



# THE PASTOR'S PEN

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## **The Mathematics of Ministry** **Effective Ministry = Prayer + Action**

When we talk about personal service and ministry during Lent, we are not just referring to those who are ordained or elected to an office in the Church. No, in actuality we are talking about everyone: members, visitors, children and guests. That also includes those who are reading this newsletter, as well as those who have it and have chosen not to read it. No one is ever exempted from being involved in service to God in some way. If you are living and breathing (both of which are gifts from God), then you need to be showing your Creator and Sustainer just how thankful you are for these gifts. The big question though is how do we show our thankfulness to God?

In showing thankfulness to God, many people will often just mumble a quick prayer of thanksgiving and think that is all that is needed. Some will send a few dollars to the church or drop a check in the offering plate once a month or so and think that is all that is expected of them. However, the reality is that God expect both prayers and actions from all of us and He wants more than just a token of either one.

To illustrate what I am talking about, let me tell you a story of an old preacher who called a prayer meeting in a drought stricken community. Now this community had been months without rain and the crops were nearly beyond saving. The grass in the pastures had turned brown and was so dry that the cows and horses could not find anything to graze upon. Just as you would imagine, everybody in the community showed up for prayer meeting. The church was packed to the rafters and every pew was filled to overflowing. The preacher came out of his study, walked up to the pulpit and then told everybody go home. Stepping down from the pulpit, he went back to his study and closed his door.

Needless to say there was quite a stir and many of the people didn't understand what was going on. Some folks got angry. Other people were just totally flabbergasted by the preacher's actions. A few began to grumble and wanted the preacher to resign after calling everyone together and then failing to hold the prayer meeting. Finally, somebody went to the door of the preacher's study, knocked on the door and waited for the old man to answer. The preacher opened the door and the man standing there asked the question: "Why?"

The old preacher looked at him for a moment and then said, "Because none of you brought umbrellas!" He continued, "You see, you came to pray for rain and for a relief from the drought, but you didn't come to pray in faith expecting God to do anything." The old preacher frowned, turned around, went back into his study and closed his door a second time. The people, knowing that the old preacher was right, slowly began to disperse and go back to their homes.

One week later, the preacher called another prayer meeting. Once again everybody showed up, but this time, they brought their umbrellas. The group started to pray and before they finished their prayers it started raining and it continued to rain throughout the summer until the drought was only a memory in their past.

Now I have been told that this is not a made up story; that it actually happened and that it was documented by another minister who lived in a another town only 50 miles away during that same drought. The difference was that his community never got together even though he called for his flock to gather in for prayer. So while the first community prospered from the rain, the second continued in the drought on through the next spring. Was all of this pure chance? Perhaps, but I think not. I think that it was God who changed things by answering the prayers of the people who came to Him in prayer and action, expecting something more to happen than just another prayer meeting. I think that God blessed their faithfulness and their efforts because they did act on their faith; they brought umbrellas to the prayer meeting expecting to use them.

Every week, we gather here at First Christian. We pray for God to work within our congregation, for our leaders to grow and our congregation to prosper. We pray for teachers and youth workers. We pray for evangelism to take place in our community. While all of this prayer is good, the question we really need to answer is: how are we acting while we pray? Are we busy doing as well as praying? Are our actions backing up what we are asking for God to help us accomplish? Are we praying, volunteering, responding to the call for teachers, sharing the gospel with our friends and neighbors and supporting our leaders? If we are not doing as well as asking, then we are just like the folks who showed up at the prayer meeting without their umbrellas. So, what is it going to be? Are we going to act in faith as we pray for the showers of blessings from God, or are we just going to put up with a spiritual drought?

Umbrella and bible in hand,

*James*