

Matt 9:36-38

36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

KJV

Western Hills Baptist Church originally called Southside Baptist Church by the Baptist convention because it was established on the southern boarder of the city limits at SW 36<sup>th</sup> street. They eventually changed the name to Western Hills Baptist Church because of an upscale housing area that was being built just to the west of this building on what was the Western Hills Golf Course and Country Club.

In 1959, a congregation of believers had there first worship service in this sanctuary. For years they had planned and prayed. They had a vision that was much larger than their old sanctuary which was on the second floor of the building just to our west where our children are meeting for Sunday School.

They envisioned a facility that would seat nearly three times as many people as their old sanctuary. They envisioned a facility that was second to none in this community. With it's high ceiling, decorative wood work, shining black and white checkered tiled floor that sloped from back to front, a state of the art sound system, solid wood pews that would seat eight to twelve people, a spacious balcony and large entry foyer at the main entrance, a large platform area and choir loft that could hold nearly 70 choir members, this facility was comparable to a smaller version of the civic center in down town Oklahoma City. They even built this sanctuary so that the walls on the west side could be removed to accommodate more people.

From this strategic central location on the south side of the city they could envision themselves reaching hundreds of people with the gospel of Jesus Christ as the city grew towards Moore.

And they did. God greatly blessed the church and under the leadership of Pastor Warren Terry, they eventually over filled this sanctuary with 800 or more in attendance.

Soon after being called to become the Pastor of Western Hills in 1984, I met with Pastor Terry who was then an aging evangelist. As I met with him and we talked about the church and this auditorium, I could see in his eyes and hear in his voice the grief that he felt over the decline of the church. He had left the church and established Southern Hills Baptist Church which also had a great vision for reaching the south side of Oklahoma City. But many members of Western Hills had followed him and that precipitated the decline at Western Hills. It was never the same after that. There were many good times. But a graph would show a steady decline until there was only an average of 60 people

attending each Sunday. To save money on utility bills, the people would not even meet in this grand sanctuary for Sunday evening or Wednesday night worship services. They would meet in the basement in what we now call the Parlor.

As I look back on that meeting with Pastor Terry, it must have seemed so surreal to him to see how this sanctuary so filled with life and excitement at one time was currently only being used by 60 people for a worship service. The bright red carpet that they had eventually put over those beautiful black and white checkered tiles was worn out. The large choir loft had lots of chairs but only a few were occupied on Sunday mornings. The balcony was empty. It grieved him but out of his grief he encouraged me. He still believed that God had a great vision for Western Hills. I told him that I believed that God had given me a vision for every seat in this building being filled again like it was when he was the Pastor. I told him that I believed that God would use Western Hills again to reach the south side of Oklahoma City. I never anticipated then that people would attend here that did not live on the south side of OKC.

Well we do. God has enlarged our ministry in ways that I never anticipated as we have made it our goal to have a ministry that strengthens the family. But God placed us here years ago to reach the people on the south side of Oklahoma City. This was His mission for this church. We must not forsake the original vision that God had for this church. If we do, why would God bless this church and preserve its life?

Our community has changed and it continues to change. What was nearly 100% Caucasian is now more than 60% Hispanic and 10% African American. We not only face the natural barriers to winning people with the gospel but now we face a cultural barrier.

But a recent report by George Barna reports that Hispanics are assimilating the faith of the Caucasian population faster than anyone would have predicted, essentially mirroring the faith of the nation's white population. In other words, the Hispanic population is open to change.

What most Americans consider to be an immigration problem that our government must solve is a great mission opportunity for the Church of Jesus Christ. Only God knows how long this window will be open.

What are we going to do with this opportunity?

Recently, I received an e-mail voicing a concern that we were being distracted by the devil from our vision for ministry. I could not agree more. We have been distracted and detoured by issues over church government. I personally have spent countless hours over the last five years trying to help resolve issues over church government and to no avail. Men with very strong wills who believe they are right are not going to agree on the same vision of church government and I am sorry to say that it is my perception that these disagreements have led to false accusations, slander, and gossip which has never been confessed. If you feel you must have more information about this than meet personally

with Darren, Cecil, and Paul. I will give them permission to share with you my entire testimony of what I have been a personal witness to for the last five years.

I have come to the conclusion that we must not be distracted from God's Vision for Western Hills anymore. We need to lay aside the issues over church government to rest and move forward. I am going to join with men that share the same vision and move forward. Currently, those men are Cecil Werner, Paul McKeithan, and Darren Telford as long as they are willing to serve. As your Pastor, I want you to join us in this vision.

We will continue to focus on strengthening the family and being very friendly to those who home school their children. We will still provide training and ministry opportunities for those who home school their children.

But to fulfill the vision that God has for this church in this community, we cannot limit our ministry or outreach to those home school. God is giving us ways to reach this community with the gospel of Jesus Christ and we must follow Him to be true to the original vision that He has for this church.

One of those ways that God has given us is Mission Week OKC. Instead of taking a mission trip to Mexico this year, we are going to reach out to Mexico in our own back yard. Over \$15000 in gifts has been pledged toward this mission. Santa Fe South School with a population of over 1300 students has literally opened its doors to us to serve and develop relationships with the students and their families.

In the fall, Donna Lay has opened the door for us to do youth for Christ meetings at the middle school where she serves as principal.

We are already doing after school bible clubs in public schools and with more laborers we can add more schools in the fall.

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**KJV**

What is your goal for your children? I would assume that the goal is for them to be authentic disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**There is nothing that you can do as a Parent that will be a greater encouragement to your children to be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ than to get them involved in missions!**

There is nothing that you can do as a Parent that will be a greater encouragement to your children to be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ than for you to get involved in missions!

If you do not do this at Western Hills, then please do it some other church. Do not let another decade of your life pass without in significant involvement in missions thru your local church.