

Breaking the Reactive Cycle
Matt 25:1-13, Proverbs 6:6-11

Friends, I'd be willing to bet that when most guys were little boys – if they were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up...at one time or another said they would have said “I want to be a fireman!”

And I think that lots of little guys go through the “I want to be a fireman when I grow up stage” because being a fireman is exciting, adventurous, and dangerous!

And Firemen are heroes – So it's easy to understand why most little boys and maybe even some little girls might want to grow up to be firemen.

Now, the years have gone by and we've grown up...and most of us didn't become firemen...or did we?

And I say that friends, because as I watch how people live their lives, and from my own experience in trying to get settled and live my life - a great many of us – men and women - spend a large amount of time running around trying to put out fires!

Whether it is at work, or home, or in school, or church... we go from one emergency to the next, from one crisis to another. First responding to this situation, and then having to deal with that situation. Before you know it you're running around dealing with fires all the time and you're become stuck in reactive way of life.

Have you ever experienced that?

Now some may say – well that's easy to prevent, just don't respond to the fires! But it's not that simple is it? Because if we don't respond something bad will happen – and usually we'll take a hit somehow, and we're not willing to let that happen.

So when the crisis occurs, our adrenaline kicks in and we drop what we doing and react – we focus whatever energy, efforts and resources are necessary to put out that fire and prevent a catastrophe.

But friends reacting to and putting out those fires means that you are pulling resources – time, money, or emotional energy, away from some other area of your life and pretty soon a crisis will develop in those areas too because they are “under resourced”.

Eg. You’ve been busy fixing issues at work, so you’re taking time away from your home life, too much time...so marriage problems develop. Then after a huge fight with your spouse you realize you need focus on fixing your marriage for a while. So now you’re going away on some week-end trips, romantic dinners out, but you’ve overspent and so now you have budget problems...

Our lives are defined and controlled because you’re moving from one fire to the next.

And Friends, the danger is that we can become accustomed to living in this reactive cycle, living in constant crisis mode, and it can be kind of exhilarating, addicting even – because our adrenaline is pumping, we’re responding to something important, and if we pull this off and solve the problem, saved the day – then we’ll be the hero!

And this can happen to us in the church as well!

E.g. for whatever reason a particular program loses its leader and volunteers and it’s an important area – if the program doesn’t run the church could take a hit! So people step up and respond. But these people are now doing double duty because they are also involved in other areas so now two programs are understaffed and the volunteers are overloaded and soon they burnout and quit, and two programs have stopped. Now the church is going really going to take a financial hit – so a great deal of energy and effort is expended to rally everyone to solve this next problem – after which the congregation is exhausted and so everyone goes away on the week-ends to get a break from the church...and worship attendance drops- and on and on it goes.

Do you see how easy it is to end up “doing church” in a reactive mode? And we can easily become accustomed to participating in our church in this way – in fact we can think that this is the “normal” way to be involved in church.

“Oh no there’s a problem in the church – lets step up and fix it”
So we drop what we’re doing and get involved until we’ve solved it – and then we’ll go back to our other activities or give the attention to whatever didn’t get it while we were solving the problem in church.

Now please don’t misunderstand – It’s not a bad thing to step up to fix a problem in the church when they occur. However, many of the problems which we face and have to fix are of our own making, and they keep on occurring because we think doing church this way is normal!

Friends, as we learned last week, our church has been given a mission by God, and we’ve been instructed by Jesus Christ to “Go and make disciples of all nations”

But how can we *accomplish* this, how can we be *effective* in this, how can we do an *excellent* job in this if we are stuck operating in a reactive mode? Fellow stewards, Agents of the Kingdom, the fact is we can’t – we won’t even be focused on the mission we’ll be focused on the latest crisis!

We won’t be doing what God called us to do, and so we’ll fail in our task as surely as the five foolish virgins – the foolish bridesmaids, failed at their task of greeting the groom in Jesus’ parable and thus missed out on the wedding celebration.

Because friends – what this parable warns us about is being a reactive Christian, a casual Christian, the kind of Christian who is not really proactively committed to God’s mission to go and make disciples – because they themselves have not been disciplined, and they are not willing to make the commitment to being disciplined – they are lazy. Like the sluggard in Proverbs who would rather sleep than work, and so misses out on the opportunity to prepare.

