

Welcome Back to our study of Thom Rainer's book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive!* Today we cover chapter 5, and it is a subject that is one that is a concern on most of the churches in the country right now. Today I read that the researchers at the Barna group believe that "1 in 5 churches will cease to exist in 18 months." It is a scary time to be a church if your eyes are not focused on the right thing or the right Person. Please remember Jesus Himself tells us that He "is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except through" Him. This book seeks to sound a warning bell and get our attention to refocus and follow Christ. It is challenging. Climbing a mountain is not easy, and we are trying to climb the mountain of a bell curve and head in the right direction. To do that, difficult decisions must be made. Please know that I am always here to listen. Now for Rainer's words:

"The Rich Young Ruler and Deceased Churches

You've read the text many times. You've heard it preached and taught.

A wealthy man approaches Jesus and asks Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus starts with some of the Ten Commandments. Then, in Mark 10:21-22, this exchange takes place: "Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, 'You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.' But he is stunned at this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions."

Did you get that?

The man could not let go. He was not merely sad at the prospect of letting go. The text said that he grieved at the thought of giving up his possessions.

We hold on to things because we want our way of life. Our comfort. Our possessions.

That's what happens to churches that die. They spend for their way of doing church. Their comfort. Their possessions.

Follow the money. You will learn much about a church.

By the way, not all deceased churches died broke. In fact, a few of them had quite the treasure chest when they died. Some had inherited funds. Others accumulated funds.

You don't have to be broke to be dying. It's not a matter of how much you have. It's what you do with your money, or what your attitude is about the money. Some churches hold on to funds because the money itself becomes the focus. They no longer ask how the church can make a difference for the Kingdom with the money. They accumulate because they fear not having enough money.

Like the rich young ruler, they grieve at the thought of doing something with the money for someone beyond themselves. They fear they will not have enough money if they do.

So they die with "enough" money.

The Autopsy Was Clear and Revealing

In all the churches we autopsied, a financial pattern developed over time. The pattern was one where funds were used more to keep the machinery of the church moving, and to keep the members happy, than funding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

The money, though, was symptomatic of a heart problem. The church cared more for its own needs than the community and the world.

And no church can sustain such an inward focus indefinitely.

It will eventually die of heart failure.

Prayerful Commitment 5

Lord, help me to grasp that all the money I think I have is really Yours. Help me to grasp that all the money our church has is not the church's, but Yours. Give us healthy giving hearts to use these funds according to Your purpose.

## Questions for Further Thought

1. How would the budget and use of funds of a healthy church differ from that of a dying church?
2. How does the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10 inform us about how a church might view money it has?
3. What are some ways churches can move their use of funds from predominantly an inward focus to an outward focus? “

None of this is new to us. We've heard the words before. I offer these excerpts as a way of teaching and challenging us (please note that I am saying "us"). God is not done with Community Church (CPC). I truly believe that God has plans. BUT, there are some tough decisions that need to be made for us to move forward. Changes are coming. It is part of my job...to get this church ready for the next chapter...for her next pastor...for Brendan Kavanaugh.

Always seeking God's will,

Pastor Kimberly