



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 9

November 27, 2022

No. 48

1,680 BLESSINGS FROM GOSPEL MEETINGS

Times of Refreshing From The Lord

- Rick Laning

Next month I will be 70 years old. Ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper (translation: since I was born) I have attended a minimum of two weeks of gospel meetings every year. In most years I have either attended or preached in gospel meetings at least five more weeks. Growing up it was expected of the Lanning family to be at every service during these special services. In fact, my parents often kept the visiting preacher, and now my wife and I have carried on that tradition by often hosting the evangelist who comes to hold our meetings.

I sat down and crunched the numbers as best I could. Seventy years multiplied by two for gospel meetings at the local church equals 140. Then multiply that by 8 sermons (3 on Sunday and five during the week) and you get 1,120. Now, add attending at least two nights per week of going to at least four other local churches each year who held gospel meetings. That is eight sermons per year times seventy, which comes to 560. Add that to the first number and you get 1,680. Let me assure my readers that this is a very conservative number, for there were years I went to dozens of meetings a year, not to mention the hundreds of gospel meeting sermons I have preached in my 48 years of being a preacher.

Let's get to my point. Let's take the 1,680 extra assemblies I have attended in my life and see what I might have gained or lost by such an effort.

First, what I lost.

I lost time to do my homework (which I seldom did anyway).

I lost time with my friends to hang out or play ball (I haven't seen or heard from them again in 50 years).

I lost time going to school events or playing recreational league or school league sports (somehow those "critical" games are a distant memory and I have no idea if we won or lost).

I lost sleep from getting home later than my bedtime (somehow, somehow, I seem to have survived that sleep deprivation).

In short, I lost very little from attending those special services.

Second, what I gained.

I gained 1,680 opportunities for fellowship with people I hope not only to remember in this life but also in the world to come. Those spiritual connections have made an eternal difference in my life.

I gained singing at least five spiritual hymns per night, multiplied by 1,680, which comes to 8,400 opportunities to sing *Amazing Grace*, *Rock of Ages*, *Trust and Obey*, and *When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder*. Having thousands of voices encourage me through those years with that many hymns has surely impacted my soul.

I gained participating in at least two prayers per service, which totals 3,360 "amens" that God heard and answered, including the requests for forgiveness of my sins.

Then, of course, I gained studying the Bible 1,680 times as I sat at the feet of great men of God who had studied deeply, prepared meticulously, and delivered passionately God's "*power unto salvation*" (Rom. 1:16). I was reproofed, rebuked and exhorted to "*give my body a living sacrifice*," and "*not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of the mind*" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Let me explain this with another analogy. Growing up I sat at my mother's table for 18 years, eating her well-prepared meals. I have now been married for 45 years and thoroughly enjoyed Benita's delicious meals. But, truth be told, I hardly remember the menu of those thousands of meals I have eaten at their tables. The fact that I grew to be six-foot two-inches and for many years was 175 pounds (the present weight is known only to my doctor and me) says that their food blessed my life with excellent health. I can't scientifically explain how those fruits and vegetables kept me alive and nourished my body, but they did.

The same holds true spiritually for all those 1,680 feasts from those gospel meeting assemblies. I can hardly remember a specific sermon or recall a particular prayer or song, but God's words to Isaiah are still true:

¹⁰ **"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there,
But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,
¹¹ So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.**

Those 1,680 times of fellowship with God and His people have been a huge difference in my journey to heaven. In fact, I will go so far as to say, those special assemblies have changed my life in ways only God will be able to know or explain. Perhaps the Lord will give me perfect recall of all those people I worshiped with, and all those sermons, songs and prayers that impacted my destiny. Remove all of those 1,680 assemblies and I would not be as "*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might*," nor be "*able to stand against the wiles of the devil*" (Eph. 6:10-18).

My apologies to Toby Keith's number one hit, but enough about me. Let's talk about you? What are your plans for our coming gospel meeting? What's on your calendar each night? Is it school events? Is it overtime at work? Is it family time? Is it vacation? Is it just relaxing at home after a hard day at work or struggling with the kids? Is it concern for the children's bedtime?

While all of those things might be important to you and your family, please consider what will be missed if you fail to attend these twice-a-year special weeks designed by the elders for your spiritual edification, and God's glory. The shepherds are trying to "*feed the flock*" with spiritual nutrition to save you and your family from Satan's schemes (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2-4). What better way to protect yourself and your loved ones than by putting on the armor of God with these edifying sermons, songs and prayers?

Like me, you will both lose and gain from attending these eight assemblies. I'm no accountant but I can easily audit the spiritual ledger when this special week is over and can easily determine that the credits far outweigh the debits. I will have gained far more than I lost by worshiping God and honoring Christ.

Gospel meetings are truly "*times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord*" (Acts 3:19).
Come and be refreshed!