



THE SEVEN DWARVES GO TO CHURCH

Do Bashful, Grumpy, Dopey, Happy, Sleepy, Doc, and Sneezy attend your church?



“G

ood morning, Pastor Hunter,” said Sally, the church receptionist. “Pastor White would like to see you when you have a chance.”

“Let me put my briefcase in my office,” replied Pastor Hunter, “and then I’ll go right in. And please call me Bob.”

Today was Pastor Bob Hunter’s first day as the new associate pastor at the Wildwood Community Church. He had been hired to guide and organize the church’s educational programs. Fresh out of seminary, he was full of enthusiasm and ready to get started in his new position.

Wildwood Community Church was a young church with a growing reputation in the denomination. Pastor George White had planted the church two years before. (People sometimes called Pastor White “Snow” because his hair was completely white, even though he was only forty-three.) The church, which had started with five families, had grown to two hundred fifty people.

“Good morning, Bob,” George White exclaimed. “Good to have you on board. Come on in to my office. Can we get you a cup of coffee?”

“I wanted to meet with you this morning,” he continued, “to talk about some of the people in the church. In the coming weeks and months, you will undoubtedly run into them. I wanted you to know some of their characteristics and what I think their needs are. You will, no doubt, find them representative of the rest of the church and, I suppose, Christians in general.”

by Mark Wheeler

"It may seem silly to you, but I have affectionately dubbed them, 'The Seven Dwarfs.' They are dwarfs in the sense that they still have areas in which they need to grow. Each one comes to church for a different reason and each has a distinctive need."

"Fire away," said Bob. "I'm all ears."

Bashful

"The first one is Sally Morgan," George began. "I call her 'Bashful.' She is extremely shy and tends to avoid contact with people. She always arrives five to ten minutes late and leaves during the final hymn. She comes only to the worship service, sits alone, and avoids getting involved in any way. My wife called her twice to see if she would help out in the nursery or join a Sunday school class. Of course, she declined.

"As you know, our church is built around small groups. She has been invited to three different ones. The group leaders say that while she politely accepts the invitation, she never shows up. Sometimes she doesn't even call to cancel. The irony of it is that she wrote me a letter claiming, as she put it, 'The people in this church are cold, judgmental, legalistic, and don't care about the needs of others.'"

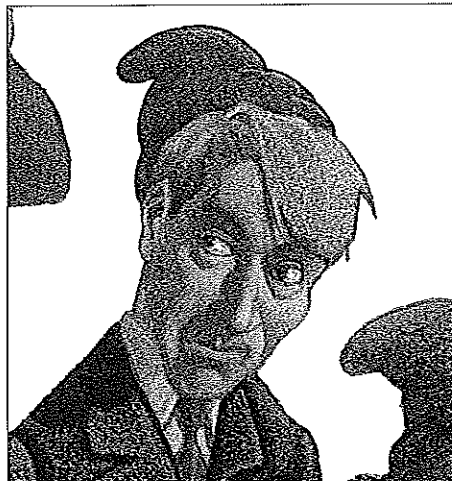
"That's really sad," said Bob. "Sounds like she needs someone to straighten her out."

"Yes and no," replied George. "She told my wife that she is a single parent, working two jobs just to make ends meet, and trying to raise two children by herself. She is so busy just surviving that she doesn't seem to have time for friendships. It's not that she's unwilling, she's just stretched to the limit so that she has very little left to give. She needs someone who will patiently and persistently befriend her, without expecting anything in return.

"In addition," George continued, "she evidently came out of a legalistic background that made her feel condemned for being divorced. Consequently, her self-image is rather low and she feels like she has nothing to offer. Whenever I preach on God's love, I think about her. I think she needs to know that God loves and accepts her as she is and that she has gifts to offer to other people."

"Wow," Bob exclaimed, "'Bashful' sounds like a challenge. Did you ever think about starting a support group for single parents, or at least providing child care for

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some of your small groups? That might allow her to attend a small group, make a couple of friends, and begin the process of healing."

"That's a great idea!" exclaimed George. "We can explore the details later. Let's move on to 'Grumpy.'"

Grumpy

"'Grumpy' is Todd Sullivan, a gentleman in his late forties who never seems to like anything. The sermon is either too short or too long, either has too many big words or is not deep enough. He tends to be rather legalistic and dogmatic over minor issues.

"In addition, he blames the church for his children's lack of interest in spiritual things. He always says that if we had a good youth program, his teenagers

wouldn't be so rebellious. I also think he's mad because he's never been asked to be on the Council of Elders."

Heaven help us if he did get asked, thought Bob. Then he asked, "Do you have any idea how he got to be so critical?"

"I'm not sure," George explained, "but I think it's all related to a series of disappointments. You see, life has not turned out as he planned. He is stuck in a dead-end job, his kids seem to reject his values, and his marriage is on the rocks. His dreams have been shattered. While he is certainly not a failure, I think that he feels like one."

