

Biggest Loser 6

We've been going through a series of messages for the last several Sunday mornings called the Biggest Loser and I'd like to stay with that theme tonight. Of course the theme of the TV show is the same for these messages- You have to lose, give up, change your thinking and lifestyle in order to lose weight and experience good health and a strong body. The show is a testament to what good discipline and coaching can accomplish.

The body of Christ, similarly needs to, with the help of some good old-fashioned self-discipline and Holy Spirit Coaching, cast off some bad habits and start some new good ones. We don't just need to survive these challenging times. We need to come through healthier and stronger than ever. We must have a greater impact on this community than ever before. Cape Coral need Jesus!

The early church in Jerusalem was experiencing some pretty serious health threatening situations in the form of severe persecution. They had fallen on some pretty hard times. I would suspect that they were not only experiencing persecution from the Roman government and the Jewish hierarchy but also in the matters of daily living they must have experienced job losses, boycotts and hatred from their fellow Jews because of their faith in Christ. Could they remain a strong and healthy church under such conditions? Would they even survive?

1 About that time King Herod cruelly attacked some who belonged to the church, **2** and he killed James, John's brother, with the sword. **3** When he saw that it pleased

the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too, during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After the arrest, he put him in prison and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was being made earnestly to God for him by the church.

Acts 12:1-5 (HCSB)

Up to that point, James was one of the three key leaders of the Christian movement. Remember it was Peter, James and John whom Jesus brought into a closer relationship with Himself. They saw and heard things even the other nine didn't see and hear. Now James was dead and Peter was arrested and awaiting similar execution. Was the church finished? What would they do? What could they do?.....They called a prayer meeting and it was specifically for the purpose of praying for Peter.

⁶ On the night before Herod was to bring him out [for execution], Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, "Quick, get up!" Then the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ "Get dressed," the angel told him, "and put on your sandals." And he did so. "Wrap your cloak around you," he told him, "and follow me." ⁹ So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what took place through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ After they passed the first and second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads into the

city, which opened to them by itself. They went outside and passed one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from Herod's grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected." ¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and were praying. ¹³ He knocked at the door in the gateway, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ She recognized Peter's voice, and because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gateway. ¹⁵ "You're crazy!" they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true. Then they said, "It's his angel!" ¹⁶ Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded. ¹⁷ Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he explained to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. "Report these things to James and the brothers," he said. Then he departed and went to a different place. Acts 12:6-17 (HCSB)

Peter was miraculously delivered from sixteen soldiers, two chains and prison at the exact same time as the prayer meeting was going on at John Mark's mother's house and that prayer meeting was called for the purpose of prayer for Peter. While they were still praying, Peter, after walking right out of the prison, showed up and knocked on the door at the gate. Rhoda (MS girl) obviously knew Peter well enough to recognize his voice. She got so excited she forgot to let him in. She ran in the

house to tell everyone “It’s Peter, It’s Peter, but no one believed. In fact they told her she was crazy. “Of course we’re praying for Peter but we don’t exactly expect him to show up.”

Peter finally made enough noise outside the gate that they let him in and believed. “They were astounded!” Peter gave a testimony of what God had done and left.

I am astound that the church, which had gathered together for the purpose of praying for Peter, was in such disbelief and shock that he could actually have experienced a miraculous deliverance by God. They were going through the motions of what a church should be doing. One of their key leaders had been killed and another arrested. They were experiencing tremendous persecution. All of their lives were in danger. So, instead of fretting, whining and complaining, they called a prayer meeting. Everything was done as they should have, but, they had no expectations. Maybe because James had already been killed, they didn’t have much hope for Peter. You would think that if they had expected God to do anything they would have believed Rhoda. If they had expected God to respond to their prayers they would not have been so unanimously astounded.

Healthy church:

Faith- We must trust God even and especially when things are tough. Do we believe that God knows and cares about what is going on in our lives? Do we believe He is able and willing to intervene in the situations we are going through? Do we really trust Him?

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; **6** think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths. **Prov 3:5-6 (HCSB)**

I would add that this: trust/faith must be based solidly on our knowledge of God's character based on the reliable record of Scripture, not our feelings. Our experiences and feelings can mislead us (Jer 17:9, Prov 14:12). If our faith is firmly rooted in truth then it should lead to and be coupled with.....

Passion- It's so easy once we've been around the church block a few times to go through all the appropriate motions, like the Jerusalem church did, doing everything by the Book, and leave out the emotions, passion, heart that is essential to fueling the things we do.

The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful. James 5:16 (HCSB)

More and more lately, I have learned the significance of not only doing everything good and right, but to do it with passion, with all my heart. And, especially as a leader, that passion must be visible. Passion is contagious.

The bible says we're to seek the Lord, love the Lord, worship the Lord, obey the Lord, return to Him, serve Him, trust the Lord, and believe the Lord with all our heart. Do you detect a pattern?

If we want the church to be healthy, we must be healthy, and if we're going to get and stay healthy, we must not only do all the

right things, we must do it with passion. And that passion must exceed that of the liberals, jihads and wackos of this world.

Expectation- The most obvious weakness or flaw in that Jerusalem prayer meeting was that they didn't expect God to respond and act on their prayers for Peter. They did exactly what they should have done, but they didn't really have much hope that it would do any good.

⁹ But as it is written: What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what has never come into a man's heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him. **1**Cor 2:9 (HCSB)

I have always understood, and more and more recently have begun to fully realize that there is so much that God is able and wants to do for us, with us, and in us, but He is waiting for us to come to the point of trusting Him, passionately seeking Him, and expecting Him to do, in many cases, what He has already promised to do.

Do you pray with expectation? Do you come to worship expecting God to not only show up but to transform your life? Do you live your life in expectation of God changing and working in and through you?