

The emergency room wouldn't help them

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By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—Do you remember when you attended a church that had a closed-door policy? Back then I thought such behavior was biblical. It seems so ridiculous now.

Jesus told the Pharisees He did not come to call the righteous but to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13).

A church service should not be a gathering of people who think they are more righteous than everybody else. It should be a place where sinners feel welcome. (Is anyone reading this article not a sinner?)

A church service should not be a weekly meeting of a social club that keeps out the riffraff. It should be a place where sinners can receive help.

(For the record: Congregations have the authority to restrict disruptive people from participating. In practice, however, such an action should be rare rather than the rule.)

A church service should not be a weekly motivational session to rally supporters around physical leaders and their advertising projects. It should be a place that helps sinners hear God's Word and become closer to God.

In Matthew 9:12 Jesus draws an analogy: They who are healthy do not need a doctor, but those who are sick do need a doctor.

Consider a modern-day parable.

Emergency-room visit

Once upon a time there was a kingdom with many emergency rooms. The administrators of each room viewed theirs as the one true emergency room. Each was so exclusive that the administrators placed bouncers at the doors to screen people before they could enter.

One day Joe Saint saw some advertisements (magazine, radio and television) about a few of the emergency rooms. Because his wife, Jane, was having heart problems, the Saints decided to visit.

When they arrived at the first emergency room, they were stopped at the door by a friendly doorkeeper.

"Excuse me," said the doorkeeper, "but this is a private emergency room. May I help you?"

"Yes," replied Joe. "My wife has been having heart problems. I saw your advertisements, so we came over here to visit your emergency room."

"Just a minute," responded the doorkeeper. "We have a closed-door policy at our emergency room. You see, we can't let just anyone in."

Puzzled, Joe asked: "Is it not your purpose to help people? That's what your advertisements state. Your advertisements are so professionally done. They attracted us to come for help."

"Thank you for the compliment about our advertisements," answered the doorkeeper. "If you would like to make a donation, we will use the money for paying our executives and for increasing our advertising projects."

"May my wife and I please come in?" asked Joe.

"We want you to talk to one of our staff members this week," answered the doorkeeper. "After he interviews you two or three times, he will determine when to invite you. We want you to come to the one true emergency room."

Joe was discouraged and said: "We were hoping to get some help sooner than that. I guess we'll try somewhere else."

"Okay, good-bye," said the doorkeeper. "I hope your wife's heart trouble clears up soon."

Another visit

Joe and Jane were discouraged, and her heart was indeed feeling worse. Then he remembered other advertisements (magazine, radio and television) that looked quite similar to those promoting the previous place.

The other places also called themselves the one true emergency room. It was almost as if they had the same background and heritage.

Jane started having severe problems as they headed toward a new emergency facility.

As they arrived, Jane was in need of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

As Joe approached the door, he was stopped by a friendly doorkeeper.

"Excuse me," said the doorkeeper, "but this is a private emergency room. May I help you?"

"Yes," replied Joe. "My wife has been having heart problems, and I saw your advertisements—"

Before Joe could explain the extent of Jane's problems, the doorkeeper interrupted.

"We have a closed-door policy at our emergency room," he said. "You see, we can't let just anyone in."

Joe quickly interjected, "But my wife needs immediate care for her heart."

"We have a booklet about heart troubles," answered the doorkeeper. "We would be happy to send one to you if you give us your address."

"I am interested in CPR," blurted out Joe.

"You are in luck," mentioned the doorkeeper. "We have a booklet about CPR, and it is one of our most popular."

"I am interested in CPR *now*," snapped Joe. "Will you help me?"

"As I told you, this is a private emergency room," said the doorkeeper. "But, since you are so enthusiastic about visiting here, you might need only one interview before we invite you in. We will get to you this week and hopefully you will be invited soon."

Joe turned to leave, seeking to find someone to give his wife the help she desperately needed.

"I hope your wife begins to feel better," said the doorkeeper as Joe scurried away.

God heals

Rest easy because this parable has a happy ending.

The Great Physician in heaven looked down and saw the problems Joe and Jane were having trying to find help from any of the one true emergency rooms. So He healed her.

Joe and Jane did not hold grudges against the people at the one true emergency rooms. They realized that the doorkeepers were only following traditions of men as they had been taught.

Besides, Mr. and Mrs. Saint were thrilled to develop a personal relationship with the Great Physician in heaven.

Here is a moral to the parable: When the Saints are disappointed by the various one true emergency rooms, they learn how effectively God heals broken hearts.