

The weekly newsletter article of Parkside Chapel

LIFENEWS

A Captive Audience

by Ron Story, Community Life Pastor

In the early years of my ministry, from 1972 to 1984, I officiated at many weddings. Ministering as a youth pastor in a large church for those 12 years and being a part of young people's growth, maturing, and making life decisions (like schooling and marriage) gave me many opportunities to partner with them through pre-marital counseling and weddings.

I loved the challenge of helping couples think through their choices in establishing their marriage and families by building their homes on Jesus and obedience to His Word (Matthew 7:24-27).

A bonus was the gift of sharing the truth and power of the Gospel and God's plan for marriage with those attending the wedding ceremony; many likely did not regularly attend a Bible-teaching church and probably held worldly views of life and marriage. What a unique opportunity to share God's life-changing truth with a captive audience!

Today, on the other end of my ministry spectrum, I do far more Celebration of Life services than weddings. I recognize that these end-of-life events have traditionally been called "funerals," but for believers, the service is truly more of a celebration of

their life on earth and, more importantly, their continued eternal life with Jesus in Heaven.

The Bible tells us that when a believer passes, "We don't grieve as those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). God's grace in Jesus is greater than all our grief! Solomon tells us that the day of death for the believer is better than the day of birth! (Ecclesiastes 7:1) We celebrate birthdays to remember the joys of life on earth. How much better to celebrate the death day of a believer as they enter into the joy of the Lord in Heaven for eternity? After all, what is better ... life on earth, or life in Heaven?

In the same way that a Christian wedding is a great testimony to the world of God's love and plan for our lives, so too a Celebration of Life service is an amazing testimony of a life lived seeking to walk with our Shepherd, Jesus, so that: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever!" (Psalm 23:4-6)

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"I shall dwell"... What a guarantee for a life lived seeking to follow our Shepherd, Jesus! What a privilege it is to share God's grace and truth with others, especially those who might have been distracted by the lures of life and are trapped in hopeless endeavors trying to find peace, joy, and meaning in a world apart from God. What a tremendous opportunity it is to share with a captive audience the Good News of God's love, plan of salvation, and the joyous fruit of a marriage and life of following the Shepherd. Both weddings and Celebrations of Life services provide an audience who needs to hear and be reminded of the difference Jesus makes!

Another bonus in our Celebration of Life services is the reception that our church, primarily our deaconesses, provides to the family and loved ones attending. It truly is a feast of food and fellowship, provided and served with the love of Jesus. The folks attending, especially those not from Parkside, are "blown away" by this special ministry of comfort and care administered by many in our church family. Once again, it is a grand opportunity to intentionally connect others to the transforming love of Jesus ... trusting God to capture the hearts of a captive audience to Himself!



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