

## Chapter 17 (The 100)

*Unused talents give you no advantage over someone who has no talent at all-* Mark Twain

That is, it! How do you make sure that your shine is greater than their shine? How could a town of 65 thousand have 100 church migrant families? With over 20 churches open for business on Sunday, they have no home? How is that possible? Reality is simple. People want to shine for God. They have passion for the Lord. Passionless preachers only look passionate if they keep the lamp covered. So, there we have it, 100 families looking for a home to shine, yet finding none.

I figure there are around 100 families in my home town that are churchless. Each one of them is searching for a church to call home. A place to shine. What they meet is indifference. You know the routine. Talk to a pastor and they are always looking beyond you. Looking to the next conversation. Just hit as many people as you can. Make them just happy enough to stay. A real conversation with one person? A real passion to see people shine? Not on Sunday.

Sunday has been reduced to recruitment day. Make sure the masses are just happy enough to return next Sunday. Preach big ideas with little to no commitment. We are a body that can-do big things. We reach the community. We target the world. Yet, Sunday after Sunday here we are. The politician ploy. Shake, hands, kiss babies, and make sure the foyer is clean. Bring in happy music. Happy sermons. Be the shining light on the hill. Never light the other lights too bright. Not on Sunday.

So, there we have it. 100 families trying to shine. Trying to fulfill the call of a pastor. Yet, the resistance is amazing. No word of a lie. I listened to a sermon one fine Sunday addressing the current state of the church. He pronounced great things ahead. We will be the

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church leader in the community. We will change people. This church will make a difference. The buzz in the foyer was amazing. People wanted to get involved. Then came the meetings. Or, the lack of meetings. The whole purpose of preaching big is to look big. The whole purpose of doing little is to look big.

If a pastor's main job is facilitating a church, then he or she is not out there making a difference. Oh, they say they are. Yet, meeting after meeting bogs people down in paperwork (at church)? Yep, "bogged down" in plain English means: let's reconvene in a week after praying about it. Suddenly, weeks have passed. Passion has been re-adjusted. What it really means is to keep the wicks of passion trimmed. Never let their lamp burn more brightly than the facilitator.

It's frustrating. I have seen so many families leave church at their wits end. How is that possible? I have heard pastors say to them "try a different church that's more suited to you." I have heard the excuses "how can we guarantee that you will maintain this ministry?" Who will pay for this? It's a great idea but we are full of ministry. It's not healthy to do too much. I have heard them all. What ministry gets accepted? We all know the answer to that. How much money do you make?

I knew a church that polled its pastoral and staff of about 20. They were to rate ministries within the church. The ones ranked high got funding and pulpit time. The ones ranked low were either axed or reduced. Think about it. More resources were put into high functioning ministries. More passion given. More time placed. What happened to "you're only as strong as your weakest link?"

At some point all ministry is valuable. God inspires and we try and do what he asks. Then a ministry fails. Why? It always comes back to ministry passion within the pastoral. What will

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they champion? Duh! Their own puppies. I know a very successful ministry that has changed lives. The problem? It helped the current members but did not increase the flock. Hence, it was cut. Ministry is there to make church a better place for the congregation and the community. Yet, why is ministry really there? We all know the dark truth. It's to make the church bigger, better, faster, more.

Back to the 100. They just keep recycling churches looking for a home. Keep looking for fulfilment of the promise. Here is how it goes. They hear from a friend that a certain church is good. Mom and dad get so hopeful. They pack up the kids and go to church as they love to do. Each one of them are welcomed by warm hands and a clean foyer. The preaching is dynamic and they offer to do anything to make your stay: stay. The hope is in the delivery. We need you. We have a place for you. The hope is given. The hope is received.

Then comes the battle. People are placed in the holes. The holes of plug and play. We need teachers. We need ushers. Serving on Sunday fulfills the mandate to be Christ-like. At some point you feel the need to explore yourself. To use your passion for God in the way you were made. We need you turns into not right now. We love you turns into not in this budget. We endorse you turns into make a life group. I get it that church is not about satisfying the self. Yet, if our passion for God is not fed properly, then what?

Church is a body. A group of god-like passionate people. This passion burns! Some would even say God draws us to church to emulate his body. Then the conversations start at home. I'm not as on fire as I want to be. This church is not interested in my passion. They want my service, just not my passion. It sounds so self-centered. Yet, people were made individually. We have unique passions. The ultimatum is offered. Do what the church needs and wants or go find your passion elsewhere. The revolving door swishes and there looking for hope once again.

