



## Jiggling the Wires

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This winter, the temperature in my bedroom has been uncomfortably hot. Inevitably, my husband and I are kicking off our covers and fitfully tossing and turning. At some point in the wee hours, I'll croak with a parched throat, "Water, water..." as I reach for the cup on the bedside table. The rest of the house remains pretty comfortable, day or night, but not the bedroom.

We have a programmable thermostat in the bedroom. I tried having it hold the temperature steady at 65 degrees, but at night we still had uncomfortable fluctuations. So, I got adventurous and decided to program the thermostat for each phase of the day: wake, leave, return, and sleep. For "sleep," I set the temperature to 65 degrees. At 3:00 am, however, I woke sweating and checked the thermostat. It was 74 degrees, and the heat kept blasting out of the vents.



The next night, I figured I could tweak the system just a bit by lowering the sleep setting to 60 degrees. At 4:30 am, the vents were running full bore, pumping hot air into our room. In a near heat stroke, I squinted at the thermostat. "78 degrees!" I exclaimed to my husband. "You have to do something!" Despite my indignant effort to foist the problem on my husband, he was just as frustrated and mystified as me.

We decided to call in an HVAC expert, who found that the wiring to the furnace baffles was loose. The baffles, like little doors, were stuck and so not responding to the thermostat. No amount of programming would make any difference if the doors were stuck. He warned that the whole system was old and in need of replacement, but he jiggled the wires enough to get the baffles working again. For the moment, we are comfortable again.

By now, you know me well enough to realize I've been wondering what God is trying to teach me through this struggle. One phrase keeps coming to mind, "No amount of programming makes any difference if the doors are stuck." As I work with congregations toward increased vitality, I hear about the many programs you are offering or intend to offer or wish you could still offer. Through programs, we hope to attract people to church, enticing them to come join us. In one traditional model of congregational life cycles, our greatest growth is shown to coincide with periods of increased programming.

The truth is, however, no amount of programming will make any difference if the doors are stuck. Rather than an attractional model of church that insists people come to us, congregations are finding greater vitality in a missional model, joining our neighbors where they are. Instead of insisting people come to church to experience all it has to offer – the smorgasbord of programs – we are learning instead to go out the doors of our buildings to be the church in the midst of our community.

Fair warning: if the overriding goal of our outreach is still to woo people to church so that we can be as vibrant as we used to be, then we're just jiggling the wires. Jiggling the wires on an old system might fix our broken doors and make us comfortable for a spell, but it is a temporary solution. Eventually the furnace is going to give out, and the hard work of adaptive change will be thrust upon us. As we prepare for that eventuality, let's experiment with being the church on the other side of our doors. Then, worship on Sunday mornings will be a joyful response to all that God is doing in the community the rest of the week.