

PASSION FOR PRODIGALS

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Theme

- A.** The theme I have been using for most meetings is “Come Home.”
- B.** It’s very important to give the thrust an identity.
- C.** Another theme is the name of the program - “Passion for Prodigals.”
- D.** “Slide-back” ...backslid inverted...would work well in a youth setting. The idea is undeveloped but a little creativity could make it fly. Picture of a young person sliding into Calvary. (Youth)
- E.** “MIA’s” - Missing In Action
- F.** “The Road Back”

Timing

- A.** Mother’s Day is the best time of the year to target prodigals
- B.** Easter is the next best holiday to reach for them.
- C.** The best season is a week before Thanksgiving, going all the way through the week of Christmas. (Family gatherings, and a sentimental time of the year)

A Burden For the Prodigal

- A.** This will be the keynote service of the meeting. This is what I call “stirring the pot.”
- B.** It is in this service we are reminded something we do not have to be convinced of. Our backslid loved ones and friends are lost and going to hell, and we are not doing all we know to do to reach them.

- C. This is where a burden is reborn and a new awareness of the grave circumstances that person they care so much for is in.
- D. The atmosphere has got to generate a conviction that will bring on a commitment from the saint of God. If we just make an announcement to please turn names in of backsliders, you will see the dramatic difference in the level of response verses the conviction of the Holy Ghost birthing a burden in the church.
- E. It is in this service the saints need to “adopt” a backslider.

Data Base

- A. We need a person who preferably has a burden for the prodigals and would take this mission to heart. This person will have much to do with the outcome of the push.
- B. This person will be the clearing house on everything that is done with each prodigal we are targeting.
- C. They will take the cards and form a database with them. They will keep track of who has committed to reach individuals. It is important that the people turn in whatever level of contact they have made, when the contact was made, and if the response was favorable. This way we don't have 10 people who are ambushed by well meaning saints and 100 who have no contact at all.

Pin A Yellow Ribbon Round Old Oak Tree.....

- A. How many of us could finish the words to that song? Probably most of us and so can the backslider.
- B. Ribbons have been used for so many causes such as the war on terrorism and the victims of **911**.
- C. Create a pin with a yellow ribbon and maybe ribbons the color of your church theme.
- D. Or there are companies that will make your church logo into a pin and have them put a yellow ribbon around it. Create something that looks nice for the saints that have committed to reaching a prodigal as a reminder of those who are lost.

- E.** The armband thing has an incredible principal, it's just not very practical, and people think you just gotten out of the hospital. Lets take the good this idea presented and with a little adjustment, we can have something that looks nice and not like you have just been in the hospital.

Pastoral Contacts

- A.** This is an area you must feel comfortable in doing. There is no set way to do this. You may feel a nudge of the Lord to contact some more then others. So this is an area where you must follow your heart.
- B.** Here are a few ideas I have used that were extremely effective and productive.
- C.** A very nice letter gently identifying the fact it has been a while since you have been here, we sure do miss and love you, and if there is anything we can do please call...etc.
- D.** A personalized card, "from the desk of" or your initials on it, a short hand written note is VERY effective. Something as simple as, "Joe ...just wanted to drop you a note and tell you that you were prayed for today....we love you."
- E.** This next one is nuclear in the spirit world. I carried a stack of cards and a stack of prayer cloths into the church one day. I would pick them up and carry them and pray over them for a particular person in my church that was backslid. Then once I felt the liberty to write the card, I would write the card, slip the prayer cloth in it and move on to the next one. I got phone calls and visits the very next week from many of these, many of which prayed back through.
- F.** Also a postcard with the theme and your logo on it could be nice. Someone savvy with graphics could wrap your logo in a yellow ribbon and something like "Come Home...things haven't been the same since you left." Or...."dinner's on this week at Fathers House...you know the way!"

Booklet

- A.** I have been in so many services and seen the Lord stir up the saints. God gives them a burden for the backslid and yet they left empty handed with no tool to reach the loved one or friend.

- B.** For this reason, I wrote a booklet I feel the Lord gave me. It is 32 pages and very short and easy for the prodigal to read. It has proven effective over the last year. I have used it in a variety of places across the country.
- C.** The booklet can be customized to the local church. The pastor writes a forward in it so it is very personal to that prodigal. It is very moving that the local church would go to this much trouble to go after them. It leaves an impression on them.