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One by one families leave. All the time looking for a place to fit in. Discouraged by church. I can usher. I can teach. Yet, deep inside I am so much more. I read a story once of a girl who needed more. She asked God to push her. She insists that one day she felt God push her to her knees at church. It began a strenuous journey of prayer and outward pushing. Outside church it worked. God used her. Inside church, not so much. They gently told her to stop. It made some of the congregation uncomfortable.

William Carey wanted to reach people of different cultures. One elder sat him down and stated "Young man, sit down; when God is pleased to convert the heathen world, He will do it without your help or mine." It's how it rolls at church. I had a friend ask if he could evangelize the community for Christ. He also asked for help and pulpit time. They said no. He asked why. The pastor said "*we don't have an outreach ministry right now.*" The man exclaimed "I'll do it!" Then came the honest answer "*if we do decide to reach the lost it won't be your way.*"

It's how it goes in many churches. Even 100 years before with William Carey. Pastors and elders protected their own. Their passion needs to be the passion. Just do as I say and not what I am afraid to do. What it comes down to is failure. Passion succeeds most of the time. Facilitating pastoral have no passion running a church. All they do is run around making sure passion for individual ministry is trimmed low.

That is directly why there are 100 families floating around from church to church in my home town. It's not like this is new. William Carey faced it. Martin Luther faced it. Jesus encountered it. I have hit it straight on. What did I get? Patrick, I want you to go to counseling. There is something off about you. What did the councilor say in the first 15 minutes? Patrick, you're not at the right church. That hit me square between the eyes.

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My church history is small. I began in a church 60 km away from home. A friend's church in another small town. Eventually, I found a home for 10 years in my home town. For every one of those years I pushed them to be more. To do more. It was a struggle and fight. I tried so desperately not to leave. I even went to university to be a pastor. To conform. Yet, the university pushed my passion. Fueled my resolve to reach the lost.

Why did I eventually leave my home church? I did a practicum in my church. The lead pastor took me out to visit a new couple. Two things happened. I asked my pastor how often he does home visits. He thought it has been three years. Hmm... what made this one special? Secondly, within a month the new couple asked me if they could start a ministry. That hit me full force. I knew how it goes in my church. New ministry is really hard to get endorsed. I was forced to lie. "Of course, you can do ministry, just ask." I could not stomach the lie. We left the next week.

It still bothers me that we left. I grew so much in that church. Some of my favorite Christians go there. Then the conversations started. The meetings at the grocery store. Family after family had left too. They were all so frustrated. I realized that I was not alone. It got ridiculous. We tried other churches and there was this person and that person from our original home church. I was saying the wife there have got to be a hundred families that have left. We could start our own church!

The alternative is simple really. Stay and plug and play. Bide your time and wait for your chance to shine. Sorry, you can't outshine your pastor. They will never let that happen. The leadership in your church hold the keys to ministry. It's designed to keep anything more passionate than them at bay. All in the name of doing the right thing. Being a good Christian.

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If I had a dime for every time a pastor preached on being a biblical Christian, I'd be very rich. I can hear all the amazing quotes from the pulpit. Giving 10% to the church is being real they preach. How to have real faith? Serve on Sunday with honor, that's being a real believer. God shines on those who serve faithfully. (I love this one) Check your heart. Ask God to search your soul. Pray and ask God what you can do for your church? It's all designed to bring you down. To cast your eyes from your passion to the church. Just do your job and shut up!

Keep the agenda simple. Oil the revolving door well. The 100 migrant families make the door look used. Here is a good trick. A recent church said they had 118 baptisms this year. That is astounding! Yet, at years end how many of them used the revolving door? Patrick, that does not matter, they got baptized. Do you think the 100 families really give a rat's ass about being baptized? Sure, they appreciate being saved. However, trimming or dousing their passion might rank higher.

I just don't think that any church that boasts baptisms is really doing well. It's like a government saying there were 57,000 jobs gained. Yet, they dispute 46,000 lost the next month. Jobs come and go. Baptism numbers fluctuate. Inside of all these stats and numbers are people. In church they are called Gods people. What drives an economy? What drives a church? Far too often a government or church cite a program. They report growing numbers. Yet, they miss the people part.

People are Gods tools. As each person comes through your revolving door God keeps on knocking. Here they are! My gift to you? To plug and play? Hell no! To use your church as a city on a hill. To inspire the community unto which it was given. It's just a rumor. Your church is a gift to inspire a community given by God no less. What will you do with all that passion? All

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that talent and spiritual gifts? Run church towards Sunday? Oh, my goodness! Are you really going to bring God down that low?