"Sounds like a classic case of midlife crisis," replied Bob. "What he needs is a good swift kick and to stop feeling sorry for himself."

"No," explained George, "what he really needs is to experience God's love and forgiveness. Then he could share it with others. You see, until he accepts what God has done for him, he will not be able to accept himself and his own faults. And until he accepts himself, he won't be able to accept others.

"We've talked some about the fact that he needs to lower his expectations and also realize that he is not a victim of circumstances. Much of his troubles are simply the natural consequences of poor choices that he made years ago. He needs to learn to stop blaming others and to accept responsibility for the choices he made."

Dopey

"Have you met Andy Jameson yet?" continued George. "I call him 'Dopey.' He is thirty years old and a classic 'baby Christian.' The sad thing is that he has been a Christian for five years, but I haven't seen any growth at all. He doesn't read his Bible—he doesn't even know if Matthew is in the Old Testament, New Testament, or the hymn book! He's always daydreaming about what team is playing on TV rather than listening to the sermon. In fact, he once told me that church was boring.

"When he goes to his Sunday school class, which is rare, he asks the most irrelevant questions. He answers questions based on his feelings and defends his opinion even when it's contrary to Scripture. When his mind is made up, don't confuse him with the facts! When we ask ►

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for prayer requests, he brings up things like Aunt Matilda's knee or his neighbor's dog that ran away.

"You can gauge his attitude towards church like the weather. If he feels good, then everything is great. But if his car stalls, the weather is hot, or his football team loses, then he stays home from church and pouts."

"How in the world do you get through to someone like that?" pondered the young pastor.

"Well, I think that he needs to be confronted and challenged," the older man said. "He needs to be encouraged to start reading his Bible and praying. I'm beginning a discipleship group next month, and I'm going to strongly suggest that he be in it. He relies so much on his feelings that he really doesn't know what he believes or why he believes it.

"In addition, he needs to be challenged to be involved in something bigger than himself. In reality, he is a very gifted, artistic person. If we could find some way for him to use his gifts in ministry, that would capture his attention."

Happy

"Anyway, let me tell you about 'Happy.' Her name is Virginia Baker."

"Yeah, she was the first person to say 'Hello' when I visited the church," said Bob.

"That's what she does best," explained George. "She is a very friendly, outgoing person. She always has a word of encouragement for whomever she meets. It's amazing that she has such a positive outlook, because her husband is dying of cancer. She even asked who she could visit and encourage in the hospital."

"Sounds like she is a real saint. Don't have to worry about meeting her needs," Bob said naively.

"Even someone like her has needs, Bob," George explained. "She needs to be appreciated and thanked. I try to publicly recognize everyone who is involved in a significant ministry. I also try to encourage her to keep up the good work as a greeter. Chances are, when people think about our church, they think of 'Happy.'"

"She also needs someone to encourage her and check up on how she is handling her own struggles," continued George. "I know her well enough to realize that the more she is hurting, the more she asks for

things to do to help others."

"Sounds like all her activities are merely an anesthetic to deaden the pain in her own life," Bob suggested.

"In a sense that's true," agreed the older pastor. "But her motives for serving are pure. She really does care about others. But she also needs people to care about her and support her. It's easy to assume that someone who is that cheerful never hurts. The reality is that often she is smiling on the outside and crying on the inside. She just doesn't let people know."

Too bad she can't rub off on "Grumpy," Bob thought.

Sleepy

"Let me tell you about 'Sleepy,'" George continued. "He's the most surprising one of all. His name is Don Tuttle, a sixty-eight-year-old grandfather. He doesn't get involved, never seems to pay attention during the service, and always falls asleep five minutes into the sermon."

"Sounds like a real loser to me," exclaimed Bob.

"That's where you are wrong," replied George. "I once visited him in the hospital after he had surgery. He asked me a startling question: 'Pastor, if I die, who will take my place in your ministry?' I sheepishly had to say, 'I'm not sure what you do.'"

"He explained that he had committed himself to stay up late on Saturday night to pray for me and the ministry of the church. In reality, he is the backbone of our entire ministry and one of the reasons for our growth. You know, you'll find others like him, quietly serving behind the scenes without any fanfare."

"Wow, what a saint," said Bob. "Too bad he can't pass on that commitment to others. Maybe he could disciple 'Dopey,' er, I mean Andy."

"That's a great idea," replied the senior pastor. "What he needs is a younger man whom he can serve as a mentor to, someone to whom he can pass on his love for the Lord. I'll call him to see if he would be interested."

Doc

"Well, let's see. That takes care of Bashful, Grumpy, Dopey, Happy, and Sleepy. I suppose you have a Doc and a Sneezzy, too?" asked Bob.

"That's right," replied the pastor. "Snow White can't have only five dwarfs."

