

News Of The Sick And Others For Whom To Pray

Keep those in your prayers who either have on-going illnesses or have immune deficiencies and other concerns that are keeping them at home or away from us for other reasons:

Keep those who are struggling spiritually in your prayers and strive to encourage them

Everyone needs Encouragement during this difficult time. We need to be checking on each other and maintaining contact with those who are not attending at this time so we can stay close to each other and to the God whom we serve. I challenge everyone to reach out to someone this week to encourage and see if there is a need you can supply.

To protect their privacy, all personal information concerning members of the Lakeland Hills Blvd congregation have been removed from this post.



Lakeland Hills Leader

LAKELAND HILLS CHURCH OF CHRIST

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SERVICES

Sunday

Bible Study 9:00 A.M.

Morning Services 9:50 A.M.

Evening Services 6:00 P.M.

Wednesday

Bible Study 7:00 P.M.

“Many of His Disciples Withdrew, and Were Not Walking with Him Any More.”

John 6:66

The Bara Institute is an organization that follows and monitors religious trends in this country. Bara polls are very common. They take a cross section of what religious people believe. Their polls cover just about every dog in town religiously. Since this global pandemic, a majority of churches have had to offer worship, classes and special studies by video, livestream and Zoom. The Bara Institute wanted to find out how many were keeping up with these things. How many church members are using the online technology that their congregations were producing? This is what Bara wanted to find out. Shockingly, 30% of those who claimed to belong to a church, have not stayed up with what their congregations were putting online. They were not watching the Sunday worship. They were not participating or watching class studies. They were not listening to sermons. Nearly one-third had dropped out, dropped off and stopped. For the past four months they have not worshipped, connected, grown or been encouraged and strengthened by what their churches have provided. They have not tuned in. They have not participated. They fell off the map.

This is sad, shocking and surprising. A third of the church unplugged, tuned-out, and not engaged spiritually. One wonders if these unengaged third will ever come back. Are they gone for good? Have they given up completely on the Lord? Have they quit? And, then one must think about their own congregation. How many of our members are watching the videos, learning from online Bible classes, worshipping, and listening to sermons? How many have become unplugged, unengaged, and dropped out? Could it be as many as a third? Could it be higher?

Our verse reminds us that some left the Lord. The Lord had been feeding the multitudes. Now it was time to get back to teaching them. The food stopped and so did the dedication and commitment. They were only interested as long as their bellies could be filled. No food, no commitment. No food, no following. How shallow the faith of those food chasers must have been.

There are Lessons for Us:

First, it is easy to follow Jesus when He is blessing us with things we like. Physical blessings are wonderful. It's easy to draw a crowd when something free is offered. But where is our hearts when the free things end? Is one interested in Jesus only because of the blessings? Friendships. Nice lifestyle. Comfort. Ease. Those things drop off, what about our dedication to the Lord? This is what Satan thought about Job. God had a hedge around him. Remove

the hedge, stop the blessings and protection and Job would curse the Lord. Tough times are the times we really need faith. Job shows us that we trust the Lord because He is the Lord. The Lord doesn't "buy" our commitment through blessings.

Second, when the crowd walked away from Jesus, they may have had a distorted and false view of Jesus. They walked home disgusted, discouraged and complaining. Where was the free food? Why stop the blessings now? And, when God doesn't answer prayers as we think He should, it is easy to get a distorted concept of Jesus. God doesn't come running to us because we are the master. How spoiled, selfish and vain is that thinking.

Third, when the crowd walked away from Jesus, they would not find anywhere else what the Lord had done for them. They were not going to find anyone else who would multiply food. They would not find anyone else who would bless that size of a crowd. And, they would not find anyone else who could forgive their sins. They would not find anyone else who could change their eternity. They would not find anywhere else those life changing principles. They walked away, but what did they find? Emptiness. Loneliness. Misery. Bitterness. Lost. That's the way they were before they came to Jesus. And, leaving Jesus, they would go right back to the way that they were. And, when we unplug from the Lord, His people and the spiritual opportunities put before us, we

won't find those things watching TV, sleeping in, or playing games on our phone. Worry and fear will once again return to our hearts. Uncertainty, misery and selfishness once more dominates our thinking and lives. We become once again, what we once were before we found Jesus, hopelessly lost.

Finally, each person must take ownership of their own faith. One cannot allow others to determine how they will believe or what they shall do. Some walked away from Jesus. The apostles did not. Some today have not taken advantage of the blessings churches are providing. It's to their loss. This time of separation does not mean one has to get weaker in the Lord. There have been so many opportunities to learn, listen, grow that through these times one may actually be stronger than they were. Bible classes can be revisited over and over by watching videos more than once. Sermons from all across the country could be watched. While Satan has used this period of separation as a tool to weaken us, for some, it's been the opposite. They have used this time to get stronger, better and closer to the Lord. What Satan hoped would be the end for some, has had just the opposite impact. Some are stronger than ever.

Shepherds across this land ought to look into the condition of their flocks. If a third has unplugged for more than a quarter of the year, the spiritual starvation will impact the church. It may be time to try other concepts to reach and connect with people. It is time to find out how effective the tools that the church has provided has been. Just how many are engaging in these things? How many have stayed with things? Personal contact, asking the right questions, digging a bit deeper will reveal who has stayed with things and who has dropped out. Imagine how devastating it would be if a third of the congregation fell away. Satan may well be using this pandemic to see just who will stay with the Lord and who will walk away. In tough times, the weak often get weaker and the strong often become stronger.

We shouldn't just wait until things return to normal to see who remains and who fell away. By then it may be too late to do anything. The pandemic has been a quarter of the year now, and for some, it may be too late already. Prayers and actions are what is needed.

By Roger Shouse

Note from the Elders: *It will take years for the church to recover from this. The congregation at Lakeland Hills Blvd is no exception as about a third of our members either have not worshipped with us since this pandemic began in March, or have been sporadic in their worship. Others are here one service, then they are not here for others and no one really knows where they are. We understand your dilemma but we also want to encourage you to remain faithful to the Lord and return to worship with the saints as soon as you feel safe to do so. We need you and you need us. In the interim, do things that will help to keep you strong. We also encourage the members of this congregation to reach out to these and encourage them*