Harvest Service

- A.** The target service to harvest the backsliders should be within 2 weeks of the keynote service.
- B.** Everything in that service needs to point to reaching that prodigal. Any kind of needless activity should be eliminated for the sake of a prodigal that has a short attention span. Streamline it if need be. Keep it flowing.
- C.** Choir song and specials geared towards a theme or restoration or hope should be used. There are quite a few out there that directly appeal to the backslider. Philips, Craig, and Dean have several that are very appropriate. In other words not “One Day Too Late”...use something positive and stirring. The music must pave the way for the word!
- D.** Get the speaker on the floor soon! If it’s me, I will save any kind of thanks to the pastor or congregation for another service. I will hit the ground running. The message will be short and to the point. It will be more of a long altar call than a sermon. But when you think about it, that’s all a message is...bringing that person and God together.
- E.** If they try and sit there looking hard, don’t worry about it. God is the only one who can truly reach them. And His anointing can surely break that yoke. My experience has proven over and over again, if the saints will just get them there, the Holy Ghost will break the yoke that binds them. So let them talk all big and bad, God will melt all of that deception away.

Altar Call

- A.** This is where we have worked towards since starting the service.
- B.** It is at this point the saints need to be very sensitive and very quick to respond.

- C.** We do not want a walk the plank atmosphere, which hesitation sometimes can create.
- D.** It is very appropriate for saints to invite that loved one or friend to go to Calvary with them and see what God will do for them. The push should be very gentle and not to aggressive. Sometimes the person will want to pray in the pew, and there is nothing unspiritual or prideful about that. This is serious business and they realize that. Some view it as a very personal and private matter and don't want to feel on display while they make things right with God.
- E.** The music needs to pick where the preacher left off. He invited them to come and give God a chance...to come back to Father's house. The music should in turn, pick up where he left off and make an appeal to that person.

Tracking System

- A.** Now that we have prayed a lot of the prodigals back through the work really begins.
- B.** We need to know who was in the altar praying, regardless if they pray through that service or not. So we need a record of who was praying. AND if they did pray through, we need to know this also.
- C.** Clipboards under the altar are a good idea for any kind of evangelism but would work well for prodigals also.
- D.** Sometimes saints will forget to write the info down on a clipboard, so the preferred idea is for several people to walk through the altar area as they are praying and write the info down. Finally they can find out who prayed back through.
- E.** Most of the time, you will have a precious committed saint who will know a good portion of these people in the altar, which will make the job of keeping these records easy.

Four Categories of Prodigals

Unlike new converts who all fit in the same category. Prodigals have a whole different set of issues. They do not all leave church over the same reasons nor will the same methods work on all of them. Prodigals are like fishing for trout...they have their own mind and many times you just have to wait on them.

1. Some were barely in to begin with and were never grounded in the truth. (This person would no doubt benefit from a new convert care program.)
2. There are those who grew up in this, yet they never fell in love with the truth, therefore they never understood why they believed the truth.
3. The ones we have prayed through consistently and think they are earning frequent flyer miles coming in and out of church. They are very carnal and love the world.
4. Burnt out leaders that poured themselves into God's work. They got discouraged or had a storm they did not come through.

Discipleship Program For Prodigals

This is not yet finished. I believe one of the reasons we have not been able to keep backsliders is because we have not helped them settle the issues that caused them to leave to begin with. This is what inspired me to write a booklet called "Standing Tall When You Have Fallen Short" which deals with things like guilt and failure, the ability to get back up, and be more successful than they have ever been before. This is designed to put in the hand of a backslider as they get up from the altar from praying. I think this meets a need on the immediate level because the fight to keep them just began. Yet there needs to be something even more.

I want to take this concept to a whole different level and develop a Bible study to give them over a period of 4 weeks. This would be to assimilate them back into the body and fellowship and help them resolve the issues that led them out. Keep in mind there are 4 different types of backsliders and each of them have their own little hang-ups and weak spots. You may be dealing with a couple different types of backsliders at one time and each of them will have individual needs to meet.