Who is to blame for 100 lost families? This is scary. Just my home town? Far from it. Did it ever occur to the pastoral that songs written by artist blasting their religious upbringing comes from somewhere? How about children going around and round through revolving doors. How about listening to mom and dad frustrated with church. Passionate people asked to be passionless. So, years down the road those kids grow up. They begin to sing songs from their youth. Using words that throw barbs at an uninspiring church.

I have to ask? Why would unbelieving kids write music to bash the church. Who really cares? Would the church hear it anyways? Would an unbelieving world care? I have to ask, why bother talking about church if you don't go? It's like a pizza lover sending a stinging indictment over sushi? They wouldn't but kids that attended church in their youth would. Why?

They hated seeing their parents suffer. They hated being offered heaven or hell. Passionless pastors telling us they would save the world, but don't. Those kids saw it all. Now they preach to millions telling the world that church sucks. Exactly who's fault is it? The 100 families are not just baptisms. They are not just spreadsheets. Oh no, they are people. People who have children. You know, children. Those little recording devices some mothers birth. They remember church all too well.

Alanis Morrissette- Forgiven

You know how us Catholic girls can be  
 We make up for so much time a little too late  
 I never forgot it, confusing as it was  
 No fun with no guilt feelings

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The sinners, the saviors, the lover-less priests

I'll see you next Sunday

Carrie Underwood- church bells

It was all bruises, covered in makeup

Dark sunglasses

And that next morning, sitting in the back pew

Praying with the Baptist

I could go on if you like. The revolving door says some you win some and some you lose. Does God say that? Don't we all want God to give second and third chances? Don't we all want God to leave the 99 sheep and look for us? Who is looking for the 100? Do you really think they don't notice? My wife asked me if we could go back to my original home church. I laughed. She laughed. I'm not that convinced that God is laughing.

Here is my problem with the 100. Are they the normal fallout of unbelief? Are they the fallout of a fallen world? People will always seek God. Yet, the path is narrow. Only a few good souls will be saved. I have heard it all. Is it the 100 family's fault that they float between churches? I refuse to believe that. Did I write all this to justify my floating? Who wants to float? Why do they keep trying? It's because they love God. They want to belong. The 100 are just not willing to die to self for a lifeless church.

Each one of these families want to express themselves. God says I made you special. Over the years you noticed that. Someone sings well. Another man is good with his hands. He can fix anything. Pat who began the Mustard seed is a really good sales man. I have met him. He has charm and confidence. He uses it to feed the homeless. Billy is a great communicator. He could talk to the lost like a great hockey player could stickhandle in a phone booth. Our passion was meant to be expressed.



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Is it more than some irate artist is talking trash towards the church, or that they are frustrated? Does the church have any idea how many people believe? Do they really? I just think we are looking at the 100 all wrong. Your telling me 100 families are that difficult to work with? I knew a lady that was deeply involved in the church. Christianity is her life. I honor her for that. Yet, she mildly fought the church to get programs for the kids. She was frustrated. Yet, she stayed. She became just silent enough to not be asked to find another church. How much blood is she willing to sit on in the pews just to stay? Just to seem loyal. However, she was not that loyal to the 100 families that left. Sucks to be them, right?

Voluntold is actually a word. I looked it up. That mazes me. Church leaders snicker when you say that word. I have seen the smiles. They love that word. From the pulpit: God is commanding us to serve the body. It's kind of true. On the other hand, we are asked to check our heart. What would we be willing to do for the church that Jesus is head of? My lady friend was willing to be convicted enough to serve. Yet, she was also willing to give up some God ordained passion to remain. She refused to speak up for the 100.

To the 100. They were not willing to be voluntold and sacrifice themselves. Again, that seems selfish. Yet, God is screaming through the Spirit for us to be amazing. Be an amazing usher? It's a yes and no thing. Be an amazing usher. I've known some. They rock! Yet, they are much more than that aren't they? Otherwise we could just put them in the closet and wait to bring them out next Sunday.

The 100 could not stomach the thought of sitting in the closet all week. Further to that, they wanted to bless the church. I suppose they could just do something on their own. The problem is that we are asked to love the church. To belong to the church. Yeah, I get it that the church is more than four walls. I was belonging to a group of men who did a massive breakfast

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once a year at the football stadium. My pastor asked if his church was involved. It was two things. One is that he wanted to know if I used the church name without asking. Secondly, he wanted to make sure we did promote the church name. Church is more than Sunday. What about the men we were trying to reach? Stipulations, conditions, risks?

