

## **The Spillover Effect: What's in the Bucket?**

**By Bob Young**

What you feed will grow, what you starve will die! Basic truth, basic principle.

Down at the church house, preachers, leaders, ministers, what do you feed? Who do you feed?

Do you know how to feed for results? How to develop the right spiritual atmosphere, nutrients, water, light?

What you focus on, talk about, and provide resources for will grow more quickly.

When we talk about problems, even how to overcome problems, an interesting thing sometimes happens.

Rather than seeing people succeeding, we see people failing. It is somewhat like trying not to think about something, but we have to remember (think about) what we are not going to think about.

It is vitally important that the local church learn how to feed the things that matter eternally. Many churches are busy in a wide variety of projects that will make little or no difference in eternity. The church can be overwhelmed with good works, both in local ministry and in mission work, and yet made little difference in the advancement of God's eternal purpose for the salvation of the world. Many churches do a lot of "unexplained good works," which are hardly distinguishable from the good works done by many other people and groups.

Can I share with you the "spillover effect?"

At grandma's house, sometimes it was my job to carry the slop bucket to the pig pen. On other occasions I carried buckets of fresh milk to the milk strainer. I carried buckets filled with feed for the horses, other buckets filled with hot water for the old-fashioned wringer washing machine. Sometimes I spilled a little of the contents. I saw an important principle in action. What is in the bucket is what spills out of the bucket.

In preaching, church leadership, ministry, mission work, the goal is to "feed" consistently with vision, purpose, and strategy that enables growth. The goal is to "feed" the church so that energy is developed for doing God's work as we are sent forth from the assembly. Sunday gatherings provide great opportunities for feeding.

Small group gatherings, weekly in many churches, provide an opportunity to see the spillover effect in action. I have noticed that people talk about the things they constantly think about. What's in their buckets spills out. I have attended small groups where the majority of the conversation was about secular matters. What people spend most of their time thinking about "spills over." I remember a comment from one small group member, a telling explanation of why small group meetings of Christians often fail to focus on shared spiritual concerns: "I don't want to do church again."

I feed myself with spiritual concepts, Scripture, uplifting verses, challenging thoughts, because that is what I want to spill over from my life to others. I like to talk about spiritual matters, because I get to spill over and I get to hear others spill over.

The saying is true, congregations begin to look like their preacher, their leaders. Why? Because the leaders are sharing with the congregation the things that they are passionate about. What is your preacher passionate about? What spills over? What subjects are most frequently heard? Favorite eating places, favorite foods, favorite soft drink, sports, geographic loyalties? Leaders, what are you sharing? What are you feeding? What is spilling over? The focus that God puts on our hearts and the passion he instills are contagious. What we value, our priorities, what we think, how we think, what we do—these will spill over and trickle down.

The pulpit cannot push everything, so the pulpit must use the spillover effect to promote the church's goals, to encourage and to feed those present—members and visitors, for spiritual energy and vitality. Leaders must seek to understand God's plan for the church, the DNA of the local church. The themes that advance the church's identity must not be seasonal themes. The spillover effect must be constantly at work. The church must learn

how to function, what to do, how to be church, how to determine priorities. That purpose is best accomplished in the assembly.

No matter the text, the topic, the primary focus of the church must spill over in the assembly. This is who we are, this is what we are about, this is what we do, this is our passion, our mission.

A church where the preachers and leaders do not have these matters clearly in mind and defined will struggle to find God's spiritual compass to determine direction. May we pray for the local church, so that the vision will be cast and the call will be clear, spilling over into everything we do as we pursue together the great calling of God in Christ Jesus, focused on the heavenly prize, for us, and for all who will go with us.

What is the business of the church where you attend? What is the church's purpose? Goal? What is #1? What defines the church? How does the church seek to be, to do, church? Now imagine you are a first-time visitor to the church. How long would it take to hear about the #1 priority you just identified? How long would it take for you, and every member, to get plugged in, on board, for the #1 priority?

I call us, I challenge us, to hear God clearly when he declares his eternal purpose, and let us make it the center of our every conversation and encounter with one another, and with others. May God's purpose spill over in all of our conversations.