The five foolish bridesmaids represent Christians who react only when something is really wrong, “oh no a crisis in my life- I better pray” or “oh no a crisis in the church – I should help out.” Jesus warns us that if living reactively characterizes our Christian life, and how we serve in the Body of Christ, it will catch up with us when Christ returns and then our reaction will be too late!

The five wise bridesmaids represent Christians who plan ahead, who prepare, who have broken out of the cycle of reactive living by focusing on how important their task is to them! They plan ahead and are prepared – they accomplish their task and they join in the wedding celebration!

You see friends; that is the good news – the reactive cycle can be broken! We don't have to be caught off guard by the return of Christ and we don't need to be stuck in an in-effective, sloppy, uncommitted way of being the church and accomplishing God's mission!

We can change things around so that when we stand before Jesus Christ we can say- what you instructed us to do was too important to simply react to it as an afterthought – no, I was proactive in planning how I could participate, contribute and accomplish making disciples.

And friends I pray that is what you want to do, because the solution is really simple - Proverbs tells us look to the ant, nobody is telling it what to do yet it knows it needs to store up food for the winter – so it does it.

To break out of the reactive cycle – you just do it! You do it because you've been warned that being lazy in this regard might cause you to miss out on heaven and frankly that's not a risk worth taking!

You just do it because you've been reminded again of how important the mission is! And you can do it because it's not terribly hard to do – and besides the scripture promises us that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (2 Cor 9:8)

So we have God's promise that he will help you do it! And so friends, given these things... there's no reason not to do it! There's no reason to remain in the reactive cycle of doing church.

So what does it look like to be proactive as a church, what does planning ahead and having extra oil with us mean, how do we take initiative like the ant and do the work before us to store up food for the winter?

Well friends, It means making a commitment to do the hard work of being disciplined – reading and studying the bible so you can understand it and live by it,

It means making a commitment to discovering what your “spiritual” gifts are. You may know where you are talented and what you like to do – but these aren’t necessarily your spiritual gifts. You need to learn about your spiritual gifts and commit to using them in the body of Christ.

It means making a commitment to give at least 10% to God from your income, and having your money follow his mission.

It means holding yourself accountable and sharing your progress in these commitments with other Christians – and you can do all this by joining a Christ Care group.

Friends the secret to breaking out of doing church in a reactive mode is regular commitment.

Now someone might object and say but if we all commit like that won’t we end up spending all our time and energy at

church and this will just cause us to go into reactive mode in our personal lives?

No, it won’t and here’s why!

First and foremost is that when people participate in the body of Christ according to their spiritual gifts – things run smoothly, take less time and people are energized by their participation instead of being drained.

Secondly, we need to take Jesus promise seriously that if we seek first his kingdom all that we need to live and meet our needs will be given to us as well. When we give back to God, He only increases our blessings!

And finally, when you have commitment you can organize. Let me illustrate – If you all studied and discovered your gifts – we might find that we have four people with the spiritual gift of teaching.

If those four teachers committed to developing their gifts by going to a week-end children’s ministry conference they could

come back trained and ready to serve and run our Kidz Zone ministry. And if they committing to each serving four Sundays in a row each teacher would serve for one month and get three months off. – Its pretty hard to burn out with a three month break, right? That's plenty of time for other commitments and responsibilities or getting away on a week-end, right?

Friends, many of our ministries could become more effective, be done with more excellence, and actually produce results in accomplishing our mission if just four gifted people for that ministry would make a commitment to serve for a month, and have three months off.

You grow in skills and abilities by exercising them regularly and consistently

We develop new ideas about things after we spent some time doing them

People open up to each other and trust us when we see them regularly

And there are many other benefits but I don't have time to go into them all right now.

Pretty simple isn't it – just like the Ant.

Friends – we're making a choice today here at Valleyview, we're moving from being stuck in a reactive mode church to becoming a church which is committed!

We want to be committed to being committed so we can reach our potential as stewards of what God has given to us, so that we will faithful, effective and excellent in making disciples of all nations! Amen.