

**“A Thought-Provoking Interview”**  
**Psalm 145:13; Ephesians 4:32; Luke 10:25-37**

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February 15, 2004

I'm sure you noticed the article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* a couple of weeks ago about our church. Each Saturday in the Faith and Values section an Atlanta church is spotlighted. I was pleased Smoke Rise was recently featured.

Kysa Daniels interviewed me for the article. It was my response to one of her questions that serves as the catalyst for this sermon.

Near the end of the interview she asked me, “In one sentence, tell me about Smoke Rise Baptist Church.” I responded, **“Smoke Rise is a church that wants to be faithful to God, good to each other and good for the world.”** I was pleased that she ended the article with this quote. I think it says a lot about us, our very purpose for existing. Allow me to share my thoughts with you.

**At Smoke Rise, we want to be faithful to God because He is certainly faithful to us.** Psalm 145 is a song of celebration and praise that highlights God's goodness and faithfulness. David proudly describes God as merciful, compassionate, patient, trustworthy, dependable, righteous, accessible and generous. This morning, my attention is drawn to Psalm 145:13, “The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made.”

I believe this. I have been the recipient of God's goodness and faithfulness more times than I could count. I believe all of us have and feel that our worship service would overflow with testimonies of God's benevolence if I asked for them. One reason we assemble each week is to express gratitude for God's goodness, just as David and his people did.

As a result, we want to be faithful to God, not out of obligation or duty, but love and appreciation. This is our highest priority and provides the motivation for all that we do.

We also want to be faithful to God because we believe that His way of living is best. We know of no better way to arrange values and priorities, relate to others or handle problems, challenges or temptations than the way Jesus did. He is our most reliable instructor and role model. We believe that faithfully following him leads to life, abundant and eternal.

**Secondly, we want to be good to each other.** We take seriously Paul's advice in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Paul encouraged the early Christians to be good to each other because he knew their lives were filled with struggles, hardships, problems and sorrows. They did not need fellow believers making their lives more difficult but more durable. We need the same from each other.

Many enter these doors each week hurting in a variety of ways. At times, the world is not kind and can hit us hard and bend us low. More often than not, we are our own worst enemy and create more problems than we can solve and pain than we can control.

We need church to be a hospital where wounds are bandaged and spirits are soothed. We need it to be a support group where we hear encouragement not condemnation and find a helping hand not a hateful word. We need it to be a place of learning where we can discover the consequences of right and wrong and the skills to make wise decisions. We need church to be a refreshing fountain of forgiveness from which people find the strength to begin again. For church is not “a showroom of shiny, brand-new models. It is a garage of grimy, beat-up broken down cars in various stages of reclamation,” as L. D. Johnson wrote.

In Philip Yancey’s book, The Jesus I Never Knew, he related a story that haunts him to this day. A prostitute came to him desperate for help. She was homeless, sick and unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told Yancey that she had even stooped so low as to rent her daughter out to men that would abuse her. She made more renting her daughter out for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night.

After listening to her story, Yancey asked her if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. “Church!” she replied, “Why would I ever go there? I am already feeling terrible about myself. They would just make me feel worse.”

In another of Yancey’s books, What’s So Amazing About Grace?, he admitted that he rejected the church for a time because he found so little grace in it. He returned, though, because he found grace nowhere else.

The Swiss doctor Paul Tournier wrote in his book, Guilt and Grace, “I cannot study this very serious problem of guilt with you without raising the obvious and tragic fact that religion, my own as well as that of all believers, can crush instead of liberate.”

At Smoke Rise, we want to heal wounds not inflict them. We want to strengthen weakened people so they can walk on their own again. We want to restore people’s self-esteem not destroy it. We want to point people in the direction they can go not berate them for getting lost. We want to love people at their worst with the hope of bringing out their best.

It has been said that the church is the only army that shoots its wounded soldiers. May this never be so for us.

**Thirdly, we want to be good for the world.** We want to be a church of Good Samaritans. We believe when Jesus concluded this powerful story with the challenge to the expert in the law, “Go and do likewise,” he was talking to us. We feel, therefore, that we have a mandate to go beyond these walls to help others. The world is our mission field and we have no boundaries.

Last week I received in the mail a copy of the sermon that Dr. John Claypool preached the Sunday after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. My cousin was a nursing student at the time and attended his church in Louisville. She was cleaning out her parent’s home in order to put it on the market and came across it. Let me read an excerpt for you.

“I cannot help but sense here more than the failure of one man. I see behind it the failure of a church. Our main Christian task, it seems to me, is to reach men with this revolutionary ethic of Jesus and this Divine type of love. Yet somewhere in Texas or Oklahoma or Louisiana or wherever a certain Lee Harvey Oswald grew up, this redemptive contact was not made. Have you ever thought of how different things would be at this moment if somewhere back up the line the one who ate that chicken dinner and

pulled that trigger had been converted to Jesus' way of responding to an opponent? Sometimes we get the feeling that the work of the church is irrelevant and unimportant. But this crisis bespeaks the opposite. Here one obscure, insignificant man in Dallas, Texas may have changed the course of human history. And then to think that a church could have changed him! I am stunned when I realize what a responsibility we have and what a crucial function we are called to perform."

At Smoke Rise, we want to change the course of human history by meeting the needs of people in the name of Christ. We want to help God rescue those that would harm us and transform them into believers that will make the world safer. We want to be good for the world.

Perhaps you are looking for our kind of church. Maybe you, like Philip Yancey, walked away from a church because it lost its way and forgot its purpose. I encourage you to give the church another try and invite you to become a part of Smoke Rise. I know you will receive a warm welcome from a church full of folk that want to be faithful to God, good to each other and good for the world.