To that vein, I had asked my pastor to be involved. He did not notice me until he noticed the event. God had already asked him to support it through me. What he noticed was me asking for another ministry. Another of one of my countless passions. He tried hard to ignore me. He could not however ignore the impact of that breakfast. Yet, I wanted my church to use my passion for its benefit. However, they resisted until my passion benefited them. I just don't think that is how God works. We should send out passion to benefit the kingdom.

I think one of the rules of thumb with God is "give a little to get a little. It's not written in stone but I bet it happens more than we think. The "no works" people are screaming at me. James 2:18 *"But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds."* We could fight over this. The 100 wanted to used their works to make the church better than it was. To bless themselves or the community? Did they really want to be honored? Most likely they wanted to be part of something special that was bigger than themselves.

Why I am disappointed in my lady friend who stayed at a dysfunctional church is this. She was willing to accept a certain amount of trimmed passion to stay. She was also willing to let other people go. It's harsh criticism but I believe she was also willing to let bad pastoring run amuck. It was more about not rocking her little boat within the church hierarchy. It's sad. Pastors and lay persons willing to oil their revolving door just to keep what they have.

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There is this theory that our cure for cancer might have died within the clear cutting of the rain forest. I have seen movies about that. What if God gave us a cure? What if we knew that some plants hold the key? What if our need of farmland outweighed the chance at finding a cure? We know clear cutting is bad but we need it. I think the church knows the revolving door is bad. It's not what God intended. Yet, protecting the first 20 feet inside a church is more important than cultivating people isn't it?

You were willing to bet the 100 were not that important. You were willing to bet the 100 were not as important as you. Quite frankly, God hired you to run the church, right? Is it possible God asked you to build the church through the 100? There it is. The line in the blood-soaked pews. It's either them or me. It has bothered me to no end that I can't find a home in my home town. Aren't my gifts and passions important to the church?

My choices are really simple. Pick a church that is not that great theologically. Choose another than does a whole bunch of crazy crap during the service. Find another that has a pastor without schooling. Another that changed their name (lipstick on a pig). One more that demands holy living. One that wants to stay small and continue to split every few years. Or, I could drive 40 minutes to church in the big city. For the 100 families in my town there are a ton of choices.

Yet, what are their choices? Each one of us knows the answer. Start my own? Yes, I could. I should. However, I want to be used by church. It bugs me to death I cannot share me to help them. I want to lift a Moses arms. I want to honor Gods anointed. The church does mean something special to me. Start my own? Is that really the answer?

Here is my problem with that. I am not that willing to just let the church ruin passion. I cannot sit in blood-soaked pews. By the way, the "blood" part is those that the church sacrificed

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to remain plug and play. The ones they pushed through the revolving door. I have passion to not let church remain the church of Jesus Christ if they are going to treat 100 families that way. I won't stand for it.

We need a healthy body of Christ. We do! The only way that is going to happen is if we change habits. Habits that church has silently endorsed for a very long time. The 100 are people. They are Gods people. All they really want is to share themselves with the church. I will serve on Sunday. I just want to be all God made me. The church should be endorsing the 100. Imagine the money? Imagine the brain power and talent? Imagine the numbers! Why are churches so willing to remain ambiguous? To keep the pastor's job? To keep the church normal? To make sure our passion does not exceed your passion? And you still call it the church of Christ?

Ok, I have ranted. From the outside church is crazy. The common theme I hear is that church is cold. Church is not fun. Church is boring. All they care is about money. They have moral issues. From the outside it looks ugly. Even if it's not true, those are some pretty good rumors. Are there rumors about your job like that? Of course not, they are not the church.

It's time to invite the 100 back. To apologies to God for the farce we made church. Apologize to God for misusing his people. What could be opened to the church if they embraced the passions of the 100. I asked a pastor to send out an invitation to the whole community. To invite them to church. He replied "no, we don't have the resources." Uh, with another 100 families you do not have the resources?

Finally, I want to offer hope. I just experienced what church should look like. A small church was offered to run Easter Sunday during this virus outbreak. How were they going to do that if people can't gather? Within a week they used all the church talents to rent a screen. Make

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a sermon on video. Someone edited it. Another person rented a parking lot. The band recorded worship songs. Someone filmed it. A group of volunteers set it up within three days. They created an Easter drive-in. Everyone stayed in their cars. The local paper was intrigued. The next big city news was fascinated. The country news channel sent film crews. All because one single pastor took a risk. He enabled people to exercise their talents and passions to be the church. To be Christianity. To make the community outside the church a better place. Maybe, just maybe, this church is a place the 100 could find a home.