texas—it's Sunday Morning Live!" We could name our television broadcast SML for Sunday Morning Live!

Last week I started a short series called "Back to the B.A.S.I.C.S." If God is going to use or congregation in the most powerful way possible, we must use the early church in Acts 2 as a model for ministry. In this passage of scripture we can discover six basic core values we should adopt. Each letter of the word B.A.S.I.C.S. reminds of these six foundational ministries. Last week, I mentioned how the letter "B" reminds us of the necessity of Bible study in the Christian life. "A" reminds us that Adoration or New Testament worship must be a primary purpose of a congregation. We also discovered the early church had both a large group gathering, in the temple courts and small groups that met in homes. If you want to be a growing, balanced Christian, you need both a large group worship experience and a small group Bible Study setting, which we call Sunday School. Today we are going to take the letters "S" and "I" in B.A.S.I.C.S. to examine two more of these core values.

Acts 2:42-47. "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and

enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Let’s focus in on two more of the important B.A.S.I.C.S. we see in this early church. One of the core values the early church in Acts 2 held was:

I. SOUL-WINNING: REACHING OUT IN LOVE TO THOSE WITHOUT CHRIST

Skip back up and look at Acts 2:41. After Peter preached his Pentecostal sermon we read, “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Then look again at the last sentence in Acts 2. “And the Lord added daily to their number daily those who were being saved.” That means people were constantly being saved, so there was a lot of evangelism or soul-winning going on. Soul-winning is a term you don’t hear much any more but it’s just a word meaning personal evangelism. Evangelism is a word literally meaning “good news.” When Peter preached and 3,000 were saved—that’s mass evangelism. But people were saved every day, even when Peter wasn’t preaching. How? The members were involved in personal evangelism: soul-winning. Soul-winning is a wise thing to practice, according to Proverbs 11:30. “The fruit of the righteous is the tree of life. He who wins souls is wise.” In soul-winning, we have a part and God has a part. First, let’s notice:

1. My part: Seeking out the lost and sharing the Good News

These 3,000 members were common folks. They weren’t apostles, but everyday, these believers talked to their family members, their friends and their neighbors about what was happening in their life. They didn’t preach sermons to them; they just shared what had happened to them. There is no record Peter was standing up and preaching a public sermon after Pentecost. These new converts came because people just like you and me brought them one-by-one.

I’d like to conduct an unofficial survey right now. I am going to ask those of you who were saved how you came to know Christ. I will give you three options: (1) you came to know Christ from either by a Christian radio or television broadcast; (2) or you were saved as a result of hearing a sermon by a preacher; (3) or you were saved because someone (a friend, family member, or Sunday School teacher) sat down and spoke with you personally about accepting Christ. Okay, ready? If you were saved by a Christian radio or television broadcast raise your hand. Good. If hearing a sermon saved you, raise your hand—a few more. Finally, if you trusted Christ because someone cared enough for you to personally talk to you about Jesus raise your hand. Wow! See, the vast majority of us came to know Christ because someone shared the Good News with us. Next question: Are you doing the same thing?

I’m not opposed to mass evangelistic meetings. I think there are times when we ought to have evangelistic crusades. I have preached some myself. However, I’m still convinced the best way to save people by each of us sharing our faith one-on-one. Imagine this platform is filled with 500 empty soda bottles and our job is to fill all those bottles with water. I could take a fire hose and drench the entire stage and eventually, most of the bottles would fill with water but what a mess! But what if 500 of us each took a container of water and carefully poured the water into each individual bottle? Mass evangelism is like using the fire hose. Personal evangelism is

speaking one-on-one to a person and offering them the Water of Life so they will never thirst again.

