

# FOCUS

A Newsletter for ABCCR Professional Church Leaders

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*They say confession is good  
for the soul; and I need to do some  
good for my soul. Let me tell a couple  
of stories on myself and perhaps  
it will help assuage the guilt  
I'm feeling and also provide a  
platform for challenging us all  
to greater effectiveness  
as followers of Jesus Christ.*

A recent birthday celebration had me playing host and head cook. It was all thrown together rather spontaneously so Connie spent her time playing with grandkids, and I spent my time rushing between the grill outside and the stove inside. My son-in-law, the guest of honor, followed me back and forth so we could engage in conversation and better enjoy the evening. At one point, after a hasty check on the progress of the meat on the grill, I turned to rush back into the house to check something else. Glancing up, I was certain my son-in-law was holding the glass storm door open, so I charged ahead. With a startling bang, I smashed into the door, bending my glasses, mashing my nose, and wounding my pride. Obviously he wasn't holding the door. The entire household erupted in laughter, and I looked around for a couple of talking crows and a bottle of Windex. For the rest of the evening my wife laughed hysterically every time she looked at the bent glasses hanging askew on my reddened nose, the price for not paying close attention.

Later that evening, after supper, my three-year-old grandson showed me a picture of a Thomas the Train bridge he wanted. Of course, I was engaged in important adult conversation and paused only long enough to glance at the picture and say, "Oh, let's run right out and buy one!" I was being flip; but I had forgotten that "flip" doesn't work on a three-year-old. He did not stop talking about Thomas' bridge and Pa-pop's promise to buy it.

The next morning I admitted to Connie that I really didn't even know what I had promised. She showed me the picture, and I groaned. It was a pretty elaborate set-up, and it wasn't going to be cheap. I went online to get the bad news; \$59.95. Ouch! Then came worse news, it was out of stock. Everywhere I looked said it was out of stock. I finally discovered it was out of production. Then the good news, I found it on Ebay. Then the really bad news, I could buy it new for only \$475. Oh my goodness! ... Needless to say, Moses isn't getting Thomas the Train at the Action Canyon. And Pa-pop didn't make good on his promise. We did find a substitute my grandson is happy with, so I'm not the villain I feel like; but just the same, I wish I had paid more attention and hadn't responded to my grandson's request without thinking it through.

Sometimes we think we're paying attention, only to realize our perceptions were not quite accurate; and we slam into doors we did not see. Sometimes, in our self-important absorption, we just don't pay attention at all. The consequences of both these actions are not pleasant.

This summer I have had a number of conversations with pastors who are lamenting the fact that their churches are in the midst of significant financial struggle. In many cases they thought things were OK, only to be blind sided by a piece of the financial equation they did not see. There have been some who have confessed they were really focused on the wrong conversations and simply didn't pay attention to the conversation that was, at the time, perhaps more relevant and more important.

In working with many different congregations over the past 12 years, I have become aware of an area of weakness in my own pastoral ministry and an area of weakness in many of our churches. If I had it to do over, I would give more attention to helping Believers understand and exercise faithful stewardship of their resources and their relationships with Christ and with others. I'm not talking about campaigns to raise money for budgets and projects. I think our greater need is to help one another learn to see what is really in front of us and to pay close attention to God's instructions about how we are to respond. There is more to church than potluck suppers, revival services, building committees and "keeping the preacher in line."

Years ago Francis Schaffer wrote a book, How Shall We Then Live? I have long since forgotten the content of the book, but the title continues to challenge me. What does faith in Christ mean about how we live out our lives?

Attending the Baptist World Congress a few weeks ago, we were challenged to "Hear the Spirit." The theme song written for the event called us to hear the Spirit...and worship. But I believe hearing the Spirit calls us to something far deeper than worship. Hearing the Spirit calls us to live lives that make a difference, and I believe that difference happens when we live as faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God. We can only hear the Spirit by paying attention.

I suppose my soul feels a little better now, having confessed that I sometimes don't pay attention like I should. But it would feel better still if I knew we were all paying better attention to living lives worthy of Christ; lives that exemplify faithful stewardship of resources and relationships; lives that exemplify careful listening to what the Spirit of God calls us to do; lives that make a difference in the world around us.

Blessings,

John Williams