I once heard an American evangelist talk about traveling to Australia several years ago to conduct evangelistic services in several small churches. The churches hadn't done much preparation, so only tiny crowds attended. After six nights in six different churches, not a single person had been saved. The evangelist was discouraged and disgruntled. He boarded a tiny commuter flight to return to Sydney to connect for his return to the states. He was thinking, “This was a mistake. All this money, all this effort—for what?” He was so discouraged when he boarded the little plane, he prayed, “Lord, don't let anyone sit by me, because I don't want to witness to anybody, I don't want to talk to anybody. I just want to sleep.” As the plane prepared to take off, there was only one other passenger, a man seated several rows in front of him. The evangelist was thinking, “Good! I don't have to talk to anyone. This trip has been a disaster.” When the plane leveled off, the evangelist could see the other man was reading something, and he kept looking around at the evangelist. Finally, the passenger got up and walked back toward the evangelist. The passenger was carrying a copy of the Gospel of John. He said, “Excuse me, mate, but somebody in the airport gave me this booklet and told me to read it. It's about Jesus. Here on this page, Jesus tells this bloke Nicodemus that he must be born again. Do you know anything about that?” The evangelist grinned for a second and thought about God's sense of humor. He gladly told the man about Jesus, and the man prayed to receive Christ before they landed. Later, that man on the airplane became the pastor of one of the largest churches in Australia. You see, there is no substitute for sharing your faith one-on-one. There is nothing more important you can do than to help a person come to know Christ. Look at James 5:20 “Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, described what he thought the greatest threat to the church is. He said, “It is not communism, atheism, or materialism; the greatest threat is Christians trying to sneak into heaven incognito without ever sharing their faith.”

If I was your neighbor and I saw your house was on fire, and you didn't know it, what would be the kindest, most loving thing I could do? I would run to your door and warn you to get out quickly—your house is burning! We know there is a heaven and we know there is a hell. We have a sacred obligation to lovingly warn others about the danger of eternal judgement. I fear hell will be populated with people who ask for all eternity, “Why didn't David warn me about this?” We have an obligation to tell them about the grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness of God. This should be something we do gladly and eagerly because Jesus has saved us, and we love Him.

2. God's part: Saving the lost and growing His church

Did you notice that it says, “and the *Lord* added to the church?” We can't save anyone, only God can. We can't really grow a church, only God can. Jesus said in Matthew 16, “Upon this rock I will build *my* church.” I want us to learn something about God's mathematics today. In Acts 2, it says, “God added.” In Acts 6:7 we see God's addition is like our multiplication: “And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples *multiplied* in Jerusalem greatly;”

Let’s look at the numerical growth of the church in Acts. Remember, the church started with just 120 people praying in an upper room in Acts 1. On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved. Luke tells us in Acts 4:4 the number of believers had grown until there were 5,000 men, not counting wives and children. Dr. Luke, author of Acts, kept an accurate record. Finally it had grown so much by the time Luke reported the number of believers in Jerusalem in Acts 21:20, he uses the word *myriads* which means “tens of thousands” or too many to count. Wow! That’s what I call church growth—and that’s just in Jerusalem. That’s not counting the thousands of Gentiles who were saved. Some people are amazed when they learn Green Acres started with 297 members in 1955, and has grown to around 10,000 members in these past forty years. That’s wonderful but it is nothing compared to the growth of the early church.

You see, God’s addition is like our multiplication. What do you think would happen in our congregation if tomorrow just one person led someone to Christ, and taught them to do the same thing, so on the next day, those two led two people to Christ and taught them to do it. What would result after just thirty days? On day 1 there is one Christian, on Day 2 there are 2, on day 3 there are four, get the trend? Well, after 14 days, there would be 8,192 new Christians. After 21 days, there would be over 1 million new Christians. By Valentine’s Day there would be 5.3 billion new Christians (larger than the entire population of the earth). If you doubt those numbers, get a calculator yourself and start with 1, double it for thirty times and see what happens.

Now, I realize it would seem very unlikely someone would lead a person to Christ every day for thirty days, and teach him to do the same thing. So, let me offer a more realistic scenario. Would you be willing to look around and identify one person this year who needs Jesus? It may be a friend, an acquaintance at work or school. It may be a neighbor or a relative. Would you begin to pray for them and cultivate a relationship with them? Would you look for the opportunity to simply share your testimony with them? What would happen right here if God used each one of us to add a new Christian to our church? By this time next year, we would have baptized over 3,000 people and our attendance would be over 6,000 every Sunday. God is willing to do His part—will you do yours?

The “S” in B.A.S.I.C.S. is for Soul-winning. We reach out in love to those without Christ. The “T” stands for:

II. INTERCESSION: REACHING UP IN PRAYER TO THE LORD

Acts 2:42 says the early disciples “devoted themselves to prayers.” Notice the word is plural to signify there were different kinds of prayers. The word is *proseche*, which is a general word of prayer that literally means, “to put your face toward God to express a desire.” One of the basic core values of the Christian life is prayer. Prayer is communicating with the Creator. You really can’t call yourself a Christian if you don’t pray.

I agree with Andrew Murray who wrote: “In relation to His people, God works only in answer to their prayers. It is in prayer that we exchange our natural strength for the supernatural strength of

God.” R.A. Torrey wrote: “Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies beyond the Will of God.”

Of course, I could preach an entire year of sermons on prayer so today I just want to cover the basics. Prayer is not something that comes naturally. The disciples of Jesus asked Him, “Lord teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1) They never said, “Teach us to sing, or to preach, or to heal, or teach.” Effective praying is something that can be learned. Many Christians express frustration because they really *want* to pray, they just don’t really know *how* to pray. I wouldn’t want to embarrass anyone but if I called you up here and asked you to pray aloud for five minutes could you do it? Now, the value of a prayer isn’t tied to it’s duration but the truth is that many Christians run out of things to say once they have asked God to bless their food and take care of their family. If you really want to grow in your personal prayer life, there are some skills you can learn. Most of you know that I have written a book called *The Spiritual Powerbook*. It is a simple step-by-step guide to help you develop a consistent devotional life. There is a whole section on prayer. Our Media Ministry offers these books for \$7 if you would like one. The prayer outline in the book is one I have used for years. If you aren’t satisfied with your prayer life, try this plan for yourself and see if it doesn’t help your prayer life.

This simple prayer outline uses the acrostic CATIS. That’s really not a word, or you can make it two words, “CAT IS.” It’s just a simple structure to guide you through your prayer time.

1. Confession of sin

You begin your personal prayer time confessing your sins to the Lord. I believe it’s important to approach God’s throne with confession and repentance every time you pray. Why? Because we see in Psalm 66:18 “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;” The Bible never tells us we must confess our sins to a priest or to anyone else. Sin is always against God, so it must be confessed to Him. As you begin to pray, ask the Holy Spirit to shine the searchlight of His glory into the recesses of your heart and reveal to you any secret sin that may be hiding there. Then confess it specifically to God. The blanket confession, “Lord, forgive my sins” is worthless. I once was at an FCA conference and a college football player came to talk to me. He was a Christian but he wasn’t growing and he was miserable. I told him we needed to get on our knees and he needed to confess his sins to the Lord. We got on our knees and he looked at me and said, “I can’t think of any sins.” I said, “Just start guessin’.” Later, he said, “Everything I guessed, I was right.” I told him that was the Holy Spirit revealing it to him. To confess means “to agree with.” Here’s how it works. “Father, would you convict me right now of any unconfessed in my life?” Stop and listen (prayer is a dialogue, not a monologue). “Thank you, Father, I confess, I have bitterness and resentment toward John. Please forgive me. I repent and I will ask for his forgiveness, too...what else?...Yes, Lord, I confess I didn’t obey you when you gave me the chance to share my faith with that man yesterday.” Just keep going until God gives you liberty to move on in your prayer time. Of course, some of us have to spend a long time in this stage! I like to end this time praying David’s prayer in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.” This allows you to approach the rest of your prayer time with a clean heart.

2. Adoration of God

Now you are ready to worship God by praising Him. You can praise Him because He is a God of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. You have just experienced His mercy afresh. Do you ever truly praise God? To me, the best verse in the New Testament about praise is found in Hebrews 13:5, "Through Jesus, therefore let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name." I see that praise is a sacrifice to be offered to God. To me, that means our praise is most valuable when it costs us something. It's easy to praise God when everything is going wonderful in your life, that's not hard. But when things are going lousy, and you are hurting, disappointed, and discouraged, that's the time praise becomes valuable to God. I love Habakkuk's the prayer of praise in Habakkuk 3:17. Habakkuk complains about how hard his life is in the entire book. Then as he completes his message he prays, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior!" Wow! A modern paraphrase of that would be, "Lord, even though the value of my stock has dropped, and my 401K is sinking, though my spouse is in the hospital, and my teenager wrecked our car, and I just lost my job, and my dog just died...yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." That's a sacrifice.

Also, note true praise is the fruit of our lips that confess His name. I've said before, you can love and praise God mentally—sure He reads your mind. But praise is most perfected when you express it vocally. It doesn't say the fruit of your mind; it says the fruit of your lips. It speaks of confessing His name. I'm afraid many Christians have stopped short of really praising God with their lips. When you are praising God alone, go ahead, talk out loud, sing to Him and shout to Him. I'm not much on mental praying myself, because my mind wanders too much. Even when I pray alone, I talk to the Lord out loud, because if I don't I find myself thinking about all kinds of weird things. So the "A" is for Adoration. Next is

3. Thanksgiving unto God

The Psalmist tells us we need to "enter His gates with Thanksgiving and into His courts with praise." (Psalm 100:4) Again, we read in Psalm 30:12, "Oh Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever." Some Christians get confused about the difference between praise and thanksgiving. Generally speaking, you praise God for who He is. You thank God for what He has done. When you praise God you are speaking of His character and nature. For instance, you may praise God this way, "Father, I praise You because you are full of mercy and forgiveness. Your loving-kindness never fails. You are faithful." I could thank God this way, "Father, I thank you for saving me, I thank you for giving me such a wonderful wife. I thank you for letting me be a pastor of this wonderful church."

If you are like me, it's easy to thank God for the big blessings of your life. But we need to thank God for all things, even the small blessings in our lives. I never once thanked God for a flushing toilet until I returned from my first mission trip to a third-world country! Look around your life and see how many "little blessings" for which you need to thank God.

By the way, sometimes, try praying just these first three letters—CAT—and stop. Don't *ask* God for anything; just worship Him. If you are a parent and your teenager comes to you and says,

“Dad, have I told you lately you are the world’s greatest Dad and I really love you? I really appreciate all you do for our family.” You may say, “Thanks. But what is that you want?” What if they said, “Oh, I don’t want anything, I just wanted to tell you how much I love you.” After you get up off the floor, you are going to be blessed! Doesn’t it seem like sometimes we only go to God with a shopping list? Sometimes, just pray CAT. But most of the time, you will want to ask God to grant your requests. The “I” in CATIS stands for:

4. Intercession for others

Too many of our prayers sound like a “Polly wanna cracker” prayer. In other words, we only ask for things for ourselves. Before you make requests for your own needs, be sure to pray for others: that’s called intercession. Our word “intercede” comes from two Latin words, *inter* (between) and *cedere* (to go). When you intercede for someone, you go stand before the Father on his or her behalf. You are praying for them. Jesus is the champion Intercessor. In John 17, He prays His great prayer of intercession for us. The Bible tells us at this very moment, Jesus is making intercession for us before the Father. (Hebrews 7:25)

Our prayer ministry here at Green Acres is called the Intercessory Prayer Ministry, because we pray for the needs of others. We call our participants Prayer Warriors, because there is spiritual warfare going on in every life, every marriage, every family, every church and intercessory prayer makes the difference.

There is an Old Testament story of Moses up on the mountain watching a battle in the valley. Every time Moses lifted the Rod of God, the Israelites prevailed but when he lowered the rod, the enemy advanced. Lifting that staff is a picture of prevailing prayer. Finally, Moses got the idea and he held the staff over his head, and even Aaron and Hur held up his hands for him. What a beautiful picture of intercessory prayer. The real battle was being fought in prayer on the mountain, *not* down in the valley where the soldiers were. That’s why we pray for one another. That’s why we ask others to pray for us.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.” (Ephesians 6:18-19) When someone asks me, “Pastor, is there anything I can do for you?” I always say, “Please pray for me.” I need your prayers; I covet your prayers. I realize the devil attacks me and he attacks you so we need to be mighty in prayer for one another—that’s intercession.

5. Supplication for my needs

This final part of your prayer is asking God to “supply” your personal needs; that’s why it’s called supplication. David prayed, “Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon you; for you will answer me.” (Psalm 86:6-7) When you find yourself in trouble—and you will—what should you do? Don’t despair; try prayer! Don’t give up; go down on your knees in prayer. Don’t quit; find a quiet place and cry out to God.

This is not selfish praying where you say, "God let me win the lottery." Or, "God, even though I didn't study for this test, let me make an A." It's asking God to give us wisdom, patience, boldness, or strength. It's believing God will supply all your needs. In the *Spiritual Powerbook*, I guide you through daily assignments for intercession and supplication.

Using this simple acrostic CATIS, you are guided through your prayer. If a few minutes ago, you didn't think you could pray for five minutes, if you only spent two minutes on each letter; that would be ten minutes of praying. Do you hunger to have a quality prayer life? Are you making it a daily priority?

Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly remind the negligent one, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." Has the grass grown tall on the pathway to your quiet time?

CONCLUSION

We have our priorities confused. Most Americans worship their work, work at their play and play at their worship. We've gotten away from the B.A.S.I.C.S. These early Christians didn't have buildings, buses, or budgets. They didn't have seminary trained pastors or padded pews or PowerPoint presentations. They didn't have television, radio or printed presses. They didn't have cassette tapes, CDs or the Internet. But it was said of them, "They are turning the world upside down." They shared their faith: Soul-winning. They were mighty in prayer: Intercession.

Stephen is one of my favorite characters in Acts. He wasn't an apostle; he was a layman, one the church selected to serve food to the widows. But he opened his mouth and testified that Jesus is alive. The religious leaders couldn't accept it so they dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death. My friend, if you adopt a lifestyle of soul-winning and prayer, don't expect to win any popularity contests. You will never appear on the cover of *People Magazine* but for sure people will never forget your life or your message.

In the novel, *The Robe*, C. Douglas describes Stephen in the moment he is stoned to death for his witness for Jesus. Holding one hand high, Stephen shouted, "I see him! My Lord Jesus—take me!" When Stephen fell among the stones hurled at him, Marcellus turned from the brutal scene and looked at a soldier standing near Stephen's body. The soldier gripped his spear and commented he had heard Stephen say he thought someone was coming to rescue him. Marcellus corrected the soldier. Stephen *had* actually seen someone coming. The soldier guessed, "You mean that dead Galilean?" Marcellus replied, "That Galilean is not dead, my friend! He is more alive than any man here." And so was Stephen a few moments after.

What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?

OUTLINE

SOUL WINNING—REACHING OUT IN LOVE TO THOSE WITHOUT CHRIST

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. He who wins souls is wise.—*Proverbs 11:30*

1. My part: Seeking out the lost and sharing the good news

Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. *James 5:20*

2. God’s part: Saving the lost and growing His church

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. *Acts 6:7 KJV*

INTERCESSION—REACHING UP IN PRAYER TO THE LORD

A simple prayer outline:

1. Confession of sin

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listened. *Psalms 66:18*

2. Adoration of God

Through God Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. *Hebrews 13:15*

3. Thanksgiving unto God

Oh LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever. *Psalms 30:12b*

4. Intercession for others

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. *Ephesians 6:18-19*

5. Supplication for my needs

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me. *Psalms 86:6-7 NKJV*



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If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes