



THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

MARCH / APRIL / MAY 1997

“...SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE...” Eph. 4:15

**ALL I NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT LIFE
I LEARNED FROM MY BIBLE**

Miracles happen.

Somebody loves me.

I am not alone.

The majority isn't always right.

Wonderful things happen in dungeons.

Death is only skin-deep.

Poverty is temporary, and so is wealth.

*He who dies with the most toys
loses the most toys.*

You can always go home again.

Things may look a lot better in three days.

— Donna MacLean

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Submit to One Another

As a boy, I looked forward to Friday nights at 7:30 P.M. My fertile imagination filled in all the pictures suggested by that superb radio program, *The Lone Ranger*! It made great drama for a boy—but it doesn't work in the ministry. Over 38 years of pastoral ministry, I have watched the tragic mistake of pastors trying to be ministerial lone rangers. It usually ends up in a short run or abuse of power over a congregation or finding oneself out on a limb alone with no one to catch him or her.

Lone rangers haven't discovered that we need each other in ministry. Those who choose to go alone usually make little lasting impact for the kingdom of God.

Two movers struggled with a huge crate, trying to get it through a doorway. After strenuous but futile effort, they felt exhausted. Sitting the crate down to rest, one man said: "I give up! We'll never get this thing in here."

"In there?" exclaimed the other. "I thought we were trying to get it out!"

That's the sorry picture of people trying to minister without having learned to submit to one another. They are going nowhere—and expending a lot of useless energy doing it.

To the family of God, Paul wrote, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Does that apply to everyone but pastors? Or do we demonstrate good examples for our people to follow? What is your attitude toward neighboring pastors? How do you feel about the numerically successful church down the road? Do you show respect to your superiors in your ecclesiastical organization? Or are you just another lone ranger? Hear the biblical instructions to pastors once again: "Submit to one



by **Randal E. Denny**
Editor, Spokane, Washington

another out of reverence for Christ." Are we **ordained** people permitted to pick and choose commands of the Lord to our own liking?

The apostle Peter taught: "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. . . . Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Pet. 5:5).

I have never been simply a yes-man, but I have respected and loved my superiors and have enjoyed their personal friendships and well-intentioned counsel. Had I served as a lone ranger, I would have lost the enrichment of their contributions to my life and ministry. If I had played the lone ranger, I would not have gained the rich knowledge and camaraderie of my neighboring pastors—in and out of my own denomination. So many fellow pastors of all stripes from all sizes of churches have made a lasting impact on me and have given me good ideas and advice in this thrilling profession of ministry.

Lone ranger, jerk off your black mask and join the team—God's wonderful corps of called and ordained ministers of the gospel.

Many of you readers live in a culture that claims to exert its right of independence and self-expression with its sad song, "I Did It My Way." Remember that our culture stands in total opposition to God's plan for His family, the Church. Learn submission—that beautiful quality of trustful obedience. When one refuses to submit, he or she is also resisting the Holy Spirit. Submission comes with the fullness of the Spirit because we seek to obey all of the Lord's commands—even submitting to one another "out of reverence for Christ." Don't try plucking up God's promises and skipping His commands.

The bride-to-be said to me, "I don't want any mention of submission in the vows."

I replied: "If you have a personal struggle over submitting to the one you intend to marry, you will not have a Christian marriage. It is only going to be a marriage of two Christian individuals. Your concept of marriage is in total opposition to the Word of God." Those words were true, but not pleasing to her. If they remain in that mind-set, they will simply be two lone rangers running alongside each other.

Pastors, in the same way, we must ultimately decide whether we will follow God and let His Word be our Guide. Lone rangers, don't let the sin of "me first" infect your ministry for Jesus Christ. God's Word instructs us to "submit . . . as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). Submit to one another—superiors, pastoral peers, and parishioners—"as the church submits to Christ" (v. 24).

Why hesitate to "submit to one another"?

After all, we are family!



Walking on the Edge

Given in chapel at Nazarene Theological Seminary, May 8, 1996

2 Cor. 4:1-6

I am wondering what you have found that you really want to live for? Is it something important enough for you to be willing to *die* for? If you are ever faced with the option of merely staying alive or dying for something really important, perceptions about life and what's really important suddenly change.

Visualize walking on the edge of a high precipice. Things get very simple there. I know. I once found myself walking there. I was on the edge of despair. I felt fierce gales pushing me toward the edge. It was a precipice of temptation. I wanted to jump, but another impelling force was drawing me back. I looked down. It's a long way down from a precipice so high. And there is nothing to catch you.

I glanced back along the road I had traveled. It was not an easy road, but as I gazed ahead at the difficulties of taking "the road less traveled," I realized that was my only choice if I were to avoid the danger and consequences of slipping off the edge.

God promised Jesus that He would "command his angels . . . they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:6). In the wilderness things had boiled down to an irreducible simplicity for Him too.



by Wilbur W. Brannon

*Director of Pastoral Ministries,
Nazarene Headquarters, Kansas City*

But I was not even thinking of Jesus when I was walking on the edge. All I knew was I had two options: (1) survival and death, or (2) destruction and death. Strange, isn't it, how the abstractions of critical thinking become so pointless when trying to keep your balance between two forces on the edge of a precipice?

The questions and arguments that had so often tantalized my mind simmered down. There are only a few critical singularities. That's the way it is on the edge. If you've been there, you understand that life's complexities do not go away. But standing on the edge, you have to decide what you are going to do. The difficulties are stark realities, but the simplicity is in the options offered.

How often we ignore priorities in the maddening pace of life. Priorities suddenly come into sharp focus when you stand on the edge. It may be the edge of a relationship that is shaken by a 7.6 Richter scale tremor. Commitments we make with a strong sense of conviction are put to the supreme test on the edge of disillusionment. The fierce winds of doubt can be strong enough to make you wonder if faith can keep its balance—on the edge.



It has been the God of Abraham and Moses and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that has grabbed my attention when I've been on the edge. I can't escape Him. Moses was on the edge of the back side of the desert when he encountered that mysterious Presence. He asked the Voice what His name was. "I AM," was the awesome reply. You can't get away from that Word—even on the edge of a precipice or in the dark.

The poet-king admitted: "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you[, LORD]; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you" (Ps. 139:11-12). Somebody has to say it now and then; usually it takes someone shouting it to get *my* attention: ***He is there. He's there with you, even when you're alone. When you can't see Him, He is there!*** Even when you deny Him, He is bold to say, "I AM THERE."

You don't have to believe it. And sometimes it is hard to believe. But that doesn't change the shape or place of His sovereignty. That has frustrated me, irritated me more than once. But He defies my denial and declares it again. "I AM HERE." He says, "You can't get rid of Me that easily."

Commitments
we make with a
strong sense of
conviction are
put to the
supreme test
on the edge of
disillusionment.

When Jesus was on the edge in Gethsemane, "deeply grieved" (Matt. 26:38, NRSV), to the point of dying right there, things got real simple for Him. He "fell on his face, and prayed, saying [KJV], 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (v. 39).

Isn't it amazing? The singular devotion and simple focus of Jesus. Doing God's will was all-important to Him. So important that no other attraction or impulse diverted Him from willing that one thing. "Here I am[, He said]—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). That was it! Nothing else, nothing more, nothing less. So important was the Father's will that He was willing to die for it.

The primary motive behind this all-consuming passion of Jesus was to reveal the God of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets in personal relationship. Indeed, He intends that it be a transforming relationship, a relationship transformed by God's indwelling love. Such love, as Jesus presented it, goes far beyond the adherence of religious practices but is borne in a personal covenant and expresses itself in redemptive compassion, reconciling the world to himself.

God does not
use our worst
moments to
pronounce final
judgment on
our character.

Many years ago I answered the call to become the pastor of a divided church. I entered a war zone. I didn't go into it blind, but—talk about a minefield! I was in it! I couldn't say a word without the fear of setting one off and blowing up in my face. It was during the years of the Vietnam War. Those who have lived to remember those days know that the citizens who supported the conflict were nicknamed "hawks." Those against the war were called "doves." Those were the terms the members of my church took to themselves as they engaged in the conflict.

The one side who had successfully rid themselves of the previous pastor were the "hawks," and those grieving over the loss of their pastor were the

"doves." Those who didn't want to take sides were called "chicken hawks." It was in that dangerous no-man's-land that I found myself most of the time. You can guess what both sides wanted to call me.

But something happened my first Sunday morning with those divided and hurting people. I have to admit there was much in the environment that was demonic. But something as close to what I would call a divine intervention took place that was more than I could have expected. It was a gift to me.

God was right
on schedule.

That community of faith had split apart because of a fallen leader. People on both sides were acting out far worse than they really were. I say that because God does not use our worst moments to pronounce final judgment on our character.

That first Sunday morning as I stood before the people, I saw how profoundly they were hurting and how desperately they were projecting their pain on each other. The gift God gave me that morning was nothing of my design or creation. I could not have come up with it. What I saw was too ugly. Too despicable. Too damaging. Too hopeless. Too painful. Too repulsive. What else can I say to describe a demonic work of evil so thorough as to plunge a strong church into a cauldron of hate and suspicion?

That Sunday morning God overwhelmed me with a fresh spring of love that welled up within and filled my heart, that flowed to every person, both "hawks" and "doves." In spite of whatever they did to contribute to the chaos.

God gave His love to me for them. I can't describe it. It was more than an emotional experience. It was the gift of a divine impulse. The currents of that love stream took me into their homes and businesses, listening and befriending them. It was that gift of love that became my source of strength during the healing process

and the basis for new hope in each meeting.

One young father asked me, "Pastor, do you think the church can survive this?"

Without hesitation but without any tangible proof, I said, "Yes, we can come through this stronger than before." If you had been a bystander and wanting to know what I really believed; and if you had asked, "Wilbur, do you really believe that?" I would have answered simply: "Yes, I do. I really believe that. Because I am willing to die to see the glory of God revealed."

I had been there six months. It was six months to the day that Jay and Robin had marked their calendar—six months for a promise to be fulfilled. They rested. Others wondered. A number doubted. But many hoped—and prayed. The board met for prayer and guidance in special meetings. Ladies met for weeks at 10:30 on Tuesday mornings, men on Saturdays.

But this Saturday was different. A circle of men joined hands. In faith we "claimed the promise."

Then came Sunday morning. A sound. A breeze. A song of praise. Jeff couldn't be there. He was listening in on our service over a long-distance telephone hookup. At 11 A.M. his promise was, "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive" (Matt. 21:22, NRSV). He put his hand on that promise from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. as he listened and literally heard the promise being fulfilled. This fulfillment came in as "a sound." Not of "brass" and "clanging cymbal" (1 Cor.

13:1, NKJV). It began as a bubbling stream of love.

The preacher was ready to stand to preach. Mrs. Smith stood, weeping for revival. "A must!" she said. "We can't wait any longer. . . . Forgive me."

Others followed. Testimonies, confessions—and the altar filled. Walls that separated began to crumble. Love began to ease the pain and heal the Body. What glory! What blessing! What victory!

Then came Sunday night. With a new lilt in the music, a fresh freedom in the praying, a deep quietness in faith, God came again. After the gospel message, more responded to the invitation of the Holy Spirit—a confirmation that this was our day for new beginnings. The glory of God was revealed.

Could it be? Six months to the day? Marked on a calendar? Jay stood at the close for the day and with confident composure, but a heart flooded with emotion, simply stated, "God was right on schedule."

The sound of reconciling waters continued for months as the church experienced the healing grace of God. When the glory of God came from the east and entered the Temple in Ezekiel's vision, "His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory" (43:2). There will be times in your ministry when nothing, absolutely nothing, is more important. I can see you walking on the edge. Storms of doubt would blow you off balance. Tense relationships would tempt you to despair. A sense of failure would

undermine the hope of ever recovering. The divine call will become confused in the fog of depression. The road ahead will look too difficult, and you will be tempted to give it all up.

But the edge! Are you willing to risk stumbling or falling off the edge? Is there not another option? The road angling away from the edge may be rocky and narrow, but there is new hope when the glory of God is revealed. When God shows His hand. When we see Him for who He is. When He makes the way, there is no other way to take.

It is rather simple after all. It is either risking His will, "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, KJV), or suffering the loss of all things, including the all-surpassing knowledge of Christ. I have no other passion that consumes me so. I want to see "the glory of the LORD" and hear again "the sound of mighty waters" (Ezek. 43:4, 2, NRSV). There are many questions I have not settled in my mind, but there is one thing I live for—and am willing to die for. That is:

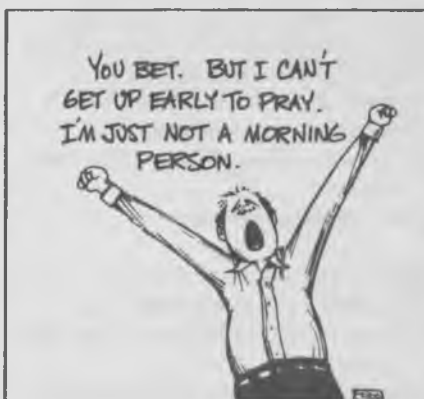
To know Him and to so live that others may come to know the Father through "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God [he has given us] in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6, KJV).

I came to know Him, and without Him I am literally lost.

That is very simple, but that is really all there is—to know *Him!* That's all I need—to *know Him!* When I am walking on the edge, to *know Him!* *And He saves me from falling.*

AMEN. ✠

BEYOND BELIEF



Earth Day

by Kenneth T. Meredith

Retired elder, Lake City, Colorado

This day is not on our church calendar. Perhaps this is so because Christians worship God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We worship the Creator rather than His creation.

We sing of the beauty and marvels of the earth as a reflection of the nature of Christ: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3, KJV).

Many of the great hymns were penned and set to music centuries before the modern ecology movement came into being, long before the idea of Earth Day was conceived. Sadly, some in the movement have written that before their goals and objectives can be met, they must rid the world of the Judeo-Christian concept found in Gen. 1:28. Their view is that this puts man in dominion over the earth and hence has brought about its destruction. Not so! God, not man, has dominion. He has given man the responsibility of stewardship. Admittedly, because of man's sinful nature, complete with such characteristics as greed and selfishness, he has not always been a good steward.

Christ, who created, sustains, and brings renewal to the earth, is the One who brought redemption and renewal to man. Through Him our sins are forgiven and the nature of sin is destroyed. By walking in yieldedness to Him, through His Spirit, we can find His will and live in harmony with His universe.

The following lines give evidence that the concept of Earth Day has belonged to Christians through the centuries.

Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226, wrote:

*All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam,
O praise Him! O praise Him!*

*Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice;
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!
O praise Him! O praise Him!*

*Dear mother earth, who day by day
Unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
Let them His glory also show!
O praise Him! O praise Him!*

*Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness.
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748, penned:

*He framed the globe, He built the sky,
He made the shining worlds on high
And reigns in glory there:
His beams are majesty and light;
His beauties, how divinely bright!
His dwelling place, how fair!*

He also composed these lines:

*I sing the mighty power of God
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command,
And all the stars obey.*

*I sing the goodness of the Lord
That filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with His word
And then pronounced them good.*

*Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed
Where'er I turn my eye:
If I survey the ground I tread
Or gaze upon the sky!*

*There's not a plant or flower below
But makes Thy glories known;
And clouds arise and tempests blow
By order from Thy throne.
While all that borrows life from Thee
Is ever in Thy care,
And everywhere that man can be,
Thou, God, art present there.*

Joachim Neander, 1650-80, wrote:

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear,
Now to His temple draw near;
Join me in glad adoration!*

Joseph Addison, 1672-1719, wrote:

*The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky
And spangled heavens a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun from day to day
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an almighty hand.*

The lovely German hymn from the 17th century reads:

*Fairest Lord Jesus!
Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish,
Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.*

*Fair are the meadows;
Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring.*

*Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to
sing.*

*Fair is the sunshine;
Fairer still the moonlight,
And all the twinkling starry host.
Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer,
Than all the angels heaven can
boast.*

Reginald Heber, 1783-1826,
penned:

*God, that madest earth and heaven,
Darkness and light;
Who the day for toil hast given,
For rest the night;
May Thine angel guards defend us,
Slumber sweet Thy mercy send us;
Holy dreams and hopes attend us
This live-long night.*

John Needham, 1786, composed
the following lines:

*How vast His knowledge, how pro-
found!
A deep where all our thoughts are
drowned;
The stars He numbers, and their
names
He gives to all those heavenly
flames.
Through each bright world above,
Behold ten thousand charms unfold;
Earth, air, and mighty seas combine
To speak His wisdom all divine.*

Cecil F. Alexander, 1818-95, wrote:

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful—
The Lord God made them all.*

*Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings;
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.*

*The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.*

*He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.*

**The concept
of Earth Day
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to Christians
through the
centuries.**

Folliott S. Pierpoint, 1835-1917,
penned:

*For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the wonder of each hour,
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light,
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

Henry van Dyke, 1852-1933, wrote:

*All Thy works with joy surround
Thee;
Earth and heaven reflect Thy rays.
Stars and angels sing around Thee,
Center of unbroken praise.*

*Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain
Call us to rejoice in Thee!*

Maltbie D. Babcock, 1858-1901,
wrote:

*This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world;
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.*

Thomas O. Chisholm, 1866-1960,
wrote:


*Summer and winter, and springtime
and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their
courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold wit-
ness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy,
and love.*

Carl Boberg, 1859-1940, composed
the well-loved hymn, "How Great Thou
Art," which tells of God's creation.

Isaac Watts also composed these fa-
miliar lines:

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills,
and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.*

May we continue to lift our voices in
praise to God, giving Him the glory for
all creation. Let us sound forth, not on-
ly on Earth Day, but every day and
night. Let us continually worship Him,
our God, Creator, and Redeemer! 

God Is in Action, Through You

James S. Stewart, in his classic *Heralds of God*, wrote these encouraging words:

"Every Sunday morning, when it comes, ought to find you awed and thrilled by this reflection. God is to be in action today through me for these people. This day may be crucial, this service decisive for someone now ripe for the vision of Jesus" (p. 47).

What a great encouragement for any preacher! To realize that we are in action, every Sunday, on behalf of God. The preacher in the biggest pulpit needs to hear this as does the preacher in the smallest hamlet. It is a soul-searching truth. It is a truth that will make every Sunday worth living and worth preparing for. Pastor, be encouraged—this is for you!

This is important to know, first, because each preacher needs to know the eternal reality of his call to preach. The preacher needs to know there is some purpose beyond the paycheck and some reason beyond a job. A divine reality to the preaching event overshadows all other ministerial events. It is the moment when one stands to declare the counsel of God. It is that moment when one stands to represent God and declare His Word.

There are days when a preacher needs to let this kind of reality invade his mind and heart, brushing back the bruises of pastoral life and lifting the spirits that have been dashed by careless words and petty conflicts. There will be times when one must pull away from the battle and let the heart be touched with the deep significance of preaching. For where one pulls aside, for a while, to hear the encouraging words of Stewart—and of God—one is encouraged to return to ministry with new vision and enthusiasm. To let the soul take in all that



by C. Neil Strait

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God designs by the preaching event is both refreshing and renewing.

This is important to know, also, because those who hear you preach need to know that God has a word for their situation. It was never safe to assume that those who heard us preach, in past months or years, had no problems and that life was flowing without any difficulty. It has never been that way. William Skudlarek, in his book *The Word in Worship*, has this to say about contemporary listeners/worshippers:

In the average parish congregation about one fifth of the people will be feeling a sense of loss because of a recent bereavement. A third of them may be facing marital difficulties. About half of them will have problems of adjusting emotionally to school, job, home, or community. Others will be afflicted with a deep sense of guilt stemming from their inability to deal maturely with their sexuality, or because of their addiction to drugs or alcohol (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, 46).

When the preacher knows the hurts and heartaches of his listeners, and also knows that he has a word from God, there is nothing more chal-

lenging and exciting. This is the task and the world of the preacher. He stands on Sunday with the one eternal Word that hurting people need to hear. He "is in action" for the God who can take the pieces of life and begin healing and ignite hope. To be part of such a dynamic possibility will help a preacher through some bad days, some awful board meetings, and some wrenching experiences.

Pastor, be encouraged—reflect on the Sunday past and the Sunday coming. Remember, those days are crucial because what you shared from God was decisive for someone. You were a link in a liberating moment, you were part of a beginning, a miracle, a new day!

The God who has called you to preach is the God who invites you to let yourself—your problems, your frustrations, your fears, your critics, your disappointments, your hurts—down into the grace of God and allow Him to nurture you, love you, and strengthen you.

Let me close with a great Old Testament verse, then a great New Testament word. The Old Testament word is from Isa. 30:18: "The LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" The New Testament word is from Paul in Col. 2:10, TLB: "*You have everything when you have Christ*, and you are filled with God. . . . He is the highest Ruler, with authority over every other power."

Pastor, be encouraged! The God of Isaiah and the God of Paul is your God! He changes not, His authority and power touches your ministry every time you are in action for Him. Let the strength of this thought be your encouragement for today—and this week!

What Is the Biblical Response to Moral Misconduct in Holiness Churches?

I approach this topic with a case study. This case comes from the example of moral misconduct found in the Corinthian church, and the inspired writer's instructions for handling it (1 Cor. 5:1-13).

I

I wish to make five observations.

First, the misconduct was known—widely known. In fact, the report reached Paul in Ephesus. Unfortunately the saying is too true, "Error walks a mile while truth is getting its boots on." The same is true with the news of misconduct. When church members misbehave, the fact can seldom be kept hidden. It will be noticed, whispered about, and in many cases talked most about by outsiders, many of whom take a fiendish delight in gloating over the inconsistencies of Christians.

Second, the offense was flagrant. It was a case of incest, the taking of one's father's wife (probably a second wife), a kind of moral irregularity frowned on, even in licentious, wide-open Corinth.

This reminds us of the uncomfortable fact that any kind of sin can creep into the church. Church membership does not immunize people against the evil proclivities of their own hearts or make them foolproof against the tricks of the devil. Unfortunately, some people who align themselves with the church are unconverted. In many other cases, they remain unsanctified. To the extent that they are still carnal, they constitute a foothold of Satan, by which he



by Richard S. Taylor

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has access. He will use his foothold to the utmost, bringing about confusion and disruption in the ranks of God. Church members could become liars, adulterers, thieves, and murderers. Many pastors have made pastoral calls behind prison bars.

Third, it only takes one serious case of moral breakdown to contaminate an entire church, grieve God, and rob the church of its blessing and power.

Fourth, the attitude of the Corinthians toward this wickedness in their midst reflects heresy in their thinking. This requires careful analysis.

Paul begins by shaming them: "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned" (1 Cor. 5:2, NKJV). The proper reaction, Paul is saying, would be a general church mourning, as at a funeral, combined with prayer and fasting. Instead, they plunged on in their spiritual pride over their superior gifts. They were puffed up.

What frame of mind would cause a

church to be puffed up in spite of a moral violation in their midst?

One factor in their frame of mind could very well have been a confusion over the *essence of spirituality*. That this confusion prevailed in this church is evident by the discussions in the entire Epistle. They supposed that, if they had the gifts, they were spiritual. This led to the illusion that, by comparison to their religious celebrations, moral conduct really didn't matter. To them, great services with abundant exhibitions of gifts more than compensated for any little moral irregularity that crept in. Something here sounds strangely familiar. As emphasis on emotional highs goes up, emphasis on ethics goes down. The subconscious assumption seems to be that since God is blessing us so richly, this little peccadillo over in the corner can't have much importance to Him. Whether the Corinthian church or a 20th-century church, such thinking shows the befuddlement of a radical misapprehension of what matters most to God, and of what constitutes true spirituality.

A second factor in the frame of mind of these Corinthian Christians could have been a misunderstanding of the nature of *Christian love*. Perhaps they too were continuously proclaiming God's "unconditional love" and seeking to demonstrate it to their errant brother by looking the other way. In other words, perhaps they saw their tolerance of this evil in their midst as a demonstration of Christian love—the love that refuses to pass judgment. This is the concept of love

voiced by a certain bishop who recently said, "We judge no one; we accept everyone." He gave this as a defense for tolerating the practice of homosexuality.

However, the Corinthians had much to learn about the true nature of Christian love. "Love . . . without hypocrisy" is the love that will "abhor that which is evil [and] cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9, NKJV, KJV). The right kind of love is not so maudlin as to be incapable of telling the difference. It is not a proper demonstration of Christian love for churches to tolerate evil in their midst, especially when done in the name of love, any more than unlimited permissiveness in the home is a proof of parental love.

A *third factor* that may have explained the frame of mind in the Corinthian church that permitted them to tolerate this evil could have been a *misunderstanding of law and grace*. This was true in spite of Paul's constant attempts to forestall such distortion. In 1 Cor. 6:12-20, Paul rebukes and repudiates a moral permissiveness respecting sex that seems to have crept into the thinking of some of them. He begins with the words, "All things are lawful for me" (v. 12, NKJV). Some translations put these words in quotes, indicating that Paul is not speaking his own ideas but is quoting someone else. Roger J. Green in the *Wesley Study Bible* suggests: "Perhaps a common saying among the Corinthians used to excuse sinful actions." If so, it was an antinomian interpretation of freedom from law. But this antinomian perversion Paul indignantly repudiates, not only here but throughout his writings.

Apparently the Corinthians' application of this supposed freedom was directed both to dietary restrictions and to sexual restrictions, on the ground that, since both functions were natural and physical, they were both equally matters of indifference. Green interprets them as understanding, "Just as food and the stomach were for each other, so were the body and sexual activity. The body was for this life only; therefore, sexual restrictions have no spiritual value."

However, Paul counters that their bodies are "members of Christ" and asks, "Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of

a harlot?" (v. 15, NKJV). Moreover, the body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit," and he concludes, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (vv. 19-20, NKJV).

We see basic Christian theology here. Here is correction, not only of moral confusion but also of the gnostic dualism behind it, which would abstract the physical from the spiritual and assign to the physical no eternal significance. Paul insists Jesus died for the redemption of the body as well as the spirit. The whole person is to be sanctified wholly, Paul prays elsewhere—"spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23). Thus, the tolerance of the Corinthians could partially be explained by heresy in their doctrinal understanding. All around us today are echoes of this same heresy.

Fifth, Paul did more than correct their confused thinking. He insisted that the church take immediate and decisive disciplinary action.

Before discussing the nature of this action, perhaps we should understand the doctrinal position behind it. The church as a body of professing Christians is an organism, not just an organization. As such it is a body, which to be healthy at all must be healthy throughout. This body concept is particularly developed in Rom. 12, Eph. 4, and 1 Cor. 12. In this passage, he uses the Passover figure to enforce the necessity of being free from leaven. "Do you not know," he queries, "that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (v. 6, NKJV). The whole church is contaminated by sin in its midst; and thereby the Spirit is grieved, and the church is shorn, like Samson, of its power. As much scorn as we have heaped upon the slogan "Yours for a pure rather than a big work," we should humbly concede that Paul would have had a lot of sympathy for it.

II

Let's examine in careful detail exactly how Paul instructs the church to act.

Since this is inspired Scripture, there surely must be some authoritative principles for us.

Paul's instructions can be summarized very simply. *First, he instructs them to formally pronounce di-*

vine judgment on the offender; second, to ostracize the offender socially. These are two steps the average modern church would be horrified to even consider. There would be loud cries, "Why, that isn't being Christian!" Nevertheless, here in the Word of God it is Christian.

Notice that Paul boldly says, "I . . . have already judged . . . him" (v. 3, NKJV). Paul was not afraid of making a moral judgment, not only about actions but also about persons. The evil action was done by a person; therefore, if the action is to be judged, the person must be judged.

Then Paul instructs the church to call a meeting, to face up to this situation openly, and to solemnly say in some kind of verbal pronouncement, "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5a, NKJV). This is not vindictive, for the purpose is benevolent: "That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5b, NKJV). The objective of this radical action was not simply to purge the church, but to save the person; that is, the hope was that, by taking such action, the guilty party would be brought to repentance.

That this action would carry real power is indicated by the statement that it was to be "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 4, NKJV). This action should not be seen as unchristlike, but as an action of the church in which the risen Christ is personally active.*

The implication of Paul's instruction is clear. When there is flagrant sin in a church, the church should not turn its head or sweep the fact under the carpet, but face it openly in a church meeting, and, through intense prayer, release upon the situation the mighty power of God himself to deal directly with the offender and have mercy on the church.

The other side of the instruction, to ostracize the person socially, was equally mandatory. "I have written to you," he says, "not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (v. 11, NKJV). The chapter ends with his conclusion: "Therefore 'put away from yourselves that wicked person'" (v. 13, NKJV).

Here, then, we have our case study. It is strong meat, but not the least ambiguous. How can these principles be applied to the way holiness churches are supposed to deal with moral infractions today?

III

Let us summarize the principles:

Church discipline should be protective, corrective, and redemptive.

Discipline should be protective in the sense that the church owes it to the name of Christ to take steps to preserve, and perhaps restore, the good name of the church. The honor of Christ is at stake, as well as never-dying souls.

Discipline should be corrective in the sense that the church must find a way to put an end to the offensive practice. At this point, prayer can enable God to deal decisively with the offender. If His discipline fails, at least the ostracism will be a testimony to the community that this kind of conduct is not tolerated. If the response of the person to the ostracism is voluntary withdrawal, then at least the problem is on the outside, no longer a part of the body.

The question might be raised whether ostracism ever has a redemptive effect. Psychologically this can prove the most effective action possible. The expressed disapproval of our crowd, those to whom we think we belong, can bring us around in a hurry.

In our day we face some complications that the Corinthian church did not face. Paul is not talking about official excommunication (in the Roman sense), or even what we would call "dropping from the roll." Church adherence was much simpler, more of a social and spiritual bond than a legal bond. Today membership is in a legal entity, which in most cases is subject to the review of courts. Today a disfaffected member can sue a church if the administered discipline is in apparent violation of his rights. The courts are very careful to foster separation of church and state at the public school level, yet are very willing to forget the principle when suits

against pastors or churches are brought before them. Therefore, discipline today demands a degree of care that was not necessary in Paul's day.

Discipline should be redemptive. While Christian love does not permit the abandonment of discipline, it does dictate the manner and spirit of discipline. It should be legal and loving. True concern for the welfare of the culprit should govern church discipline all the way. The desire is for his or her reclamation. This means that the pastor and any involved committee should handle the problem in such a way that the offender knows he is being loved, and that his redemption is being sought. If this comes across convincingly, legal suits are very unlikely.

Finally, the *rigor* of the discipline should be measured by two factors: the gravity of the sin and the publicity of the sin. The case in Corinth was widely known and especially repugnant. In our churches, there may be many lesser offenses and many that are not generally known. If the offense is an ongoing action of a leader, the church is faced with the option of allowing the leader to quietly go away, with as little said as possible, or requiring him or her to go public as the only acceptable means of rehabilitation within the framework of that church. If the offender is an elder, each denomination has its own way of handling the case, generally by defrocking, with possible reinstatement later. If the offender is a Sunday School superintendent, choir leader, or other such prominent person, at the very least he or she should be confronted and, even if there is repentance, relieved of official responsibilities. Of course, such action always alerts a congregation to the fact that something is wrong. However, we probably fool ourselves in most cases when we suppose the matter isn't already known.

What about the ordinary church member who holds no office and is not up front? What about teenagers? New converts? In these cases great delicacy, tenderness, understanding, and compassion are essential, yet

without ignoring the situation. In most cases, quiet talks by the pastor will be sufficient to bring about complete correction, provided he or she is gentle and keeps confidences.

There are sticky wickets in this whole area of church concern. On the one hand, we cannot allow the loose living of some of our people to seal our lips. We must teach and preach against gambling, divorce, abortion, drinking, premarital and extramarital sex, and all the myriad modern forms of dishonesty, even though we know there are guilty people out there whose names are on our rolls. On the other hand, we must not publicly browbeat victims of divorce or other sins, for such people need pastoral care as well as others, perhaps more so. Neither do we dare surrender our obligation to teach and to maintain a Christian standard of morality. Walking this tightrope requires much prayer and sensitivity.

There are special cases. What about the pregnant teenager? How can love and acceptance be shown at the very time when she needs it the most, even to the point of a church baby shower, without sending a message to the other teenagers that, after all, the church doesn't care about conduct, and teenage out-of-wedlock pregnancy doesn't matter? Would Paul have advocated ostracizing her—even refusing to eat with her? I do not believe so. Perhaps Jude can help us here. He writes: "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (vv. 22-23, NKJV).

*The NIV is more than slightly ridiculous when it translates "for the destruction of the flesh" by "so that the sinful nature may be destroyed." For one thing, here we have incipient gnosticism all over again. The implication is that the body itself is the sinful nature. Furthermore, the "sinful nature" is the enemy that Satan seeks to aid and abet, not destroy; only the Holy Spirit can destroy the sinful nature. Thus the NIV implies that the devil can do what God has been unable to do—to deal decisively with the sinful nature.

No, we cannot read such nonsense into Paul's instruction here. The "destruction of the flesh" can only mean "the destruction of the body" (NEB) through the loss of his health or some physical calamity, which would forcibly put an end to his sinning with this woman. It could be an illness that would put him flat on his back, a position that hopefully would prompt him to cry out to God for mercy.

Eternal Security, the True and the False

Editor's Note:

Many holiness people are listening to "sinning religion" on radio and television between Sundays. They often challenge the Wesleyan-Arminian view of security in Christ.

A mother who believed in "Once saved, always saved" was worried about her son. He professed to be a Christian but had gone into terrible sin. She remonstrated with him about it, but he replied, "Mother, you know I was really saved in that revival with Rev. Smith. So, since I am eternally secure regardless of how I live, I am all right." She had no answer because that was what she believed too.

A preacher whose wife died was so distraught by his grief that he decided to commit suicide. He left a note saying, "Since I am certain I



by Ralph A. Mickel

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have been born again and cannot be lost, I decided to do this to be with my wife."

Can We Be Unborn?

Calvinistic eternal security believers say, "Since I have been born again as a child of God, I cannot be lost. You cannot unborn a person. I was born a child of my father and, no mat-

ter what I do, I will always be his child."

If this were true, we could not be saved, for the Bible clearly says we are first of all children of the devil (John 8:44). This would mean: Once a child of the devil, always a child of the devil. Jesus also said that we are "born of the flesh" (John 3:6, KJV). He gives this as the reason that we need to be born again. But if one cannot be unborn, then once born of the flesh, always a child of the flesh.

Must Be Adopted

In addition, we are not children of God in the same way as we are children of our fathers. The Lord says we have to be *adopted* into His family (Rom. 8:15, KJV). Paul writes: "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5, NKJV). God further warns, "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler" (Ps. 82:6-7). Jesus quoted this translation; so it is correct (John 10:34). Thus Jesus warns us that even though we are children of God, if we live in sin, we will die as unsaved men. Hence, we can be partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4, KJV) and still die as men who never had the experience.

A very strong scripture about being a partaker of God and falling away is the following: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become *partakers of the Holy Spirit*, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they *fall away*, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open



shame" (Heb. 6:4-6, NKJV, italics added). As a result of these persons being partakers of the Holy Spirit, they have been born again. To be a partaker of the Third Person of the Triune God is to be a partaker of the divine nature. This scripture emphatically admonishes us that such a person can fall away and be lost.

Bud Robinson used to say, "I believe in 'once in grace, always in grace.' You are either in grace or in disgrace." A person who brings this reproach and shame to Christ is in the worst kind of disgrace.

Still on Probation

The second reason eternal security is false is that being born again does not end our time of probation on earth. We continue to be tempted and tried. If our probation had ended, the Bible would not say that we are still **being saved**. Paul writes: "We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are *being saved* and those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:15, italics added). Again he says, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18, italics added). Then he warns Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will *save both yourself* and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16, NKJV, italics added).

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Jesus promises security for us in these words: "They shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. . . . No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). Notice that He does not say we cannot take ourselves out of His hand. He warns, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (15:6). What else can Jesus mean but that we can take

ourselves from Him and be lost in the fires of hell!

God's "If"

The Lord tells us that His sheep are secure *as long as* they *listen* to His voice and *follow* Him (10:27). Therefore, if they live in sin, they are not His sheep. This is our Savior's "if" to the promise of eternal security.

Repeatedly, the Bible warns that we are saved conditionally. We are told that we continue to belong to God's House "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb. 3:6, NKJV, italics added). Still further, "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (v. 14, NKJV). Several times the Lord utters this warning: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13).

Probably Saved

Concerning those who are preparing the way for the Antichrist, the apostle John says they will separate themselves from the true saints (1 John 2:19). In the King James Version this verse has the words "no doubt" supplied, and the Roman Catholic New Testament of 1941 has the word "surely." Why? Because in the Greek there is a little two-letter word *an*, which Thayer in his lexicon says means "probably or perchance." It indicates this scripture may be correctly rendered: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they probably would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made manifest that not all are of us" (author's translation).

Eternal Life How?

The third reason eternal security is not true is that when Jesus gives us eternal life, it is conditional, not final. We have this life in Christ. "He is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). We will be given endless life absolutely and forever when we go to be with the Lord. Jesus says that whoever forsakes all for His sake and the gospel shall be rewarded in this life and in the age to come will receive everlasting life (Mark 10:30). Paul tells us, "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To

those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Rom. 2:6-7). Then we read, "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21, NKJV). Thus we have eternal life conditionally. We do not have this life in ourselves. Only God has life that has never begun—and we **began**. Hence we can only have it in Christ.

Being born
again does not
end our time of
probation on
earth.

The fourth reason eternal security deceives is that being saved is not just getting to heaven and escaping hell. Our Savior was given the Greek name Jesus, the Hebrew being Joshua, meaning "God saves." He was called this because "He will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Eternal security for many people is a way to get to heaven while living in sin.

Jesus warned, "You will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come" (John 8:21). Thus, if your religion lets you live in sin, when you die you cannot go where Jesus is.

Good works done before we are saved bring us no merit before God because we are saved "by grace . . . through faith" (Eph. 2:8). However, we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works," done after being saved (v. 10). They prove that we have the experience. If the good works are lacking, James warns, "Faith without [good] deeds is dead" (2:26). Paul declares of some: "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good" (Titus 1:16).

Christians do not live in daily defeat, for they are **overcomers**. Only overcomers "eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Only overcomers "will not be hurt at all by

the second death." Only overcomers will not have their names blotted out "from the book of life" (Rev. 2:7, 11; 3:5). Therefore, if we are really saved, we have victory over sin.

Do Not Habitually Sin

The Bible reminds us that a born-again person does not "habitually . . . sin, for God's nature abides in him . . . and he cannot practice sinning because he is born (begotten) of God" (1 John 3:9, AMP). This means he who habitually sins is of the devil (v. 8). A Christian sometimes sins, but he has no known sinful habits. Sin for him is like an accident, not a regular occurrence.

A poor, uneducated man arose in a testimony meeting and said, "You know and the Lord knows I ain't been what I ought to have been. I stole chickens and other things, told lies, got drunk, cussed and swore, played craps, and slashed men in fights. But I praise the Lord there's one thing I hain't never done; I hain't never lost my religion." He didn't lose it because he did not have it.

Unforgiven Sin

Many eternal security preachers do not teach confessing sin to be forgiven. They say if we confess, it will bring a reward. Yet the Bible teaches that only confessed sin is forgiven by

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God. "If *we* confess *our* sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive *us our* sins" (1 John 1:9, italics added). "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov. 28:13). King David wrote: "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:5). These scriptures warn us that sins committed after being saved are only forgiven if we confess them to God. Unforgiven sin keeps us out of heaven.

Willful or Deliberate Sinning

Let us consider a Bible passage that warns Christians concerning willful or deliberate sinning. "If *we* deliberately keep on sinning after *we* have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that *sanctified him*, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

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sacrifice for
sins is left."

(Heb. 10:26-29). The author of this passage wrote it to Christians, for he included himself and all believers by the use of the word "we." In addition, those to whom it was written are called God's *people* (v. 30). The person is said to be sanctified, which also proves he was saved. This is definitely affirmed by Paul: "Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11, NKJV). This is initial sanctification, not entire sanctification, which we receive when baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8-9).

These persons sin willfully and deliberately, not just willingly. To sin willingly is to do it voluntarily. You

choose to do it. To sin willfully and deliberately, you do it stubbornly, rebelliously, and with a fighting attitude toward God. Such sinning can be fatal.

If we cannot be
lost, then why
do we need to
be kept?

No Standing Without State

The fifth reason eternal security is wrong is that there are no scriptures that teach that one's standing and position before God can be all right without his state and condition being made righteous. The Lord does not impute righteousness without imparting it. The Bible says: "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, . . . even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all [imparted] and on all [imputed] who believe" (Rom. 3:21-22, NKJV).

As more proof, we read that the "fine linen, bright and clean" with which the Bride of Christ is clothed is "the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8). This means that when we put on the robe of Christ's righteousness, it results in our living righteously. Jesus reminds us: "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not *defiled* their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who *overcomes* shall be clothed in white garments" (3:4-5, NKJV, italics added). In these words, Jesus puts standing and state together.

A man arose in a testimony meeting and said: "In myself, I am wicked and unclean. But the beautiful white robe of Christ's righteousness covers me like a blanket of snow covers a barnyard."

The next one to testify was a young Salvation Army lady who said as she looked over at him, "You would surely be a mess if there would be a thaw." Thank God for an experience that doesn't become a mess when close to or in the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Keeping Means What?

The final reason the "Once saved, always saved" belief misleads us is: If we cannot be lost, then why do we need to be kept? The saints and angels in heaven do not need this. We only guard something that can be lost.

To say that Jesus is keeping us while we are living in sin means He is protecting us in our wickedness. This would make Him a sinner, for He would be a partner with us in our evil deeds. When the Lord "keeps," He keeps from sin. Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are" (John 17:11, NKJV). To be one as the Triune God cannot be done while living in sin—because that is living for the devil.

Again we read, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24, NASB). In this passage, we are told that the "keeping" is done so well that we do not even stumble. What kind of protection is that which is so poorly done that the person lives a life of sin! To be guarded that way is no keeping at all.

Judas Saved but Lost

Consider Judas as a person who failed to let the Lord "keep" him. The Bible informs us that Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before choosing him as an apostle. Being in this position placed him among the highest people in the Church (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). Our Lord said the Father gave Judas to Him. This indicates he was born again. However, Jesus says the rest were saved, but He *lost* him (John 17:12). The literal Greek states that Judas "from his apostleship by transgression *fell*" (Acts 1:25, italics added). If he was never right with God, how could he fall?

In the prophecy concerning Judas we are told: "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9). Jesus said this was a *prophecy* about His betrayer (John 13:18). The NKJV margin informs us that "lifted up his heel" means "acted as a traitor." In this passage, we are told that Judas was a close friend of Jesus, in whom He trusted. This

could not have been true if, as some claim, he was "a demon" (John 6:70, CEV) and "the son of perdition" (17:12, KJV) when Jesus chose him. Some even say that he was born into this world as a demon. That would make God unfair and unjust. Judas would have been born damned, with no opportunity to choose his own destiny.

King Saul

Saul in the Old Testament was another person who failed to let the Lord "keep" him. As proof he was saved, we read: "God changed Saul's heart"; and he was "changed into a different person" (1 Sam. 10:9, 6). Because of his sins, the Bible tells us that God departed from him, no longer heard his prayers, and became his *enemy* (16:14; 18:12; 28:15-16). The *Amplified Bible* informs us that the words of Samuel to Saul, "You . . . shall be with me," mean that he would be with Samuel "among the dead" (28:19). One cannot believe a person

who has God as his Enemy and from whom the Lord has departed could be with Samuel in the abode of the "righteous" dead.


The Safer Belief

It is safer to believe in conditional eternal security because a person will be more careful about sin. He will trust the Lord more about being kept in the right path.

Any belief that permits one to play with sin or be careless about it is fatally dangerous.

As we depend on the Lord's promise, we know that no person or evil spirit can take us out of His hand. We are sure Jesus will "keep that which [we] have committed

Any belief that permits one to play with sin or be careless about it is fatally dangerous.

unto him against that [D]ay" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV). Because we have come to God by Him, we are sure that we can depend on the prayers of Jesus Christ as our High Priest. Through His intercession, He will keep us saved to the uttermost length of our lives (Heb. 7:25, KJV). 



The Convincing Power of the Cross: Reading the Gospel of Mark from Inside Doubt

There seem to be three groups of people in relation to the Christian faith. There are the Insiders. Insiders, the regular customers, gather around the table weekly for "the usual." As insiders, we have a taste for correct ceremony, orthodoxy, and acts of piety. We know the menu, speak Christianese fluently, and can order our favorite hymns by number.

In contrast, there are the Outsiders, who stand outside the church—the irreligious, the agnostic and professed atheist. Some are outsiders by choice, having purposely distanced themselves from Christian faith because they find it neither intellectually satisfying nor morally acceptable. They *will* not believe. Others are outside because they have been hurt through experiences of abuse, suffering, or religious hypocrisy. They *cannot* believe.

Then, there are the Inside/Outsiders. These doubters have not completely forsaken the faith but have chosen to put it to the test with skepticism and doubt. They stand in the portico of the sanctuary, inside by outside. These *are willing* to believe, yet are dissatisfied with the shallowness of an unexamined faith. Thomas still dwells among the disciples.

We invite doubters and outsiders to consider the classical philosophical arguments for the existence of God. These either draw upon the world (i.e., the observable, empirical universe) as evidence of a Creator God or upon the human ethical experience,



by Mark S. Copley

Pastor,
Abingdon, Virginia

with God as a necessary postulate. These undoubtedly have value. Who has not looked up at a starry sky or viewed the vast ocean without considering a divine Artist behind the masterpiece? Who has not wrestled with our seemingly innate sense of justice without imagining a divine Judge? As long as the stars shine brightly and people strive to be just, human minds will turn to consider God.

How does one address the existence of God in the face of injustice, human evil, and natural disasters? Creation whispers the name of God,

but tragedy screams in godless horror. Forty thousand people starve to death every day on this fair planet. If God exists, can we call Him good in a world like this? Visit Auschwitz, south central Los Angeles, or victims of terminal illness, and the arguments suddenly don't seem so unflappable.

How does the good news about Jesus Christ read against the backdrop of human suffering and unbelief? Is philosophy the only way of conversing with doubt and unbelief? Do we need more pulpit-pounding presentations of doctrine? I think not. The dramatic narrative of the Cross has a unique convincing power in itself. The Gospel of Mark is an excellent example. Robert Fowler writes: "Mark is an action-filled narrative played out with its audience always foremost in mind. The action of the story can often be imagined being enacted before our eyes, on a stage."¹ The lights go down, and Mark's dramatic presentation of the gospel begins.

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1, NRSV). The drama begins with a statement of faith, Mark's dogma. There is no attempt here to prove anything—just the daring, dogmatic statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the promise of good news to follow. The sentence invites the audience to know about God, not through creation or other philosophical arguments, but through the person of Jesus Christ, chief character in the drama.



The gospel has three scenes that deal with this central theme of recognizing God in the person of Jesus. In the first two scenes, only heaven knows. In scene one, Jesus is claimed by His Father's voice at His baptism: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (1:11, NRSV). Later, in scene two, the Voice speaks the same words again, this time in the presence of three disciples at the Transfiguration (9:7). Neither of these scenes offers any human response to the divinely spoken dogma. "The characters on the stage with Jesus demonstrate no grasp of the action taking place before their eyes."² This is Mark's intention, for the characters around Jesus function only as the dramatic subjects in the story. "The reader of Mark is the actual subject; it is [the reader] who sees and hears, in imagination, the unfolding drama."³ Only the audience witnessing the drama is in a position to grasp what is happening on the stage. The message is for us.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem, which leads us to the third scene. There, He is rejected, betrayed, falsely accused, unfairly condemned, beaten, spat upon, abandoned by friends, and crucified, naked and humiliated between two thieves. There, at the point of His greatest suffering, Jesus looks toward heaven and cries, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" The crowd misunderstands, but Mark translates for his audience, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34). Heaven is silent; no voice this time. Using His last breath, Jesus screams and dies.

At that dark moment, we observe two very important events. First, the curtain in the Temple, the veil separating the world from God's holy presence, is torn in two from top to bottom. No one, except the high priest, dared to approach the holy place behind the curtain. Now the barrier is destroyed. The Holy Presence, which was once reserved only for the most inside of the insiders, has escaped. God has come out of hiding. He is about to reveal himself in a new way not bound by religious structures and ceremony.

Next, the scene moves to the foot of the Cross. There stands a Roman centurion. He is an extra in the drama with only one line. No one could be more exemplary of an outsider: he is

the wrong nationality (a Gentile), the wrong religion (a pagan), the wrong kind of person (a man of war), a stranger to the gospel in every sense of the word. He looks up—he does not see a religious hero, a great teacher, or humanitarian. He sees and hears Jesus, at that moment abandoned. In the ironic climax of the drama, he opens his mouth and speaks what no other earthly character in the drama has said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39, NASB).

.....

As long as the
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to consider


At this point, our mouths should drop open in awe. Amazingly, the outsider at the foot of the Cross gets it. Again, the true message of the drama is for the audience to receive. The conclusion to which we are drawn is this: God is revealed most convincingly in the dramatic passion of Jesus, His Son. The dogma states "Jesus Christ, the Son of God," yet the dogma becomes believable only in the dramatic climax at the Cross.

Why is this true? What is it about the crucifixion of Jesus that inspires faith in God? Is it not that, in the Cross, God comes near to those who stand outside? Jesus, the Son of God, dies upon a cross outside the Holy City. His blood spills on unconsecrated ground; He dies a cursed death. There on the Cross, He fully enters our world of estrangement, despair, condemnation, injustice, meaninglessness, and death. He, being God, experiences seeming God-forsakenness. And, if God has entered God-forsakenness, we can never be alone again. The tortured soul who looks to heaven with clenched teeth and broken

voice, crying, "Where are You, God?" has found a brother and friend in Jesus Christ. He has been there himself.

Elie Wiesel, author and holocaust survivor, writes of an Auschwitz experience in his book *Night*. Two Jewish men and a child were being executed by hanging. The prisoners were forced to watch. The men died quickly, but the boy lived on in torture for a long while. Wiesel remembers, "Then someone behind me said: 'Where is God?' and I was silent. After half an hour he cried out again: 'Where is God? Where is He?' And a voice in me answered: 'Where is God?' . . . He hangs there from the gallows."⁴

Any other answer would be unbearable. Only a God seen in the person of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion is believable in our world marked with suffering, pain, and meaningless death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who did not survive the Nazis' death camp, wrote from his prison cell, "[In the Cross,] God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which He is with us and helps us. . . . Only the suffering God can help."⁵

Through Jesus' death, God brings life to our deathly world. For when God enters death, it is not the end of God, but the end of death. He enters our hopelessness to bring hope. He enters our darkness to bring light. He enters our meaningless suffering to bring meaning. Jesus lives, raised triumphantly from the grave on the third day. He lives, but the scars remain, eternal reminders of His suffering. And at the sovereign throne of the universe stands a slain Lamb—a crucified God—encircled by everyone and everything proclaiming His praise. The Cross has convincing power for us today, all of us, insiders, outsiders, and doubters alike. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, NRSV). 

1. Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 20.

2. *Ibid.*, 21.

3. Walter E. Bundy, "Dogma and Drama in the Gospel of Mark," in *New Testament Studies*, ed. Edwin Prince Booth (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1942), 81. I am much indebted to Bundy for his insight into a dramatic reading of the Gospel of Mark.

4. Jurgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God and the Apathetic Man," in *The Experiments of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 73.

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1953), 188.

Discovering What Really Counts

Candle wax had melted onto the platform carpet in the sanctuary, matting itself deeply into the rug. It had set into hard, stubborn cakes.

"We'll want to have that cleaned by Easter," said one of our members.

"Don't bother," I said. "All that carpet will come up. I expect that we'll have brand-new carpet throughout the sanctuary by Easter."

Earlier that year our church had flooded when water pipes froze, then burst. I scanned the rest of the building, anxious for everything to be cleaned up. What a mess!

Loose ends of the carpet stuck up here and there. Heating ducts were still exposed. Downstairs, missing ceiling tiles revealed gaping holes and ugly blotches; floor tile was ruined; room partitions were warped.

How many calamities this small congregation has endured! Another flood had occurred eight years earlier. An oil truck had burst and set loose a thousand gallons of oil onto the newly landscaped lawn in front of the parsonage. After the landscaping was redone, a man drove a pickup into the center of the yard instead of into the parking lot.

Then we had the fire in the electric dishwasher in the parsonage kitchen. A puff bank in the furnace left the entire house grimed by soot.

So this flood was simply one more trial; yet it was also another opportunity for us to trust in God. Each Sunday I had tried to point out eternal lessons we could learn from these events.

Now Easter was coming—a day when many visitors attended our worship—and the church building seemed to be turned upside down.



by J. Grant Swank Jr.
Pastor, Windham, Maine

One delay tumbled in after another; nothing was done about the repairs. Two weeks before Easter I was to be gone for a week. We had been promised that while I was away, workers would start the repairs. When I returned the day after Palm Sunday, I discovered that nothing had been done. Further delays and more

runarounds! At this point there was no way that work crews could have everything done by Easter Sunday.

Our Maundy Thursday Communion service was approaching. Though I had been a pastor for more than a quarter of a century, I had never seen a house of God in such disarray.

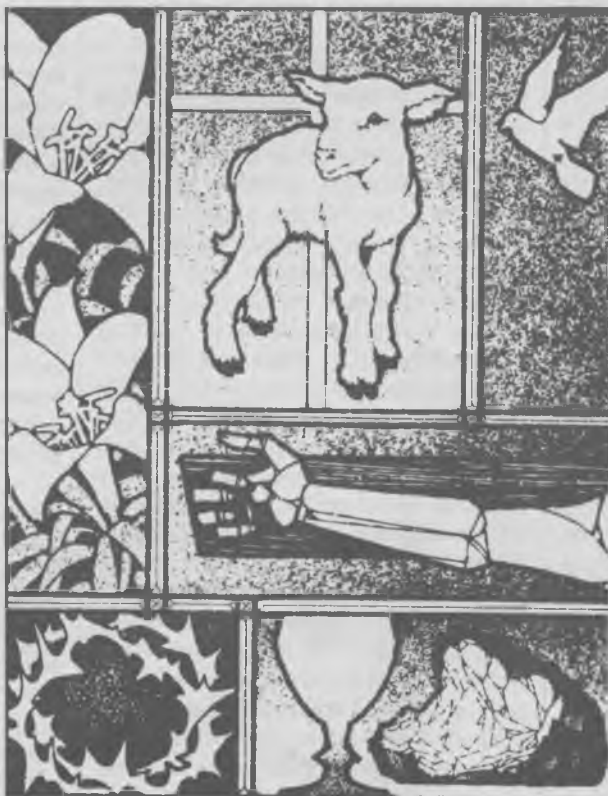
The time came to start the candle-light worship service. The elements for Communion were in place. My sermon was prepared. We sang a hymn and prayed. As I looked out over the congregation and saw the faces of those who had meant so much to me over the years, my attitude began to change.

After we had partaken of the Lord's Supper, I asked individuals to tell how God had worked in the trials of their lives, using difficulties to demonstrate His power. Testimony after testimony came forth, most exceptionally practical and ordinary, yet full of blessing.

We meditated on the bare cross at the front of the church, permitting the message of Golgotha once more to penetrate our hurried days. As we sang a closing hymn, I felt God continuing to bond our spirits together.

Then I realized that this was indeed a special Holy Week. What I had expected to be awkward and incomplete turned out warm and wonderful.

As the stillness of God's Spirit came upon us with strength, I realized anew that the reason for the Cross, the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection, is to take the mess of our sins and the confusion of our earthly pilgrimages and turn them into His glory. The beautiful appearance of a room is not what matters. Rather, people yielded to the Lord is what counts for eternity.



A Whole New Paradigm for the Church's Mission

As we approach the 21st century, we look for new handles to understand the challenges that face the future existence and expansion of the church. As leaders in God's Kingdom-building mission, we know old paradigms are dying or already dead.

In anxious, transitional times like these, it's good to know that God is never caught by surprise. He is not at a loss on how to continue building His Church. He never runs out of new wineskins in which to store the new things that He is continually doing.

Not long ago God poked His pencil into one of my mental images to draw two little new lines that opened my eyes to the new thing that He was wanting to do through my ministry. Before His lines can make sense, I need to sketch out the background canvas upon which He was working. Rick Warren, a pastor of Saddleback Valley Church in Mission Viejo, Califor-



by Doug Samples

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nia, uses a series of five concentric circles that show various levels of commitment that people experience as they get involved with their church.

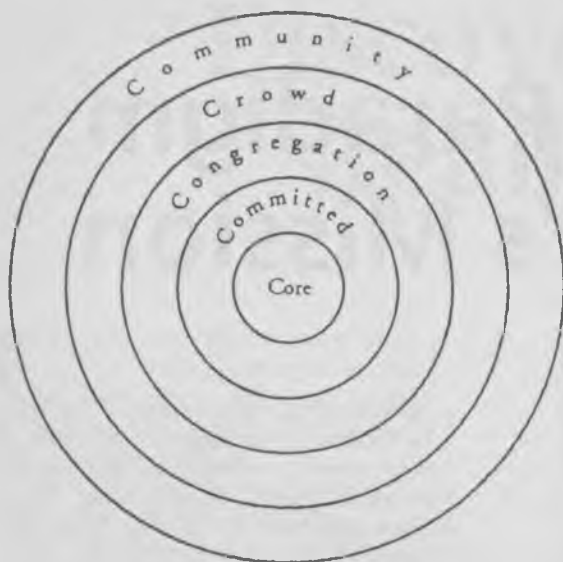
The first, outermost circle represents the **Community** of unchurched people that live outside the doors of your church. They may live in the neighborhood surrounding the church or drive from across town to drop their children off at your

preschool/daycare center. They may be hidden in the forgotten recesses of your monthly newsletter mailing list or your inactive membership roles. They may have never been inside the house of the Lord, but they live next door to one of your faithful members.

The next circle is the **Crowd**, which includes all those who participate at the worship times of your church. This group enjoys attending on Sunday morning for the worship but have not yet plugged into the rest of the church's ministry. They do not come on Sunday night, nor have they joined a small group. They may not even attend a Sunday School class. Yet if anyone asked these people, "Where do you go to church?" they would quickly respond: "I go to First Church; that's my church!"

The **Congregation** circle represents an exciting step of spiritual growth and commitment that takes place when a person sees himself or





herself as "part of the family"! At this point in a person's journey, he or she has begun to get involved in the deeper levels of the church's ministry. He or she has found a place of belonging in a Sunday School class, in the choir, in a small group, or through the Sunday evening service.

Whereas the Crowd and Congregation circles are wide and open and available to as many people as possible, moving into the **Committed** circle reflects a radically new level of depth in a person's church involvement. The doorway into this Committed circle usually is church membership. At this level of involvement, a person is often ready to make the commitment of becoming a member. Also, if he or she does not already have a place of ministry within the church nor has yet be-

gun to tithe, this is the time to address these opportunities for deeper involvement and greater blessing!

The final circle is, of course, your inner **Core** of deeply committed people who actually fuel all the ministry and organization of the church. In this Core circle you will find your ministry team leaders, department heads, church board members, staff members, and, at the center of the Core, the senior pastor. These people will be called upon and expected to make

great personal sacrifice on behalf of the greater good of the church. No one belongs in this "Furnace Room" Core who has not already built a roaring fire in his own heart for the mission and direction of the church!

Now that we have diagrammed our five circles of growing commitment to the church, it is relatively easy to describe the mission of our local church over the past four years by drawing a funnel coming into the top of these circles.

This funnel represents the **Evangelism and Discipleship** that has characterized the focus of our efforts these past four years. We have intentionally sought to open the doors of our church to as many new people as possible. We have identified the image barriers and cultural barriers¹ that

keep people away from church and have tried to remove as many of them as possible.

Dr. Millard Reed, president of Trevecca Nazarene University, once wrote, "If you want people to come to church, you have to take down the 'Keep Out' signs."² Through the implementation of Friend Day concerts; new adult Sunday School elective classes; grace-filled, need-meeting sermons; and the addition of user-friendly, seeker-sensitive contemporary worship to go along with our traditional worship service, our church is effectively finding new ways of encouraging our Community to come into the Crowd.

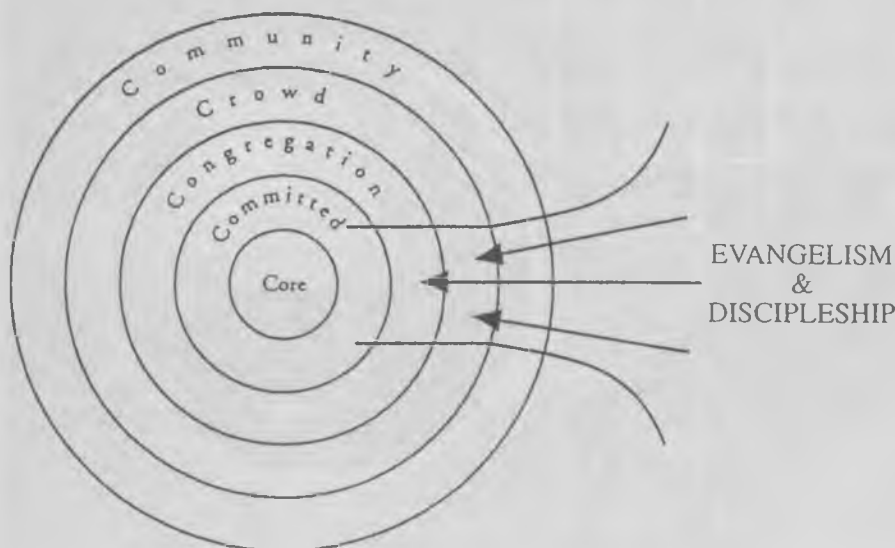
Once these new people discover that our church is a place of healing and wholeness rather than guilt and condemnation, then the warm friendliness of our people helps them to quickly become part of the Congregational "family." Many of these newcomers move into the Committed circle by attending our Pastor's Welcome Class, where they learn about the mission and focus of our local church, and the Spiritual Gifts Workshop, where they are encouraged to find a place of ministry that matches both their gifts and their time commitment.

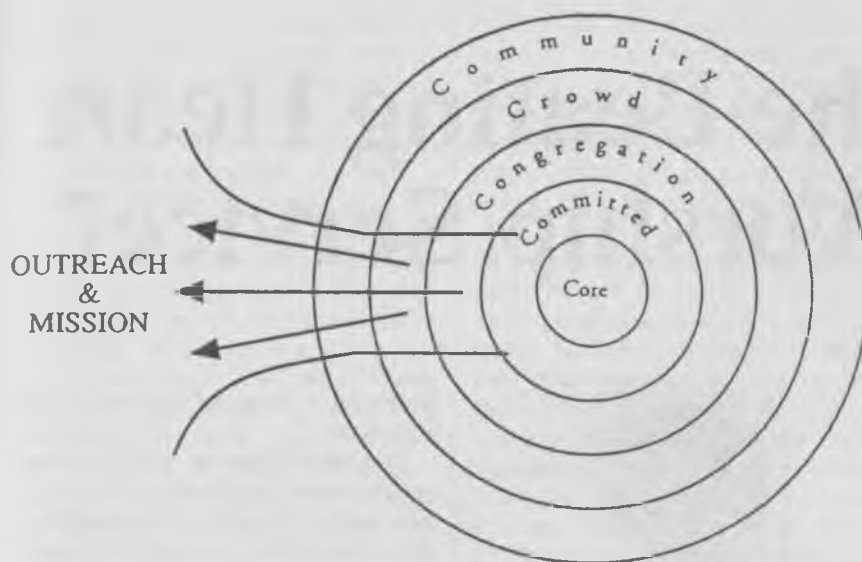
We have even seen the Core circle of leadership open itself to new people. In older, more traditional churches such as ours, the leadership circle can be one of the most closed cliques of the entire church. There often seems to be an unwritten law that requires a person to attend the church for many years before he is ever entrusted with an area of significant ministry. We have managed to break free from that unwritten law. We have allowed new people to bring their gifts and freshness into the leadership Core.³ This year, over half of our church board consists of individuals who are new to our church within the last three years.

We have seen significant numerical increases that have accompanied our intentional efforts in Evangelism and Discipleship.

Although I was thrilled by God's blessing upon our church, I was still not satisfied. Even with growth statistics, I have felt as if there was something more we needed to be doing. We were still missing something.

That is when the Lord used His pencil to draw two simple lines that gave





me a clearer vision of our church's mission for the next four years. He pointed at the concentric circles with the funnel coming into the top half of the circles and said, "Why not draw another funnel coming out of the bottom half of the circles?"

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. That would be an understatement in this instance. These two simple lines opened up a floodgate of ideas, concepts, and possibilities—enough to keep me busy for at least another four years. This new funnel represents God's challenge to our church to begin a new paradigm of **Outreach and Mission** that intentionally moves people out of the church and back into the world. It is not enough to simply bring more and more people into church. Church attendance and church involvement are not ends in themselves. As Paul Tournier said, "Everyone needs two conversions: one, out of the world and into the church; and, second, out of the church and back into the world."

As I began to comprehend the significance of God's new Outreach and Mission funnel, I discovered several hurdles that must be overcome. The biggest obstacle is the fact that we pastors are better trained and equipped for the Bringing In funnel than we are in the Going Out funnel. Most pastors know how to plan special events to draw in big crowds. Many of them do a fair job of getting their new people plugged into various ministries that the church offers.

The greater challenge, one for

which we have received little or no training, is finding ways for our people to move back into the community outside the church as a redeemed influence to those who have yet to set foot inside the church doors.

Frank Tillapaugh, in his new book *How to Break the 20/80 Barrier*, suggests that it is the fault of the pastors that more people are not involved in ministry. We have failed to provide a big enough vision beyond the walls of the church into a hurting world to motivate people to give time and energy to serve in God's kingdom.

We need to be trained in involving people not only in the **ministry** of the church but also in how to be engaged in the **mission** of the Kingdom outside the church walls! We need to encourage our people to move out in the community coaching a Little League team and serving on the PTA. They should organize two or three neighborhood block parties each year that meet at their home. Instead of inviting their neighbor to church, maybe they should invite them to a round of golf.


As soon as we encourage our people to get more involved out in the community, we immediately run into the second obstacle of time management. As a growing church family, we have done such a good job getting our new people involved in fellowship groups and various ministries within the church, they no longer have any free time for relationship building outside the church family. Sometimes the ministry of the church gets in the way of the church's mission to which Christ has called us!

A third barrier to overcome is the fact that mission work done outside the church is not as measurable as ministry work done in the church; so, therefore, it can seem to be insignificant. For instance, we already have the mechanism in place to show the growth of a Sunday School class from 10 to 15 and on up to 20. This numerical growth gives us positive feedback that we are doing good work.

However, when it comes to mission work outside the church, we have not found an appropriate way to measure how many redemptive relationships are being nurtured by our congregation. In fact, this relational caring out in the secular world may occur on so many minuscule occasions that we do not even realize that we are doing Kingdom work. This is how it was for the people in Matt. 25:35-40, who were totally unaware that when they were caring for the "least of these," they were actually doing the work of the Kingdom!

Even though there are obstacles to overcome and lessons to be learned, we are committed to the challenge of learning how to live in this new outward-focused funnel. We are committed to not only bringing people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus and a discipling relationship with our church family, but also enabling them to go back into the world as Jesus in their community.

This new commitment to Outreach and Mission enables the church to complete the mission to which Christ has called us. Rather than church being an end in itself, it becomes, first, a redemption center and, then, a sending center that returns redeemed Christians back into the world to build relationships with lonely, hurting, confused people who do not know Jesus as their Savior.

If we can accomplish that task, our churches will be full, and God's world will be changed! 

1. George G. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 85-86. Hunter says that most secular people who stray away from church do so because they have a negative image of the church. And if they ever do visit, they feel culturally alienated.

2. Millard Reed, *Let Your Church Grow* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1976), 7.

3. Opening this leadership Core to new people has created some painful but necessary losses. Several strong, committed leaders who had enjoyed church board positions that gave them significance and power under former, traditional paradigms not only have left the Core but have left the church altogether!

What Is the Beating Heart of Your Worship Service?

In many traditions, if not most, the sermon should be the beating heart at the center of the worship service. Everything that precedes the sermon points toward it; everything that proceeds from the sermon is in response to it. Yet, often the sermon fits into the most neglected part of the entire worship experience. It may not be neglected by the pastor—he has labored and prayed over it diligently—but neglected by worship planners and people in the pew.

Worship planners perform their assignments without thought for the sermon's direction or content. People in the pew relax when the sermon begins and shift to their "auto pilot" mode of worship. They switch back on when the sermon reaches its conclusion. Why is it so? How can we change it?

The problem exists because we've given the sermon short shrift in planning and because people have not been taught the central, supreme significance of the morning message. Both mistakes are easily corrected over time.

Planning ought not to flow around the sermon. Worship planning should lead directly to the sermon and directly away from it. Every aspect of the service should create either a sense of anticipation (presermon) or a sense of fulfillment and deep spiritual response (postsermon). How often, however, do the "preliminaries" (an awful term for highly significant moments) lead to an "I can't wait" attitude from the congregants? Too often the sermon becomes the pause that refreshes, the momentary break in the worship crescendo, the interlude between the stirring first and third movements of the worship symphony.

The sermon ought not to be an anticlimax. Rather than planning spectacular moments that lead to the sermon, planning ought to point to the



by Bill O'Connor

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sermon as the spectacular pinnacle of the worship experience. It is, after all, the ultimate encounter with the written and living Word of God.

Let every hymn and chorus focus on the theme of the sermon. Let every prayer and response point to the central truth of the morning message. Let the Scripture readings be relevant to the subject of the day. The key word is *focus*. Focus on what is about to happen as God's people enjoy a face-to-face encounter with their Creator-Friend. Focus on the summit of truth. Point people in that direction with every word that is sung or spoken.

Of course, the pastor must do his best to make his sermon the high point of worship. Not just informative, but inspirational. Not just tautological, but theological. Not just enlightening, but enthusiastic. Not just illuminating, but divinely illuminated by the Spirit who inspired the Word.

Sermons need not sound dry and didactic. They can live and breathe, pulsating with life. They can be, and should be, an overflow of the pastor's own worship experience, both in the sanctuary and before he enters the sanctuary. Most preachers, including myself, could take a lesson from the Black preachers of the Deep South who invite their parishioners to join

them on a personal journey up the mountain.

Pastors are planners too. We should select a style appropriate to the dominant tone of our text. We should vary our presentation to match the mood



we wish to convey through the service. We should take people with us on a spiritual journey. And we should, through worship planning and presentation, create a feeling that says, "I can't wait for the journey to begin."

People shall be more willing to go with us on the journey when they understand the primacy of preaching. Perhaps we who preach or lead worship should also be reminded about the place of preaching in God's scheme of things. Paul asks: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14). He also says, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Those two verses place preaching in the highest realm of human activity.

It is said of John the Baptist that he "came, preaching" (Matt. 3:1). The primary mission of Jesus is described as "teaching . . . preaching . . . and healing" (4:23). Peter and John "proclaimed the word of the Lord" (Acts 8:25). Philip "traveled about, preaching the gospel" (v. 40). Paul and his companions conducted their missionary activities through the primary ministry of preaching (see 16:6). Paul's instructed young Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13).

When Paul had the financial support to allow him to do so, preaching was his only task. "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching" (Acts 18:5). Perhaps if the average worshiper understood how important preaching was to the Early Church, it might mean more to him or her. Perhaps if such a worshiper understood that the apostles counted preaching their first responsibility (see Acts 6:2-4), he or she would listen more closely.


I wonder how many sermons are preached about preaching. Not many, I suspect, because preachers are reluctant to talk about what they do. If, however, the sermon is to take its place at the heart of worship, an annual sermon or series on preaching might be in order. People need to know the value that God places on preaching, and on listening to the ser-

mon as an act of worship. (Not because of the dedication that listening demands, but because it represents—indeed, it is—God's communication to His people.) There is a definite place for teaching congregants that God himself speaks through the sermon.

If we begin to teach that, of course, then preachers must do everything in their power to serve as channels through whom God can and does speak. Like Paul, we need to preach with the awareness that "my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The more we understand that reality, the more the sermon becomes an act of worship, first for the preacher, then for those who listen.

Preaching is not something tacked on to the singing and the morning anthem. It is not the parenthesis between musical sets. It is not a break in the excitement of other worship forms. Preaching is the moment to which everything before it points, and from which everything after it leads away. Preaching stands at the high point of the morning, the focus of worship, the central reason why we've come to church. At least, it ought to be. We ought to work to see that preaching is restored to what it ought to be. The heart of God beats in the Word of God, and the Word was designed to be read, studied, and preached.

Rather than assume that people will be bored by preaching, let's assume that they will be thrilled and inspired by a direct encounter with the Word of God, and with the living Word who inhabits it. Let's plan services of worship that center on the sermon. Let's plan sermons that deserve to be centered upon. Let's point to the Word, then allow the Word to point the congregation into a new week filled with enthusiasm and power.

When preaching is central, the Word is central, and God takes center stage. When preaching, properly focused and presented by the pastor as an act of worship, becomes the heart of worship, then the heartthrob of God will begin to be felt more strongly in our services. Make the sermon the heartbeat of worship. And God's heart will beat in tune with the moment. So will the hearts of His people. 


The Pulpit

by Charles "Chuck" Millhuff
Olathe, Kansas

*I've pounded thousands of pulpits
On thousands of tough battlefields.
I've wept as I've seen their faces
Spilling over with life's ordeals.
I've played the desk like a spinner
With sparks flying out everywhere.
I've seen the thing almost living—
What a thrill just to be there!*

*Some are covered with velvet;
Others are just solid oak.
Some are clear stylish plastic;
One was an icebox—no joke!
Some are as big as a frigate,
Anchored in the midst of the stage;
Some are made for the choir
With a wobbly top showing age.*

*This thing is for more than just
talking—
It's a cannon, no doubt about
that!
It shatters the myths of the devil,
When it's aimed and loaded with
fact.
I've held on to the thing like a
rocket—
Just grabbed it! It's been quite a
ride!
All the years that I've been on this
journey,
It's my joy, it's my peace, it's my
pride.*

*So the next time you look at a
platform,
And you see that thing on the
stage,
It's more than a desk for odd storage.
It's a launching pad for love and
rage.
It's my home, it's my place, it's my
anchor.
It's the ballast in the hold of my
ship;
When the seas of my life
overwhelmed me,
It's my pulpit that I loved that I
gripped.* 

Lessons from the Street People

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*

*Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer
In His arms He'll take and shield
thee;
Thou wilt find a solace there.*

From: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" by Joseph M. Scriven

After my retirement, the Lord gave me another assignment. I spent more than 10 years witnessing to street people. During those years, in a variety of ministries, I had the privilege of being His witness to alcoholics, drug addicts, thieves, prostitutes, and several other types of enslaved people that make up the community known as the street people.

Each Wednesday, I had the break-fast hour at the local rescue mission. Forty to 50 people, and sometimes more, would gather in the chapel for worship, which preceded the morning meal. Mostly men, young and old, although at times women were present. Occasionally, an entire family would eat at the mission. Some of this group were daily attendants; however, there was constant change, new people arriving and others leaving. The restlessness of street people!

The majority of the group loved to sing. The hymns they chose to sing, morning after morning, expressed the hidden depths of their lives. "Mansion over the Hilltop" was a favorite. Also "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Amazing Grace," and "The Old Rugged Cross," songs that had a mes-



by Delbert T. Morse

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sage. I was impressed by the deep sincerity with which they voiced the words of the songs. I felt the deep hunger and loneliness of their hearts as I watched them sing. Often the Lord's presence was manifested by a spirit of quiet worshipfulness.

I have known the joys and struggles of being a pastor—the privilege of ministering to wonderful people, who week after week graciously listen as we preach. They pay the bills, feed and house our families, truly the Church, the Body of Christ in our world. On the other hand, I have never ministered to a more receptive group than at the rescue mission and in other rehabilitation services. At times I have seen men, leaning forward, eagerly seeking to hear more about Him who loves them and who died on the Cross for their sins.

There have been very few disturbances. One morning as the service began, a middle-aged man in a back-seat rose up in anger, denouncing the hypocrisy and pride of the ministers who filled the rescue mission pulpit. He walked out of the chapel. Following the service, after the men had gone into the dining room for their breakfast, this angry brother came back into the chapel, almost on a run. He fell at the altar, praying with an in-

tensity I have seldom heard. Later he told me that, at one time, he had been a member of a Christian singing group. For some reason, he started drinking and ended up an alcoholic. That morning he prayed his way back to the Lord. His anger was changed to joy. The following week he came back again, rejoicing in the Lord.

I have not seen him since. Hopefully, he returned to his home background and was able to renew his life in Christ. Most street people who receive spiritual help return to their homes, and we lose contact with them.

One morning, driving through the mission area, I saw three of my friends sharing a half gallon of wine. I stopped to talk with them. They were reasonably sober, so I said to them: "You fellows have gone all out in serving the devil. Do you know what he is going to give you in return? He is going to let you spend all of eternity in hell with him." They were my friends and knew that I wanted to help them.

The next Wednesday morning when I entered the rescue mission chapel, one of these fellows came running to me. He gave me a big hug and said: "I thought about what you told us; and I decided I didn't want Satan's plan for my life. I'm now a Christian." He told me of his conversion and of the joy in his heart.

Another of these three men also prayed at the altar and found help. But soon he gave up and went back to drinking. He told me that he started drinking beer (home brew) when he was five years old. He was a veteran of World War II and became an alcoholic when discharged after the war. He later married and left home because of his drinking problem. He never quit drinking and passed away on the street. Many times I have

heard that man pray the sinner's prayer. I hope that as he lay dying in the street, that prayer was on his lips.

One night, with a group in a rehabilitation center, I presented a Bible study, emphasizing the tragedy of sin, a tragedy for which the Lord left His heavenly home and came to this world to die on the Cross, to forgive our sins, and to save us from an eternity in a place He described as "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). At the Bible study, each one read Bible portions describing the lostness of man and also descriptions of hell. Following this study, a young man came up to me and asked for prayer. He said: "I am a preacher's son. I know that there is a hell and that I am a lost sinner. I know that every word that we have read is true."

I prayed with him, and he surrendered his life to the Lord. That night, before he went to bed, a certain pastor, his father, and his mother received a telephone call that brought joy to their hearts and home.

The tragedy of a lost life is always multiplied by the reality of an eternal hell. We live in a lost world, and the street people are just a small part of it.

Years earlier the Lord gave me a verse of scripture: "And I, if I be lifted up . . . , will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32, KJV). The "lifting up" was His death on the Cross. I have found that preaching on the Cross is the most effective way to share Christ with a lost world.

The Lord Jesus responded to the thief on the cross with a promise of heaven. Only He could do that.

The high priest, in all of his priestly attire, was helpless. The leaders, the centurion, the soldiers—no one else in the whole world except the Lord Jesus Christ could have said to that dying thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

In my ministry to these men, I tried to include in every service words whereby they would know that the Lord Jesus came to this world to save them from their sins. At the close of

many of my messages, they repeated after me a prayer that always included, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." I have hoped that, even out on the street, they would know the One who could help them as well as the basics of asking for that help. I have every hope of meeting many of these people in that city where the streets are solid gold.

Also, I have learned that preaching on the Cross to the people who Satan claims as his own is a sure way to meet demonic resistance. Many times I have been aware of demonic presence. Twice I have been severely attacked.

One morning in the rescue mission, following the song service, Satan attacked me, using a man sitting directly in front of the pulpit. As I began to read the Scripture selection, he assaulted me with his eyes. He focused his eyes into my eyes. Every time I looked up, his eyes were glued to mine. I read the Bible without knowing what I was reading. I led in prayer, praying with meaningless words. My power to think was being destroyed. There seemed to be nothing I could do about it. Someone, more powerful than myself, was clouding my mind and destroying my power to think. From my heart, I cried out to the Lord for help, pleading His blood and His name. The Lord answered my prayer. He took control of the situation. Immediately those eyes dropped and stared at the floor. That man shriveled up in his chair like a little child, looked down at the floor, and sat there wiggling his feet. My mind was healed; my thoughts were restored. I had great liberty in preaching that morning.

Another time in a Bible study I had a similar experience and stopped the study long enough to witness and to share with them what the Lord Jesus has done for me. Again the enemy was defeated. The young man who was the instrument of that attack was gone the next morning.

At times, there was humor. A middle-aged man often sat in one of the front seats and encouraged the pastor by a smile and a nod of his head. Af-


ter one of the services, he asked for prayer. He said: "I want you to pray for me. I have got cancer and not much longer to live. Pray for me, that the Lord will give me one more new Cadillac before I die." And he laughed.

I don't know the entire story, but soon after that, he passed away while resting in a nearby park. At that morning service, prayer was requested for him by one of his friends.

One time I was holding services in a small city jail. Those in the jail were largely there for drunkenness, representing a variety of racial groups, plus some marines from the nearby naval air base. In that jail, we witnessed many of the tragedies associated with drinking and drunkenness. One night a man had the shakes. He would shake so violently with his whole body that he would have to grab the iron bars of his jail cell to control it.

Another night a man was continually trying to hang himself with his overall pants. Finally he started choking, and we had to call for help. One time a prisoner profanely cursed us. Another prisoner came to our rescue with doubled-up fists. He said to him: "Shut up, or I will shut you up! These people have come here to help us. You are going to keep your vile mouth shut."

But the most remembered event came from a marine. It was his second night to attend our service. Through some means he had obtained a black suit, a white shirt, a necktie, and a Bible. That night, all dressed up, he sat in the back of the room with an open Bible on his knees. Others in that jail service avoided him. He sat alone.

Even as I write this, in my mind, I can see him, all dressed up, a Bible in his hands, a witness to me and others of what it means to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, openly and unashamed. I pray for myself, that in the same way, He will help me to stand out for Him, at any cost, in any place, that others can see my love and devotion to Jesus, my Lord and my God. Amen. 

Some Commonsense Answers About Grief

by Victor M. Parachin

*Ordained minister, bereavement counselor,
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Whenver there is a death, surviving family members enter the uncharted territory of bereavement. Most people have little experience or knowledge of what grief recovery involves. The loss of a loved one generates conflicting and confusing feelings. Here are answers to some of the most common questions asked by the bereaved about grief.

The pain of loss is unbearable. How long will it last?

Grief recovery cannot be rushed. There is no quick fix. Grief recovery takes longer than most people assume. Healing normally takes three to five years. This does not mean the pain will continue to be as intense as in the early months. What usually happens is that feelings of depression and sadness gradually melt away as the bereaved adjust to the loss and begin to reinvest energy in new relationships and opportunities. Those in grief should be patient and recall the wisdom of Roman philosopher Seneca: "Time heals what reason cannot."

I am disappointed because my family and friends are not as supportive as I thought they would be. What can I do?

Unless someone has experienced a loss to death, he or she cannot truly understand the impact of grief. The bereaved can find understanding and acceptance in a support group where others are making a similar journey. A support group is also inspiring because griever can see

other bereaved people successfully managing their feelings and moving forward.

It has been 14 months since my spouse died, and I feel worse, not better. Is this normal?

Many people report the second year of bereavement is more difficult than the first. There are many reasons for this, including the fact that people are numb and in shock during the first weeks and months after a death. Again, be patient and do not expect overnight recovery. It may help to remind yourself that others have recovered from grief, and you will too.

The loneliness I feel is excruciating. Can I do anything to help?

Loneliness is common to all who experience the death of a loved one. To help ease your loneliness, find a kind, compassionate friend who will listen and allow you to speak about your pain. Grief shared is grief diminished. Remember Shakespeare's advice: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak / Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

I dread the thought of upcoming holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and other family events. How should I handle these occasions?

Joyous occasions and holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas are especially hard for the bereaved because they tend to magnify an individual's sense of loneliness. It is common for griever to dread such times, but usually anticipation of the event is worse than the day itself. It is usually beneficial to participate in family celebrations and festivities because you will gain support and fellowship by interacting with family and friends.

I can't sleep more than two or three hours at a time and constantly feel tired. Is this normal? Should I take medication to help me sleep?

Sleep disorder is extremely common after a loss to death. However, drugs and alcohol should be avoided. Sooner or later your body will take over and allow you to rest properly. Meanwhile, avoid daytime naps. Curtail and regulate the amount of time spent in bed. The more



time spent in bed, the more fragmented sleep becomes. Go to bed at regular times and rise at the same hour each morning. Don't lounge in bed.


I can't stand being in the house anymore. It used to be a place of joy and peace, but now it is a depressing place because everything reminds me of my loved one. I want to move out. Is that wise?

Unless there is a pressing financial need, you should not sell your home nor move out. All major decisions should be postponed until after the period of intense grief. You need time for your feelings to subside; then you can evaluate how you truly feel about your house and other circumstances.

I find myself crying easily and at unexpected times. It embarrasses me. Is there anything I can do about the tears?

Tears are not a sign of weakness but a sign of love. They testify to an important relationship that has been ruptured by death. Tears have a health benefit in that they relieve the body of the stress caused by grief. That is why people often feel better after a good cry. So, when tears begin to well up, let them flow. Keep in mind this insight from Augustine, a theologian of the fifth century: "The tears . . . streamed down, and I let them flow as freely as they would, making of them a pillow for my heart. On them it rested."

I feel abandoned by God. Life seems so cruel and unfair. Does God know or care about me?

When a loved one dies, it is not unusual to feel abandoned by God. Remember that He understands and accepts your feelings and loves you unconditionally. It may help to recall the many biblical statements of His care for us through all of life's circumstances. Some examples include: "The LORD remembers us and will bless us" (Ps. 115:12). "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Jesus said, "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20). Pray that God will continue to strengthen you daily and that you will be led through your sorrow into the joy that Jesus promised. 

1 Corinthians 13 for Church Board Members

by Douglas R. Wilson

Pastor, Grangeville, Idaho

If I could present my ideas as a church board member with the leadership and vision of Lee Iacocca, but did not *love others*, I would only be making noise.

If I had great vision and could successfully lead the church to follow that vision, but did not *love others*, I would only be getting people lost.

If I gave money to every offering of the many that were presented to the church, but did not *love others*, then my giving would be useless.

As a church board member, I need to have the kind of *love* that:

- is *patient* with other church board members when it seems they move too slow
- is *kind* with other church board members with whom I disagree
- is *not prideful* of my own ideas but realizes that others have ideas that have value as well
- is *polite* when someone beats me on the second—"I wanted to get my name in the minutes."
- doesn't insist on it always being done *my way*
- *doesn't get mad* when my ideas aren't accepted and immediately put into action
- *doesn't hold a grudge* against another church board member who didn't vote for my innovative and intelligent motion
- *only desires that God's will be done*

This kind of *love* will hang in there despite


personality conflicts, disagreements, and misunderstandings.

I want to have the kind of *love* that will never fail, although my plans and dreams might.

I realize that, for now, I do not have perfect understanding and knowledge. I must rely on God's direction for each decision.

When I was on the Youth Council, I thought and acted like a teen; but now that I am a church board member, I think and act like an adult—an adult that *loves others*.

Now I only see part of the total picture, and often it is out of focus. But someday I will be with Jesus, and He will reveal to me the total picture—and it will be in perfect focus. Only then will I totally understand the big picture.

All that I do as a church board member fades when compared to *faith, hope, and love*. I realize that the greatest goal for me as a church board member is to strive to have *the kind of love God showed to me through His Son Jesus*. I want to *love God* with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength and my fellow church board members and church members as myself. Compared to all else, nothing can compare to *love! Love is the greatest!* 



Renewal Through Social Outreach

Part One Historical Mandates

Who's going back to the cities?

Charles G. Finney in the early 1800s pointed out that the gospel released a mighty impulse toward social reform. On the other hand, Finney indicates that the church's neglect of social reform grieves the Holy Spirit and hinders revival.¹

The apostle John had the unique opportunity of recording the ascended Christ's observations of some of the churches planted by Paul. Our Lord's infallible comments and commands are recorded in Rev. 2 and 3. In His general assessment of the church of Ephesus, He warns that they have "left" their "first love" (2:4, KJV). He strongly commands a change with this prescription:

1. Remember what you used to be.
2. Repent of your neglect.
3. Return to your prime values.

Centuries later other newly formed holiness houses of worship were setting their priorities. For example, leaders of these Los Angeles churches were charting a course with "prime values" for the budding Church of the Nazarene. No doubt they were Spirit-led when they chose to reach the under-classed. This holiness denomination's early church history confirms the following to have been top priorities:

1. Touching the poor living in the complexity of the urban environment
2. Teaching in the city the simplicity of scriptural holiness

Metropolitan areas were then and still are a kaleidoscope of racial and cultural mixture and economic diversity, with pieces constantly falling in and out of place. In spite of this, Holiness

people brought a gospel of unity that made a difference in the life of an individual and united the brotherhood of believers.

Perhaps with the passing of time the natural human desire for ease has prompted modern Holiness churches to do two things:

1. Individuals have traded the complexity of the cities for the peace and tranquillity of the suburbs, and the church has often followed in hot pursuit.

2. We have muddled the simplicity of holiness until the average pastor and a vast majority of laymen cannot explain the experience of sanctification. To correct this, our Lord would certainly tell us, "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent" (2:5).

How we view history greatly affects our outlook on life. Three viewpoints are important in this discussion:

1. Short-term View

Americans as a whole know almost

everything about the last 24 hours. Television newscasts, newspaper columnists, and radio talk show hosts are full of information about up-to-date news. Commentators are readily available to help each individual analyze and react to current events.

However, spending so much time on the short-term view means that most Americans know only general facts about the last 24 years. Each New Year's Eve the modern media spends time reviewing the events of the last 12 months. However, little time is given relating this to recent history and trying to assimilate these facts.

The least amount of time is given to ancient history. Americans know almost nothing about the last 24 centuries. American history and a study of world civilizations are far from the most popular subjects in modern schools.

2. Middle-term View

Europeans tend to view history as it relates to the recent events. Commentators give more time to comparative studies on how current situations are seen in light of events in the last several decades.

3. Long-term View

A study of the last 24 centuries and beyond gives a much broader view of today's news. In order to understand the Bible as it relates to any subject, there must be at least an overview of ancient history.

In reporting on the birth of Jesus, Paul shows a long-term view of histo-



by Jerry L. Appleby

Pastor, Orlando, Florida

ry when he states, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4, KJV).

But what does he mean by the expression "fulness of the time?" George Salstrand comments that Paul was referring to "the moment by which the whole pre-messianic period was completed."² Then he further states that this expression means "plentitude of completeness"³ and answers to "the time appointed of the father" (v. 2, KJV).

Metropolitan areas are a kaleidoscope of racial and cultural mixture and economic diversity, with pieces constantly falling in and out of place.

When we study renewal, it is essential that we view it beyond recent happenings. While a church must look at the effects of its programming on the people to whom it is responsible, it cannot forget how the church should fit into God's plan for the world as a whole.

For example, it may not be popular today to reach out to the homeless. In fact, there appears to be a sense of "compassion fatigue" sweeping over the land. However, relating this to ancient history and studying God's handling of other people in similar situations may give some clues to the reactions expected by the church today.

SOCIAL SERVANTS AND THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT

Most Holiness denominations were conceived and born in a spirit of so-

cial awareness and servanthood to the needy. Many of the early denominational leaders felt God's special call to take the gospel to the moneyless, to the underprivileged, to any who were caught in the web of poverty.

During this inception time, a multitude of servants bound by similar goals and beliefs joined hands as they reached across the United States and stretched across ocean boundaries.

As a child I had the privilege of listening to the stories of one of the early Holiness pioneers, my uncle, C. I. DeBoard. I would never tire of the fascinating ventures he and his brother, W. I. DeBoard, encountered as they planted churches all across Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, and Arkansas. It was not uncommon for their families to be without food or in need of other necessities. Yet God provided in miraculous ways as they spread renewal across their mission field. I believe these examples are not untypical of the servant atmosphere in many early leaders of the Holiness Movement.

Various changes began taking place. Sweeping ethnic changes were seen in cities, and immigration complicated the language ministries. Very quickly the Holiness Movement that had started in a spirit of renewal was seeing less and less outreach and evangelism—and certainly a failing interest in reaching the poor and needy. Since I did not have the privilege of living in those earlier days, I can offer only my opinion based on interviews, studies, and observations as to why this happened. I have concluded that these are the major reasons:

1. The district and general church machinery increased, thus putting high demand on the budgets of local churches. While early General Assemblies and district assemblies urged the regular support of rescue missions, homes for unwed girls, orphanages, and other social homes; by 1914 the pressure was felt. A committee of the Northwest District Assembly, Church of the Nazarene, asked, "Are we getting so much machinery inside the church that we have no time for any of this kind of work . . . ?" They insisted that to fold one's arms and sing, 'Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,' was no substitute for reaching out in honest love to help lost men."⁴
2. "Material millennialism" faded

into a seeming fatalism concerning social reform. In the foundation years there was a faith that the church could make a difference in the sin-drenched bowels of the cities. By 1912 these ideas were beginning to be labeled as doomed to disappointment. The May 15, 1912, *Herald of Holiness* stated, "This is the devil's world, so claimed by him and so declared repeatedly by the authority of God's Word."⁵

These and other articles began to reflect a no-win attitude toward social evils. A movement that had stood out on labor, liquor, inequality, and other social issues of their times now faced many issues with resolve that the world would no doubt win.

Consequently, the social work that had inspired so much devotion in the early years suffered from steadily increasing neglect. Rescue homes and missions disappeared from district programs. Pronouncements on social issues, when made at all, were buried in the reports of committees on public morals whose real preoccupation was standards of personal behavior among church people.⁶

How we view history greatly affects our outlook on life.

From this subtle change in attitude has evolved a number of barriers that cause the Holiness Movement difficulty in communicating with the poor, the ethnic, and the urban dweller. This also slowed the renewal thrust that was so evident in earlier years. However, several issues have recently been overcome and have once again allowed church people to feel a sense of renewal. They are:

- a. *Freedom from sin and the poor.* "Redemption and lift" is the theory that people who are saved from their sins will naturally lift themselves socioeconomically. The time factor may vary, but seldom does the principle change. One of the possible negative

offshoots of this is a feeling that sin and poverty are equal. When middle- and upper-class Christians, including Evangelical Christians, talk of their comparative wealth in terms of God's blessings, they imply that their good fortune is an evidence of His favor—the result of their righteousness. At the same time, we also imply that the poverty of the poor is an evidence of His displeasure—the result of their unrighteousness. While this does not arise from Christian belief, it appears to be commonly practiced as denominations rise out of their poverty roots and begin their socioeconomic lift.

In order to understand the Bible as it relates to any subject, there must be at least an overview of ancient history.

b. Cleanliness and godliness. Some of the most often quoted "scriptures" do not even exist in the Bible. One of the most common is: "Cleanliness is next to godliness." With the Holiness Movement's emphasis on holy living and application of scriptures like "clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:4), the natural interpretation of cleanliness has been firmly planted in people's minds. Very few cultures share America's unusual desire for everything to be clean. We will drop perfectly clean food on a freshly scrubbed floor and declare it dirty. We often confuse dirty with messy. It is possible to overemphasize external cleanliness and thereby bring a misinterpretation of internal purity.

c. Anticity bias. The Bible itself reflects the bad reputation of the cities.

We read in Genesis that the first city was built by Cain, a murderer (4:17). Babel had its problems, with the people eventually being scattered across the land (11:8). Fire and brimstone were the only alternative for Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sins (chap. 19).

A wrong attitude toward the cities appears to have affected the Holiness churches and their ability to communicate with the cultures that traditionally live there. The largest ethnic harvest in the United States is now ripe in the cities. Renewal can only happen if we do not allow our prejudices against these areas to slow the evangelistic thrust among other cultures.⁷

3. The terms "deacon" and "deaconess" are derived from the Greek term used in 1 Tim. 3. This term, *diakonos*, actually means "servant." Deacons are servants. Their functions are to serve in a number of useful ways. Verse 11 refers to women. The distinction points out that these are not simply the wives of deacons, but an order of women set aside as servants of God (vv. 8-13). Some of them are named in Romans, with the first, Phoebe, actually being called a deaconess (or servant) (16:1, RSV).

The order of deaconess in the Church of the Nazarene is defined as one who "believes that she is divinely led to engage in ministering to the sick and the needy, comforting the sorrowing, and doing other works of Christian benevolence, and who gives evidence in her life of ability, grace, and usefulness."⁸ Other duties include "praying with the dying and pointing them to the Saviour, seeking the lost and wandering and endeavoring by all means to lead them to Jesus Christ and salvation."⁹

Emily Carlson's life was a beautiful illustration of this order. I conducted her funeral on October 29, 1984. She was an active deaconess in the Bresee Church of the Nazarene for 35 years. In this capacity, she made 1,200 to 1,500 calls annually. These visits were actually made to the sick, the elderly, and other shut-ins. Virgil Shoemaker, a present member of the Bresee Church, commented:

I remember how Mrs. Carlson ministered to my aunt, Mrs. Grace L. Stromberg. My aunt suffered a stroke in 1933, which left her par-

alyzed until her death 20 years later. Most of this time she was a bed patient. Twice a week Mrs. Carlson walked the better part of a mile to our residence, bathed my aunt, combed her hair, washed it as needed, changed the bed, and tidied up the bedroom. At the same time she was caring for two little girl twins, relatives who had to be cared for. They too walked the distance. Our family shall be forever indebted for this sacrifice of love.¹⁰

We imply that the poverty of the poor is an evidence of God's displeasure.

During the time the deaconess cared for Mrs. Stromberg, she continued to minister to others as well as to her own family's needs.

Unfortunately, these Nazarene social servants in the community faded quickly and now are bordering on extinction. But recently a new group has begun to replace them. A group of young adults have felt God's call to inner-city missions.

4. Social issues shifted from denominational and district sponsorship to individual responsibility. Instead of cooperative proclamations made by groups of churches, each individual was encouraged to make his or her own decision about social ills and pledge personal support.

5. There developed a distinct separation between home and foreign missions. Mendell Taylor comments, "The leaders operated on the principle that home and foreign missions were inseparable twins. Both must be promoted together."¹¹ They talked of the "mission of the church" and not about missions. They were determined to dedicate the men and material necessary to accomplish the task.

While in these days there is little

difference in methodology used in missions at home or overseas, there is still a strong distinction within the church organizationally. I feel we must go back to the admonition of Dr. Bresee, "to possess this land, both for its own sake, as well as the conditions of service to every land."¹²

THE PAULINE EXAMPLE FOR RENEWAL PASTORS

Why is Paul an example?

1. Paul was a churchman. He did not try to rebel to the extreme of going outside the church. When possible, he fit into the system. When he could not, he tried to change the system.

It may not be
popular today
to reach out to
the homeless.

2. Paul conducted his evangelism "in community." His whole methodology was based on winning and establishing churches for the community. This brought about true community renewal.

3. Paul trained others to feel a "third race" identity. The people belonged to their culture of the past (often Jewish). They lived in another culture (often Greek). But their connection to the Christian life was more important. A Jewish Christian felt closer to a Greek Christian than he or she did to a Jewish non-Christian.

4. Paul kept close ties with the churches that he had planted. He insisted that they develop a unique relationship to Christ and to him.

5. Paul had a unique wisdom when he worked with cross-cultural problems. He did not avoid them!

Paul was an outstanding biblical example of a renewal pastor. Because of this, what characteristics of Paul should also be present in a renewal pastor?

a. They write letters (2 Cor. 2:14-3:6).

Paul was an excellent communicator. He wrote letters, he spoke to

crowds, and he dealt with individuals. People read his letters and found them to be interesting and helpful. Their lives were changed by them, and many responded by giving, praying, and helping.

A renewal pastor must be able to communicate his message in a way that brings response from his people.

b. They expect sacrifice (Col. 4:1-18).

A wise and witty Englishman once defined an educated person as one who can do three things: (1) entertain himself; (2) entertain others; and (3) entertain a new idea.

The very word, "entertain," is misleading in this connection. "Grapple" would be better. The ability to grapple or wrestle or contend with a new idea until we have the true measure or contend with a new idea until we have the true measure of its worth—this lies at the heart of education.

(1) Little monetary rewards

I have brought up my children in multicultural settings. It has drastically affected their attitude toward being a missionary in the city. In fact, two of my adult children are serving in the inner city now, and the other is studying in seminary for missionary service overseas. Ray Bakke said, "If Elisabeth Elliot can take her children to live with the headhunters that killed her husband, I can trust God to take care of my children in downtown Chicago."¹³ I totally agree!

(2) Little recognition

Denominational and district recognition are not usually set up to give awards for attitude changes in the lives of people. Also, social programs that meet the monetary and physical needs of the poor are often overlooked in public recognition.

(3) Little understanding

Few understand the joys, frustrations, and disappointments of working with people who have other cultural values. Someone has truthfully said: "The city worker today must not bruise easily."

c. They are not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:1-17).

Examine the scripture until the gospel is communicated:

(1) that is adequate for every era.

(2) that is adequate for every culture.

(3) that is adequate for every person.

It is then that renewal is possible for the entire congregation.

d. They believe that faith works through love (Gal. 5:16).

First Cor. 13 is not a goal. It is a lifestyle that must be lived. When reaching out to the needy and less fortunate, it is essential that they see love shining through all other activities.

e. They state their faith simply (Gal. 5:16-26; 6:7-10).

A Dictionary of the Bible and Christian Doctrine in Everyday English is a project in which I am grateful to have been a small part. It began when several of us dreamed of providing materials to Christian workers trying to work with people who spoke English as a Second Language. What developed is an excellent tool to communicate the gospel in simple words that can be easily understood. In the introduction, it states:

We have tried to produce a dictionary that puts the results of sound theological and biblical research into everyday English for today's average lay reader. Those whose own expertise is beyond the level at which this dictionary is written may find it useful in explaining the Bible and Christian doctrine to others less schooled.¹⁴

The largest
ethnic harvest
in the United
States is now
ripe in the
cities.

f. They believe that the Church is the people of God (Eph. 1:1-14).

Too many denominations in the United States have conformed to the pattern of the culture in which they exist. The cultural values of Americans have crept into the church and dictated everyday practices. Detrimental aspects of this value system have been:

(1) Each individual congregation

has claimed ownership of the property entrusted to them. Without proper teaching, this possessiveness will lead to selfishness when some other culture or language group wishes to share the facility. Proper teaching will show that all possessions, including the church property, belong to God and are to be used in any way necessary to win the neighborhood in which it is located. I was appalled when a pastor of an ethnic congregation was told by the church who owned the facility that his congregation could use the bathroom to get water for their coffee rather than open the locked kitchen.

(2) Another negative effect of American cultural values is that buildings are constructed for the benefit of those presently attending the church, with little thought of future outreach. When this happens, usually no plans are given to the needs of the poor and needy, the immigrants and the refugees.

(3) Since our culture does not smile on several families sharing one house, it is difficult for churches to understand the concept of several churches or groups of people using the same facility.

Paul had a unique wisdom when he worked with cross-cultural problems.

Dr. Bresee, in an often quoted statement, said: "We want places so plain that every board will say welcome to the poorest . . . Lest the Church of the Nazarene be true to its commission; not great and elegant buildings; but to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and wipe away the tears of sorrowing; and gather jewels for His diadem."¹⁵

g. They believe in the future (Phil. 3:1-14).

Several years ago, the Committee

for Economic Development, composed of 200 leaders in business, government, and education, met to consider the question, "Can we afford tomorrow?"

My first reaction to the question was almost flippant: "Why worry about tomorrow when we're not even sure we can afford today?"

However, I have come to the conclusion that the church of today and tomorrow depends on a lifestyle change by most of the church people.

Social issues shifted from denominational and district sponsorship to individual responsibility.

David Biggs, one of the members of Bresee Church of the Nazarene where I formerly pastored, helped me on the subject of tithing and giving to the church. He pointed out that it is not a principle of the New Testament. But he goes on to say that it is not our job to decide how much we will give to the church, but what lifestyle we will live so we can give everything else to the church. He tells of the example of John Wesley (I do not remember the exact figures), who gave £10 to the church and lived on £50. But when he started making more, he did not change his lifestyle—he only changed the amount he gave to the church. Income of £500 would mean £50 for living and £450 to the church.

Another man in my congregation said together with his wife that they were bringing home \$75,000 a year. He testified that at that time they were giving 10 percent. If they made \$150,000, he said, they could give more to the church, indicating that they would still give 10 percent. Dedicated Christians must go beyond this

if we are going to reach the church of today and the future!

b. They are rebels with a cause (Eph. 6:13).

First Cor. 13 is a lifestyle that must be lived.

I love it when Paul writes, "And having done all, to stand" (KJV). You have heard the flip but true saying, "If we do not stand for something, we will fall for anything."

It is important for a person to know what he stands for and know why he stands for it rather than for some other idea. Once this is established, then stand for it through easy and difficult days.

If renewal in America with all of its ethnic diversity is important, then there must be more "rebels" that are going to stand for the cause through thick and thin.

i. They are responsible citizens (Phil. 2:1-13).

I am speaking of citizens of the Kingdom. Oh, yes, I believe in being a responsible citizen of America. I believe it is important to vote and voice opinions. But it is vital to examine our stand as responsible citizens of the kingdom of God. Let me illustrate.

We arrived in Samoa in 1969 to be missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene. Great foundational work had been accomplished by Jarrell Garsee. But we were ready to expand to other islands and plant new churches and form a district. Eventually we were even able to start a Bible college. As a young, beginning missionary, I had lots of questions. What was Christian in the Samoan context? Which of my beliefs were formed from Nazarene culture, and which were biblical? What ideas did I have that were really American culture? I had to be responsible enough to sit down with my Bible and begin to examine my beliefs according to what the Bible said, not according to what I had been taught in the context of American traditions, my home church, and my church college.

Diagram 1

Culture
American

Worst Sin
murder

Least Sin
cheating on
income tax

Samoan

stealing from
your relatives

adultery

Christian Ministers

adultery

cheating on
Sunday School statistics

That leads into the next point:
j. They have a true sense of value
(Eph. 4:11-16).

Culture greatly influences our value structure.

Social
programs that
meet the
monetary and
physical needs
of the poor are
often over-
looked in
public
recognition.

In speaking around the country, I have carried on a survey that I started when I was in Samoa. I was curious to find out what was the "worst" and what was the "least" sin according to an individual. I found out that in: See diagram 1 above.

In all cases the Sermon on the

Mount is a wonderful guideline to measure our standards. It was Jesus' way of communicating cross-culturally to Jewish people the values of God.


The city worker
today must not
bruise easily.

k. They seal their loyalty with their lives (2 Cor. 11:21-30).

Ministers dedicated to renewal in the lives of the people will really give their lives to it. It will dominate their ministry because they are missionaries, not appointed by the system, but approved by God and called by Him.

My Uncle Cale, C. I. DeBoard, started about 25 churches in Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, and Arkansas. He was always associated with small churches. However, he started Lafayette Park Church, where I was saved, and he pastored it until it ran 350 in attendance. He then turned it over to a young pastor who stayed there for 25 years and took the attendance up to 700.

I used to sit at his feet and listen to his stories and think: "The church

sure stood by Uncle Cale. He is living in a nice home and on a nice retirement." Only a few years ago, I went back to St. Louis and looked at that home, a humble two-bedroom house. I found out later that Uncle Cale got \$50 a month from retirement and barely struggled to make ends meet. But he loved it and made me feel good about it too. He was a missionary in the truest sense. He was my Paul, and I was his Timothy. I praise the Lord for these experiences. 

1. Jerry Appleby, "Social Servants and Nazarene-ism," a paper presented to the Association of Nazarenes in Social Work, ref. No. 4-86.

2. George A. E. Salstrand, *The Time Was Right* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 11.

3. Ibid.

4. Timothy Smith, *Called unto Holiness*, vol. 1 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1962), 270.

5. Ibid., 318.

6. Ibid.

7. Jerry Appleby, *Missions Have Come Home to America* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 38-60. A more thorough treatment of this subject is found in the pages listed above.

8. *Manual, Church of the Nazarene, 1980* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1980), 203.

9. Ibid., 204.

10. Conversation with Virgil Shoemaker on Oct. 25, 1984.

11. Mendell Taylor, *50 Years of Nazarene Missions*, vol. 3 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), 10.

12. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1907), 23-24.

13. Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 159-60.

14. Albert Truesdale, George Lyons, J. Wesley Eby, Nancy Clark, eds., *A Dictionary of the Bible and Christian Doctrine in Everyday English* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 7.

15. *Manual: Church of the Nazarene 1908* (Pilot Point, Tex.: Nazarene Publishing House, 1908), 3.

What Is at the Heart of Worship?

by Brent Wyss

Worship pastor, Colorado Springs

Hymns or choruses? Projection or chorus sheets? How can I get the service to flow? How do I change my song leader into a worship leader? Every time I attend a function with other pastors, I find myself answering these questions. Even at my last credentials board meeting, as they were approving my ordinations, pastors asked these questions. They have churches trying to make changes in worship style. These questions are relevant but usually spring from a desire to find the tool, trend, or gimmick that will change the worship service into something they think it should be but have difficulty making it happen.

The longing is for a real, transforming work to be evident in worship. Though the goal is correct, the questions often reveal a lack of understanding about the nature of worship. Worship happens at the level of the individual. The power of worship is in the understanding of who God really is. Worship is a condition of the heart first. Only after we understand this will we understand better the impact and relevance of the corporate worship service.

Most of our problems with the worship service stem from the me-centeredness of those who attend. "Blessing collectors" want to leave feeling that those in leadership have given them what they want. However, what they need may never have been addressed. Worship happens at the level of the individual when he or she focuses on God. My primary call as a worship leader must be to lead the worshiper to focus on the Lord, not on his problems, not his agendas, not his neighbor or the pastor, but on

God himself. When people truly sense His omnipotence, they find that their very real problems have very real solutions in His power and presence.

We speak of the sovereignty of God, but we have difficulty bringing it down to the level of our daily lives. That ability to see His eternal perspective operating in our daily walk is at the center of personal worship. If God is God, He is always, continually God. We know this is true, but often we forget to help our people make application on a daily basis.

Too easily their daily troubles overshadow the Almighty. Our focus on His power does not eliminate the struggles, but it does place them in perspective with that which is immutable and eternal. That this great, all-powerful God who holds the universe in place knows and cares about us individually should be a constantly treasured and awe-inspiring reality. This idea is the driving force behind

worship that allows the Spirit to have a life-changing effect in both our private and corporate worship times. The bigger our God, the more complete our trust. We need to help our people celebrate this fact. What better people than Holiness people to understand that everything we are and do is an act of worship?

When this becomes the goal of worship, the form of worship becomes a limitless variety of ways to express His greatness. Whether it is a scripture, a great hymn, a timely chorus, the giving of offerings, prayer, or listening to the message, they each provide a vehicle or worship that points to God himself. When worshipers understand this goal, that He is the Focus, they become much more open to the vehicles used to express worship.

The variety of expressions speak from the heart. When your child creates an art drawing out of love, do you scrutinize its value as an art form, critiquing it as appropriate to the genre, or as progress toward some future value as a piece of art? No, you accept it with gratitude and place it on the refrigerator door! I wonder if God doesn't feel that same way. Our Heavenly Father values the genuine expression and the variety of expressions of love and adoration given as sincere gifts from His children.

I'd hate to think that He has a scale of what the proper standard of performance and style should be for worship. That is a standard *we* are constantly trying to define. Is not the vast God of creation more concerned about the motive behind the gift than the gift itself? Didn't Jesus try to explain that worship is a matter of spirit



and truth, not external procedures (John 4:23-24)? The Scripture is replete with examples of worship that today would be seen as somehow not appropriate or downright sacrilegious.

I am not trying to make a case for "anything goes as an expression of worship." There should be proper order. What we offer up as worship should have integrity. But who do we think we are, assigning our individual value judgments, which we rarely can agree upon, to these expressions meant for the Father of limitless creativity and beauty? He taught the birds to sing! Our creativity and expression flow from Him. Do we really think that He is more impressed by a Bach cantata than a simple expression of love like a chorus of "I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice. . . ." Or more impressed by a praise chorus than "The Hallelujah Chorus"?

They all have value, but it is at the heartfelt level that our praise is acceptable to the Father, not at the level of performance. Although we should choose to offer our best as a sacrifice of praise. At this heartfelt level the worshiper is transformed by God's presence in worship.

Yes, indeed some things can help in the area of public worship—flow, focus, musicality—but all of these things must be seen as a part of the broader aspect of worship. It is the understanding of a sincere heart focused more on God than on ourselves to which we must move our people.

We think that changing the style of the service will change the hearts of the people. No, we must help the people understand through biblical teaching what it means to have a changed heart. Then a change of style, if necessary, will be led by the Spirit and have relevance. In fact, each individual part of the service will have a specific relevance that can be entered into with joy, rather than with the suspicion that somehow I'm being manipulated by some new fad that is working its way into the service. It is then that trendy gimmickry fades, and the timeless, powerful truth of God's power and glory can be seen and expressed in its ever expanding forms, which concern themselves less with what is acceptable to man than what is pleasing and acceptable to God.

On the Tree Was a Thorn



by Joe Seaborn

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On the tree was a thorn.

Just a plain brown spike, hidden among the green leaves and the pink flowers. From a distance you would never have known it was there.

Especially in the summertime. In that season when the leaves are exploding with grandeur and the flowers are flinging their spores of new life and the limbs are sagging with luscious fruit, it's hard to see the thorns.

But never forget it on the tree was a thorn.

In another season, the tree can look like it's nothing but thorns. When the winter blusters in and the chill sets in and the snow flies and the green leaves and the orange fruit and the blue sky are all swept away, the thorns stand out like vivid spears, piercing the sky in a thousand directions.

I have known a few people who claimed that we should act as if there were no thorns, as if caring for this great "gospel tree" was a life free of frustration and care, stress and struggle, sharp points and jagged barbs. But I've lived too long to believe that.

Never forget it on the tree was a thorn.

The tree is not all thorns. There will be fruit aplenty. There will be seasons when you are sure that you have landed in the Garden of Eden, and the serpent is dead. I hope you have a hundred such seasons. I hope you go for days when all you see is ripe fruit and pastel skies and rich earth tones.

But never forget it on the tree was a thorn.

Really a thorn is a reminder, a string tied around the finger of a tree to remind us that in spite of all the beauty of our world, there is the potential for pain in there too. As long as we live on this side of eternity, as long as we are the Church Militant, as long as evil is a factor in the cosmos, we need to keep alert to the thorn.

Someday it will be removed. Someday the potential for pain will be no more. Someday the thorn will itself blossom, and from its needle shape will flower an eternal fragrance. But until then, keep an eye out; unless yours is highly unusual, on the tree will be a thorn.

The Preretirement Years: Financial Planning

Submitted by Pensions and Benefits USA Church of the Nazarene

The preretirement stage of life can cover the years from age 50 to age 65. During this time of life, many parsonage families become "empty nesters." They realize that the years have passed quickly and that retirement is on the horizon. For far too many parsonage families, their first serious efforts at financial planning for retirement begin during these years. No matter what your age, there is great truth in the principle that it is "never too early to begin planning your retirement finances."

It may encourage you to know that ministers generally live longer than any other professional group. However, before you go out and spend all your money on extra birthday candles, realize that with extra years come extra responsibility. More than most other groups, ministers must plan carefully for their future. You should ask the following questions about preretirement financial planning.

How Much Money Will I Need in Retirement?

You will probably need to plan on living on less money in retirement. But the good news is that you may be able to reduce many of your expenses. For instance, you may need to maintain only one car, have a reduced need for business attire, and a lessened obligation to entertain. In these ways, as well as many others, you can reduce expenses significantly.

Set the goal of initially having a minimum of 70 to 75 percent of your preretirement income coming in at retirement. Don't forget to include in your calculation the rental value of the parsonage provided during your ministry.

Make adjustments gradually rather

than suddenly. With this in mind, start living on less, beginning three to five years prior to retirement. Finding corners that can be cut, without reducing the quality of life, can be a challenging, but very rewarding, adventure in preretirement planning.

How Can I Project My Retirement Income?

Generally, retirement income will consist of your social security benefits, your pension benefits (including tax-sheltered annuity benefits), interest and dividend income from personal savings, and postretirement earnings.

Your denomination's pensions office can help you estimate projected benefits from your retirement plans. You, like many ministers, may find that, during the "empty nest" years, you are able to contribute substantially to your tax-sheltered annuity plan. This not only will reduce your taxes but also will provide for tax-deferred compounding of interest on the assets. Benefits from your church's pension plans, including the tax-sheltered annuity plan, can be declared as housing allowance at retirement, and substantial amounts can be received as tax-free benefits.

Your local social security office can

assist you in estimating your future social security benefits. You should check the accuracy of your social security income records every three years. If no questions are asked within a three-year period, the record becomes a permanent and unchangeable part of your social security history. By calling the Social Security Administration (1-800-772-1213), you may request a form to check your record at no charge.

You also will want to check carefully with either social security or denominational pensions office to determine the amount of income you may earn prior to age 70 without jeopardizing your social security benefit. Remember that the fair market rental value of any parsonage provided, including the utilities paid, counts toward social security earnings test.

Some ministers are fortunate enough to have extra sources of personal income. These may have come from an inheritance or from personal savings and consist of investments in stocks, bonds, real estate, and other assets. All of these need to figure into your retirement planning schedule.

If your planning indicates a significant difference between retirement needs and retirement income, you



need to plan carefully how you are going to cope with the shortfall. If the gap is too large, you or your spouse may need to continue working, at least on a part-time basis, beyond the time of your retirement. Retired ministers often have opportunities to supplement their income by continuing to serve as supply pastors in smaller churches or by turning other skills and hobbies into paying propositions.

How Can I Handle Unforeseen Emergency Expenses?

Sadly, many of you will face a financial emergency in your retirement years. As preparation, you should attempt to have from \$10,000 to \$15,000 in an interest-bearing account that is accessible to you. You should firmly commit that these funds are only for a *real* emergency. Small consumer loans and credit cards may be convenient sources of emergency funds, but they carry a very high cost. Your adequate emergency fund can eliminate the additional expense of interest. Use this fund only as a last resort, and make every effort to replenish it after it has been accessed.

How Will Inflation Affect Me?

Inflation is a significant problem for anyone on fixed incomes because purchasing power diminishes as prices rise. Although social security has a built-in cost-of-living factor, its future may be in doubt in light of federal deficits and future social security tax increases to support the system.

Long-term inflationary trends are very difficult to project, but we cannot ignore them. The best approach is to put aside as much money as possible before you retire. It is also important that the earnings or return on your invested assets be greater than inflation. Otherwise, the real value of the investment declines. Few ministers have ever said that they had too much retirement income. May you be so "unfortunate."

How Can I Project My Living Expenses in Retirement?

First, establish a budget and develop a record keeping system now. This will help you know how you are spending your current income and will help you discover expenses that you can reduce after you retire. You

may even find funds now that could be saved to help with your retirement funding later.

Certain types of individuals find maintaining adequate records easy and enjoyable. Others find it time-consuming and frustrating. Even if you are one of the latter, you must do it anyway. Unless you have records that categorize your living expenses prior to retirement, you probably can't predict your retirement living expenses.

What About Insurance Needs After I Retire?

Insurance needs change significantly with age.

In the health arena, surveys confirm that many retirees worry about having a major illness with inadequate hospitalization benefits. You need to understand that Medicare provides both hospitalization insurance and medical insurance. The medical insurance portion is optional, and, if you choose, you may pay a monthly premium for it to social security. Medicare does not pay for everything, and the plan has undergone, and will continue to undergo, many changes.

Many private insurance companies offer "Medigap" policies that supplement Medicare. Congress has established federal standards for such policies. In most states, you may choose from a standard list of 10 Medigap packages. Of course, the more comprehensive packages cost more. Be informed and shop carefully. You should explore the offerings of different insurance companies to make the best choice at the best price for your specific needs.

Life insurance needs change drastically with retirement. At retirement, your primary purpose for purchasing life insurance no longer exists. You no longer have to worry about protecting your dependent survivors from the loss of income between the time of your death and the time your income would have ceased at retirement. If you have sufficient cash resources to cover final expenses and burial, then you may not need much, if any, life insurance.

Carefully evaluate whole life insurance policies that you may have taken out long before retirement. Check to see if the policy's monthly premiums must be paid until death, or if the policy could be converted to a paid-up

policy with no future obligations. Also check to see if the policy has accumulated dividends that could be withdrawn to meet retirement needs. In addition, if substantial cash values are built up in the policy, you may withdraw these on a tax-free basis to supplement your retirement income. Continuing to pay large insurance premiums during retirement years can drain your available finances significantly and unnecessarily.

Carefully rethink your insurance needs, perhaps with the assistance of a trusted insurance adviser. This is an important part of your retirement financial planning.

What Can I Do About Housing in Retirement?

Many ministers either will live in a parsonage throughout their ministry or will receive a housing allowance. Retirement ends these benefits from the local congregation. If you haven't begun already, start saving money now for your future housing needs. Then, plan your housing arrangements carefully in light of the amount you have set aside for this purpose. Perhaps you will rent an apartment or a condominium. You may purchase a mobile home, a prefabricated home, or a standard home. You might move into a retirement community.

Some ministers have purchased small houses during their years of active ministry and rented them out. This supplements their incomes and prepares a potential home for the retirement years. Still others have had conscientious churches that have placed "retirement equity funds" into their TSA account to assist with retirement housing.

Ministers usually have a significant tax advantage in retirement housing in that benefits from their church-sponsored TSA plan account may be designated as tax-free housing allowance. This housing allowance tax shelter is important both before and after retirement and is unique to church-sponsored plans.

Use common sense when considering a location. Retiring where you had your last pastorate may sound appropriate and desirable but may not be the best idea. Living next door to married children may seem appealing if you enjoy the grandchildren, but it may also limit personal freedom. You

might be thinking about moving to where the climate is better, but moving to a new area may be difficult if you do not make friends easily. No one can make these decisions for you, and careful planning can bring you greater peace of mind in making these important decisions.

What About My Will?

An updated will is always an important part of a minister's financial plan, whether it is before or after retirement. Rethink your will at retirement because conditions change. There are many unhappy stories of ministers and their spouses who did not think about changing an obsolete will or who ignored making a will at all. Good stewardship demands that you protect your assets and make certain that your resources are left as you desire. Your denomination has an office that can help you draw up a will in proper legal form that carries out your wishes.

Be sure to check that the executor of your estate can be recognized as an executor in the state in which you retire. Make sure that the language empowers the executor to determine how to handle situations not covered specifically in the will. The executor should have the power to pay all claims of the estate. Your spouse and your executor should know where your will is kept. Copies of the will should be given to your executor and to your attorney. Any changes in your will should be made by your attorney to make sure they will be legally recognized.

Planning—It's Your Job

By answering these questions you can plan and anticipate a meaningful period of life after your active years of ministry. Planning comes right down to you as an individual. No one will do the planning for you. You must do it yourself. Planning is a process that should be ongoing. You and your spouse should review your plan frequently to determine how well you are meeting your plan's objectives and to revise those objectives in light of your real-life situation.

Proper financial planning for retirement may seem like a major task, and it is. But then, nearly 30 percent of one's lifetime may be spent after retirement, and doesn't 30 percent of your life deserve adequate planning?

Today's Books for Today's Preachers

Revival Fire

by Wesley Duewel
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)
PA031-049-6616, \$14.95

Dr. Duewel is a well-respected author in the area of prayer. This recent release is a dynamic indictment of our day regarding prayer.

Revival Fire documents numerous periods of revival throughout the world and highlights the religious and secular environment of the day. It also briefly discusses the involvement of God, the people of God, and the people not readily acquainted with the movement of God throughout His creation. Throughout the 350 pages of text, Dr. Duewel repeatedly brings out the importance of concentrated, convicted, committed prayer, by the people of God of all

ages. In a day where we believe revival will come through the effort of prayer on Sunday morning and evening services and maybe Wednesday evening prayer service, it is refreshing to read of the hours and days of prayer that preceded the "falling of the fire."

Revival Fire presents a strong statement regarding "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). I personally appreciated the fact that secular businesses and schools closed down for periods of one hour up to two or three days, in order for the people to be engaged in concentrated, convicted, committed prayer for the Holy Spirit to visit, and endue with the glory from on high.

—Terry Pinkerton

You Might Be a Preacher If...

by Stan Toler
(Tulsa, Oklahoma:
Albury Publishing, 1995)
PA188-008-9467, \$7.00

Theology, administration, study, sermon preparation, counseling, crisis management, growth statistics, and so on. It is enough to drive any preacher crazy! While ministers must address these relevant issues every day, they still need a good laugh once in a while—right? Right!

Stan Toler has written a book just for you. His one-liners, coupled with great cartoon illustrations, will put your oppressions to flight, put bounce back into your step, and bring a smile to your face. Stan wrote this little book to help clergy persons regain perspective and repossess some sanity.

John Maxwell wrote about author Toler: "Anyone who meets Stan Toler knows immediately that he is an original. No one else I know has the same kind of wit, charm, and positive outlook on life that he does. And he is also one of the funniest men I have ever met."

Stan collaborated on this book with his preacher brother, Mark (Toler) Hollinsworth. Mark and Stan have about a half century of wonderful stories between them. This book is an outgrowth of their Monday morning coffee hour often spent reviewing and finding humor in the previous Sunday.

These same one-liners will whet your appetite for the rest of the book:

You might be a preacher if...

... you've ever received an anonymous U-Haul gift certificate.

... you've ever been tempted to stock the baptistery with catfish.

... you've ever dreamed you were preaching, only to awaken and discover you were.

... you've ever asked for the clergy discount at a garage sale.

... you find yourself counting people at a sporting event.

... you'd rather negotiate with a terrorist than a church organist.

You Might Be a Preacher If... is a book that will make you laugh out loud! Go ahead; you just might need that today.

—Derl G. Keefer

So You're the Pastor's Wife— What Does That Mean?

Called to Be a Helpmeet

Editorial Note:

This is specifically written to pastors' wives. Nothing has yet been submitted from a lady pastor's husband. We would welcome some good material from such men.

"Oh, so you're the pastor's wife!"

How many times have you heard those words? And wondered, like me, just what are the expectations that lurk behind them?

When my husband knew his call to the ministry had been confirmed, I wondered where I fit into the plan. There were no college classes for prospective pastors' wives. Many students' wives went to work to pay their husbands' way through college. That, in itself, became an expectation put onto other wives who chose to stay home in order to care for the little ones, making mothers feel guilty and frustrated. How could I prepare for the ministry?

I determined to educate myself as best I could in order to prepare as well as possible for whatever task lay ahead. I read every book I could get, old-fashioned and modern, that could tell me about other pastors' wives. Carefully I sifted through their treasures to find the gems that fit me and my family, mentally storing things that I knew were of priceless value, rejecting some that seem irrelevant for today.

Then I cornered every pastor's or missionary's wife I could find, asking them the same question: "What must I do to be a good full-time minister's wife?" Here are some things they shared. I am still shaping them to fit me and my situation. Since I know how little privacy they get, I have changed their names.

Linda said: "Don't go into the ministry unless you know you will lose your soul if you don't go. When things



by Mary Paynter

*Pastor's wife,
Pietermaritzburg, Republic of South Africa*

get tough, you will need to be able to hang on to something, and that something must be the certainty that you have been called there by God." Many times I have found that truly the anchor that keeps the soul is that sure

Truly the
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knowledge of my relationship to Jesus and His call. Scriptural knowledge can too easily sound like just another platitude, a weary old thing we trot out as pills for others' ills. If I allow my relationship with Jesus to become as stale

and cold as yesterday's coffee, I am the worst kind of hypocrite, and bitter to the taste.

Linda also told me: "The hardest thing about being a pastor's wife is the criticism—especially when my husband and children are criticized. Still, I try to thank the critic for coming to me and not simply spreading his or her views around the church. Then I take a hard look at the criticism—it may be valid. If it is, I can change the situation with prayer in the power of Jesus Christ. If it isn't valid, I have to put it aside with a forgiving heart."

Amy said, "Don't make the ladies your friends." But how can you do that and not seem cold and distant? I've tried to be careful not to get so close to one or two of the ladies in the church that others feel excluded. Certainly many things known in the parsonage we can't talk about. Yet somehow one must be "all things to all men [or women]" (1 Cor. 9:22). Many ladies are crying out for someone to be a friend. They need the sort of friend who cares enough to listen, without judging or sermonizing; that will lend a hand when things are tough, helping to bear the load that is peculiarly a woman's. They need someone who will pray with them and for them about their husbands and their children; or having no husband or no children, about their jobs or unemployment. They long for someone who will laugh and cry with them in births and deaths, in all the ups and downs of ordinary, funny human life. Can the pastor's wife be that sort of friend? I think we *must* be.


Many said, "Just be yourself." Martha's husband added, "Within reason." "Whose reason?" I wondered. I saw a woman trying desperately to be the self that others expected her to be. Then, when she was altogether her-

self, the things she did and said had been bottled up so long that they came out distorted and hurtful. Rather, God made me. If He thinks that my husband can be a minister with me as his wife, I can be free to be all that He made me to be. I can try to help others in my church discover their own uniqueness and to express that uniqueness in ways that glorify God.

Some said, "You will have to get a job, of course; you could never live on a pastor's salary." Why not? Sure, many in our churches will have better things than the parsonage family. But then, we're not in this for things—are we? I like the approach of a dear pastoral couple who said that if Jesus could feed 5,000 people, He could surely take care of their family. Their wonderful grown children, well educated and faithfully Christian, are a glowing testimony to their faith.

Then, of course, others said, "You can't possibly take a job; you must be available at all times." One pastor replied: "The church hired me, not my wife. We must work out what is right for us." I admire the evangelist's wife who patiently sows seed with the folks she meets through her work, then calls on her husband to reap the harvest—true partners in ministry.

What about the pastor's home? Should it be locked tight like Fort Knox? Or should it be as open as Grand Central Station? Everyone has different ideas, but it comes back to, "Be yourself." Yes, a family's privacy and dignity must be preserved. Yet warm, loving, Christian family life is a rarity and a powerful witness in these days of fractured families. Young people have to learn how to sustain a marriage and other relationships. How will they know what to do unless they see it being done? Perhaps now, more than ever, the manse or parsonage should provide a vivid alternative to the relational instruction from the television sitcoms.

Now that my husband has done his time at college, served his apprenticeship as an associate, and serves as the full-time pastor of a church, these nuggets of wisdom are all the more meaningful, being tested in the fire of everyday ministry. I know one thing for sure, however: I will never stop learning what it means to be the pastor's wife. And I know that I am called to be a helpmeet. 

The Preacher's Wife



by Elaine Cunningham

*Pastor's wife,
Wenatchee, Washington*

You've heard of Preacher Noah;
he did all kinds of stuff.
But have you ever met his wife?
Now she was really tough.

Old Mrs. Noah carried tar,
filling many a pan.
She made the beds and cooked the meals.
She never walked—she ran.

The people laughed and shouted;
it really gave her pain.
"Look there at Mrs. Noah;
she thinks it's gonna rain!"

And when the ark was finished,
she stood beside the door
Just counting all the animals,
two by two—and more.

Inside the ark, she shouted,
"Here, Noah, get the broom;
That big old ornery elephant
is in our living room!"

For forty days and forty nights,
it surely was a mess;
She fed and cleaned, and then she said,
"I need a brand-new dress."

One joyful day she walked on deck
to look for grass and trees.
She saw a rainbow far above
and knelt down on her knees.

"There'll be no floods upon the earth";
I know the Lord can't lie.
Our God has truly blessed us
with a promise in the sky."

The tears of joy began to flow—
a flood right down her face.
Her heart was filled with praise to God
as glory filled the place.

So when you meet a preacher
and learn about his life,
Go, take a look behind the scenes—
remember Noah's wife.

Holiness and the Lay Movement

Recently, a group of us gathered to discuss the new reformation taking place with the rise of the lay movement. This wave of interest in ministry seems to be the result of an outpouring of God's Spirit along with a critical mass of the postwar generation reaching midlife and finding a need for deeper fulfillment than merely consuming. Promise Keepers provides one example of this fresh breeze blowing. Regardless of the causes, churches, books, and resources are addressing a renewed interest in the biblical premise of the priesthood of believers. As our group discussed how we might facilitate the



by Alan E. Nelson

*Pastor,
Scottsdale, Arizona*

lay movement in our own denomination, questions were raised as to how our Holiness distinctions intersected

with lay ministry. At least four main reasons demonstrate why we need to be on the cutting edge of this movement, given our doctrinal beliefs.

1. All Believers Are Priests

The Bible says: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6). Peter continues the theme in the New Testament when he writes: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

When we get to heaven, there will not be two lines, clergy and laity. There will be only one, marked "priests." Much of the hierarchical distance between the clergy and laity lacks biblical precedence. It has become acceptable through centuries of tradition and assumptions. Although many of the clergy have accepted their "higher" calling and perpetuated their specialness, the laity have allowed it as well. One reason the laity have allowed it is because when you are a priest, you are supposed to act differently. As a pastor, I know that society treats you differently when it finds out you are a pastor.

Those who are not pastors can get away with more. Therefore, we have intentionally or unintentionally created two different standards, one for clergy and one for laity. What things would your pastor do or say that would shock you but would not raise



an eyebrow if another layperson did them? We expect more from pastors because—they are pastors. Although the Scriptures prescribe harsher judgment on those of us who have ministry gifts of influence (e.g., pastors, teachers), we are not told to pursue different lifestyles. All priests should live lives becoming of priests. If all believers are called to be priests, then we need to start thinking of ourselves as such at work, in school, at the mall, in traffic, and around the neighborhood. What things would you not want your pastor to say, think, or do? Such is to be your lifestyle as well.

The lay ministry movement reclaims our calling to serve as priests regardless of where we work or live. As priests, it is our individual responsibility to seek a lifestyle that reflects that calling. Thus, holiness necessarily emphasizes that all believers fulfill their reputation, not simply the few professionals.

2. A Minister Is a Grace Dispenser

Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). At first we are taken aback by such a dogmatic statement. We can think of many things we can do without Christ. But He was saying that we can do nothing of eternal value without Him. We could define ministry as that which we do through Christ and His Spirit. We are told that at the time of judgment, many people will profess to all the good deeds they did, but sadly they will be denied entrance into the celestial city. The reason is that they did them on their own. Regardless of whether you are a Christian, when you do good deeds without God's Spirit, the deeds fall flat. They are chaff that blows away. The difference between ministry and good deeds is the source of the power. Sometimes only God knows the difference. Therefore, all ministry is alike, regardless of whether it comes from an ordained elder or a layperson. The term "lay ministry" is really a misnomer because ministry is ministry. Perhaps someday we will get beyond the term "lay ministry" and refer to all grace dispensing as ministry.

God calls priests to minister. Every believer has a call from God to minister to those around us who need His grace. In essence, ministry centers on dispensing God's grace. A minister is

basically a grace dispenser. Like a saltshaker, the container is merely the vessel for the salt, not the creator of the salt. God calls everyone to ministry. He calls some of us to minister

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primarily to the Christian community to equip, train, and motivate the body to function properly. Pastors talk about their "calling," while laypeople refer to their "vocations." The word "vocation" comes from a Latin root from which we get the English word "vocal," or literally, "to call." A vocation is a layperson's calling to minister to people outside of a church set-

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ting. We must begin to see the importance of seeking God's guidance in our jobs, home purchases, shopping locations, and so on, because He brings people across our paths who need His grace. As they meet us, we have opportunity to dispense grace to them.

The role of holiness in grace dis-

pensing insists that the vessels need to be pure and holy for both efficiency and effectiveness. Fat and impurities clog our arteries, making our hearts less efficient by restricting proper blood flow. Similarly, sin, selfishness, and an unsanctified ego restrict the flow of the Spirit in and out of our lives, making us inefficient. A holy God with His Holy Spirit require a holy vessel in which to live and work.

Holiness also enhances our effectiveness as ministers. For too long we have equated holiness with a mind-set of condemnation and alienation of those who were not godly. True holiness does not seek to alienate those lacking grace, but rather embraces others to Christ. When we strive to minister as dirty vessels, people will not be impressed concerning our testimony for Christ. But when our lives truly demonstrate a pure lifestyle, the grace we dispense will be effectively absorbed. Just as we do not drink from a dirty container, we diminish our ministry when we do not reflect our Source. Understanding that we are ministers, grace dispensers to other people, we begin to see how important it is to be a holy vessel.

3. Lay Ministry Is a Part of Spiritual Growth

Christianity is a relationship. Instead of a static lifestyle, holiness involves a dynamic life of growth as we increase our capacity for God. True spirituality involves consumption of the Word as well as its application. In our ardent desire to study the Bible and learn its sound doctrines, we sometimes equate mental assent with fruit bearing. The holiness message begins with salvation but recognizes that there is more to the picture. We seek completeness in Christ. Our theology recognizes a second work of God's grace to both purify and empower. The message of full salvation says that one's Christian life should involve seeking constant growth in Christ. That describes the essence of spiritual formation.

One very important aspect of spiritual formation is ministry. If we only consume, even the finest of spiritual foods, we become unhealthy unless we exercise. Spiritual constipation among Christians stands at epidemic proportions. The author of Hebrews

says, "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (5:13). Righteousness shows up in the right-use-ness of our time, motives, and resources—holiness. The Bible says, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (v. 14). The writer implies that spiritual meat is basically the application of spiritual truth. We are to "constant[ly] use" what we learn.

**The difference
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You never see a fishing boat on the Dead Sea. Why? Nothing lives there. Water flows in but has no outlet. After you get into the Word, you let the Word get into you by obedience and action. Ministry provides an outlet for what you have learned. Christians not involved in ministry, regardless of how much biblical knowledge they may have, will only grow to a certain level. Knowledge in the biblical sense is not intended for mere mental assent or recognition, but especially given for application in ministry. Spirituality can only be recognized by whether or not a person acts upon spiritual truth in ministry. Ministry, a vital part of our spiritual formation, paves the road of holiness.

4. Imitating Christ


When asked to prioritize numerous Old Testament laws, Jesus synthesized them by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength . . . Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). In the past, popular holiness strove to set external standards in

hopes of measuring internal change. Of course the problem remains that you can replicate behaviors without manifesting real heart transformation. Although simplistic and reductionistic, the heart of holiness is Christlikeness. We desire to imitate Christ.

Jesus not only is but also does. On earth, He constantly ministered in situations, touching bodies, healing hearts, dispensing grace. True piety is not a matter of being; it is also doing. Doctrine that stops short of ministry is not sound. Holiness involves incarnational ministry. Ministry that relies on human strength and talent does not follow the ministry of Christ. Jesus is the incarnation of God, and He is our Model as well. Incarnational ministry flows out of who we are as a natural process. Trees do not try to grow fruit. Healthy trees grow fruit naturally. In John 15, Jesus tells us that if we abide in Him, we will bear fruit. Too much Christian effort goes into fruit bearing, and too little into abiding. As we abide in Him, we will automatically be compelled to minister.

John Wesley, founder of the Holiness Movement, emphasized the importance of both holiness as well as the ministry of the laity. He quickly realized that the work of the Kingdom was far too big for him and a handful of professionals. Thus he en-

listed many people to disperse the work of God. If holiness truly is the imitation of Christ, then we must become ministers. Jesus saw the needs around him and touched lives. He did not heal everyone. He did not do it all. But He obediently followed His Father's leading as a minister of grace. The holiness call today urges us to become ministers. We must involve ourselves in others' lives, to lighten their loads, to heal their hurts, to love and to accept them into God's kingdom.

We stand on the verge of a New Reformation. God is doing a new thing in our midst. If we desire to experience this new wine, we must get ready by sewing a new wineskin to contain it. Our old wineskin, the one where a few professionals carry out the majority of the ministry, will not contain the new. We need churches that recognize the priesthood of all believers and that will enable each Christian to find a place of productive ministry inside or outside the walls of the local sanctuary or both. We need pastors who are leaders of ministers more than they are spiritual technicians and church managers. The holiness message and the lay movement go hand in hand as we recognize every Christian's priestly call and duties. 



"Writing hymns is harder than I thought.
I can't think of anything decent to rhyme with 'Hallelujah'
except 'glad I knew ya' and 'we'll tattoo ya!'"

Recruiting Adult Workers

by Gary Shank

Freelance writer, Olathe, Kansas

The church organization uniquely depends on unpaid volunteers to carry out its God-given objectives. Week after week, a host of people give their time and talents in an effort to fulfill the mission of the church. This reliance on volunteers has been referred to as both the greatest weakness and the greatest strength of the Evangelical church.¹

With the diverse needs of the church, there are too many demands of time and energy for any individual to effectively lead and grow a viable ministry. The task is simply too large for one person. But more than that, the lone ranger approach misses a large part of the church's objective: discipling, teaching, and training others to go, win, and repeat the process—all are vital to the commission of Christ.

The New Testament makes it clear that "every member of the body of Christ is a minister."² Each plays a significant role and becomes an integral part of the healthy functioning and growth of the church. Every gift has been given in order that the saints might be equipped to serve and build up the body of Christ.³ Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the leader helps individuals discover their gifts, understand their needs, and live out their Christian calling in satisfying and fulfilling ways.⁴

Today's leaders must provide for the various tasks and ministries necessary to fulfill the mission of the church while effectively managing all of the church's resources. One writer pointed out, "Volunteers are the most important resources a church can have."⁵ It is the responsibility of the leadership to find volunteers and to create an environment in which they will be motivated to serve.⁶ Recruiting and equipping the next generation of leaders provides an avenue for the development of persons and their

gifts, makes application of their assorted gifts to the benefit of the whole body, and insures that the work will survive beyond the tenure of current leaders.⁷

In his book *Working with Volunteer Leaders in the Church*, Reginald McDonough suggests that God has placed within every church the creativity and resources needed to achieve its unique mission.⁸ He further states that God will not give a mission without also making available the resources necessary to carry it out.⁹

While often reported that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work,¹⁰ "The biggest reason why people don't volunteer is because no one asked them to."¹¹ According to Douglas Johnson in *The Care and Feeding of Volunteers*, "In the typical congregation, 30-65 percent of the members are willing to serve . . . if they know they are needed, if they are challenged with a responsibility that matches their interests and abilities, if they are given meaningful assignments, and if they know they are appreciated."¹²

The next generation of leaders is already a part of the organization among the fellowship of believers. How do we recruit them, develop them, and enable them to serve?

1. Pray

Begin the recruitment process by praying for the Lord's leadership. Pray specifically that God will direct you toward people with compassion who are willing to share in the vision and burdens of the church. Pray for people willing to stretch and learn new tasks and assume new roles of leadership. Pray for good judgment in approaching potential volunteers.¹³

2. Determine the need

Since all programs should develop to address a particular need, identify the need. Determine which needs are feasible and in keeping with the stated mission of the local church. Research and know the need thoroughly.¹⁴

3. Identify objectives

What can be done in order to minister to the community in the identified area of need? What programs will be required, and what tasks will peo-



ple need to perform? Be as specific as possible, narrowing the objectives down to individual tasks and responsibilities.¹⁵

4. Identify skill and knowledge needs

Each program and task will require different skills in order to adequately accomplish the objectives. Determine what skills will be necessary.¹⁶

5. Create a purpose statement and job descriptions

By defining the mission and providing detailed job descriptions, potential volunteers can more readily determine their fit within the organization and with a given assignment. In fact, the better defined the job description, the easier it will be to identify and attract the right person for the job.¹⁷

6. Begin a prospect list

Start by identifying those people among the congregation who have talents and interests that will be helpful.¹⁸ To do that, leaders must know the people, learn their hopes and fears as well as their interests and aspirations.¹⁹ Such a knowledge is crucial if leaders are to help the body to identify, develop, and apply people's gifts in service. Only then can members be directed to the activities or events that will be most fulfilling.²⁰

7. Inform the congregation

The need for workers should be announced to the entire congregation for prayerful consideration.²¹ Share the vision, the ministry opportunity, and how it relates to the overall mission of the church. Goals that are agreed upon by both the volunteer and the organizational leadership insure ownership of the goals by those responsible for their attainment.²²

8. List interested applicants²³

Hopefully, the people who have expressed interest are a part of the larger list of potential prospects compiled earlier. Review all names and consider their appropriateness to serve in the particular capacity.

9. Visit prospects

Conduct a personal interview and discuss needed skills, job requirements, expectations, and potential for personal growth. Do not seek or accept a decision at this time. Your goal is to inform and to determine interest.²⁴ "Never minimize the importance of a job in the church. . . . If a person is going to perform this task

through study and worship, it is a big task."²⁵ Make the assignment worthy of their time, effort, and ability.

**"Volunteers
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10. Conduct preliminary training

The object of the session is to help potential volunteers better understand what will be expected of them and allow them to get a feel for the task. At the same time, evaluate prospective volunteers for compatibility with the needs of the organization. This is a good time for potential volunteers to get familiar with any materials to be used, and to begin to develop strategies and methods.²⁶

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unique
mission.**

11. Second interview

After the initial training session, follow up with a second visit. Ask for questions, and address any misgiv-

ings. The written job description and expectations should be discussed and understood in the context of the mission.²⁷

Allow time for a decision, and avoid pressuring people in order to fill a position. Getting members involved at their level of comfort and ability increases the likelihood that they will follow through on their commitments.²⁸

12. Ask for a commitment

Be sure to specify a definite time period. Knowing that the commitment is for a certain time allows the volunteer the option of changing or stepping down in the future.²⁹ When asking for a commitment, be sure to indicate your commitment to the volunteer: What are you willing to do to insure the person's success? How will you support and help this volunteer?

13. Training

"Every volunteer needs training."³⁰ When people assume positions of responsibility, they have the right to expect adequate resources and training to help them succeed.³¹ Staff training should be an ongoing, year-round effort geared toward building the lives of the volunteers as well as imparting knowledge about the jobs they hold.³² Training promotes morale and decreases the risk of frustration and the likelihood of failure.³³ Success and accomplishment create a sense of security that increases satisfaction and willingness to serve. Successful, motivated people will participate in more things that they enjoy and feel capable of doing.³⁴

In addition, it is important to express appreciation. Be open to suggestions and ideas. Work at developing the creative input of others. In this way, leaders are created and equipped for carrying out the mission of the church.

Conclusion

In order to attract and hold volunteers, their competence, knowledge, and skills must be recognized and put to work. The gifts of the individual are very much a part of the healthy, functioning body. The role that each volunteer fulfills is unique and necessary to the mission of the church.³⁵ Successful supervisors seek to match volunteers' gifts, talents, and interests with needed job skills for maximum personal growth and satisfaction.³⁶

Volunteers want to unite with a

cause in which they believe, to do something they consider of value,

Goals agreed upon by the volunteer and the organizational leadership insure ownership of the goals by those responsible for their attainment.

where they can make a *difference*. Most of all, volunteers want to make

When asking for a commitment, be sure to indicate your commitment to the volunteer.

a valuable contribution.³⁷ They give themselves to the work of the church because it represents something meaningful and purposeful—"a force for good in them and in the world."³⁸

Therein lies the strength of the volunteer in the church.

Go ahead, *ask* qualified persons to serve in meaningful positions. People need to be needed.³⁹ They will feel honored by your recognition of their competence. But first, do your homework. Develop job descriptions and determine the place of the individual task within the overall mission. Share that vision with those whom God has gifted in the area of need. Share your enthusiasm and support. Allow the volunteers to use their creative energies toward the accomplishment of the objective.

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"Walter, . . . I've come to the conclusion that you and your wife are the perfect candidates to sponsor our youth group this year, . . . I can back that up with several verses of scripture if you like . . ."

Freeing the Church from . . .

The Beg, Borrow, and Steal Syndrome

by Ray Bowman

Architect and church consultant,

with Eddy Hall

Freelance writer, Goessel, Kansas

As my wife, Sally, and I entered the 3,500-seat sanctuary, the warm voices of gathering worshipers welcomed us. Sparkling Christmas trees, graceful garlands, and the cheerful clamor of the orchestra tuning up heightened our anticipation. Though we were visitors, we knew the music here was always excellent. This was Christmas Sunday; today it would be extraordinary. And the pastor, we knew, was one of the best preachers around.

Sure enough, the congregational singing, the prayer time, and the special music—all invited us to worship. But then something happened that I won't soon forget. The pastor stepped to the pulpit and announced that by the following Sunday the church had to raise over \$100,000 for its end-of-the-year mortgage payment. Then he went on to make a long appeal for funds.

Though his appeal was as gracious as anyone could have made it, by the time it was over our focus was no longer on the Christ child; it was on paying bills. The pastor went on to preach an excellent sermon, but I couldn't enjoy it. The long interruption for fund-raising had destroyed the spirit of worship. Nor did the members welcome the appeal any more than we visitors. They had long since grown tired of almost every Sunday sitting through yet another request to pay debt.

But of all the people there, the one

who most abhorred what happened that morning was the pastor. He had been forced to take on the thankless task of every week begging people to pay a debt more massive than the church could reasonably bear. He later told me, "The burden of debt is so heavy, sometimes I don't think I'll survive."

This church, though certainly not by design, had fallen into a pattern of begging, borrowing, and stealing. The pastor was forced to beg because of the church's extensive borrowing, and to make debt payments the

church was having to steal funds needed for ministry. And I was partly to blame.

The Difference a Hat Makes

Twenty years earlier this church had hired me to design their building, a building for which they borrowed heavily, and I had cheered them on. In fact, as a church architect, I had become something of an expert at persuading hesitant church leaders to borrow to the max and showing them how to do it.

This church had bought wholesale



into the borrow-and-build thinking I so enthusiastically advocated. They had borrowed for various projects, each time expecting it to bring growth, but they had been repeatedly disappointed. And now paying the debt had come first, even when that meant using funds urgently needed for ministry.

For most of my life, I had considered all this normal. I had seen pastors beg for money so often that I thought nothing of it. I was so used to churches putting debt payments ahead of ministry that I had accepted it as the way things had to be. And, of course, I not only had seen church borrowing as normal but also had enthusiastically promoted it.

Then I changed jobs. I became a consultant helping churches coordinate planning of facilities, finances, and ministries. No longer was my focus on building church buildings; it was on building churches.

Through working with scores of churches on their finances—some thriving, others fighting for their financial lives—I learned that the beg, borrow, and steal syndrome is widespread, but it is also curable. Pastors don't have to borrow, and churches don't have to steal funds from ministry to pay for institutional maintenance. Though the process is neither quick nor easy, a financially burdened church can replace indebtedness with provision, institutionalism with purpose, and insufficiency with plenty.

From Indebtedness to Provision

Early on in my consulting I noticed a pattern: The more debt a church had in relation to its income, the less financial freedom for ministry it tended to have. What would happen, I wondered, if churches built debt-free—living within the income God provided—and used the saved interest for ministry?

Next I realized that most of the churches asking me for building advice didn't need to build at all; they had better alternatives. I began helping churches devise creative ways to get more out of their facilities. While each situation was unique, some solutions proved useful in many churches.

Move classes to the right size rooms.

Moving large classes to large rooms

and small classes to small rooms gave larger classes room to keep growing.

Replace pews with chairs.

Good church chairs are not cheap, but they cost far less than building. By replacing pews with chairs, some churches made their largest single space, the worship area, useful for a variety of ministries seven days a week.

Build a storage shed.

When rooms were used as storage closets, they could be freed up by building a low-cost storage building.

Add a fellowship foyer.

For a growing church to get out of debt and stay out of debt, it must hold multiple worship services. To make this practical, some churches added a fellowship foyer big enough that those leaving one service had room to visit with those arriving for the next.

Using these and other innovations, some congregations have been able to grow to two or three times the size for which their buildings were originally designed without needing a major building program. Then when they have built, by building intensive multiple-use facilities, they have cut the number of square feet needed by half or more.

By avoiding interest and building multiple-use buildings, some churches have saved 50 to 75 percent of their construction costs—money they could then use for the real work of the church, meeting people's needs in the name of Christ.

From Institutionalism to Purpose

I've read scores of church mission statements, and I haven't read a bad one yet. Every church has good intentions. But the church, like any other organization, can get caught up in pouring most of its time, money, and energy into maintaining its own structures and programs until its mission gets little more than lip service.

One way to gauge your church's true priorities is to go through your church budget line by line, assigning each dollar of spending to one of six categories. Three of these categories—facilities, staff, and operations—pay for maintaining church structures and ministry programs. The other three are for sharing—money the church gives away to meet the needs of people outside of

the community, people in the community, and people within the church.

Maintenance and Ministries

Facilities
Staff
Operations

Sharing

People outside the community
People in the community
People within the church

How does your church's spending on maintenance and ministries (facilities, staff, and operations) compare with its spending on sharing? A church that spends freely on itself while giving far less to others may be driven more by institutionalism than by a sense of mission.

Is spending among the three sharing categories balanced? Giving to world missions is important, but it is no substitute for personal involvement in ministry to people in need right on your doorstep. For every dollar they give to world missions, I urge churches to also earmark a dollar to meet needs within their own communities and, even more important, a dollar for financial needs of people within the church. If we neglect the needs of our own spiritual family, the Bible says we don't have God's love in us (1 John 3:17).

When a church is reducing the proportion of its budget spent on facilities and staff, when it is increasing spending for sharing and outreach, when it is moving toward the goal of devoting one-third of all staff time, facility use, and operations spending to ministries of intentional outreach, that church is on its way from institutionalism to purpose. It is learning to put its money where its mission statement is.

From Insufficiency to Plenty

Growth costs. A nongrowing church doesn't need much money. If the people give the church 3 percent of their income, that is usually plenty to keep it going. But for a church to sustain modest growth, the people need to give an average of 5 to 6 percent of their income. And for a church to sustain growth of 10 percent a year or more requires a giving level of 8 to 12 percent.

Why? Because it takes money to

Picture Windows for Preaching

operate ministries of intentional outreach. It takes money to add staff. It takes money to adapt or build facilities. It takes money to sustain growth.

How can people be inspired to give at this level? A generation ago, institutional loyalty motivated much church giving. Today baby boomers and baby busters are far less likely to give out of institutional loyalty than their parents and grandparents were. The secret to inspiring people to give generously, even sacrificially, in today's church is to invite them to give not to an institution, but to a vision.

One pastor explains his church's approach this way: "We don't say, 'We need this amount of money.' We say, 'This is the ministry God is calling us to do; and, by the way, this is what it will cost.' The vision for ministry comes first; finances are secondary." He has discovered that when people have a vision worth giving to, they love to give.

Set Free to Fly

A church struggling financially is like an airplane that is overloaded, off course, and underfueled. The load of debt is so heavy that the church uses most of its energy just staying aloft. A church whose mission statement gives priority to ministry and outreach but whose budget gives priority to institutional maintenance is like a plane whose flight path doesn't match its flight plan. And a church whose giving is a fraction of what is needed to sustain vigorous growth is like a plane carrying only part of the fuel needed to reach its destination.

By itself, no amount of financial expertise can make ministry happen. But if a passion for ministering to people inspires your church to do whatever it takes to get out of debt, reorder budget priorities, and multiply giving, your church can enjoy a greater freedom for ministry than ever before. No longer overloaded, no longer off course, no longer underfueled, your church can be set free to fly. ✠

Adapted from *When Not to Borrow: Unconventional Financial Wisdom to Set Your Church Free* by Ray Bowman with Eddy Hall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). Ray Bowman, a consultant living in Larkspur, Colorado, works with churches to coordinate planning of facilities, finances, and ministries. Eddy Hall, a freelance writer and editor, lives in Goessel, Kansas. They are also authors of *When Not to Build: An Architect's Unconventional Wisdom for the Growing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

Picture Windows for Preaching



Compiled by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor,
Three Rivers, Michigan

Fellowship

Linda, a young single woman, decided to travel the rugged highways of Alaska in the fall of the year. She thought she would travel the highway between Alberta and the Yukon, not realizing that one didn't travel that route in a rundown Honda Civic. Only four-wheel drives ventured out on the roads that time of the year.

Finding a room on the mountain near a summit, she left word to be awakened at 5 A.M. so that she could get an early start on the road. The puzzled look from the desk clerk had left her a bit uneasy as she snuggled under the covers for the sleep she desperately needed. When the call came at five that morning and she peered out the window, only to see fog shrouding the mountaintops, she understood his quizzical look.

Being independent and not wanting to look foolish, she got up and started to breakfast. Two truckers invited Linda to join them for coffee and food. The place was tiny; she felt obligated to join the pair. The white-

bearded one asked, "Where you headed on a morning like this?"

"Whitehorse," she replied.

The younger one of the duo responded a bit sarcastically: "In that little Civic? Not a chance! This pass is dangerous in this kind of weather, even for a four-wheel drive, much less a little car like the one you drive."

"Well, I'm determined to make it," was Linda's not very informed but gutsy response.

"Then I guess we're just going to have to hug you," the old trucker suggested.

"There's no way I'm going to let you touch me!" Linda began to scoot back from the table quickly.

"No, not like that, woman!" the trucker chuckled. "I mean I'll put my truck in front of you and Charley here will put his truck at the back of your Civic. In that way we'll get you through the mountains." She agreed. All that foggy morning Linda followed the two red dots in front of her and had the reassurance of a big escort behind her as well. They made their way safely through the mountains to Whitehorse that day.

Fellow Christians often travel through dangerous passages of life. They need our "hugs" as well. They ought to feel comfortable to know that Christians who passed that way before go before and behind them, tenderly encouraging along the mountain passes, leading and following safely.

Craig Brian Larson, ed., *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 77. ✠

Spiritual Intimacy

More than Just Prayer

I just hung up the telephone. It was a new caller with an old concern.

Throughout the years that the CoNET Heartline (a confidential counseling hotline for pastors and families in the U.S. Church of the Nazarene) has been available, there are times that I see patterns of having the same kind of call from different people. This person asked the same question that some have asked before: "Am I the only person who calls with



by Douglas Williams

CoNET coordinator,
Nashville



this concern, or are there others?" Unfortunately, I had to tell her that she was one of many. There was relief in her voice, but also some sadness. She doesn't understand why there are so many calls like this. Frankly, I don't understand it either.

The caller was the wife of a pastor who is very good at ministering to the members of his church. He is available to his parishioners at just about any time. He has prayed with his members in times of crisis and in times of joy. He has prayed with his church members in their homes, in their hospital rooms, and in their places of business. He is willing to pray with his members whenever they want him to pray with them.

Her question: "Why won't he pray with me?"

When I first began answering the Hotline, I was amazed at the number of pastors' wives who said that their husbands do not pray with them. At first I thought that these complaints were isolated incidents, and that they might be exaggerating. Surely I could not be getting the whole picture. Now, five years later, I am no longer amazed at that kind of call. I am disappointed.

Dr. Don Harvey, in *The Spiritually Intimate Marriage*, defines spiritual intimacy as "being able to share your spiritual self, find this reciprocated, and have a sense of union with your mate" (p. 45). He goes on to clarify what this means. Sharing is a behavior. It is something that we do. "It is an act of self-disclosure, of opening yourself up to someone else and privileging them with a genuine glimpse of who you really are" (ibid.). There is no limit of what can be shared—whether thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or even misbeliefs and doubts. Anything that can happen in your spiritual life is, with openness and acceptance,

able to be shared in a spiritually intimate marriage.

The union is the emotional aspect of a spiritually intimate marriage. It is a sense of acceptance, of being able to be who you are, and where you are, and knowing that it is all right. You have the feeling that at least one person, the person who should be closest to you, is praying for you.

Dr. Harvey continues to say that to "find it reciprocated" means that it is interactional. That means two-way, not one. If the sharing is not reciprocated, it is not sharing. It is a monologue. Intimacy cannot happen by itself. If it is not reciprocated, it will not lead to closeness. In fact, a lack of reciprocity leads to a sense of isolation.

What inferences would put a pastor in the situation that he would not be able or willing to pray and talk about spiritual matters with his wife? My guess is the same thing that can happen to us laymen. There are lots of excuses, but not very many reasons.

Excuse No. 1: "**I don't have time.**" I'll agree. You don't have the time. We are all busy people, and we are all limited to 24-hour days. With the heavy responsibilities of ministry, pastors keep especially busy. But busyness should not prevent us from doing what is important. While we may not *have* all the time to do everything that we would like, *we will make time to do what is important to us.* You don't *have* time for spiritual intimacy; you *make* time.

Excuse No. 2: "**I have tried it before, but it doesn't work.**" Again, I'll agree. But I'll remind you that if something is important, we continue to work at it until we get it right. Maybe some things you could do differently; some adjustments you could make to enhance what you have already tried. Maybe you can ask your spouse to be involved in the process, making it a joint effort. Maybe you should try again.

Excuse No. 3: "**My spouse doesn't want to be spiritually intimate with me.**" It is rare for us to hear from a pastor's wife who has no interest in spiritual intimacy with her husband. When we do, the lack of desire

for spiritual intimacy usually gives a clue that other aspects of the marriage may be suffering. It is difficult to be intimate spiritually if there is a lack of intimacy in other areas of the marriage. Therefore, if this is a problem, I encourage you to evaluate the overall health of your marriage. Some changes on your part may lead to your wife having a greater desire for spiritual intimacy.

Intimacy cannot happen by itself.

Excuse No. 4: "**It's not that important.**" Are you sure? Where would you be if you had the same interest in developing a spiritual relationship with God that you have with your spouse? This is not to say that you can't have intimacy with God if you don't have it with your spouse. It is to say that it is always beneficial to have all that God has for you. We were created for intimacy. If physical and emotional intimacy are important, why isn't spiritual intimacy?

I'm sure that many other things can serve as interferences. Don't feel bad if I didn't give yours. The important thing is that you know what interferes with the development of intimacy and that you do something about it. Here are some suggestions.


1. Choose to be close. Set your face toward intimacy, and decide that it is important enough to pursue. "Things change, not because they become easy, but because we become resolute" (Harvey, p. 77). Both parties must be ready to start this process.

2. Remember that it is a process. There will be times of great closeness, as well as times of drought. One can't stop doing what is right because it becomes difficult. You must persevere.

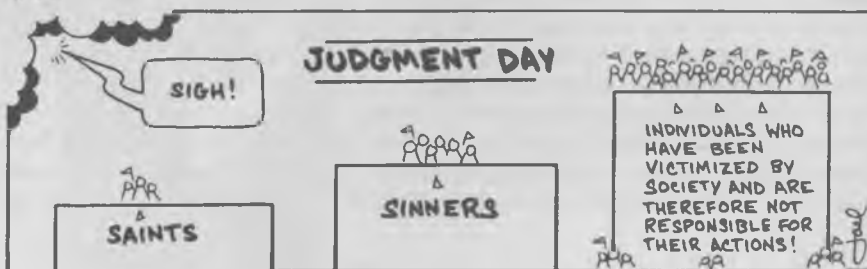
3. Share your spiritual journey. You can't go to where you want to go if you don't know where you are starting from. Share your testimony with your spouse. It may be the first time he or she has really heard it.

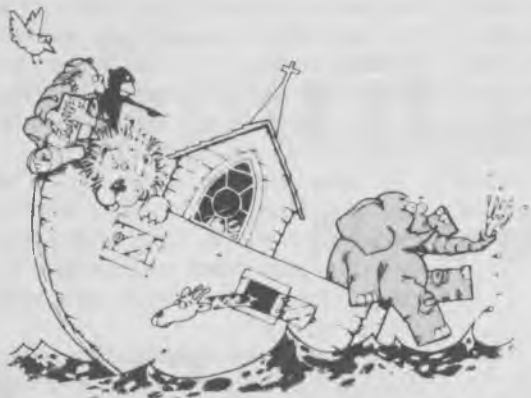
4. Make a plan. Structure the plan. This may not sound good, but it is sound advice. Be realistic. If you plan to meet daily for three hours, you will be destined for failure. Start with once a week meetings, have a common study or issue, and keep it spiritual. This is not a time to talk about family issues, budgets, or church problems. It is a time for only you and your spouse to develop **your** spiritual intimacy.

5. Have some boundaries. If this is a priority with you, it may mean saying no to some other important things. Be willing to say no.

This plan is workable, but it may not be easily attained. It may not be essential, but it can enhance everything. Spiritual intimacy is not instantaneous. Spiritual intimacy results from a *process* of growth. God created us as intimate beings. When it comes to having all that He has for us, don't settle for less. 

Pontius' Puddle





Whatever Became of Fire and Brimstone?

I think I have finally figured out what happened to fire and brimstone preaching.

Do you remember it? Those days when the preacher would raise his voice till it thundered, pound the pulpit till it splintered, and generally clear enough space to pitch a fit? You don't hear much about that kind of preaching anymore. I think it is at least partly because of air-conditioning.

That's right! A/C. Which, in Garrison Keillor's fictional boyhood home of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, was placed in the same category of suspicion as "dishwashers, automatic transmissions, frozen dinners, and liberal theologians," although until last Sunday I didn't understand why.

For reasons too complicated to explain, we didn't have A/C at my church last Sunday, and things began to get a little warm. With the temperature nearing 90 degrees outside, it was well above 80 inside. Women with flushed faces began using their church bulletins as fans. Men pulled off their jackets and loosened their ties. Children squirmed in the pews. Then the heat began to have another effect: it began to make people drowsy. From the pulpit I could see heads nodding, eyelids beginning to close, and there—halfway through

the sermon and desperate for an audience—I got what I can only describe as a fire and brimstone feeling:

I wanted to preach **LOUD!**

The way I see it, preachers used to face a regular problem with the heat, especially in the South. Even with the windows up and the funeral home fans flying, a Southern summer Sunday morning could sap the attentive powers of an entire congregation. A wasp bumping lazily across the ceiling would be enough to distract them. A dramatic pause in the sermon—and half of them might drop off to sleep.

Naturally the preacher began to raise his voice just to wake them up. For a while that was enough. "And MOSES saith unto PHARAOH, 'Let my people GO!'" But people get used to things. Eventually they got used to loud preaching. So the preacher began to punctuate his sermon by pounding on the pulpit. "And MOSES [Bam!] saith unto PHARAOH [Bam!], 'LET my people GO!' [Bam! Bam!]" But they got used to that too. Until finally the preacher had no choice but to preach on matters of life and death, heaven and hell. "... CAST them [Bam!] into the FURNACE [Bam! Bam!] of FIRE [Bam! Bam! (and) BAM!!]." That worked. That kept the

congregation awake. In that context, one of the great sermonic punch lines of all time was developed: "You think it's hot NOW!"¹

But then along came A/C, and suddenly those same people who had been dozing off before were sitting bolt upright in the pews, their expressions eager. Preachers found to their amazement that they could speak in their normal voices and even wander off into such tepid topics as "Providence" or "Humility" while the churchgoers stayed wide-awake.

As you might imagine, that was the end of fire and brimstone preaching and proof enough that there is a closer connection to A/C and liberal theology than you might think. As Garrison Keillor says about some of those people who move away from Lake Wobegon: "They get A/C first thing and crank it up to Cold. They drape themselves over it. Then they find a church where God is the gentle mist rising from the meadow and the smile on a child's face.

"They don't want to get sweaty anymore if they can help it."²

1. Little wonder that the wide band of fervent faith known as the Bible Belt stretches across the sultry South and not the lukewarm North; those Southerners have had just about all the heat they can take!

2. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York: Viking Publishing Co., 1985), 132.

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Derl G. Keefer

March/April/May 1997

Prepared by Derl G. Keefer

INTRODUCTION

G. B. Williamson defined preaching as “the mediation of the truth of God to men through human personality.”¹ His definition still remains solid. Preaching must hold center stage for the clergy person of the late 1990s!

My excitement for the Word of God through Mark’s Gospel generated in an inductive Bible class that I attended at Southern Nazarene University 30 years ago under the tutelage of Dr. Tom Barnard. I discovered that Mark wrote with a baton in his hand, leading a march down the field of faith. I’ve since wanted to be a part of the band!

As I prepared these messages, I turned to my old friend, Mark, and began to ask God to rekindle my heart with the flame of excitement to share with you these next several weeks. Mark’s stories of Jesus will encourage, inspire, and challenge you as you delve deep into the Word. These messages and illustrations naturally will only be the beginning of your study.

One quick note: I diverted from Mark’s Gospel on Pentecost Sunday to explore the Samaritan Pentecost. I trust it will be of value to you on this important day on the church calendar.

May God bless you as you become part of the parade down the street of faith. Oh, yes, bring your congregation with you on this march—the more the merrier!

1. G. B. Williamson, *Overseers of the Flock* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, n.d.), 49.

THE BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 1:4-11

March 2, 1997

INTRO:

John the Baptist looked tired, almost drained, in fact. Etched in his disciples' faces were marks of concern. They did all they could to relieve their master. As day dawned, the crowds already were gathering to catch a glimpse of this powerful preacher. Some of the men had gotten up earlier to ask the people to stay back so that John could rest.

But now it was time to begin his day. Standing in the midst of the crowd, he began his usual message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2). Unnoticed by the crowd, but noted by John, a man about 30 years old appeared in the back of the audience. He listened intently to John's message. When the call for repentance and baptism came, this man stepped forward.

John immediately perceived in his spirit that this was the One of whom he stated, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8).

John recognized that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God to redeem Israel and, in the broader scope, to redeem the whole world! At this moment Jesus wanted to be baptized to launch His public ministry. Later, He commanded His followers to do what He did: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. For many there is confusion about the meaning of baptism. Some fear the commitment that baptism requires. Others never fully grasp its significance. The importance of baptism for Jesus is translated to modern-day believers.

I. Baptism Was a Moment of Decision

A. Jesus had waited for a sign to emerge as spiritual Leader.

B. Jesus understood that baptism dealt with the Father's grace and an individual's response to that wonderful grace.

ILLUS. St. Charles Avenue Christian Church in New Orleans, belonging to the Disciples of Christ, caught fire several years ago. The sanctuary sustained substantial damage. In the early morning darkness after the fire had been extinguished, the assistant fire chief had to sift through the rubble to assess the cause and inspect the loss. As he flashed his light to the ceiling to look for damage, he failed to notice where he was stepping. He stumbled over something lying on the floor and fell headlong into the church's baptistery. Fortunately it had been filled with water from the fire hoses. Struggling to get out, he was finally able to pull himself out and leave the building.

Just at that moment, the fire department's chaplain was coming by the area. The assistant chief, a Roman Catholic, asked, "Father, who are those people in there?"

The chaplain replied, "They're the Disciples of Christ."

Still soaked from his dive into the baptistery, the chief responded, "Well, Father, I don't know anything about them, but it looks like I'm one of them now."¹

Most people realize it is much more than a plunge into a baptistery to make us a disciple of Christ. It is a lifelong decision of faith on our part coupled with grace on God's part.

C. As Jesus did, we must summon ourselves to meet the challenge of God through a decision to follow Jesus.

II. Baptism was a Moment of Identification

A. Jesus did not need to be baptized. He did not need to repent. He had no sin in His life.

B. In that day there was a Godward movement by the people. Jesus determined to identify himself with this important thrust.

ILLUS. Out on the cattle ranches of the Western United States, the unbranded calves that roam at will are called "mavericks." They are claimed by the person who is the first to get his brand on them at the annual roundup.

A little Western girl had accepted Jesus as Savior and asked her Methodist pastor if she could be baptized. He granted her request the following Sunday. The next day her classmates questioned her as to what it meant to be baptized. She answered, "Well, I will tell you that I was a little maverick out on the prairie, and that the preacher put the mark of Jesus on my forehead when he sprinkled me. That way when Jesus sees me, He will know that I am one of His children."²

Do you carry Jesus' identifying mark?

III. Baptism was a Moment of Approval

No one leaves home to set out on his or her own without some thought about desired plans and goals. There comes a moment of truth when what is about to happen brings assurance that it is right.

Mark tells the story of Jesus' baptism as one of personal approval of the Son by the Father. The demonstration was not for the crowd's sake. It definitely came for the benefit of Jesus. Speaking directly to Him, the Voice says, "You are my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11, TLB). At the Baptism, Jesus submitted His decision to obey God. That decision met with the Father's approval, which came by fact, faith, and feeling.

ILLUS. Archibald Brown relates the story of an old Scotsman who testified at a public assembly that he was saved and he knew it.

A nonbeliever asked, "How do you know that for sure?"

He replied, "I happened to be there when the thing was done!"

As a Christian, do you remember the assurance that came when the Holy Spirit witnessed God's approval to your spirit as you yielded your life to Jesus?

IV. Baptism was a Moment of Equipping

While John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a symbol. God chose a dove at that moment of symbolism. The dove represented the gentleness of the Spirit.

John's message came like an ax laid to the root of the tree. It came across to the people as a terrible sifting, of a consuming fire, a message of doom. But from the very outset, the Spirit of God is likened to a dove of gentleness. Jesus came to conquer, but His conquest is through divine love!

ILLUS. I read that the famous French evangelist who died in 1856, Adolphe Monod, stated a little while before his death: "I have strength for nothing more than to think about the love of God; He has loved us—that is the whole of dogmatics; let us love Him—that is the sum total of the ethics of the gospel."³

Baptism reminds us that the Father has come to equip us with the same divine love that He gave to Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Paul reminds us that "we were . . . buried with him [Jesus] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4).

The efficiency of baptism lies in the relationship between God and the individual rather than in any property of the water. The baptismal water does not save us or provide the means of our salvation. Baptism portrays the peril through which we are brought into new life.

Baptism, then, is not merely a religious ceremony, but it is a moral and spiritual pledge of devotion to the Savior.

The conclusion of this sermon comes only by the way each candidate for baptism carries out the rest of his or her life. As Jesus devoted the rest of His life to God, may each candidate devote his or her life to Jesus Christ. You write the conclusion of this sermon!

1. "The Disciple," *United Church Observer*, September 1993, 47.
2. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), 58.
3. *Ibid.*, 455.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CELEBRATION PRELUDE MUSIC WELCOME TO THE CELEBRATION

Whether you are a first-time visitor or a seasoned veteran here at our church, we welcome you to meet the One we honor, Jesus Christ. His presence can cause you to leave in awe and wonder of His holiness. Welcome to the celebration!

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

INVOCATION PRAYER

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING "Baptized in Water"
"Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine"
"There Shall Be Showers of Blessing"

OFFERING

SOLO

SCRIPTURE READING

Mark 1:4-11

PASTORAL PRAYER

SERMON

"THE BELIEVER'S BAPTISM"

BAPTISMAL CEREMONY

Creative Worship Ideas

Scripture Reading

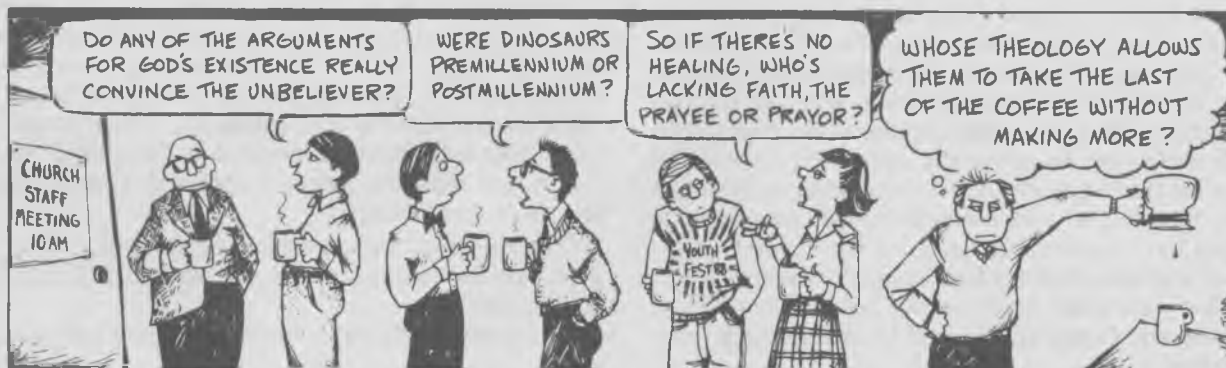
Do this as a dramatized reading.

Cast: Narrator, John, Voice

Baptismal Ceremony

Have candidates testify specifically of their salvation.

BEYOND BELIEF



A COMMITMENT TO FOLLOW JESUS

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 1:16-20

March 9, 1997

INTRO:

When I was a little boy, one of my favorite games was follow-the-leader. The object of the game was to imitate the actions of the leader. If the leader spread his arms out, so did we. If the leader walked like a duck, so did we. My friends and I spent hours in the backyards of our homes in Kansas City playing follow-the-leader.

One day Jesus passed by four men going about their usual business down by the fishing docks of Galilee. As He walked by, He said to these men, "Follow Me" (v. 17, NASB). To them it was no game. They dropped their fishing nets, left their families, and abandoned all to follow the Leader.

The sincerity of their decision to heed the call offers an example for modern-day people considering the commitment to follow the leadership of Jesus.

As He stood on the beaches by the Sea of Galilee, He challenged them to follow. He did not say, "I have a new theological system for you to investigate." Nor did He state that He had a new moral or ethical code to discuss with them. "I have no new theories for you to ponder about life." He simply said, "Follow Me." Christ's call began with Andrew, Peter, James, and John on the same level that He deals with everyone—personally. His summons began with a tug on their hearts that stabilized into an unshakable loyalty. That day began a lifelong journey to follow the Leader.

Today we look at what the journey means to people in the final years of our century.

I. To Follow the Leader Is to Have FAITH in the Person

Faith trusts in someone or something. Today's world knocks at our heart's door with assorted religions, all in the name of God.

ILLUS. The headline for a May 5, 1996, front-page article in the *Kalamazoo (Mich.) Gazette* was titled "Divining the Ways of God." The article stems from a "Guest Viewpoint" by Rev. Donald Van Hoeven and the Southwest Michigan Classis for the Reformed Church of America. In that "Guest Viewpoint" article dated March 19, 1996, Van Hoeven wrote that non-Christians can find salvation without Jesus.

The controversy has spread to debates in the "Christian" community. Two pastors were featured in the May 5 article. Pastor Joel Brooks Jr., of the Christian Life Center of Kalamazoo, a nondenominational Christian church, "sees the world as a burning house, and he knows the way out—salvation through Jesus Christ." He makes the statement that Jesus said that He was the Way to salvation, and "that's the way it is." On the other hand, Rev. Carol Amos, pastor at the Unity Church, also a nondenominational Christian congregation in Kalamazoo, said that her church's approach is different: "Every religion is

someone's road to God. It's like spokes on a wheel, with every one leading to the center. There is one truth, but there are many roads to the one truth."

In that same article Pastor Danny Janes, senior pastor at Kalamazoo Wesleyan Church, said, "I don't have a choice about that basic tenet of faith if I claim to be a biblical Christian. Jesus was very exclusive. He said, 'I am . . . the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,' in John 14:6."

Janes went on to say, "It's not a question of whether God loves non-Christians, because God's love is universal. It's a question of our compliance with the truth."

The disciples who followed Jesus determined that He was the Way—the only way. Don't let the world rob you of your exclusive faith in Jesus Christ. Continue to follow the Leader with faith!

II. To Follow the Leader Is to OBEY the Leader

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, insists that God's call needs a response from humankind. He adds that the response is a "single-minded obedience." Nothing or no one should stand in our way.

Peter and Andrew left their nets and fishing business. James and John left their fishing nets, too, but with an added dimension—they also left behind their old faith.

We are all called to obedience!

ILLUS. On a hot Fourth of July in 1976, in Entebbe, Uganda, a daring raid took place by Israeli commandos attempting to free 103 Jewish hostages held by seven kidnappers. Within 15 minutes the raid was over; the soldiers had killed all seven of the kidnappers and set the hostages free.

As successful as their rescue was, however, three of the Jewish hostages were killed along with the kidnappers. They didn't obey the command of the leader of the commandos. As commandos entered the airport terminal, they shouted in Hebrew for the captives to "Get down! Crawl!" Immediately the Hebrew hostages understood the command, while the guerrillas did not understand the language of the command and were left standing. Quickly the commandos opened fire and shot the kidnappers who were upright.

However, three of the hostages were also mowed down in the gunfire. Two of the prisoners hesitated, perhaps wanting to get a view of what was happening, and they lost their lives. One young man was lying on the floor but foolishly stood up when the Jewish liberators entered the building. Likewise, he was shot down with the bullets meant for his captors. Had these three men obeyed the soldiers' command, they would have been free with the remainder of their group.

Our Leader has given some very specific instructions to obey. Unless we obey those instructions, we too will fall with the enemy. Obey the Leader!

III. To Follow the Leader Is to LEARN from the Leader

Learning makes the wise wiser and the foolish more foolish. Learning is the process of absorbing the subject matter and incorporating it into the fabric of life until it becomes natural.

ILLUS. Many years ago a Korean Christian repeated the Sermon on the Mount without a mistake to a missionary. The missionary who listened to what seemed like a rote memory quotation said to his Korean friend, "You have done well in memorizing this sermon, but it will do you little good unless you practice it on others."

A smile broke out on the Korean's face as he said, "Why, Pastor, that's how I learned it. I am only an illiterate farmer and could not remember it, so I learned one verse at a time and then went out and practiced it on my neighbors until I had the whole sermon bit by bit."

Jesus said, "I will make you to become . . ." (Mark 1:17, KJV). We are not going to know everything about the Christian life immediately, but our job is to become like Christ, by accepting Him and by learning all we can. Learning is part of following the Leader.

IV. To Follow the Leader Is to Be OPEN to the Leader

The disciples responded to Jesus on the day He called them by name, "If we follow, You must open Your life to us." And He did! They discovered that they could read Je-

sus like an open book. He taught them the parts they could not understand. He was open and honest with them so they could understand who God is. He instructed them to be open with those whom they would encounter. We write a bit of the Gospel every day as we live with openness in our faith, actions, and attitudes. What's the Gospel According to YOU?

V. To Follow the Leader Is to WITNESS for the Leader

As the disciples had caught fish from the lake, they would now catch men for Jesus. They would become the nucleus of the greatest soul-winning team in the world. They were endued with power from God to tell people of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Christians must never be like the rivers that flow into the Arctic Ocean—frozen at the mouth.

We must confront people with their need of salvation. The Christian can give, without apology, hope to the hopeless.

To follow our Leader is to testify for our Leader!

CONCLUSION:

We must follow the Leader, Jesus. But ours is not a game; it is life!



"Good morning. Today's sermon deals with modern society's short attention span. The end. Amen."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

OPENING CELEBRATION	Praise Band
WELCOME TO THE CELEBRATION	
INVOCATION PRAYER	
CELEBRATE IN SONG	"Follow, I Will Follow Thee" "Follow On" "Faith Is the Victory"
CELEBRATION THOUGHT	
CELEBRATE IN GIVING	
CELEBRATE IN PRAYER	
CELEBRATE IN SPECIAL MUSIC	
CELEBRATE IN SERMON	"A COMMITMENT TO FOLLOW JESUS"
CELEBRATE IN CLOSING	

Creative Worship Ideas

Welcome

Give first-time visitors a loaf of homemade bread baked by someone in the congregation. As you hand them the bread, say, "Jesus is the Bread of Life, and this gift of bread is the symbol of His life from us to you."

Responsive Thought

Leader: If Jesus is alive in you now, it is because of His righteousness.

Congregation: Because of His righteousness we are free to choose life. We commit ourselves to life.

All: We are led by the Spirit of God, and we are His!

MEETING AND CONQUERING THE ENEMY

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 1:21-28

March 16, 1997

INTRO:

In the beginning stages of Jesus' ministry, the following events occurred:

1. Jesus spent 30 years preparing for ministry. He heard John the Baptist call for action.

2. After hearing John's call and feeling the Heavenly Father's urging, Jesus stepped out of the crowd to declare His intention of Sonship.

3. At Jesus' baptism, He received God's seal of approval when He heard His Father's voice declare He was God's Son. Simultaneously Jesus received the Spirit's affirmation and equipping for the task that lay before Him.

4. Jesus was tested by Satan, withstood it, and overcame the devil's onslaught.

5. Jesus chose 12 men to become a circle of kindred hearts, whose lives He would impress for eternity.

6. Now Jesus is ready to deliberately launch His own spiritual campaign to save the world from spiritual destruction.

If a person has a message from God, the most logical place to turn is where His people meet together. That's exactly what Jesus did. He entered the synagogue where He worshiped.

On that Saturday, Jesus entered with His four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. The little synagogue was crowded with worshipers. The ruler of the synagogue asked the *chazzan* or minister to read the scrolls on which the Scriptures were written. Following prayer and reading of the scripture, the ruler called on the fledgling rabbi, Jesus, to give the morning address and exposition.

As Jesus began to speak and teach, the congregation sensed that He was teaching with an authority they had never known. Whenever a scribe or other rabbi visited, he did not speak with such authority. They would quote from ancient authors and talk about what they had read or heard. Jesus' message, however, demonstrated a difference in content. He spoke without quoting anyone except the Scriptures, for it was He to whom the Scriptures were pointing.

At the close of the sermon, a man from the back of the synagogue shouted out: "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" (v. 24).

According to the Scriptures, the man was demon-possessed. Inside of him huddled the enemy of life. When he met Jesus, he met the Conqueror of all of life's enemies.

Our goal is to meet the enemy of life and be victorious.

I. When We Meet the Enemy, We Need the Church (v. 21)

Through the Gospels, Jesus and His followers met regularly at the synagogues and at the Temple in Jerusalem. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians banded together to become the Church. The Church helps identify the enemy of God. The Lord's people need to

unite against the foes of truth, justice, salvation, and holiness. The Church must never forget the strength of the enemy.

ILLUS. In a gun factory many years ago, a great bar of steel, weighing 500 pounds and eight feet in length, was suspended vertically by a very delicate chain. Nearby a common bottle cork was suspended by a silk thread.

The purpose of the demonstration was to show that the cork could set the steel bar in motion. The cork was swung gently against the steel bar, and the steel bar remained motionless. The action was repeated for about 10 minutes. At the end of that time, the bar gave evidence of a slight movement. After another 10 minutes, vibrations began. At the end of half an hour, the great bar was swinging like the pendulum of a clock. No person is mighty enough in his own energy of will to feel secure if continual exposure is given to the influence of evil. That's why we need the influence of the godly people of the Church. They help combat the forces of sin and evil.

Isn't it great to be a part of the family of God that opposes sin in all forms?

II. When We Meet the Enemy, We Need Jesus (v. 22)

The rock we use when we meet our Goliath-size enemies in spiritual battles is JESUS. Only in His authority can we go to battle at all. Paul understood that when he wrote his young pastor friend, Timothy: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Too often we are simply disconnected from the source of power that God offers.

IIIUS. Herbert Jackson told his seminary missions class about inheriting a car that would not start without a push.

After thinking through the problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school that was near his home and received permission to take some of the children out of class. He had them push his car. As he made his calling rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used his ingenious plan for nearly two years.

Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave. A new missionary came to that station. When Jackson proudly began to explain his ingenious plan for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood. Before the explanation was completed, the new missionary interrupted, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable." He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch, and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life.

For two years needless trouble had become the norm. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting the power to work.¹

Jesus wants to put His power in us—His Holy Spirit—

to defeat our enemies. J. B. Phillips paraphrases Eph. 1:19-20, "How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God."

III. Be Assured the Enemy Will Come (v. 23)

Satan is a trickster, a deceiver, and a dangerous enemy. His purpose is to deceive and to destroy humankind everywhere. There are several ways by which Satan will try to defeat the saints of God.

A. Satan tries by diverting worship and service away from God and toward himself.

One of the first events in the creation story is Satan's appearance to Adam saying, "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). We can allow our own blasphemous self-exaltation and selfish will to usurp the place that rightfully belongs to God. When we take His crown off, we simply exchange it for Satan's.

B. Satan says, "Neither I nor my demons exist." People frequently comment, "The devil, demons, and hell are nothing more than man's superstition." Even some Bible "scholars" believe that the biblical understanding of evil in the devil is misplaced.

C. Satan says he and his demons are everywhere. A reversal of strategy sees him in everything. The truth is that demon activities are responsible for some physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual problems. However, we have to take responsibility for most of our own spiritual undoing.

D. Occultism and stargazing are popular tricks of the devil. Many secular magazines feature an astrological

chart. Psychics pop up everywhere to tell us about the future. The world is starving for real answers; unfortunately, it is turning to the fake and foolish trying to find understanding.

When Christians drift away from pure biblical Christianity, Satan presents a counterfeit substitute.

CONCLUSION:

The choice is inevitable: Jesus must be central. He is the only way to meet and conquer the enemy of our spirits!

ILLUS. Charles Spurgeon tells the ancient parable of a dove who complained to her fellow birds that a hawk was out for her blood. One bird counseled her to keep flying low, but the hawk could stoop for its prey. Another bird told her to soar to the highest point, but again the hawk could mount as high as she could. Another advised her to hide in the woods, but that was the home of the hawk. Finally one told her to rest in the clefts of the rock. The meaning is clear. The dove is a poor, defenseless soul; Satan is the hawk. Poverty cannot protect us from him. Riches are no security. Retirement cannot save. There is only one defense; Jesus is the Rock.²

1. Craig Brian Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 182.

2. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), 134.



"You must have just written one blockbuster of a sermon . . ."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Though we have come for many reasons, each one comes bearing an accumulation of burdens. Today let us give our burdens to the Savior, who will gather them, take them, and lose sight of them.

WORSHIP SEQUENCE

SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS

2 Tim. 2:1, 3

1 Cor. 16:13

HYMNS

"Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" (vv. 1-2)

"Onward, Christian Soldiers" (vv. 1, 3, 5)

GIVING OFFERING IN WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE READING

Mark 1:21-28

PASTORAL PRAYER/FAMILY ALTAR

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"MEETING AND CONQUERING THE ENEMY"

CLOSING HYMN "Victory All the Time"

Creative Worship Ideas

Family Altar

Have people come in family groups to pray around the altar. At the end, pray the Lord's Prayer together, or have it sung as a solo.

LET'S JUST PRAISE THE LORD

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 11:1-10

March 23, 1997

INTRO:

The ecstatic joy of the Palm Sunday crowd is best seen in the light of their dark hopelessness.

Don't misunderstand. Hope flickered occasionally, but rarely. Clinging to hope, the Jewish nation kept going through the countless centuries of foreign interference in their domestic affairs. Hope for a Messiah often sparked but then fizzled. So many false messiahs appeared on the national scene but were ultimately defeated and destroyed by the dominating heathen nation. From Malachi to John the Baptist, the voices of their prophets faded to oblivion.

Jesus Christ appeared on the horizon. For a few short years embers began to flame. On this particular day, the flame erupted into a blaze—this moment of hope for the multitudes of Jews gathered in Jerusalem. In their parade of hope winding down the Mount of Olives past the Garden of Gethsemane, the crowd had made Jesus the Grand Marshal. The shouts and sounds of praise by the crowd roared like a lion all the way to the crowd around the Sanhedrin and Pilate's palace. Their songs of praise exalted Jesus as the Proclamation of salvation in the name of Jehovah! Happy and blessed were the people of God. Jesus had come to restore them to their rightful place among the nations.

Little did they realize the truth of their praise. Truly Jesus came to break the shackles that held them tighter than any Roman's iron bands. The crowd wanted Him to stop the arrows and spears of the earthly warriors, but He had come to stop the spears and arrows of an un-earthly, unholy warrior enemy, Satan. Jesus came to create new hearts as King David had desired.

Today we possess a clearer understanding of Jesus' mission than did the crowd on the first Palm Sunday. Our shouts of praise should ring true because we understand the real purpose of Jesus' coming. Praise should be upon our lips and hearts.

Praise emulates from our hearts.

I. We Offer a Word of Praise—LOVE

Praise reminds us of God's love as we visualize His love in the life and death of Jesus. Compared to His love, our shame and guilt for sin become unbearable. Finally, sin crumbles under the load of love that Jesus gives. In place of our sin comes pure hearts filled with praise for our loving Lord.

ILLUS. Donald Grey Barnhouse described a night when he and his wife had an evening out. They left their children under the care of a baby-sitter. About midnight they returned home to a greatly concerned baby-sitter. Their oldest child had been crying for almost four hours. Nothing the sitter attempted could stop her crying.

Dr. Barnhouse went to his daughter's room and found her flushed, red-faced, and sobbing. As he started to pick her up, she grabbed onto his neck and cried out, "Daddy, say it isn't true. You do love me!" He assured her of his love for her. The little girl said that the baby-sitter told

her that if she were bad, her daddy wouldn't love her. The child explained that she had been bad at times, so she was afraid Daddy didn't love her anymore.

Dr. Barnhouse wrote that he held her close and said: "My dear child; I always love you. When you are good, I love you with a love that makes me glad; when you are bad, I love you with a love that makes me sad. But I love you good and bad. I'm always your daddy." After he held her and talked with her, she began to calm down, and a smile broke out on her face!

God initiates love to all His creation who are willing to hear His calm, assuring voice and feel His gentle touch. His love is available to anyone who will reach out to accept it. Will you do that today?

II. We Offer a Word of Praise—HOSANNA

The word "hosanna" literally means "salvation." No wonder that it became a word of praise. The Jews on the parade route that Palm Sunday pictured Jesus as God's Messiah—God's salvation plan. The focus of their picture needed adjustment. The Pharisees believed that salvation began outwardly, making its way inwardly. God's picture, however, originated from the inside, where sin reigned, to the outside—from attitude to action.

The central biblical theme is to redeem humankind from the terrible sin problem. God worked His wonder in history by the marvelous act of redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus binds us with His love; He binds us with His blood. He has brought us back from Satan. "*Hosanna!*"

III. We Offer a Word of Praise—FORGIVENESS

The prophet Isaiah wrote: "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (55:7).

God's response to our returning to Him is simply forgiveness.

In the Old Testament four words are used to explain God's forgiveness.

A. *Salach*: "To pardon or pass over." When God forgives us, He passes over our guilt. He delivers us from some of the consequences of sin—although not necessarily from all the consequences. The whole process restores the sinner to favor with God.

B. *Padhab*: This word indicates that God alone ransoms the wayward sinner.

C. *Nasa*: This Hebrew word carries the idea that God accepts, bears, carries, and lifts up. Jesus accepted, bore, carried, and lifted our sin on the Cross.

D. *Kipper*: Means to "cover over . . . atone . . . to wash away." Jesus meets that requirement by covering over our sins and carrying them away by His blood. His atonement offers complete access to the Father.

Praise for God's forgiveness stems from forgiven hearts. C. Neil Strait wrote, "Genuine forgiveness unclogs the heart and lets love flow again. It unshackles life and lets it live on a higher plain."

ILLUS. Richard Hoefler tells a great story about how sin enslaves a person, but how forgiveness liberates. He tells of a young boy who visited his grandparents for a couple of weeks with his sister, Sally. The boy was given his first slingshot and went out to the woods to practice. He practiced for a long time but couldn't hit anything.

As he came back to his grandparents' home, he spied a pet duck in the backyard. On a whim he pulled out his slingshot, took aim, and let the stone fly. With bad luck, he hit the duck and killed it.

The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the duck in the woodpile. Just as he put the last log over the dead duck, he looked up and realized his sister, Sally, had been watching all the time but said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes."

Sally said, "Oh, Grandma, Johnny told me he wanted to wash the dishes today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And then she whispered to him out of earshot from Grandma, "Remember the duck!" Reluctantly Johnny did the dishes.

About midafternoon Grandpa asked if the kids wanted to go fishing. Grandma informed him that Sally was needed to help make supper. Sally flashed a big grin and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed with Grandma while Sally and Grandpa went fishing.

After many days of doing his chores and Sally's, Johnny couldn't stand it any longer. He went to his grandmother and confessed that he had killed her pet duck.

Giving him a hug, she said, "Johnny, I know because I was standing at the window and witnessed the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I just wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you."

God desires to set us free by offering forgiveness. He is waiting for us to ask.

IV. We Offer a Word of Praise—OBEDIENCE

We need to give God a blank sheet of paper to write out our personal instructions. We must have the willingness to follow those instructions. Obedience is commitment to a lifestyle for a lifetime. Dr. Earl Lee said in a sermon that to OBEY is to be Open, Believing, Energetic, and Yielding. As the Christian grows, matures, and yields to the Holy Spirit, the natural response to God is "yes."

Is there any better praise than obedience?

CONCLUSION:

Be part of the praising crowd this Palm Sunday morning.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO THE PRAISE GATHERING!

CHOIR CALL "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"

CONGREGATIONAL CALL TO PRAISE

PRAYER OF PRAISE

SONGS OF PRAISE "Majesty"

"To God Be the Glory"

"It Is Good to Sing Thy Praises"

PASTORAL PRAYER

GIVING PRAISE IN OFFERING

DOXOLOGY OF PRAISE

SCRIPTURE OF PRAISE

Ps. 63:1-5

SPECIAL MUSIC Trio

SERMON

"LET'S JUST PRAISE THE LORD"

CLOSING SONG

"Lord, We Praise You"

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Call to Worship

Use a dramatic reading of Ps. 118:1-2, 19-24, 28-29. Have readers dressed in ancient style garb.

Choir Call

Have choir sing, "O Come, Let Us Adore Him." Have them wave palm branches as they enter singing, and have a member of the choir shout above the singing, "Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy" (Ps. 99:5).



"Yet another inspired text?"

THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 16:1-8

March 30, 1997

On Sunday morning, just after the sun's rays streamed down to kiss the earth, three grief-stricken women were trekking along a rock-strewn path to the unenviable task of embalming a dead body. These three had watched the previous Friday as Jesus of Nazareth was tortuously crucified between two thieves. They had watched as the Romans nailed His hands with large spikes into the rough wooden Cross. Wincing as the thud of the Cross jolted into place, they were overtaken with grief as they saw Him suffer so much agony and pain. Hours slowly ticked by as these women stood as sentries on a deathwatch. They took the place of Jesus' frightened male disciples who were shivering with fear in an upper Jerusalem room—afraid of their own shadows.

For a day and two nights, the men contemplated and grieved over Jesus' death. A question persistently followed them through those long, lonely hours—Why? All of the good Jesus had done flooded into their minds, along with the acts of kindness, the healing ministry, the love, and the help He had given.

Wearily the women trudged toward the garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where the body of the crucified Jesus had hastily been laid. As they walked, one asked a fundamental question: "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?"

Upon arrival they were surprised to find the huge stone back in its original position with the entrance open. The guards had also vanished. An uneasy feeling pervaded their spirits and brought apprehension to their faces. At first questioning whether to enter or not, one ventured to look inside, and the others followed. Apprehension turned to fear as the women beheld an angel, who reported an amazing headline news event—"JESUS IS RISEN!"

All the forces of darkness could not stop God's victory on that Resurrection morning.

Later, Paul parades for his readers the enemies of life, to expose their impotence. He writes:

Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (*Rom. 8:34-35, 38-39*).

The resurrection of Jesus signaled the dawning of a new day for all of humanity and for all time!

I. Resurrection Day Dawns on a New Day for Our Age (vv. 2-6)

Many who read this account would believe that it be-

longs in the archives of cultural Israel. In practical thought it appears this is just another mystical Eastern religion created before scented soap, cars, subways, missiles, space flight, electricity, computers, E-mail, fax machines, or the cellular phone. What does this religion mean for a people ready to burst into the 21st century?

The universality of sin is timeless. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve decided to have their own way. All of their offspring demonstrated the same will. At the Fall, humankind punctured God's hope for fellowship with His creation.

C. Neil Strait wrote: "Man has bettered his life and updated his standard of living. It is questionable, however, whether he has bettered his heart and his standard of conduct. A man is not better off until he is better within."

A new day has dawned even for modern people ready to move into a new millennium.

II. Resurrection Day Dawns on a New Beginning for Faith (v. 6)

Phillips Brooks defined faith with the acrostic *Forsaking All, I Take Him*. The Resurrection remains the central theme of our Christian faith. Radiant Christians are born through the Resurrection.

A. We put our faith in a living Presence. Our ultimate goal is to meet Jesus, not just to think and study about His life.

B. We put our faith not in a memory of things past, but in a present help through troubled waters.

My wife's calendar says: "The boat can be your life, the sea your emotions, the wind your circumstances. When you feel overwhelmed by the things that are beating against you, ask Jesus to calm the storm—He's already in your boat!"

C. Our faith must never stand still but continuously move to maturity. Jesus is alive. Because of His life in His disciples, we should look to discover new truths and to grow in our faith!

III. Resurrection Day Dawns on a New Day of Forgiveness (v. 7)

The angelic reporter specifically says, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter . . ." Jesus left particular orders with this angel to tell Peter that everything was all right. Forgiveness dawned on Peter through the loving act of Jesus.

Many runners practice for races wearing leg weights. After the weights are removed, their legs feel lighter and more capable of running the race.

When the weight of sin is removed, the heart feels lighter and free to run the race of life.

ILLUS. When missionaries first came to Labrador, they found no word for forgiveness in the native language. Their job was to help the people to come to an under-

standing of the word. After a period of time they came up with "Not being able to think about it anymore."

When we ask God to invade our hearts, He does not think about our sin anymore. He discards it in His sea of forgetfulness (Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:19).

IV. Resurrection Day Dawns on a New Day of Limitless Possibilities (v. 6)

The 4,000-pound stone that worried the women obviously would be a limitation, but Jesus overcame the limitation! He blasted open the tomb of despondency and hopelessness. He rolled away the disciples' stone of resistance to life. The 12 (now 11) disciples truly were the historical proof of the Resurrection. Before the Resurrection, they were defeated, discouraged, and depressed. Following the Resurrection, these men became adventurous, courageous, and triumphant. "He is risen" became the chant of new life with limitless possibilities.

On the pages of Luke's Book of Acts is penned the history and victories of these early vibrant people of Easter. The word "impossible" became foreign to them as they yielded body and soul to the resurrected Lord. They discovered wells of limitless resources at their disposal through the power of Jesus and His Holy Spirit of deliverance.

The possibilities are released as life becomes limitless through the following:

A. Surrender self to God. A total commitment of control must be turned over to Jesus.

B. Realize a personal resurrection. Jesus has come so that we might be transformed from the dead to the living!

C. Victory of tremendous proportions.

Read the undaunted faith of "possibility believers" in the first century.

1. "He is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

2. "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him" (Heb. 7:25).

3. He "is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24).

4. "By the power that enables him to bring everything under his control" (Phil. 3:21).

5. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).

CONCLUSION:

Life is not always easy, but through the Resurrection there is the dawning of a new day!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO RESURRECTION SUNDAY!

Jesus has risen to roll away the stone that blocks our worship, hinders our praise, and impedes our celebration. Welcome to the dawning of a new day!

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

CONGREGATIONAL SONGS OF THE RESURRECTION

"Thine Is the Glory"

"Worship Christ, the Risen King"

"Christ Arose"

OFFERING AND OFFERTORY

PRAYER CHORUS

"He Is Lord"

PASTORAL PRAYER

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY"

HYMN OF PRAISE

"He Lives"

CLOSING THOUGHT

Creative Worship Ideas

Closing Thought

Up from the Grave

Glorious Tidings . . . Good News

Spread the Word—He Is Risen!



"Goldilocks went to the first church and said, 'This sermon is too meek.' then Goldilocks went to the next church and said, 'This sermon is too angry.' Finally, Goldilocks went to the third church and said, 'This sermon is just right!'"

IT'S A MIRACLE!

by Derl G. Keefer
Mark 1:29-34 (Cf. Mark 1:21-34)
April 6, 1997

INTRO:

The exhilaration of the day lingered in the minds of Peter, James, John, and Andrew. All four attended synagogue services with their new rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. They witnessed with their own eyes the fantastic power He displayed by healing a man with a demon inside his spirit. His screams curdled their blood as the power of the demon terrorized and agonized him. But the evil spirit found itself no match when Jesus commanded it to release its prisoner. The disciples and worshipers watched as the man convulsed, then lay limp. In a few moments, the man rose from the floor. Everyone realized a miracle had been performed, for he was in his right mind again.

That wasn't all. They heard with their ears a unique teaching of divine authority that caught all the parishioners off guard. They felt astonished!

Peter, James, John, and Andrew heard John the Baptist speak and had followed him. Yet John the Baptist and Jesus differed greatly. The authority by which Jesus preached was light-years ahead of John's. The Baptist had charisma and force but did not compare to this Jesus whom they now followed.

As they discussed the events of the morning, Peter began to think about his mother-in-law, who had become ill. His wife remained at home to nurse her back to health. Peter wondered how she was doing. Peter's wife heard the men talking a short distance from the house and ran out to meet them. She hugged Peter, expressing concern that her mother had taken a turn for the worse. Even without a thermometer, she could tell that her mother's fever was very high.

Upon entering the house, Peter and his wife excused themselves from Jesus and the others to go upstairs where this dear lady lay ill. Both Peter and his wife returned downstairs to their guests and quickly described the situation. He asked if Jesus would look in on her.

Showing genuine concern for the situation, Jesus made His way upstairs with this couple. Standing by her bed, Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand and helped her up. As soon as He touched her, the fever left her body! It was a miracle.

So happy to be well, Peter's mother-in-law began serving Jesus and His disciples some lunch that she prepared after her healing. The men talked and rested throughout the day. After sundown at the end of the Sabbath, Peter heard a knock at his door. His neighbor brought his sick daughter to see Jesus. He hoped Jesus would look at her, maybe place His hand on her head, and heal her as He had done for the demon-possessed man earlier in the day. Shortly after Peter shut the door behind his neighbor, there was another knock at the door—and then another. News spread quickly that Jesus was staying at Peter's house. The crowds gathered outside his home, calling

the name of Jesus. They desired for their loved ones to be healed by this Miracle Worker.

Three ideas are clear on this first day of Jesus' campaign to change the world.

I. The Miracles Reveal the Character of Jesus

The miracles reveal the tender, sympathetic, compassionate heart of Jesus. His compassion, demonstrated that day, would eventually lead to a cruel cross outside the gates of Jerusalem.

The miracles Jesus performed, from the exorcism of the demon-possessed, the private healing of Peter's mother-in-law, to the healing of the crowds, did not come from a sense of duty. Healings were not a laborious task that the Father required of Jesus. They demonstrated His concern for people that stemmed from the character of God.

Often people take the miraculous and turn it into a circus for power and prestige. Jesus did not. True Christianity does not display its power but in humility uses it for the good of humankind. Jesus had an instinctive desire to help, an example to be followed by all Christians.

Where can Christians direct their energy to help people?

1. Christians help people through the church. Compassion sees the aching hearts of people and works to bring healing to the spirit. Salvation is uppermost in the hearts of those who have discovered their own healing. It is impossible to live in Christ and yet be selfish, hoarding the gospel. Clergy and lay must cooperate in the healing process with preaching, teaching, and evangelizing, performing the basic role of the Church. All other programming revolves around those basic roles because of the deep, loving compassion that the lost must be healed spiritually.

2. Christians help people through parachurch organizations. Many churches cannot enter secular schools without interference as parachurch groups can. Youth for Christ and Campus Crusade can get into high schools to share the gospel. Gideons can place Bibles in hotels, motels, hospitals, military camps, and schools. Focus on the Family ministry emphasizes the family through the media. It is used by God as an instrument of compassion. Many organizations dot the spiritual map, bringing the gospel where the official churches cannot enter.

3. Christians help people through governmental and service agencies. Christians need to infiltrate agencies that can go to countries where the church is yet unable to enter. As doctors, nurses, agrimissionaries, and computer experts teach and perform their duties, they can touch the hearts of people who long for spiritual healing.

Jesus had compassion on people who had names, parents, children, friends. They were not phantoms, indeterminate equations who had lost their identities, but real people with real needs. They were God's creation aching to feel His touch through Jesus. People are the same to-

day. They, too, are in need of feeling the touch of God through us.

II. The Miracles Reveal the Character of the Disciples

Peter had a problem—his mother-in-law lay ill. Let your imagination roam for a moment. Think about the cast of characters involved in this true-life story. First on the list is the sick mother-in-law. Think about her feelings. When you are sick, how do you react? Personally, I'm a big baby. I stick the thermometer in my mouth, feel my head, check my pulse, and groan about how bad I feel. All I want to do is go to bed and stay there because I'm really sick. I'm of no value to anybody at that time. This lady was really sick!

Second, think about Peter's wife. How do you feel when your parent or child is sick? Genuine concern permeates your entire being when someone you love is sick. You want to help, but sometimes you feel absolutely helpless. There were no medicines to lower a fever or break up the congestion. It certainly was a difficult time for Peter's wife.

Then third, Peter was concerned not only for his sick mother-in-law but also for his wife, who was trying to take care of her mother. Where does a man go when all this is facing him? Peter went to Jesus. Even though they had been acquainted only a little while, he felt comfortable and natural taking his problems and troubles to Jesus.

Today, Jesus wants His people to bring their woes to Him. He is a friend with whom you can discuss your pains, hopes, and fears anytime. He is there as you speak from the heart.

Charles F. Andrews said, "The older I grow in years, the more I wonder and my joy increases when I see the power of these words of Jesus—'I have called you friends'—to move the human heart. The one word, 'friend,' breaks down each barrier of reserve, and we have boldness in his presence. Our hearts go out in love to meet his love."¹

III. The Miracles Reveal the Character of the Crowds

Living conditions during Jesus' days on earth were terrible. Illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, slavery, disease, and death were the norm. Hopelessness prevailed. When Jesus came, people caught a glimmer of hope. The tragedy at sunset was that the crowds gathered, not out of respect or love for Jesus, but rather out of selfishness. They wanted to use Jesus for their own purposes.

ILLUS. In Hawthorne's story "Rappaccini's Daughter," he describes a chemist experimenting with poisons. He developed a beautiful flower garden. However, each one

was laced with poisonous substance. As admirers would breathe in the poison, they would become a poison dispensary. For years, in a fiendish experiment, he exposed his own daughter to the flowers so that her own breath was deadly to any living thing.

Amos Wells wrote concerning the story, "This is a true picture of those who breathe the selfish atmosphere of the world, for they are poisoned by it and become poisonous in their turn."²

Three years later many in the crowd that surrounded Peter's house that night for healing may have found themselves in the crowd calling for Jesus' crucifixion. No longer could He meet their selfish demands. So why not let Him die?

Before we become critical of those people, let's turn the microscope to examine our motivation. Do we really want a miracle of love, or our own miracles?

CONCLUSION:

We must pose the question: Are we more interested in immediate solutions for physical problems, or are we interested in the solutions to our spiritual maladies?

1. Carroll E. Simcox, *3,000 Quotations on Christian Themes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 81.

2. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), 634.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP "A Living Hope"
(1 Pet. 1:3-5, 8-9)

SOLO

MORNING PRAYER

MORNING HYMNS "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary"
"The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power"

OFFERING

MORNING SCRIPTURE Mark 1:29-34

PRAYER CHORUS "Gentle Shepherd"

PASTORAL PRAYER

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON "IT'S A MIRACLE!"

CLOSING "Bless His Holy Name"

Creative Worship Ideas

Welcome to Worship

Worship is acknowledging God's worth. It culminates with our human response to the divine God.

Morning Prayer

Offer sentence prayers of thanks by members of the congregation.

PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 1:35-39

April 13, 1977

Jesus experienced an exhaustive day at Capernaum. It began at the synagogue early in the morning. While attending there, the synagogue ruler asked Him to teach the lesson for the morning. As He taught the people, astonishment gripped the congregation at His authoritative teaching.

Near the conclusion of the sermon, a demon-possessed man broke out in a shout to reveal the true identity of Jesus—"the Holy One of God." Walking the two city blocks from the synagogue, Jesus entered the home where Peter's mother-in-law lay ill. Once again Jesus complied with a healing hand. Shortly the whole crowd surrounded Peter's home to demand Jesus' time and energy.

Having compassion on the whole community of ill, Jesus assumed the task of healing. Hardly a moment passed that someone didn't need Him. He didn't have a free moment!

Do you ever feel as if free moments are rare? A variety of activities swirl at you constantly like a twister—40-plus hours of work, clients to meet, PTA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, soccer, Sunday School lesson preparation, gardening, miles to travel, schoolwork—what a busy time! As some of my friends say, "We hardly have time to ourselves, much less for God."

Jesus experienced pressure-packed days. That Sabbath drained Him. He dropped off to sleep quickly after the bed mats were rolled out. Peace and quiet filled the house, interrupted only by snoring. Shortly after Jesus fell asleep, He awoke with a desperate need to be with the Father. No one noticed the figure of Jesus slipping through the front door into the darkness. It was early morning before the sun was even up. Jesus felt His way through the twisted paths of brush until He came to a clearing where a fallen tree struck by lightning long ago lay still. He had escaped from the hustle and bustle of the crowds scurrying to get a favor from Him, tiptoeing to see Him, or straining to hear His words. It was imperative for Him to speak with the Father in prayer.

Prayer is an appeal of the spirit to God. Jesus gripped that truth with tenacity, as we also should. There is a vital need to speak to God; then we need to listen to Him!

I. What Motivates Us to Pray?

A. A sense of cooperation with God motivates us to pray. It is not a chore or duty to pray, but a privilege to talk with the God of the universe.

Dee Freeborn wrote: "What if the goal of prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance and obstinacies but cooperating with His highest 'willingness' for His world? That kind of prayer is vastly superior to my old idea of 'getting hold of God' in order to yank Him into my world to get things done on which He seemed reluctant to act. Prayer is bringing myself into alignment with what He has purposed for me and for those I love."¹

B. A sense of obedience and submission to God motivates us to pray. The biblical concept of obedience is not imprisoning but liberating. I have the freedom to submit to the will of God. I desire to do that without hesitation. My obedience stems from an attitude of faith that states that God desires to be with me.

C. A sense of humility and need of God motivates us to pray. The world thinks it is on its own with no need for Him. That is a false sense of pride and defiance toward God. The Christian realizes a great need for His direction in life. In humility he asks the God of the universe for help. When we pray, we recognize that we are stripped, naked, forsaken by the world, and lack everything. That's why we need a God who can supply all our needs. Our God can!

D. A sense of power through God motivates us to pray. We should never hesitate to increase our work because of the limitation of our own strength. Isaiah wrote to the people who had miscalculated their God's power. They thought Him too small. The prophet declared to them the greatness of the Lord and reminded them that they were puny. Human strength is insufficient to meet the greatest challenges of human life. Those who wait on the powerful Creator God receive His strength.

Isaiah writes:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (40:27-31, NKJV).

ILLUS. G. B. F. Hallock told about a grain elevator with a floor of concrete about a foot thick built in a town out west. For 18 months, a half million bushels of wheat rested on the floor. When the time came to empty the elevator, the farmers noted that the floor in a particular spot bulged. After removing the concrete from the spot, they found that a growing plant had raised that solid concrete floor with all the grain upon it several inches.

Where did the plant get all this power? The answer is from the sun. "Thus, may we, without any special gift or accomplishment, draw enough life and power from the Son of Righteousness to lift his kingdom higher, even when it seems impossible." Prayer and faith allow Jesus to do for us and with us what we could never accomplish alone.²

E. A sense of protection by God motivates us to pray.

ILLUS. Ed Robinson wrote about an incident that happened to him in the Minaret Wilderness of California several years ago. He had spent four days hiking through the High Sierra. "It was time to leave the peace and rugged solitude of the high country and return to the rat race of southern California."

As he headed down the rugged mountainside, his mind began to replay all the great memories of the past four days. Accordingly he lost track of his position on the trail and found himself stuck on a precipice with no way out except to cross over a rocky crag and a rushing stream. He thought he remembered how to get back; but as he started his return trek, he soon discovered that it wasn't the way at all. He writes, "I followed a couple of paths, but they just ended up going down a marmot hole. Finally, in frustration, I stood on the edge of the precipice and yelled out, 'Somebody help me, I'm stuck!' But nobody answered. I got lost because I missed the trail."

He had overlooked the markers along the trail and couldn't retrieve his sense of direction. He concludes, "I was lost with no recourse but to span the crag and head down the hill."³

All of us have had experiences like that. People, circumstances, and Satan throw us into a state of utter confusion. We lose all sense of spiritual direction. That's exactly the time we must focus upon Jesus and pray for His protection and direction at that moment. Without that protection and direction, we could fall down one of those mountains and be lost forever. Unlike Ed Robinson, we can call for help, and God the Protector shows us the trail map.

II. What Characterizes Us as We Pray?

What are some of the characteristics of prayer that the Christian should demonstrate as he or she prays to God?

A. We need a sincere heart. Sincerity or genuineness states to God that we are honest before Him. God desires for us to talk with Him about all of our feelings. Dump the bad on Him, and He doesn't move away as some people do. Tell Him the good, and He is interested and rejoices.

God does not leave the sincere in heart who honestly want Him.

B. We need a simple prayer of faith. We don't have to be elaborate with our words. We need to come to the point. Martin Luther said, "The fewer the words, the better the prayer."⁴

C. We need a heart full of praise. Praise stimulates our process of knowing our awesome God. We acknowledge Him as the One Supreme Being worthy of our trust, hope, and love. We must spend time to thank Him for His attributes shared with finite beings like ourselves.

III. What Hinders Us from Prayer?

Obstacles move in on us as we pray that hinder us from focusing on God.

A. Self-gratification hinders prayer. James points out, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3, NKJV).

B. Unconfessed sin hinders prayer. If there is a rebellious attitude in your heart, it will stop prayer dead on the spot. Ps. 66:18 is a great reference.

C. Busyness hinders prayer. The word "busy" has taken on a high status in our society. People think that if they are busy, they are important. But if we are too busy to pray, we are too busy!

D. Impatience hinders prayer. If God doesn't answer our prayers when we want them answered, we don't take the time to continue to ask. Be persistent. Quiet the inner restlessness, and settle down in God's timing.

E. Unbelief hinders prayer.

CONCLUSION:

God has allowed us the greatest privilege: to dialogue with Him. Will you take advantage of His offer today?

1. E. Dee Freeborn, *When You Pray* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1992), 17.
2. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (Richard R. Smith, 1931), 571.
3. Ed Robinson, "Somebody Help Me—I'm Stuck!" *Resource* 14, No. 4 (June—August 1996), 3.
4. Bob Phillips, *Book of Great Thoughts and Funny Sayings* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1993), 251.
5. Richard S. Taylor, *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 409.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

"Prayer is a conscious turning of a man to God for communication or to seek divine help in time of need. . . . Prayer can be a sigh, a moan, or an inarticulate cry."⁵ Prayer is our reach heavenward with deep longing for a loving God. Come, let us seek the Son Jesus, the Holy Father, and the Spirit of Divine Love.

OPENING PRAYER

SONGS OF PRAYER

"I Must Tell Jesus"

"Behold the Throne of Grace"

Offering/Offertory

GIVING THANKS

SCRIPTURE OF ASSURANCE

CHORUS OF PRAYER

"If My People Will Pray"

PRAYER AROUND THE ALTAR FOR ALL WHO DESIRE

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER"

CLOSING HYMN

"Sweet Hour of Prayer"

CLOSING PRAYER

The Prayer of Serenity

Creative Worship Ideas

Opening Prayer

Break up into small groups and begin the service with prayer. The pastor will close the prayer after approximately five minutes.

DARING FAITH FOR LIFE

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 5:21-43

April 20, 1977

INTRO:

The days challenged Jesus continually. Prior to the incident of our text, Jesus focused on a pattern of helping people discover faith as a lifestyle.

1. Jesus had helped His men who had been accosted by nature as a wild storm arose on the lake where they sailed. Jesus stepped to the edge of the boat, spoke a few words, and the howling wind and tumultuous waves ceased. The lake became a mirror of glassy calm.

2. After landing the boat on the shores of Gadara, Jesus was again accosted—this time by a wild man filled with demonic spirits. Without fear, Jesus stepped up to the man to confront his personal demons. He healed his mind and spirit by driving those demons away.

3. Returning from the region of Gadara, Jesus immediately encountered the relentless large crowds vying for His attention and power. They wanted to see Him, touch Him, talk with Him, listen to His words, and enjoy His presence.

At this point the text begins its plot. As Jesus spoke to the crowds, a disturbance from the back of the crowd progressed forward. The synagogue ruler by the name of Jairus broke through the crowd, seeking Jesus' help. He moved forward, increasing his vocal and emotional intensity. When he finally made it to Jesus, he fell at the Lord's feet, pleading with the Master to come and heal his 12-year-old daughter at the point of death.

This occurrence would seem natural to the modern reader, but it was unusual to the crowd that day. Jewish clerical leadership, of which Jairus was a synagogue ruler, had been advised to avoid Jesus at any cost. Synagogue rulers were the administrative heads of the Jewish worship community, serving as the president of the Board of Elders. His responsibility was the allocation of duties for the worship services. He held an important role in the Jewish community.

Religious position at this moment of his life was insignificant, as was any threatening message from Caiaphas. He swallowed his pride in this daring act of faith as he ran to the lakeshore to find Jesus.

Jesus responded to Jairus's need in a positive, forthright manner. In essence he said: "Jairus, I see your faith. I will come to your house now. Let's go see your daughter."

Off they went together, with the crowd tagging along to see what they perceived to be a circus.

On their journey a sideshow event occurred that could have crushed Jairus's hopes and faith. In the middle of a sentence, Jesus abruptly stopped walking. He turned to look at the crowd and asked a most illogical question: "Who touched My clothes?" (NKJV).

The disciples responded that the crowd was so large that anyone near Him could have, even if only by accident. Jesus knew that this was no accident, but a deliberate act of the will.

Peering into the crowd for a response, Jesus' eyes landed on a poor woman who obviously seemed genuinely relieved. She moved closer to Jesus and confessed that she had touched His garment, hoping for a miracle. She explained that for 12 years she had dealt with a personal problem of bleeding, leaving her weak and helpless. Searching for the right cure from doctors had also left her poor. When she discovered that Jesus would be passing by her area, she decided to seek His help.

Since He was busy talking to Jairus, she decided to simply reach out and touch His garment in faith, believing she would be healed. As she explained, her faith was rewarded, for she sensed inwardly that she was healed of the disease. A great round of exclamations rolled across the crowd. People began rejoicing.

But in the midst of this spontaneous rejoicing, one of Jairus's friends slipped behind him to whisper that his little girl had died. Immediately Jairus began to cry.

Jesus turned His attention from the woman to Jairus. Jesus assured Jairus that through faith his daughter would be healed.

Arriving home, the air hung heavily in the house of death. Friends were consoling Jairus's wife. People were crying hysterically. Gloom dominated the scene. Jesus ignored it all. He took three of His men—Peter, James, and John—along with Jairus and his grieving wife to the bedroom. There he looked into the face of the 12-year-old, took her hand, and told her to get out of bed. She did!

Can you imagine that bedroom scene? Can you feel the excitement and joy of that mother and father? What about the amazement of the disciples and the feelings of the crowd? What about the girl herself?

The incident demonstrates the deity of Jesus Christ. He is our High Priest. He sympathizes with our weaknesses and rewards our faith.

I. Jesus Is Our Tender, Compassionate Help in Life

Do you sense the tender compassion radiating from Jesus? Jairus's call for help was not cowardly, but from desperation. Jesus is the Hope and Help of the desperate! His arm is not too short to extend help in our time of need. Jesus modeled for us meeting human need at all levels. Our task is to aid in the relief of people's suffering and infirmities. Compassion must never cease. The church must be known as "Church of the Open Heart"! Compassion must motivate us to action. Many people look for someone to show an act of compassion.

ILLUS. I read a story about Pastor John R. Ramsey, who wears a rose boutonniere on his suit lapel each Sunday. He wrote that since he always had a flower on, he really did not think much of it. Though the flower was given by an individual, it was on such a regular basis that it became routine. However, one Sunday morning it became very special.

As he was leaving the Sunday morning service, a young boy about 10 years of age approached him. He came right up to Pastor Ramsey and asked what he was going to do with the flower he was wearing. Ramsey said that he was going to throw it away. After thinking about it a moment, he asked if the lad would like to have the flower. The child responded positively. The minister then casually asked what he was going to do with it.

The answer was different than what Ramsey anticipated. He said: "Sir, I'm going to give it to my granny. My mother and father got divorced last year. I was living with my mother, but when she married again, she wanted me to live with my father. I lived with him for a while, but he said I could not stay, so he sent me to live with my grandmother. She is so good to me. She cooks for me and takes care of me. She has been so good to me that I want to give that pretty flower to her for loving me."

John Ramsey's eyes filled with tears, and he could hardly speak as the boy finished his story. He handed the boy his rose and then told him that it wasn't enough. He said, "Son, that is the nicest thing I have ever heard, but you can't have this flower because it's not enough. If you'll look in front of the pulpit, you'll see a big bouquet of flowers. Different families buy them for the church each week. Please take those flowers to your granny because she deserves the very best."

The pastor said that if he hadn't been touched enough already, the last statement the boy made would always stick with him. The young fellow said, "What a wonderful day. I asked for one flower but got a beautiful bouquet."

Can you reach out and give a rose of compassion to someone today?

II. Jesus Is Our Authority in Life

Authority in this sense is power, strength, or ability over anything. The text and its preceding verses describe in vivid detail the authority that Jesus had over disease and death. His authority blended with God's power, combining with the faith of such people as the woman in the crowd and Jairus's faith. All that produced the seemingly impossible.

God responds in authority from the physical to the spiritual as we combine faith with His power.

ILLUS. During the Tournament of Roses parade one New Year's Day, a beautiful float began sputtering, gave a final gasp, and quit moving. It was out of gas. The entire parade stopped until someone could get a can of gas.

The irony was this float represented the Standard Oil Company. With all of its enormous oil resources, its parade truck ran out of gas.

Christians often neglect their spiritual maintenance. Though they are "clothed with power" (Luke 24:49), they find themselves out of spiritual gas. Their power is depleted. Don't be one of them.

III. Jesus Is Our Confidence in Life

When Jairus approached Jesus about his daughter's ill-

ness, Jesus did not delay. He instantly brought an air of confidence that Jairus adopted. He sensed that something positive would happen to his daughter because Jesus was coming to his house.

ILLUS. Norman Vincent Peale wrote that everywhere he went he always carried a card in his pocket that had four lines on it. These words were printed on the card:

The light of God surrounds me.

The love of God enfolds me.

The power of God protects me.

Wherever I am God is!

Peale said the card reminded him that he served a God of love and care. God is the perfect remedy to fear, worry, anxiety, and all other problems known to the human race. The thought evoked the concept that God was only a prayer away.²

People today look for confidence in a variety of places, but only in God do they find true certainty for life.

The writer of Hebrews penned, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (4:16).

CONCLUSION:

Jesus is our Help, Authority, and Confidence for life and forever!

1. Jack Canfield and Mark V. Hansen, *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1995), 32-33.

2. *The Answer Bible* (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1993), 23.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

INVOCATION PRAYER

SONGS OF FAITH "O for a Faith That Will Not Shrink"
"Blessed Assurance"

OFFERING OF LOVE

SCRIPTURE Heb. 11:1-3, 6, 8-9a, 11, 17a; 12:1-2a

PRAYER SONG "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" (vv. 1-2)

PRAYER OF FAITH

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"DARING FAITH FOR LIFE"

CLOSING HYMN

"My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

Have three people testify about their faith in (1) a loving God, (2) a healing God, (3) a powerful God.

Prayer of Faith

Offer anointing for those who desire the prayer of faith for healing.

GROWING AS A DISCIPLE

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 8:27-38

April 27, 1997

Jesus declares the immutable principle of the Christian life to the crowds that followed His travel: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The death of Jesus means nothing, except to those who are willing to die to sin and self and to follow Him as disciples. The call reaches to all people who will renounce carnal self to become a participant in the Christian walk.

Lifting the cross does not incorporate some little or great irritation, distress, or burden as part of life. Rather, it means a crucifixion of selfish goals and ambitions in order to follow Jesus. The believer embarks on a journey without knowing the specifics, but understanding that he or she will not be alone. Jesus, the Protector, Guide, and Example, has called us to be disciples.

Who is a disciple? In biblical terms, the disciple was a true believer in Jesus (Acts 6:7; 9:26; 11:26; 14:21-22). The earliest synonym for "Christian" was "disciple," as seen in 11:26. Also in Acts, the Twelve are called "apostles" to differentiate their leadership capacity instead of the common name for a believer—disciple. Simply put, discipleship is an ongoing process of being a Christian. Michael J. Wilkins defines it as "living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image."

ILLUS. When our children were younger, my wife and I would put them next to a "growth chart" periodically to see how tall they had grown. As they nudged up to the wall chart, a thrill would tingle up and down our spine to discover that little Jeff or Julie had grown another one-eighth inch. We would pat them on the back and make a big deal out of their growth spurt.

Growth charts for Christians are not as visible to the naked eye; but with God's help, work, and grace, there is spiritual development. The Christian's growth comes through companionship with Jesus and discipline in one's personal life through God's help.

The relevancy of following Jesus as a modern believer still persists as it did that day when He first called people to become disciples. We still need to grow as disciples.

I. Discipleship Growth Involves a Denial of Self

Denying self is saying no to selfish, carnal things. It occurs only as we give ourselves fully to Jesus.

ILLUS. In December of 1995 I traveled to Israel on a tour with other ministers. The tour guides took us to many sacred Christian places on that two-week trip. The Church of the Nativity stood out to me. The oldest Christian church building in the world was built in the fourth century there in Bethlehem. As we stood in the courtyard, our guide explained that this church was the only one that the Turks did not destroy when they invaded Israel in the sixth century. Showing no respect for the Christian faith, the Turks rode their horses through the doorway

and came right into the sanctuary to do whatever they desired.

The monks devised a plan to make the doorway into a small opening. It is perhaps four feet high by two or three feet wide, making it impossible for horses to enter. It also causes entrance into the church for humans almost impossible without bowing as one enters. It is now called the "Door of Humiliation." It is a parable of the entrance to the Christian life. We come humbly, on our heart's knees, as we enter the Christian lifestyle, asking for forgiveness from sin. We have to deny ourselves if we would be Jesus' disciples. Rejecting our way, we accept His way.

II. Discipleship Growth Involves Death to Self

If we take up the cross of Jesus, it involves more than bearing a cross of affliction, suffering, or pain. It is a voluntary act of taking up our cross.

The cross symbolizes crucifixion and death. Self-crucifixion with Christ stands as the price of spiritual power and freedom. Paul writes: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). He also writes: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:6-7).

There can be no resurrection into the life of full victory in Christ until there has been first a crucifixion with Him. This is the meaning of taking up the cross personally. It involves more than sympathizing with the crucifixion idea; it is being there. No spiritual growth takes place until we die and Jesus lives!

III. Discipleship Growth Involves Determined Obedience

The verbs "deny" and "take up" both relay a tense of momentary action. These two words suggest the crisis of a crucial conversion and complete consecration resulting in holiness. Paul writes: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

Following Jesus is a continuous action. After the crisis of conversion and sanctification, there is a step-by-step progress in spiritual growth. It involves a constant determination to do His will regardless of the outcome. That determined, single-minded obedience responds to the call of Christ.

To follow Jesus demands an individual response that doesn't mimic another's call to discipleship. Not everyone will make the same sacrifice. Nor will all be called to specific fields of service. Growth comes differently to each person, but it must occur.

IV. Discipleship Growth Involves Understanding the Cultivation of Growth

My wife loves to garden. She and a friend named Kristin share a garden in our backyard. Their ultimate goal is to eat the things that they have planted. But much work precedes the growth. I enjoyed listening to their excitement while planning the garden's growth.

First, Karen planned the location of the garden plot. Then the earth needed to be prepared by tilling the ground—my part. After I had tilled the ground several times to break it up, Karen raked the dirt to get it smooth. She and Kristin mapped out where the plants and seeds would be located so that everything would be in straight rows, the right distances for proper spreading, height, and width.

Next, armed with hoes, seeds, plants, stakes, and string, they marched out to the prepared garden spot to begin the process of planting. With the right mixture of sun and water, their plants are growing. There will still be weeding to do. If the rain doesn't come, I will be out watering with the garden hose. My wife also talks to the plants with words of encouragement to help them grow. She is somewhat rough to the weeds to discourage their growth! Already in a short time the seeds have sprouted. We are seeing the result of all the hard work.

Growing in the faith of Jesus resembles my wife's garden. It takes determined work. One doesn't simply throw seeds on the ground and hope they grow. The basic growth of our faith comes through hard work and determination.

A. Growing means digging deep into the Word.

ILLUS. Ann Keimel, writer and lecturer, stated that the thing that altered her life was when someone told her that the Bible is the absolute truth and is the power of God speaking to her. She said of that experience:

FALLOWFIELD

SIGNS OF THE TIMES



All I know is that God put it within my heart to read His Word, and if I were going to try to encourage somebody to read the Bible, I would ask them to pray for the desire to read the Word. I think only God can put that desire in the heart of a human being, and put the desire in that heart so deeply, that he or she will truly be hungry and thirsty for it. Only then does it take on meaning. You have to seek that. You have to want it. And I guess beyond that, I want to love it so much and I want to say "change me," that without holding it up and admonishing people to read it they will watch my life; they will see the sparkle in my eyes; they will feel the sunrise in my life; they will hear me laugh; they will see me cry, pick myself up, and go on. They will see all of those things in my life that exude love and power and hope, and that will draw them to God's Word.²

B. Growing means communicating with God. Prayer is a dialogue, a two-way conversation between God and me.

C. Growing means a life of worth for God. It isn't living, but abundant living by serving others.

D. Growing means a life of praise and thanksgiving to God.

CONCLUSION:

Discipleship is more than talk. It is action. What are you doing with your call to discipleship?

1. Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 42.

2. King Duncan, *Lively Illustrations for Effective Preaching* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds Publishing, 1987), 68.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

WELCOME

Take a moment and shake hands with one another. Greet each person by saying, "The peace of Jesus be with you." The other should respond, "And with you."

MUSICAL CALL TO WORSHIP

INVOCATION

SONGS OF WORSHIP

"A Charge to Keep I Have"

"We Are Called to Be God's People"

"Find Us Faithful"

WORSHIP WITH OFFERING

Offering/Brass Ensemble

CHOIR SELECTION

RESPONSIVE READING

"A Charge to the Church"

HOLY SCRIPTURE

Matt. 9:35-38; John 4:35-36;

Matt. 28:19-20

PASTORAL PRAYER

SPECIAL MUSIC

MESSAGE OF THE HOUR "GROWING AS A DISCIPLE"

CLOSING

Covenant Prayer

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

A symphony of worship is about to commence: the melody of God—the harmony of people. Come, listen to the music that God and people create.

JESUS REACHES THE TINY WORLD OF CHILDREN

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 10:13-16

May 4, 1997

INTRO:

The Romans had a custom of holding the face of every newborn baby toward the heavens, signifying by presenting the child's forehead to the stars that it was to look above the world into the celestial glories. Though superstitious in its origin, the Christian understands that Jesus is the Star to reach for. Each newborn child has the potential to reach for Jesus.

The text reveals a very loving, compassionate, caring Jesus who loves children.

1. Jewish mothers very naturally desired their children to be blessed by a great and distinguished rabbi.

2. Jesus had been speaking of the sanctity of marriage, in which the safety of the home is dominant. He now teaches the sacredness of childhood, in which the home finds its completeness, its glory, and its enabling care.

3. I can believe that when Jesus saw them coming, perhaps a smile broke across His face.

4. The apostles move in to "protect" Jesus from this intrusion. This incident is close to the end of Jesus' life. The disciples sensed tragedy in the making and wanted to shelter Him.

5. Jesus sharply rebuked His men: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (v. 14). The Lord understood the children. They require human touch, acceptance, approval, caring interest, honest concern, guidance, and, most of all, love. Today children look for those qualities. If they do not find them at home, they head into the streets to search for anything and anyone who offers at least a facsimile.

I. Parents Brought Their Children to Jesus

Jesus tells parents to take an interest in their children's lives.

ILLUS. A disturbing report on page 3 in the *Three Rivers (Mich.) Commercial News*, dated May 21, 1996, states: "Parents who encourage their teenagers to abstain from sex may be making the suggestion too late." In a study of children from two low-income schools, a startling discovery was made that 46 percent of the eighth graders had already experienced sexual intercourse.

This study included 59 fifth graders and 169 eighth graders at unidentified schools. The following statistics reveal a frightening trend. Among the fifth graders, 6 percent said they smoked at least half a pack of cigarettes per day, and 1 percent said they drank from one to three days a week. An additional 3 percent said they drank on weekends.

Of the eighth graders, 6 percent said they smoked half a pack or more per day, 1 percent said they drank one to three days a week, and 13 percent said they drank on weekends.

Without loving concern and support from parents, these statistics will only grow worse.

On the same page of the paper, a bold headline read, "Abandoned baby found in shoe box near clinic."

Christian parents must participate in their children's lives to make a change in those statistics. Your active presence in your children constitutes colossal power. This power is more than most parents imagine. Parents can design a strategy that will help their children.

A. Understand the awesome responsibility of parenthood. It is far beyond mere biological responsibility. Almost anyone can produce a child, but parenting represents much more.

B. You have more influence than you suspect. What you do in front of them and behind their backs will be reproduced in them. You have a choice to use your power for good or evil.

C. If you are absent from your children, they will pay a huge toll for your absence. It may take the form of worry, fear, emotional distress, loneliness, and emptiness in the future.

D. Material possessions, though valuable, are but of secondary importance.

E. You are what is vital in your children.

The following action steps may be used in your parent/child relationship.

1. Remind yourself three times today to be there for your children and be affectionate toward them.

2. Within the next month, read a good book on parenting. Set aside one or two hours in review and discussion with your spouse. The next month ask your spouse to do the same. Alternate throughout the year.

3. Find two other couples with whom you feel comfortable, and begin developing a relationship for sharing. Ideally this could evolve into a support group.

4. List important things that you want to teach your children before they leave home and become independent.

5. Set aside a minimum of 15 minutes to be with your children. During that time read, play, talk, and love. One minister said that most fathers only spend 3 minutes per day conversing with their children, and that included giving commands like "Take out the trash" or "Wash the car."

Remember that children are the responsibility of parents!

II. Disciples Blocked the Children from Jesus

The apparent briskness and harshness of the disciples set up an obstacle course for the parents attempting to get to Jesus for a blessing for their children.

Charles Erdman regarded the disciples' action as coming from a view that the blessing and the children were too insignificant at that moment for Jesus. His work de-

manded precious time and care that should be spent on the adults of the community, so they thought.

Commentator William Barclay, conversely, viewed these men, not as ungracious or unkind, but sensed that they needed to shelter their Master from the masses of humanity that constantly beset Him.

Regardless of which view is taken, the action significantly typifies the difficulty that parents encounter trying to bring their little ones to Jesus.

Such obstacles can include:

1. Spiritual ignorance. I have heard Miriam Hall, director of Children's Ministries for a holiness denomination, state that within the next three years, by A.D. 2000, one-half of American children will not have entered a church building. If that is true of American children, how much more so for many other countries. European church attendance is only about 3 to 5 percent of the population.

2. Carelessness in our spiritual walk.

3. Customs that are unchristian.

4. Indifference to the gospel.

5. Fear and defiance of the message of redemption.

6. Ungodly friends who set poor examples before children.

7. Busy lifestyles that leave Him out.

Whatever blocks a child's encounter with Jesus must be avoided. The church and Sunday School must help destroy the obstacles that prevent children from coming to Him.

The church must set examples of bringing Jesus to the child's world.

1. Christians who really know Jesus as Savior become great examples of the Christ-centered lifestyle.

2. Teaching ministry that incorporates the message of Jesus into the minds and hearts of children.

3. The preaching of God's Word. My wife and I and our two children, Jeff and Julie, were all converted before the age of eight. The message of Jesus was planted through preaching so that we asked Jesus to enter our hearts.

4. Activities that keep children interested in learning and coming to church. Caravan, Vacation Bible School, quizzing, and Sunday School are examples of various ministries.

5. Fellowship with other believing children.

Let's be building blocks, not roadblocks!

III. Children Loved Jesus, and Jesus Loved Them

The word used for gathering the children up into Jesus' arms meant that He put His arms around them like a hug. They responded by hugging Him back. Jesus saw the innocence of the children. They had not yet learned to think in terms of prestige, pride, place, or prejudice. He gained their trust.

Even with the tension of the Cross in His mind, Jesus took time to smile, play, and bless the children. He reached down into their world. Jesus is the Savior of the children.

CONCLUSION:

To paraphrase Charles Erdman, where Jesus is trusted and followed, infancy is sacred, and children are secure.

Let us bring children to see Jesus. He died for them too.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO THE FELLOWSHIP

MOMENTS OF FRIENDSHIP

Greet one another in the Lord

CALL TO WORSHIP

OPENING PRAYER

Led by a child

SONG OF WORSHIP

"Fairest Lord Jesus"

"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"

"Tell Me the Stories of Jesus"

OFFERING/OFFERTORY

Have children as ushers

SCRIPTURE

Mark 10:13-16

SPECIAL MUSIC

Children's Choir

SERMON

"JESUS REACHES THE TINY WORLD OF CHILDREN"

DEDICATION OF CHILDREN

SPECIAL MUSIC SOLO

"We Give This Child to You"

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

CLOSING HYMN

"The Lord Bless You and Keep You"

BENEDICTION

Num. 6:24-26

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

Come, Father, fill our cups.

Make them spill over with Your blessing.

Dedication Service

Have the church board come and stand behind the parents as a symbol of the church's support.

BEYOND BELIEF



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LET'S PARTY!

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 14:3-9

May 11, 1997

INTRO:

Jesus never liked to miss a good party! When Simon invited Him to Bethany for a party, He accepted. Looking back on the scene, it seems odd that Jesus would want to go to a party. Surely He sensed that His life was quickly coming to an end. Shortly He would leave the little village of Bethany for the last time and walk the 15-minute stroll from the outskirts of Bethany to the grassy hill atop the Mount of Olives. He would then walk down the hill on a path past the Garden of Gethsemane and arrive at the Eastern Gate within 10 minutes. Total walking time would be about 25 minutes. He would enter Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with His disciples. Little did they suspect that Jesus would serve as the Passover Lamb that year and forever after.

But before the agony of the Cross, Jesus opted to spend Passover Eve night with friends. He would be the honored Guest. Simon, the former leper, had been cleansed by Jesus. Knowing that He would be in the area, Simon invited a few people to his party whose lives had also been touched by Jesus.

It was a night of conversation, lots of laughter, plenty of good food, a happy event. Optimism, joy, and fun highlighted the evening. All was well until Mary entered, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Following the custom for distinguished dinner guests, she approached Jesus to put a drop or two of nard upon Him, a pure and expensive perfume imported from India. Mary couldn't contain her excitement and gratitude for the life changes that Jesus had made in her. Instead of a drop or two, she poured the entire container on Him!

This extravagant generosity sent up a howl of criticism and snippy remarks. The party could have gone sour then, but Jesus commanded them to leave her alone. He saw far more than what critics could see. Jesus said that she was doing a lovely thing on His behalf. They would always have the poor, but He wouldn't always be with them. The next several hours would prove Him a prophet. I imagine that the party continued, and Jesus enjoyed it magnificently.

I. Love Made Her Give Spontaneously

I have a sanguine personality, according to Florence Littauer's personality book. I like to do things with a flair, talk a lot, operate without an agenda, laugh at the dumbest jokes, smile at crazy things, and be the life of the party. The more people, the merrier I am. Spontaneity is my lifestyle.

It appears that Mary possessed a sanguine personality. Instead of following the routine of cooking the meal and doing the housework when Jesus visited her house one time, she opted to sit and talk. Instead of dropping a few drops of perfume on the head and feet of Jesus, she poured the whole bottle.

To some people spontaneity is a foreign word. Every-

thing must be done in its proper time, place, and order. Excitement and spontaneity are seldom used either in word or action. Serendipities are rare for them.

I believe Mary broke the alabaster jar with spontaneous, serendipitous love. It probably caught everyone off guard, including the hosts, guests, servants, disciples, Jesus, and even Mary herself. What a glorious moment!

Love needs to be extravagant and reckless, refusing to count the cost. We need those beautiful moments. They include:

1. Putting a love note in your spouse's lunch.
2. Catching a child doing something good and giving a fun reward.
3. Children washing the dishes or at least putting them in the dishwasher for mom.
4. Calling a friend to whom you haven't talked for a long time.
5. Slipping a \$10 bill into an envelope and giving it anonymously to someone that needs it.

David McKenna wrote:

People whom Christ redeems from gross sin are often the most extravagant Christians. Converts in the Wesleyan revival, for instance, were converted from gross sins of drunkenness, brawling, sloth, profanity, and adultery. In the joy of their redemption, they sang and shouted the praises of God and were ridiculed as "enthusiasts" by the hierarchy of the established church. There are times when spontaneous and extravagant love is appropriate.¹

II. Love Made Her Give Sacrificially

Could Mary afford a gift equal to a year's salary? I'm not sure, but she did it anyway! The cause was greater than the cost.

Can you name many causes that are greater than the cost? What cause would produce a wholehearted commitment from you without regard to cost?

What sacrifices are you making?

1. For your marriage? We live in a selfish, materialistic society that would rather that a marriage dissolve than make it to the end. The sad statistic is that almost one out of two marriages end in divorce in America. The staggering number of couples applying for divorce papers before five years have lapsed is incredible. Our society has forgotten that marriage is a union of loving sacrifice that doesn't give up when the going gets tough or when we don't get our way!

2. For your children? The altar of materialism stands strewn with the sacrifices of children. But job, time, fun, and money seem too important for some parents. Children would be proud to have dad and mom attend their sporting event, listen to a piano recital, go to their school's open house, sit and play a game, or simply listen to them. How long has it been since you heard a pleading heart? Take a moment and listen closely to your son or daughter.

3. For your church? We would rather dine at the Master's table than give time, effort, or a hand in service. We have become spiritually fat and lazy without any spiritual muscles because we have not exercised our privilege of servanthood.

- a. There is always someone to teach.
- b. There is always someone to visit.
- c. There is always someone to win.
- d. There is always someone to help.
- e. There is always someone to love.

I used an illustration in a sermon at my church, but I cannot find who the author is.

ILLUS. A sailing vessel suffered terrible damage below the waterline. The pumps could not stop the ship from sinking. Exhaustive efforts were made to close the break, but to no avail. It seemed that the vessel would surely sink and all the sailors be lost.

One of the deckhands asked the captain to give him some bagging and let him go down to the break in order to give it one last effort. Permission was granted. The deckhand went below but never came back, nor was it his purpose to do so. The man deliberately corked himself into the hole and stopped the water from entering

the crippled ship. He saved the lives of all his fellow crewmen that day.

So many need our sacrifice of time, energy, resources, money, ideas, and personnel. Can we spare any of it for the needy and lost?

III. Love Made Her Give Specifically

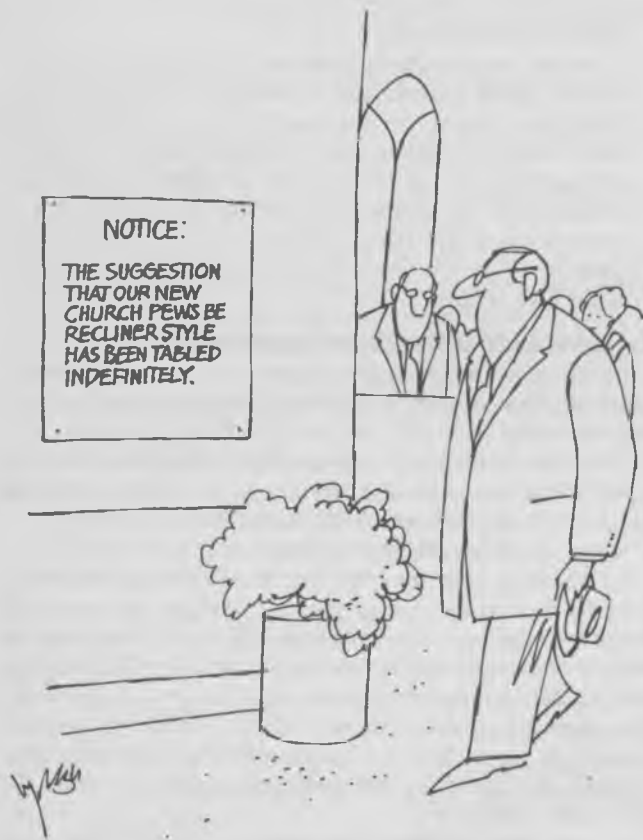
Mary had a vial of ointment to offer Jesus. She willingly gave it to Him. It is a real tragedy when God asks us to do something specific for someone, but we balk because we are either shy or apprehensive.

For the next few minutes, please take the sheet of paper and pencil that the ushers will distribute. On the top of the page, write your name, the date, the time, and the name of your church. Below that draw three columns. In the first column write the name of a person. In the second column list a specific thing that you can do with or for that person. In the third column write the date by your plan for this to be accomplished. Let's pray, asking God to direct you to the one(s) with whom or for whom He wants you to do these specific tasks.

CONCLUSION:

Today we are imitating Mary's act. Her giving was spontaneous, sacrificial, and specific, flowing from a heart of love. We can duplicate these qualities that she first saw in Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, our goal is to replicate those same Christlike qualities.

1. David McKenna, *Mark*, vol. 2 in *The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Tex.: Word Book Publishers, 1982), 280.



SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO THE HOUSE OF PRAISE

CALL TO PRAISE

OPENING PRAYER OF PRAISE

SONGS OF PRAISE

"Joy Unspeakable"

"Jesus Is the Joy of Living"

"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"

OFFERING

CHOIR SPECIAL

SCRIPTURE

PASTORAL PRAISE PRAYER

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

CLOSING HYMN

BENEDICTION

Mark 14:3-9

Quartet

"LET'S PARTY!"

"Joy to the World"

Eph. 3:20-21

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Praise

God has called us to His house. Let us not disappoint Him, for He is our God. Come with hearts bursting with joy!

PENTECOST—RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Derl G. Keefer

Acts 8:14-17

Pentecost Sunday—May 18, 1997

INTRO:

No individual, group, or church organization has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. God gave the gift of His Spirit in divine love for all people, of all people, of all languages, to all nations. However, for the Early, Jewish-dominated Church, the Holy Spirit seemed only for them. The Early Church was composed of Jewish Christians from all nations. Though Gentiles were foreign to the Early Church, changes were in the air.

Our text reveals that a revival erupted in Samaria under the anointed preaching of Philip. One of the original deacons of the Church under the appointment of the apostles, Philip's job was to distribute food to the widows in Jerusalem.

Then God created a new job for Philip, as a distributor of spiritual food. As Philip preached, God began to do a miraculous work in the people of Samaria. The message penetrated their hearts, and salvation came to the Samaritans!

The apostles heard of this spiritual phenomenon and immediately dispatched two of their own to research the matter closely. The apostolic council commissioned Peter and John to travel to Samaria, seeking the truth. They needed to know if it were possible for those not fully Jewish to receive Jesus into their hearts.

Before we criticize this council, we must ask ourselves, how long has it been since white Americans wondered if Black people have a spirit? People defended slavery, insisting that the Black person could not have a soul; thus subjugating him or her for menial tasks was acceptable. Because of their so-called subhuman life, it was permissible to beat them. Even within my lifetime, I have heard this issue questioned.

At least these Jewish Christians did not view the Samaritans as subhuman. Arnold Airhart observed, "The Samaritans, although non-Jewish, were kin to the Jews and formed a natural bridge between the Jewish and Gentile worlds."¹ They simply wanted to know if God really loved the Samaritans enough to send Jesus into their hearts. As Peter and John arrived, they discovered that genuine conversion had taken place. The Samaritans willingly served Jesus.

Since Samaritan converts were coming out of paganism and sin, the apostles knew these people would need a spiritual power to keep them pure. Laying hands on them, they prayed that the Holy Spirit would come and cleanse their hearts. It happened! He came in His fullness and purified their hearts by faith.

Today people need that same power of purity in the midst of modern paganism and sin. The power occurs when the Holy Spirit is allowed into the heart of the believer.

The results of the Samaritan Pentecost duplicated the Jewish Pentecost. We, too, need personally a duplication

of those experiences with the filling of the Holy Spirit today!

I. The Filling of the Spirit Means Accepting Jesus

Philip's message of salvation truth convicted the people of Samaria. They listened intently to his sermons, becoming aware of their rebellion against a holy God of love. They had searched honestly for salvation in all the wrong places.

II.I.U.S. Bob Zuppke, University of Illinois football coach, was well known for his motivational halftime speeches given to his team. He discovered the secret formula of inspiring a team.

One Saturday afternoon the team seemed lethargic and was being clobbered by the opposing unit. Coach Zuppke gave a "win one for the Gipper" type speech and fired up his team to play hard for the next half. The team went into a frenzy responding to his pep talk. At the end of halftime behind closed doors, the coach pointed to the door at the end of the locker room and challenged his men, "Go out there and win the game!"

Emotionally high, the players jumped up and pounded each other's shoulder pads. They shouted and yelled as loudly as possible to psyche themselves up for the next half.

Finally, one of the players led the team through the door by blasting it open and running full speed out the door. Several others followed—but it was the wrong door! One by one, they all fell into the swimming pool!

That's how life goes for many people. We look for life and end up following the wrong person into the cesspool of life. For the Samaritans, Philip's message brought conviction that led through the right door and brought them into repentance met by God's redeeming grace.²

II. The Filling of the Spirit Acknowledges God's Power

The Samaritans received Jesus and were baptized at once into His name. As Christians, they were not destitute of the Holy Spirit. He regenerated them, then indwelt them, and witnessed their conversion; but they did not know Him in His fullness. They needed that empowerment of God's Spirit from on high.

Individuals and the church still need God's empowerment for holy living that purifies and equips believers.

1. The filling of the Spirit sets us apart for God's exclusive use.

2. The filling of the Spirit cleanses our hearts from carnality.

3. The filling of the Spirit dedicates our life to God.

4. The filling of the Spirit liberates from all that hinders God's will, purpose, and plans for us.

5. The filling of the Spirit creates a Christlike character.

6. The filling of the Spirit creates a divine love for others.

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie relates his experience searching for the Holy Spirit's touch. He writes: "Finally one day I got down on my knees and asked for the Spirit of the Lord to fill me. He did. I felt every part of my being invaded with the Spirit. I felt deeply loved as never before, intellectually equipped with the mind of Christ, and endowed with spiritual gifts which were far beyond my talents. . . . The struggle was gone!"³

Stop struggling with God. You will be amazed what will happen in your life as you yield to His Spirit.

III. The Filling of the Spirit Welcomes Holy Fellowship

The warmth of the Holy Spirit melted the ancient walls of national separatism. The laying on of hands signified the acceptance into holy fellowship of those who were not Jewish Christians. That day the Church took a historical and spiritual step by receiving the Samaritans into the Church of Jesus Christ.

While at Promise Keepers Clergy Conference in Atlanta in 1996, I watched as the walls of church and racial differences melted again as pastors from all nations stood together. I felt that I was witnessing another Pentecost miracle. Men prayed, sang, hugged, and praised God

together as the Spirit poured His joy upon us, making us "one in the bond of love."

The entire Church of Jesus Christ needs that glorious experience as it accepts people into its holy fellowship regardless of economics, social class, or color casts. Only the Holy Spirit empowers His Church for genuine fellowship.

CONCLUSION:

We need the Holy Spirit's presence today.

ILLUS. A Sunday School teacher asked his boys' class to memorize the Apostles' Creed and to repeat it clause by clause, with each student having memorized his own clause. This would be presented for the adults in the church service.

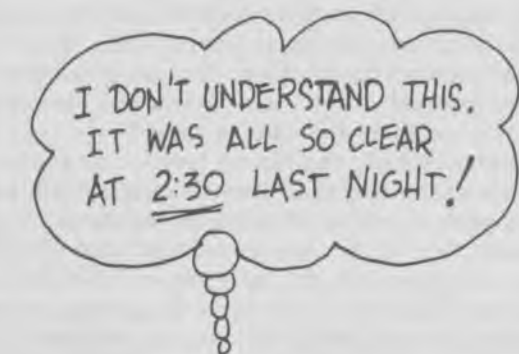
The boys lined up on Sunday to give their recitation. As they began, the first boy said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

The second lad repeated his phrase, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

The recitation went on well until it reached a dead silence. Something had gone wrong. The pause ended when one of the pupils spoke up and said, "Teacher, the boy who believes in the Holy Ghost is absent today."

The teacher responded, "Lots of people are absent when it comes to that clause."

Let's not be one of those people!



LaPine 1992

1. Arnold E. Airhart, *Acts*, vol. 5 of *Beacon Bible Expositions* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 93.
2. Stan Toler, *God Has Never Failed Me, but He's Sure Scared Me to Death a Few Times* (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1995), 125.
3. Lloyd Ogilvie, *Acts*, vol. 5 in *The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 156.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME

Today we celebrate Pentecost Sunday around the globe. The Holy Spirit was given in His fullness to the Church on this day. Let us sing and pray in the Spirit of God as He brings divine love and power upon the people of God!

SONG OF PRAISE

Choir
"Holiness unto the Lord"

INVOCATION PRAYER

SONGS OF THE SPIRIT

"Sweet, Sweet Spirit"
"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
"Come, Holy Spirit"

OFFERING

SCRIPTURE

Rom. 8:1-2, 5-6, 10-11, 13-14
"Life in the Spirit"

PASTORAL PRAYER

TESTIMONIES

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"PENTECOST—RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT"

CLOSING SONG

BENEDICTION

"Spirit Song"
Rom. 15:13

Creative Worship Ideas

Testimonies

Before Pentecost Sunday contact three people to testify to the experience of sanctification when they received their own personal Pentecost.

THE COMMUNION COVENANT

by Derl G. Keefer

Mark 14:22-26

May 25, 1997

INTRO:

Reading Mark's Gospel evokes the feeling of being on a march. Mark writes with energy at a fast pace. It seems that he wants to get to the end quickly, where the good news lies and all other is preliminary. Mark 14 closes in on the end of the book, but also on the end of Jesus' life. The description of the Passover Feast turned Lord's Supper slows the pace down a bit. It offers an opportunity for readers to catch their breath. The Lord's Supper reminds for the Church age the reason that Jesus came to earth. It would be repeated as a sacrament from the beginning to the end of Christian history.

ILLUS. An old Eastern fable tells that when Zacchaeus was old, he continued to live in Jericho. Each day at sunrise he would go for a walk. He always came back renewed in spirit and mind.

One morning his wife secretly followed to watch him. He went to the tree from where he first saw Jesus and first heard the Master call his name to tell him that He was coming to dinner with him. At the site of the tree, he poured water about the roots, pulled the weeds, and passed his hand fondly over the old trunk. He looked up at the place where he had perched himself that day to see Jesus. After a few moments of silent meditation he closed his time with a prayer of gratitude. He patted the old gnarled tree again, and off to his house he wandered.

His wife soon confessed that she had followed him to the site and asked why he went there. He quietly explained, "It was that tree which brought me to Him whom my soul loveth."¹

I. The Lord's Supper Reminds Us of Our Own Personal Redemption

Partaking in Communion, using the bread and juice, symbolizes my participation as a believer in all the benefits of Jesus' atoning work on the Cross. Communion recalls for me the spiritual life that only He can impart to me. No one else can redeem me from sin's clutches.

ILLUS. In her devotional book *My Sacrifice, His Fire*, Anne Ortlund talks about the Incarnation, the way that Jesus came to earth. She concludes:

To rescue the very ones He's battling—to rescue us, His enemies, whom He loves so passionately—to rescue the ones who fight Him, bloody Him, hurt Him, defeat Him, wound and kill Him.

To rescue us so that He can rise, scarred and bloodied, to enfold us tenderly to His breast and gently clear our vision so we can see how deeply He loves us, and then to spend eternity pouring out His kindness upon the precious ones He's rescued, comforting us and sustaining us and doing uncounted good things for us all the days of our eternal lives.

Alleluia!²

As Communion is served, think about the personal

spiritual journey that Jesus has brought you through to the present.

II. The Lord's Supper Reminds Us of Our Fellowship with Other Redeemed Believers

Gathered here today are many who have their own personal redemption stories that they could share. Some have been Christians for decades, while others have been redeemed only a short while. The exciting proposal is that all who have been redeemed have the same Jesus. We compose the universal Church! Fellowship means we care about what happens to the people around us.

ILLUS. Samuel Logan Brengle wrote:

The best neighbors I know anything about are my two hands. They have lived on opposite sides of the street for many years, and they have never had a row. If my left hand is hurt, my right hand immediately drops all other business and rushes across the way to comfort it, and help it out of its trouble. If one happens to hurt the other, the [one that is] hurt doesn't get in a huff and say, "Here, I will not stand for that; you can't treat me that way," and get in a fight. No, no, no. They are good neighbors. My two hands are members of one another.

And Christians should be like that. They are members of Christ's body. They should be as loving, as forbearing, as sympathetic and helpful toward each other as are my two hands.³

III. The Lord's Supper Reminds Us of the Challenge That We Face and the Power We Have in the Spirit

Daily we struggle for spiritual survival. God supplies the weaponry that empowers us not only to survive but to live life abundantly—His Holy Spirit.

ILLUS. In 1951 Richard Bolling was a young congressman from Missouri in the House of Representatives. He proposed a bill that a dam be built in his district but experienced its defeat in committee. With mulelike determination, he brought it up before the whole House, knowing he lacked the votes to secure its victory.

But Bolling had a powerful ally, and his name was Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House. When Bolling rose to present his proposal, Sam Rayburn, who had been sitting in his chair, rose to stand beside Bolling as the proposal was given. Rayburn said nothing at all. He didn't have to—the message was clear. By simply standing with the young Bolling, Rayburn meant he wanted the bill passed—and it was.⁴

Who is better qualified to be the one to stand beside the church individually and corporately but the Holy Spirit?

IV. The Lord's Supper Reminds Us That We Are to Worship and Evangelize

We are not to become spiritually fat at the Lord's table.

Rather, Communion commitment drives us from the table to the world. People around the world need to hear the message that "Jesus Saves." We are the proclaimers, the evangelists, and the witnesses.

A. W. Tozer gave a scalding assessment of Evangelical Christianity:

We have lost the art of worship. We are not producing saints. Our models are successful businessmen, celebrated athletes and theatrical personalities. We carry on our religious activities after the methods of the modern advertiser. Our homes have been turned into theaters. Our literature is shallow and our hymnody borders on sacrilege. And scarcely anyone appears to care. . . . Much that passes for New Testament Christianity is little more than objective truth sweetened with song and made palatable by religious entertainment.⁵

Then he jabs his point across: "Christ calls men to carry a cross, but we call them to have fun in His name."⁶

Evangelism is work! People are lost, and we need to bring them into a saving relationship with Jesus. Communion calls us to the table, not only to feed, but also to serve.

CONCLUSION:

Take seriously the reminders of the Lord's table. Remember the night that Jesus served His disciples bread and wine, His body and blood.

1. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), 172.

2. Anne Ortlund, *My Sacrifice, His Fire: Weekday Readings for Christian Women* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 261.

3. Albert M. Wells, comp., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 41.

4. Virgil Hurley, *Speaker's Sourcebook* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), 101.

5. A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1960), 36, 28.

6. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations*, 42-43.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Pastor reads Ps. 116:5-9 as he or she enters the sanctuary worship service. Candles are being lit by acolytes.

CHOIR SONG

INVOCATION

SONGS OF COMMUNION

"I Come with Joy"

"Here, O My Lord, I See Thee"

COMMUNION MEDITATION

OFFERING/OFFERTORY

SONG OF THANKS

"Give Thanks"

SPECIAL MUSIC

SERMON

"THE COMMUNION COVENANT"

COMMUNION

As people prepare for the Lord's Supper, the song "Let Us Break Bread Together" is sung as a solo or by the congregation.

PASTOR READS FROM HYMNAL

"Preparation for Communion"

PRAYER

HYMN AS CONGREGATION LEAVES THE ALTAR

"Now Let Us from This Table Rise"

BENEDICTION

Num. 6:24-26



Preaching through pain and fatigue, Pastor McNichols maintains his consecutive sermon streak at 2,144.

Highpoint

REMEMBER WHEN INFORMATION CAME THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY?

Preparing sermons meant clearing a space on the desk of the study, lining up your Bible, favorite commentaries, book of illustrations, and maybe, the Greek New Testament and Thayers' Lexicon. While many preachers still use this means of sermon preparation, times have changed. Now, through the Internet, tools to help you preach effectively week in and week out, are available for immediate downloading to your personal computer. Bible software, illustrations, and now through Highpoint Preaching Resources, your computer can become a virtual library for sermon preparation.

Only recently, we thought we were approaching state of the art transmission of information when we made Highpoint Preaching Resources available to pastors in diskette form. The changes in technology make accessing this information as easy as a telephone call. By accessing the Nazarene Home Page on the World Wide Web (WWW), you can pull down Highpoint Preaching Resources for easy manipulation on your personal computer. When combined with access through your favorite Bible software such as LOGOS, you can do the

word studies, customize the illustrations, and configure the application to your local needs. Follow these four simple steps:

Step One: Using any online service, connect with <http://www.nazarene.org>

Step Two: Page down to Church Growth Resources, looking for Pastoral Ministries.

Step Three: After clicking on Pastoral Ministries, select Highpoint Preaching Resources.

Step Four: Download to your personal computer. When you have completed your download, log off, and begin manipulation of the data to suit your needs.

Where is technology leading us? That's a good question. While we know there are any number of possible answers to this question, we believe it's the wrong question. The right question is "Where is God leading us . . . and how can we use technology responsibly as His servants to accomplish His mission and task?" We hope you will discover the potential technology offers clergy for effective use of limited scarce resources, viz., their time for study of the Word in preparation for its proclamation.

WELCOME TO *HIGHPOINT*

On my way to the office one morning, I passed one of those drivers that have always worried me just a bit. Hunched over the wheel, hanging on for dear life, I could almost see the white tint on his knuckles. His eyes were fixed straight ahead. His seat was scouted forward, the seat-back in its full, upright position, putting him in full contact with the steering wheel.

I learned to drive on the freeways of Southern California. My father taught me to steer the car but not to over-correct or ignore the unseen laws of physics and motion. As a teenager I understood what racers call push and understeer. While I didn't know much about physics, I intuitively understood that once a mass is moving, one can often use the forces generated by the action to help the driver make a needed correction.

As I passed the driver, I looked in my rearview mirror to see how he was getting along. We were coming up on a curve in the freeway where three highways meet, called the Triangle. As I scanned the road ahead, I saw something lying diagonally in the highway. I was on the inside lane. Whatever the debris was, it was on the outside lane of this two-lane section of the freeway.

Holding my speed, I realized that there was more than one piece of debris. Apparently a truck had lost cans of paint and an aluminum extension ladder. Two thoughts flashed through my mind: (1) I sure could use a ladder like that, if only I could figure a way to stop and safely pick it up. (2) Oh no; I hope that driver behind me can avoid running the ladder over.

No sooner had those thoughts flashed through the synapses of my brain, when I watched the driver, frozen in indecision, allow his car to run across the ladder on the pavement. He made no attempt to steer around the ladder. On impact both front tires blew out. My exit ramp was coming up, and as I watched him fade in the distance, my last vision of him was his effort to bring the car to a stop on the side of the road.

There is a parable hidden in that story that relates to *Highpoint* Sunday night preaching resources. It's about what happens in Sunday night services and how your community of faith is maintained.

Ministry and driving an automobile have several similarities. For example, pastors through preaching provide spiritual direction. Someone has to steer, alter the course

of direction, make adjustments, compensate for obstructions, and so forth. Preaching is not about being hunched over the wheel in white-knuckled paralysis. Nor is preaching about overcorrection, coercion, or forcing change while ignoring the laws of spiritual physics.

Norm Shoemaker understands preaching. This quarter's offering is a practical approach to preaching that has the warm, fluid, yet intuitive feel for the spiritual roadway. Don't be misled by Norm's quiet, almost casual approach. Like the racer who seems almost relaxed at the wheel, he is ever vigilant, anticipating the next curve, scanning the distance while maintaining adequate reserves for the unexpected turn of events. That's not a bad description of good preaching.

Using the Pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Shoemaker opens these passages to reveal persuasive, not coercive, directives for better living in a holy community. And what better place to forge this kind of product than in a campus congregation where the spiritual roadway presents an ever-changing kaleidoscope of possibilities.

At a Glance

Previous issues of *Highpoint* have offered suggestions for working with the material in a variety of settings. You may want to refer to those for additional ideas regarding application, setting, and format. Along with each sermon are variety suggestions to enrich the moment or environment of presentation. Of course, you are well-equipped to create your own approach to this material. Feel free to put it into the context of your ministry setting.



Norman Shoemaker

Meet Norm Shoemaker

Norm Shoemaker is a resurrection preacher. Not only was he born on Easter Sunday, but he has spent his life proclaiming in word, deed, and letter the transformative possibilities of grace. He is a native Californian, educated at Pasadena College, California State College, Los Angeles, and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He is a veteran minister having experience in many facets of Christian service. His list of assignments include youth ministry, campus pastor, denominational leadership, and senior minister. Norm authored two books: *Discipleship Is More than a Twelve-Letter Word* and *Small Groups . . . Big Ministry*. He is married to Judy and they have three grown children. He currently pastors First Church of the Nazarene, San Diego, California.

David J. Felter, editor

THIRTEEN WEEKS IN THESSALONIANS

Rev. Norm Shoemaker

- | | |
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| Sermon 1 | A Good News Church |
| Sermon 2 | Welcoming the Present Presence |
| Sermon 3 | It's Your Turn to Serve |
| Sermon 4 | Communicating the Word That Works |
| Sermon 5 | You Are My Sonshine |
| Sermon 6 | The Sacrament of Presence |
| Sermon 7 | The <i>Proof</i> Is in the Pleasing |
| Sermon 8 | Real Care |
| Sermon 9 | Passing on the Walk |
| Sermon 10 | Faith That Works |
| Sermon 11 | Distinctly Different |
| Sermon 12 | Loves Works |
| Sermon 13 | The Promise Keeper |

A GOOD NEWS CHURCH

1 Thess. 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

A. Most of you know that Judy and I spent last month in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea in New Brunswick. St. Andrews is a quaint village snuggled along the shore of Passamaquoddy Bay. Most of the time Judy was up to her elbows in watercolors, and I was knee-deep in books and journals.

One afternoon I picked up a book that, in packing, I had thrown into my briefcase. It happened to be a book written by a couple of friends of mine—H. B. London Jr. and Neil Wiseman. Actually, the book, *Pastors at Risk*, had been lying around the house for a while—not read! Since I wasn't a pastor, it wasn't top priority on my reading list. All that changed about a month ago.

I read with curiosity the list of hazards:

- Walk-on-the-Water Syndrome
- Disastrous Problems
- Member Migration
- Electronic Culture
- Distracted People
- Consumer Mentality
- Suffocating Expectations

Seven down and eight to go. I felt I was being pummeled by some unseen counterpuncher! It was kind of depressing and discouraging. I was about ready to resign before my first Sunday, and I hadn't even finished the second chapter. I kept mumbling to myself, "This isn't the way it's supposed to be." Judy's response was, "Don't read that book anymore!"

So I laid it aside, picked up a magazine, and began reading a story in the *Durham Morning Herald* about a Black woman whose brother was senselessly shot and killed as he was going to cook a turkey for some poor people. Along with

the article was a heart-wrenching picture of this woman lying prostrate on the sidewalk, screaming with grief, "It ain't supposed to be this way!"

B. Thessalonica was Macedonia's finest city, not unlike America's finest city, a major seaport strategically located alongside an international trade route.

I. "OUR GOSPEL CAME . . ."

A. Intrinsic to the very nature of the gospel are the words of initiative. Words like "spend," "leave," "go," "come."

B. Grace led the way.

II. "OUR GOSPEL CAME . . . WITH POWER"—IN PERSON!

A. We must not divorce these three: message, messenger, and Spirit.

B. We preach because God has spoken; it's the Good News, and we are called to communicate it.

III. THE GOSPEL CAME TO US WITH POWER—IN PERSON!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 1

Music:

1. Have special music presented by your children's department.
2. Present special music by adult groups, soloists, or worship teams.
3. Have a singspiration time. Encourage spontaneous groups to form.
4. If you have a youth music group, let them present their music in tonight's service.

WELCOMING THE PRESENT PRESENCE

1 Thess. 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

There is a picture hanging on my study wall. People drop by my office just to look at the picture—a picture of hands, hundreds of them, reaching, stretching to receive a copy of the New Testament in the Russian language. The picture calls to mind the hundreds, even thousands, of people I have met in Russia, Albania, Romania—people to whom I have preached the gospel, and people who have eagerly welcomed the message with joy!

That's what happened in Thessalonica, to fashion and shape this Good News church. The gospel came with power—in person. And they welcomed the message with joy! It's the story of grace at work.

Two sides of the same coin. Initiative and response. Giving and receiving. Coming and welcoming. They moved from observation to participation, from the bleachers onto the field. Simply stated, they got involved—and it does make a difference.

(I usually don't look to Seinfeld for sermon material, but . . .) He does a routine about a kid who had spent the day at the zoo. After he returned home, his mom quizzed him: "What did you see at the zoo?" Pawing the ground, the kid said, "Aw . . . nothing." "Oh, come on," his mother remonstrated. "You mean you spent the day at the zoo, and you didn't see anything? Tell me, what did you see?" "Aw . . . *nothing!*" So she grabbed him by the collar, threw him into the car, drove like crazy to the zoo, and said to the keeper, "Give me the keys to the lion's cage." She ran him to the cage, opened the door, and pushed him in. The boy's eyes got as big as saucers, while the lion was shocked with surprise. He flinched. The boy took off, bouncing off

the bars, leaping in the air, and screaming at the top of his lungs. On the way home the kid was in a daze. They pulled up in front of the house. As he got out, a friend ran over to him and said, "I hear you went to the zoo again. What did you see?" "I saw a lion!"

How many times has someone come up to you and said, "How was church today? What did you see?" And you said . . .

I can't escape the feeling that what happened in Thessalonica has something to do with the fact that they welcomed the Word with joy!

I. *HE IS* SHAPES THE ESSENCE OF OUR LIFE IN FAITH. SAY A COURAGEOUS YES TO THIS REALITY.

A. "Yes" must be affirmed and repeated over and over again in the context of the ever-changing patterns and circumstances of life.

B. We make the joyful discovery that *He is*, and we are not alone.

II. THAT'S THE TIME WE NEED TO WELCOME THE PRESENT PRESENCE OF THE LIVING LORD!

A. It is one thing to be in the midst of bad news, but it is another thing to let the bad news get in the middle of you.

B. It's time for confession.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 2

Social/Fellowship:

1. Everyone enjoys table fellowship. Why not sponsor an all-church fellowship hour following tonight's service?
2. Recreation time can be a positive experience for members of the Body of Christ. If conditions are favorable, encourage a family recreation hour following the service, with table games, outdoor games (weather permitting), etc.
3. Group fellowship bonds individuals together. Whether it's a Sunday School class or a small-group fellowship, time spent together enjoying each other's company can be a positive experience.

IT'S YOUR TURN TO SERVE

1 Thess. 1:8-10

INTRODUCTION

A husband and his wife arose one Sunday morning, and the wife dressed for church. It was just about time for the services when she noticed her husband hadn't gotten up. Perplexed, she asked, "Why aren't you getting dressed for church?"

He said, "Cause I don't want to go!"

She asked, "Do you have any reasons?"

He said, "Certainly, I have three good reasons:

First, the congregation is cold—not friendly.

Second, no one likes me.

Third, I just don't want to go."

The wife replied, wisely, "Well, honey, I have three good reasons why you should go:

First, the congregation is warm.

Second, there are a few people who like you.

Third, *you're the pastor; so get dressed, and go!*"

A. In verse 6 Paul says, "You welcomed the message with . . . joy." Furthermore, it is grace radically believed. Verse 9 says, "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

B. The gospel came to them, and they welcomed the message with joy; and then this church actually enfolded the message.

C. People were telling people, and then those people were telling more people.

I. WHENEVER YOU HEAR A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION, THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A TURNING.

Highpoint

- A. The obvious shift in passion—a passion redirected.
- B. The paltriness of our lives is largely due to our fascination with the trinkets and trophies of the unreal world.
- C. In the middle of misdirected passion, the gospel came to Thessalonica.

II. IN WELCOMING THE MESSAGE, EMBRACING THE PRESENT PRESENCE, THE PASSION OF THIS FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH WAS REDIRECTED.

- A. Their purpose was refocused.
- B. There was a fundamental shift.
- C. Love for the living Lord energized their life of service.

III. OUR ZEAL TO SERVE CAN BECOME PRESUMPTUOUS.

- A. They *worked* and they *waited*!
- B. When we do our work and wait upon God to do His work, it is absolutely amazing what can happen.

CONCLUSION

Churches are littered with good people who turned to serve but instead failed. Churches who believed in a vision and wanted to make a difference, but for some reason it didn't work out. Now there is hurt, pessimism, and disillusionment. Their only passion is to not have a passion. Serve, you ask? No way. Been there and done that! Not interested! I pray that the next time the Spirit of God whispers to your heart and says, "It's your turn to serve," you will say yes; and in saying yes, you will discover that not only have you welcomed the message, you have become the message. Then the Word will get out, and your friends and your family will talk about "how you turned . . . to serve the living and true God"!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 3

Recognition:

1. Awards never fail to stimulate participation and affirm achievement. Use time during the service to recognize special service or honor someone with an award. (This would be a good time to recognize Continuing Lay Training participants who are earning awards and recognition through their study toward self-improvement.)
2. Service recognition lets the congregation know about the many thoughtful deeds of love and kindness extended by other members of the Body of Christ. Use tonight's service to recognize someone for special service rendered to the Church.
3. Interview an active member of the congregation. Ask the person to tell about his or her ministry involvement. Encourage that one to share what God is doing through this personal involvement in ministry and service within the local church.
4. Achievements offer a special window of opportunity to provide recognition of church members and friends. Take time to spontaneously recognize the accomplishment or achievement of someone in your church tonight.

COMMUNICATING THE WORD THAT WORKS

1 Thess. 2:13-16

INTRODUCTION

Come with me on a tour of downtown Thessalonica. Let's start in the marketplace. This city has a population of 200,000. Our first stop is the ever so popular slave market. The crowd is clustered around the most recent crop of African slave girls, their brown skin glistening under the hot Aegean sun. With lustful eyes, the men take their measure. With groping hands they feel their firmness. It's a way of life as they look for a wife of respectability and a mistress for pleasure. As usual, the slave markets are always busy.

- A. Hear the commotion, as Greeks haggle with a Jewish merchant over the cost of cloth. Voices rise, tempers flare, faces redden, hands whip the air. Bitter racism and crooked pricing. Welcome to downtown Thessalonica. You see heartlessness as well. Look at that old man staggering under his load of clay pots. He's about to drop some; he calls for help. A couple of young aristocrats watch in disdain, too proud to lend a hand. Work? Never! They were raised for better things. Labor is for the poor.
- B. Now let's go to the temple. Like other Greek cities, there are many shrines and temples. "Who are the young ladies," you ask, "strolling in the temple courtyard?" You will probably be shocked by my answer. "They are temple prostitutes, serving the worshipers." Religion and immorality go hand in hand. Faith is culturally friendly in downtown Thessalonica. Distorted views of God always lead to the perversion of persons. Lust and abuse, crooked business and cruel bigotry, arrogant selfishness and heartless laziness, immoral religion and distorted values are some of the highlights of our tour of downtown. This city was not the Garden of Eden. But into this context the gospel came, and the Word began to work!
- C. When the gospel came to Thessalonica, it came to the streets. If the Christian faith was to work at all, it had to work in this setting. Belief in Christ does not take place in a vacuum. We do not commit our lives to Christ in the antiseptic environment of a sterilized sanctuary, and we do not live out this commitment in the pious atmosphere

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of a prayer meeting. We are in the world, as the Thessalonians were. We are called to put our faith to work in the midst of the situations where we find ourselves, whatever they may be.

It seems to me that verse 13 of this second chapter actually summarizes all that we have been talking about in the previous sermons. In one verse Paul thankfully describes faith at work: "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

There is here an intentional interplay in this important statement. Three dynamic themes come together, and whenever they come together, "good news" becomes real life. Notice the interplay of "God," "us," and "you." Clearly Paul is saying, "What you received, what you heard from us (the witnessing community), you accepted as the Word of God (who is the originator of the Good News), which then is effectively at work in you (those who believe)." As members of Christ's Body—the Church—you and I are called to be "good news," the communicators of the Word that works. So let's take a closer look at these three themes. The first theme is the dynamic word—the gospel of God.

I. THE DYNAMIC WORD—the "Gospel of God"

- A. Paul's basic confidence was not in his integrity or his conduct but in the Christian message.
- B. The gospel is the word *of* God and the word *from* God.
- C. But the gospel is also the word presented and seen.
- D. Because God is the Source and the Origin of the gospel, it has authority. It can be trusted.

II. CREDIBLE COMMUNICATORS

- A. First, there is *the approved steward*.
- B. The second metaphor is *the caring mother*.
- C. The third metaphor is *the involved father*.
- D. The fourth metaphor is *the credible communicator*.

III. WELCOMING BELIEVERS

- A. The passage contains two words.
- B. Both responses are essential.

CONCLUSION

Today is World Communion Sunday. As we join the worldwide church in celebrating the Supper of our Lord, we once again will encounter the Living Word—the Word present and seen—in the bread and in the cup. In this act, our Lord gives to us the gift of himself. Let us welcome His presence, receive the gift that He offers, and accept this means of grace as the visible Word, "which is at work in you who believe." The Word never fails!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 4

Missions:

1. NWMS offers opportunities for your church to educate its membership about world mission responsibilities and opportunities. Consider a missions segment in tonight's service as a segue from one section to another.
2. Work and Witness teams accomplish much for the sake of Christ and the outreach of missions around the world. If you have Work and Witness personnel in your church, consider giving them a segment of tonight's service to share announcements and testimonies.
3. Compassionate Ministries express the biblical understanding of holiness in action. By attending to the responsibilities encompassed in the Great Commandment, the Church of Jesus Christ expresses His love and compassion in everyday settings. Do you have volunteers or workers involved in compassionate ministry? Take time tonight to showcase their ministries.
4. Volunteers are the heart and soul of our church. Without them, ministry would be restricted to the range of skill, ability, and availability of the clergy. Every church needs to recruit new volunteers, train them, interview them for placement, then deploy them. Take time tonight to talk about volunteers. Conduct an interview of a newly placed worker. Have a layperson speak about the joys of volunteering.
5. Community projects offer local churches ministry projects/settings for volunteers. If you have volunteers working in community projects, affirm them by recognizing their involvement.

YOU ARE MY SONSHINE

1 Thess. 2:17-20

INTRODUCTION

- A. My mother had a variety of ways of communicating with her two sons. Sometimes she was very direct. She let us know in no uncertain terms what she wanted, how she wanted it, and when she wanted it. In other words, *you, here, now!*
At other times, she was more subtle but just as intentional. She would take the indirect approach. For instance, she would begin to hum or whistle a song to herself but loud enough for us to hear. It was a carefully selected song. A song she knew that we knew. And the title or the words communicated a message. If she was feeling neglected, she would hum "No One Understands like Jesus" or "No One Ever Cared for Me like Jesus." If she wanted us to feel guilty, she would whistle "For You I Am Praying." If she wanted us to know that nothing could get her down, she would sing "It Is Well with My Soul."
But there were those times when she sensed that I was wounded, discouraged, and bruised. Mothers have a sixth sense for reading the soul. At such times she would begin to hum a song that's never been in any hymnal that I'm aware of. You might have heard it. It is "You Are My Sunshine." How many of you know the song?
- B. As Paul sat in Athens, alone, thinking about this Good News church, he began to reflect on his deep affection for his friends in Thessalonica. If he had known the tune, he probably would have begun to sing the song. The apostle was committed to genuine ministry and real relationships. He also knew the price one had to pay for real friendship. Notice his words of care and affirmation found in 1 Thess. 2:17-20.
- C. Let's go back and notice some words and

phrases: "brothers," "torn away," "short time," "in person," "intense longing," "every effort" (v. 17).

These are the expressions of a person who is committed to quality relationships. More than just superficial, shallow, and "professional care." More than a casual "How are you?" in the church foyer. Rather Paul was committed to authenticity in all of his relationships.

Today people are trained to be nice and friendly. Because nice and friendly sells. I never fail to feel somewhat awkward as I file by the flight attendants after an airplane trip. I sense an obligation to make brief eye contact and smile quickly when they look at me, smile, and say, "Good to have you on board."

I'll never forget the trip I took to Kansas City. The lady next to me was angry and cantankerous. At various points on the journey, I tried to befriend the stewardess to compensate. When I walked off, she smiled and said, "Good to have you on board." I felt rewarded for my efforts to support her. But then I heard her say to the mean-spirited lady, "Good to have you on board!" I looked over my shoulder and caught the attendant's eye. I'm sure she read my thoughts.

Can't you just feel the intensity of emotion as Paul writes this letter? It oozes and drips with feeling—the feelings of a man who made relationships a priority. It takes courage to care deeply. Notice verses 17-18 when Paul says, "But, brothers [and sisters], when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us."

Like the apostle Paul, most of us have discovered the risk and courage expressed in caring relationships. Effective ministry and care that really is good news requires quality relationships and the risk of real ministry, the rhythm to real ministry, the reason for real ministry.

I. THE RISK OF REAL MINISTRY

- A. Risk of involvement

B. Risk of intimacy

- II. THE RHYTHM TO REAL MINISTRY
- III. THE REASON FOR REAL MINISTRY
- CONCLUSION

(Illustrate out of the congregation examples of people as part of the crown of glory.)

Variety Ideas for Sermon 5

Special Days:

1. Birthdays are always a special time for the Family of God to share fellowship. Plan an all-church fellowship time for spiritual and chronological birthdays. Expand this to include wedding anniversaries, etc.
2. Holidays, while predictable on the calendar, vary somewhat from one location to another. Use local holidays as well as traditional times to highlight themes that strengthen the community of faith.
3. Themes can be developed that carry a community of faith through a specific period of time. What theme are you working with this year? Would this be a good time to revisit the theme and generate some enthusiasm by review and celebration?
4. Seasonal emphases are sometimes difficult to hook onto, but they provide markers by which we mark the passage of time. Linking the life of the community of faith with these seasonal emphases helps your church family see the connection between faith and everyday living. What seasonal emphasis could you tap into this week?

THE SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE

1 Thess. 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday evening we did something different. We broke out into about 15 cluster groups. The idea was to share ideas about ministry in and through the church. Something amazing happened. Some of the groups just began to minister. Because they were together. They shared dreams and desires, and it wasn't long until needs and hurts emerged. People prayed and lives were touched by the caring presence of the Body of Christ. At the end of the evening, some people came up to me and said, "Let's do that again." They talked about meeting new people and feeling support and affirmation. It was encouraging. As I walked around the foyer surrounded by circle groups, I began to think of them as "crowns."

Last Sunday, I talked about "the crown in which we will glory." A crown is that circle of relationships of family and friends that God has entrusted to us. Reuben Welch, as he walked out the door, gave me a hug and then said, "You know what I was thinking: if we have a crown—a circle of relationships—we really do need to treasure it or them, as the case may be. After all, that is what you do with a precious crown—you treasure it." He is right! We should treasure our precious crown.

Yet my heart goes out to people who are not a part of a circle of care. I meet them every day. They call me on the phone. People left out of the loop, alienated from the circle. One of my deepest desires is to see First Church filled with people who bring and include people. A church that treasures this crown of glory.

What does that mean to treasure the crown—this circle of a Christian community, this crown made up of people like you and you and you? Well, Paul certainly treasured his crown of hope and joy!

It is clear to me that Paul deeply loved and

Highpoint

treasured his circle of Christian friends in Thessalonica. Any picture of the apostle as a lone ranger without deep needs for a caring, supporting network of relationships in Christ is permanently erased by this passage from his pen. Note phrases like:

"So when we [later, I] could stand it no longer."

"Timothy has just . . . brought good news about your faith and love."

"You always have pleasant memories of us."

"And that you long to see us."

"How can we thank God enough for you . . . ?"

"Night and day we pray . . . that we may see you again."

So how did Paul live out this sacrament of presence?

I. PAUL DESIRED TO CARE FOR HIS CROWN BY PRACTICING THE SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE.

A. Sacrament has to do with practicing sacred promises and covenants.

B. The need for constant strengthening and support is an integral part of the Christian community.

C. Paul finally sums it all up by saying, "For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord."

II. YOU PRACTICE THE SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE THROUGH PRAYER.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 6

Youth:

1. Activity is essential to youth. Can you imagine inactive youth? Combine a youth activity with tonight's service. Encourage youth to attend, sit together, and then enjoy a special activity time following the service.
2. Music may be second to the place and importance of activity in the lives of teens. Giving teens an opportunity to participate in the music makes them a real part of the worship/learning experience of adult church. Plan for teens to provide music in the service tonight.
3. Participation is essential for youth if the church is to keep them through their years of formation. Without opportunities for participation, teens may lose interest in the church. How can you involve teens in tonight's service?
4. Planning around themes give you solid ground on which to build Sunday night services. Do you have a theme that could involve teens? Do you have teen representation in planning public worship times for your church?

THE PROOF IS IN THE PLEASING

1 Thess. 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

John Naisbitt, throughout the 1980s, reminded all American businesses that it was essential to repeatedly ask, "What business are we really in?" Churches need to ask a similar question from a different angle, a question that probes for the heart of our essential reason to be. That question is: "Why do we exist?" Too often, the church's response to this diagnostic question is terribly human and very earthbound. Sometimes our answers define . . .

- . . . very human structures
- . . . very human ambitions
- . . . very human motivations
- . . . very human techniques

And sometimes the truthful answer is, "We exist just to exist!"

I. "LEAD A LIFE WORTHY OF GOD, WHO CALLS YOU INTO HIS OWN KINGDOM AND GLORY" (v. 12, NRSV).

- A. The word *worthy* means "weight" and comes from the world of weights and measures.
- B. It is immediately apparent that Paul is hurting from the stinging accusations leveled by his detractors.

II. PAUL HAD BEEN TESTED BY GOD, APPROVED BY GOD, AND THEREFORE ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL.

A. What does it mean to please God?

B. The one great passion in Jesus' life was His Father.

CONCLUSION

As you know, I have three sons—each one unique. Whenever they wanted to make a move on me for money, car keys, or anything else they thought they needed, they had their own unique approach. For example, Scott is direct and straightforward. Steve is prepared, meticulously covering all the bases. David is subtle, patient, and always has timing.

When David was much younger, one day he dropped by my office. We lived next door to the church. It had been one of those days. I was working at my desk, and he walked in and sat down on the sofa. Didn't make a sound. He just sat there. Finally, feeling a need to get done with it, I said, "OK, David, what do you want?" "*Nothing!*" "Come on, David, what do you want?" And then he said, "I just wanted to be with you." And I could tell by the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice that he meant it. Somehow those words got through my mind into my heart. I felt like running outside and yelling out loud to the whole world, "This is my son!" I love him! I sure am pleased with him! Why? Because he "just want[s] to be with" me. In the midst of all the other options a boy his age has, he still wants to be with me.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 7

Children:

1. Feature kids in the services, and their parents will be sure to attend. That is a law to which there are few exceptions. Work with your director of Children's Ministries to explore periodic ways of featuring kids in your Sunday evening services.
2. Participation in services by children may take some time, but the end result is well worth it. Kids can participate in music, telling stories, reciting scripture, prayers, and assisting with worship rituals.
3. Honor and recognition of the children of church members and friends is very special. Take time to recognize children's performance from school, scouting, 4H, etc.

REAL CARE

1 Thess. 2:6-9

INTRODUCTION

A. I don't know about you, but I like things that are real. I love butter. I mean real butter, not margarine. I mean butter. The other day I was in a restaurant, and in the course of eating, I called the waitress over and said, "Would you bring me some butter?" She nodded. I persisted, "Not margarine; I mean real butter." She replied with the most amazing question. She asked, "Is there a difference?" *Is there a difference?* Anyone who loves real butter knows that there is a difference.

B. I like mayonnaise, not Miracle Whip or salad dressing. I like real iced tea—not instant, but freshly brewed iced tea. We live in a world full of plastic reproductions and "just like the real thing" imitations. Advertising pitchmen reach out to us with their toothy smiles and their pseudowarmth, speaking the words of intimacy and care to sell soft drinks, perfume, and deodorant.

So our response is to fall in love with antiques and originals. We go back to our roots, in search of the authentic, the genuine, the real thing. The disconcerting thing about all this is that around the church I hear folks talk about "real Christians." As if there was such a thing as an *unreal* Christian! But have you ever noticed how people talk about "real Christians"? Usually the conversation goes something like this . . .

C. He is a *steward* of God entrusted with the gospel.

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D. But what does it mean to *be* with the Father?

I. INTENTIONAL

- A. There is a first-class textual problem in verse 7, namely, whether we should read "gentle" among you or "babes" among you.
- B. If Paul used "gentle," the implications are equally profound.

II. INCARNATIONAL

III. SACRIFICIAL

- A. Wherever you find real care, gentleness, and forgiveness, you also will discover that someone has paid a price.
- B. Anyone who gets involved in caring knows that it may involve some time, some listening, some effort, some money.

CONCLUSION

(I'll never forget the day I drove Karen . . . to the airport . . .)

Karen taught me that obedience to the Spirit's call to care is its own reward. Sometimes our very best efforts to care from a human standpoint just don't work out. Our motive for caring is the call of Christ, the love of God, and not always a happy ending.

(I can't tell you how many times I have had this conversation with people who are hurting and angry, people turned off by the church. Usually I ask, "But what about Jesus?" "Who cares?" "Oh, I know a lot of people who care!" "Name one!")

(Next time, may I give your name?)

Variety Ideas for Sermon 8

Seasonal Emphasis:

1. Winter can be a special time for outreach. Generally, the pace of life slows during colder winter months. People are often looking for ways of tapping into the community, gaining a lift to the tides of life, and participation in meaning-making experiences. Consider making Sunday evening an outreach time as you build your sermons around livable themes.
2. Springtime can be equipping time for the church. You may want to think of your Sunday evening times as teaching/learning/equipping times. Consider changing the format of the evening service toward more of a seminar or equipping time.
3. Fall deployment is essential if the church is to grow. By September, most family vacations have been taken, and the pace of life settles into the routines of work. Ministry interviews can be conducted in connection with Sunday evening services, thus giving your people opportunity to participate in both the service as well as ministry placement activities.
4. Summer church-in-the-park, or some other off-site location, often proves effective in changing the pace of congregational life. While your Sunday morning services and Sunday School will continue to meet in their customary locations, evening services can be held periodically off-site to add a change of pace.

PASSING ON THE WALK

1 Thess. 2:10-12

INTRODUCTION

I guess all of us have our idiosyncrasies. I certainly have my fair share. I've decided to expose mine, knowing that sooner or later you will become aware of them anyway. One thing I can do is *concentrate*. I can become very focused. That's one way to put it. My wife might say preoccupied. Sometimes this is a gift. Other times it is a plague.

A. Last Sunday I mentioned in the course of my message that "some people say I bounce when I walk." Living around students, my uniqueness has given creative minds plenty of opportunity to imitate and mimic. I don't remember ever trying to learn to bounce when I walk, I just always have done it. My earliest recollection of this phenomenon goes back to grade school at George Ellory Hale Elementary School in Pasadena, California. My teacher had asked me to run an errand. I was walking along the corridor when suddenly the principal, who was second only to God, walked out of an office door and proceeded to walk toward me. I just knew that he would confront me and ask why I was out of class. But instead this white-haired, kind gentleman patted me on the head and said, "Young man, I sure like that bounce in your step." I have been bouncing ever since. It must be in the genes and chromosomes because some of my sons also have that "Shoemaker bounce." I can't wait until Ryan begins to walk. He may look like his grandmother, but I'm thinking that he will walk like his grandpa. I guess you could call it "passing on the walk."

B. When I gave this message that title, I had something else in mind. By walk I mean the Christ life, the Kingdom life, the walk in the Spirit. Have you noticed how easy it is for the Church to pass on its buildings, its language, its forms, but how difficult it is to pass on the *life*, the walk?

C. Again this morning, we reflect on the mission and purpose of the Church. As we ask the question, "Why does the Church exist?" we will identify a third priority:

Highpoint

the nurturing, teaching, discipling task of the Church—passing on the walk! It is easy to pass on the talk of the Church. But passing on the walk—the Kingdom lifestyle—is another matter. But it certainly mattered to the apostle Paul.

Again Paul introduces us to a third metaphor—a way of seeing and understanding his mission and objectives. In the first paragraph, he likens himself to a steward—entrusted with the gospel—pleasing God in a life of worship. In the second paragraph, he focuses on care—describing himself as a mother gently caring for her children—a care that was more than talk. Now Paul writes, "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children." Here we have the language of nurture, instruction, and discipleship—cultivating growth and maturity. As I reflected on this passage, it seemed to make sense to begin with the end and work back from there. What kind of people do we want to develop? What kind of church will develop? What type of leadership will effect that kind of church?

It is clear to me that Paul knew exactly what kind of people he wanted to deploy into the marketplace of Thessalonica—people constantly called to walking a Kingdom walk.

I. CALLED into a "Kingdom walk" (v. 12)

- A. First there is the *former* way—the old walk.
- B. In contrast, there is the *present* way—the new walk in Christ.
- C. Paul also mentions the *Kingdom* walk in the present presence of the *living Lord*.

II. A COMMITMENT of personal involvement on his part

A. *Cultivating growth*

1. *Encourage*—even exhort at times.
2. *Comfort*—and affirmation.
3. *Urge*—even challenge.

B. *One on one*, or in small groups

III. CONTEXT of a credible life

CONCLUSION

I'll never forget the summer in Colorado when Scott, Steve, and I decided to hike to The Craggs on the back side of Pikes Peak and camp out overnight. We got a late start and arrived at our campsite after dark. The wind was blowing, and so we had a difficult time getting the fire started. The baked beans never quite heated up. We consoled ourselves with the thought that things always "taste better outdoors." Things got worse. Scott spilled the hot dogs on the ground. We tried to wipe the dirt off, but it did not work. We ate them anyway.

They did sort of crunch between our teeth. After a wholesome meal, we sat by the fire, which now had resuscitated itself. The flames flickered, casting eerie shadows, dancing with the tall pines. Scott and Steve had anxious looks on their faces.

Finally Scott said, "Ah, Dad, could we go to bed now?" "Wow, Scott, it's only 7:30." "Yeah, I know, but I'm sleepy." So we rolled out the sleeping bags, and Scott, typical of his personality, was asleep the minute he hit the rock underneath his head. Steve, who is the reflective type, just lay there alongside of me, looking at the sea of stars overhead. Pretty soon he said, "Dad, your eyes open?" "Yeah!" "So are mine." Long pause. Again, "Dad, your eyes still open?" "Yes!" "So are mine!" An even longer pause. "Dad, your eyes open?" "Nope." "Neither are mine!" Pretty soon I could hear the slight snoring sounds of two sleeping boys beside me. On that night, on the back side of Pikes Peak, I became a father. The reality of my nurturing responsibility settled down deep in my heart. That night I asked God to help me "pass on the walk."

Variety Ideas for Sermon 9

Community Themes:

1. Formation of community is crucial to the life of every church. Without a sense of community, the Body becomes fragmented.
2. Nurture community by encouraging healing services, special seasons of prayer (e.g., a concert of prayer, group participation in worship).
3. Celebration and affirmation are two key words in the vocabulary of community building. What can you affirm or celebrate in tonight's service that will strengthen the community of faith?

FAITH THAT WORKS

1 Thess. 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

It's time for a little review. We began this series by getting acquainted with a Good News church, a church that had openly received and radically believed the gospel. In the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians, we get a closer look at a model of Christian leadership in ministry. Paul, in describing—and in some cases defending—his mission and ministry, used four metaphors in chapter 2: (1) steward, (2) mother, (3) father, (4) herald. These metaphors, it seems to me, suggest the four primary priorities for the Church:

- A. The *upreach* of worship and the ministry of the Word. Verse 4 says, "We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel."
- B. The *around-reach* of care and support. "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (v. 8).
- C. The *inreach* of nurture and instruction. "You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you" (vv. 11-12).
- D. The *outreach* of proclamation and evangelism. In verse 13, Paul says, "You received the word of God, which you heard from us . . . [and now the word] is at work in you who believe."

Here we have a double commitment. First, to the Word of God, and second, to the people of God—word and church; truth and love. The Good News church is committed to both, but it is a challenge to maintain the balance. Some

leaders are great champions of truth and anxious to fight for it but display little love. Others are great advocates of love but do not have an equal commitment to truth. Truth is hard if it is not softened by love; and love is soft if it is not strengthened by the truth.

How do you develop this double commitment—this balanced combination of truth and love? There is really only one answer. You do it by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, since He is the Source of both. He is "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13), and "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22).

I. GOD-CENTERED LIVING as opposed to me-centered living

- A. This is a *radical* concept.
- B. This is a *flexible* principle.
- C. This is a *progressive* principle.

II. RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE "IN THE LORD JESUS"

- A. The *model* is the life of Christ.
- B. The *means* is the presence and power of Christ.
- C. The *motive*, the incentive, is the love of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Is there anyone here this morning that does not know that there is a *big* difference between "pleasing because I have to" and "pleasing because I love to"? I'm thinking about that young bride who married a guy whose concept of marriage was "boot camp." He gave orders. In fact, he actually put into writing all of his expectations and requirements and made her sign it prior to the wedding. At first, she tried to live up to his expectations. But whenever she failed, he would drag out the contract she had signed. Finally, the contract became a source of deep resentment and anger. She finally found release in the death of her husband. Now in midlife, she determined never to marry again. She had learned her lesson the hard way.

But as providence would have it, she met another man who was kind, considerate, and loving. They married and lived a fulfilling life of mutual support and

affection. One day while doing some spring cleaning, the happy wife ran across a box in the attic that just happened to contain the contract, now yellowed and wrinkled from age. Immediately the old feelings returned but then softened into tears as she realized that she was still doing those things, not because she had to, but as an expression of love.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 10

360° Feedback:

1. What is 360° feedback? While there are technical descriptions and definitions associated with this term, think of it as a means to gain input from all parties in a way that is constructive and informative. One way to encourage this following your service tonight would be to have a roundtable discussion over the topic of tonight's sermon.
2. Create a panel prior to tonight's service, and let them respond to your sermon following its presentation. (Use care and caution to make sure that all participants adhere to Christian standards and constructive approaches to this occasion.)
3. To stimulate participation, conduct a "man on the street interview" following tonight's sermon. Ask participants what they heard, what they thought was the key point, how they are going to react to the truth, and so on.

DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT

1 Thess. 4:1-8

INTRODUCTION

We have already established the fact that downtown Thessalonica was no Garden of Eden. Idolatry and immorality walked hand in hand, distorting views of God and perverting attitudes toward persons. It is into this cultural context that the gospel came with power and deep conviction. If the Christian faith was to work at all, it had to work in this setting. It is like an experience I had in Kiev, Russia. During one of my first visits to Kiev, I was involved in a Bible study. We were studying Eph. 4. We came across verse 28, which states, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." I couldn't help but notice the look on the faces of my Ukrainian friends. I knew about the economic system and the black market. One new believer raised his hand and asked, "If we don't steal, how are we going to support our families?"

A. My Ukrainian friends, like the new believers in Thessalonica, were being called to put their faith to work, just as you and I are called to "faith it" in the midst of the situations, dilemmas, and circumstances of our place and our time, whatever they may be.

B. A faith that works is one thing for which Paul commended his new converts.

The Word reminds us that we are called or urged to "more and more . . . live in order to please God." And the life that is pleasing to God is a God-centered life, as opposed to a "me-centered life," which is a life consumed by self-interest. The God-centered life is defined by the life of Jesus. He is the *Model*, the *Means*, and the *Motive* for a holy life.

Now Paul applies this principle in several

Highpoint

concrete situations in our passage today. The application focuses on faith that works at home in marriage and even in sex. You can't get more practical or relevant than that.

C. It really should not surprise us that the apostle begins with sex.

I. OUR SEXUALITY, OUR MALENESS AND FEMALENESS, IS SOMEHOW RELATED TO OUR CREATION IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

A. There is simply complete mutuality of relationship.

B. Sexuality expressed and celebrated is "good" in the context of loving relationship, full mutuality, covenant commitment, and open transparency.

II. PAUL OFFERS TWO FUNDAMENTAL APPROACHES TO EXPRESSING THE CALL TO "GOD-CENTERED" SEX IN A "ME-CENTERED" CULTURE.

A. First, on the basis "that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him."

B. Second, Paul reminds us that we are to live on purpose.

C. Third, we are not alone in this effort.

III. NOW IS A GOOD TIME FOR ME TO REMIND EACH OF US THAT WE HAVE ALL FAILED.

CONCLUSION

If I asked you to describe your concept of holiness with a color, what would it be? Black? Gray? Does holy conjure up images that are severe, dull, drab, grim? Or would it be white? No smears or stains. Why not the warm, vivid, bright colors that convey the beauty of God's creation? God is not calling you to a life that is

weird or strange. He is not interested in fashioning moral nerds. He is calling us to a life that is useful, whole, complete, and a life of influence that really is distinctly different.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 11

Intergenerational Theme:

1. Music across the years is a neat way to span generational gaps in the musical tastes of your congregation. Incorporate some old music, some modern and contemporary pieces, as well as some traditional music.
2. Stories and biographies of faith often illuminate the pathway of faith, especially for young believers. Coach participants on how to give a testimony that combines biographical as well as spiritual worth.
3. Special recognition can be given to the pillars and prayer warriors of your church. Honor them for their spiritual attainments, leadership, and positive Christian example.
4. Storytellers can help in the retraditioning of the congregation. These can be times when the history of the church is celebrated through stories and rituals. Let time be given to hear these stories. Combine this time with a time for rededication of church furniture, musical instruments, buildings, and even the lives of the community as it stands in linkage with its great history.

LOVE WORKS

1 Thess. 4:9-12

INTRODUCTION

It's amazing what one football game can accomplish. It can do what mediators, counselors, advisers, and negotiators seem unable to do—*bring people together*. We're talking 70,000 people in Jack Murphy Stadium, hugging strangers, giving high fives. People who ordinarily do not have time for each other are coming together and acting as if they love each other. But sometimes our enthusiasm and affection is short-lived. I love this week and the Super Bowl. It's just full of good sermon illustrations.

I noticed an article in the paper talking about the fact that a Steeler defensive back that let Tony Martin get in front of him actually passed out after the game and had to be carried off the field. But another reporter had interviewed Emmitt Smith following the Cowboys' loss to the 49ers. When asked how he was handling the defeat, Emmitt said, "Well, two weeks ago my mother died. The day before yesterday my wife left me a note saying, *'This is just another football game.'*"

Out of the mouth of running backs comes the word of insight. One way or another, most of us still understand that there is no substitute for loving, caring relationships. Especially for people attempting to live God-centered lives in a me-centered world. There is no substitute for love, brotherly and sisterly love.

Again, let's review for a moment. Paul has been urging this Good News church to live a God-centered life—a life that is pleasing to Him. A life that is distinctly different from the me-centered culture. For them in their day and for us in our day there are at least two distinct differences. The God-centered life is not self-preoccupied. Rather than being passionately consumed by self-interest, Christians are called to please God (v. 1) and to love one another (v. 9). Second, we are to be committed to personal growth and spiritual maturity. We are to please God "more and more" (v. 1), and we are to love one another "more and more" (v. 10). It is a life that is truly free. True freedom is not freedom from responsibility to God and others in order to live for ourselves, but freedom from ourselves in order to live for God and others.

Paul applies this principle to a couple of very specific situations. First, life together in the area of sex and marriage, and now in this passage, life together in the church and on the job. When you think of the numerous issues that Paul could have

selected, why did he select the issue of community? Again, it has to do with what is relevant to their culture and calling.

Downtown Thessalonica was not the Garden of Eden. Racial bitterness, social bigotry, and economic snobbery were everyday occurrences. That's what made the church so important. If their newfound faith was to work at all, it had to work in sharp contrast to society's status quo.

The home, the church, and the job—these are the great centers of our living where our faith has to work. In fact, Paul talks about love that labors. The Thessalonians needed special help on the job because they were part of a society that despised manual labor. Only slaves and lower-class citizens were allowed to degrade themselves by hard labor. The upper echelons prided themselves on their clean hands and sweatless foreheads. Defile themselves with menial work? Never. They were destined to think and rule, to enjoy their arts and indulge themselves in me-centered pleasure.

Not so with the Christians. Work had special meaning for them. It goes all the way back to the "culture of creation," all the way back to Gen. 2:15. This verse states, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The vocation, the occupation of humankind was to be expressed in the responsible pursuit of caring for creation, rather than me-centered preoccupations, expressed in the careless and reckless exploitation of the resources of creation. God called Adam to "work it and take care of it" rather than "use it and abuse it." To love God is to love His creation. When love turns in upon itself, it abuses and exploits. As Christians, we affirm that God has made the materials with which we work. He has given us the ability to work. The Master was a carpenter. The apostle worked night and day as a tentmaker. Once again, the Word brings culture and calling together. Apparently some of these new converts anticipating the soon return of Christ had decided to quit working and just wait. They became a burden, depending on others to support them. They forgot that love works. Paul had to remind them that irresponsibility is not a mark of Christ; in contrast, brotherly loves reveals the mark.

I. BROTHERLY LOVE REVEALS THE MARK, THE STAMP OF THE SPIRIT.

II. BROTHERLY LOVE REQUIRES THE SCHOOL OF THE SPIRIT.

A. First, "brother [and sister]"

B. "All"

C. "More and more"

III. BROTHERLY LOVE RECALLS THE STRESS OF THE SPIRIT.

A. There is the tension between agitation and apathy.

B. There is the tension between neighborliness and nosiness.

C. There is the tension between independence and indifference.

CONCLUSION

So the Word, some ducks, and Emmitt Smith have something to say to us this morning. When your brother is dying, your sister is out of work, your husband has cancer, or your father is leaving your mother, then the Super Bowl is just another game; but life *is not! It's time to huddle!*

Variety Ideas for Sermon 12

Outreach:

1. Seldom do we think of using Sunday evening services for outreach anymore. Perhaps the evangelistic theme with its accompanying emphasis on outreach has been laid to rest prematurely. Targeting special groups (e.g., neighbors and friends, etc.) can give Sunday evening services a special emphasis. Use sermon topics/titles in creative advertising, direct mail, and point-of-contact communication to stimulate interest in attendance.
2. Off-premises services, extension groups, and study groups are creative options that may be open to innovative congregations looking for ways of varying their Sunday night church experiences.
3. Sunday School class involvement offers another avenue of creative linkage between thematic topics and specific interest groups. For example, you may wish to target the membership or enrollment of specific Sunday School classes and small groups. Share the outlines from which you will be preaching. Maintain regular weekly contact via telephone, mail, or E-mail with members of these groups.
4. Small-group involvement can be similar to the Sunday School class emphasis. Encourage attendance with follow-up sessions after the service.

THE PROMISE KEEPER

1 Thess. 5:23-24

INTRODUCTION

One of the “new wineskins” into which God seems to be pouring wine of His Spirit is Promise Keepers. Christian men are gathering together to worship and support one another and be held accountable for the promises they make to God, their wives, their children, and their church. Promise Keepers is being used by God in a marvelous way to remind men that it is not just in the promising but in the keeping that genuine influence is expressed in a culture where it’s easy to make promises but harder to keep them. That’s another matter.

Others intend to keep their promises, but it just seems to take a while—like this letter with a \$20 bill attached.

“Dear Norm,

“Greetings from— — —First Church of the Nazarene.

“Well, thank God for Promise Keepers.”

In the passage for this morning, the apostle Paul prays a closing prayer. It is a prayer of desire. It is a “wish” prayer that expresses his deepest concern, in love, for this church of such great promise. I can all but see the apostle as he begins to dictate the prayer to the scribe but reaches out and takes the pen in his own hand and says, “I want to write this.” And what he writes is a prayer that the saints of God in one way or another have all prayed.

I. “MAY GOD HIMSELF, THE GOD OF PEACE . . .”

- A. From a biblical point of view, God’s story and our story is essentially the story of promise and fulfillment.
- B. It was a word of promise that was spoken to the patriarch fathers, especially to Abraham.
- C. It was the word of promise that Jeremiah heard in a time of national collapse, when the possibility of

a future was in doubt; then he heard the promise of a “new covenant” and “new heart.”

- D. Jesus took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read the words of promise:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (*Luke 4:18-19*).

II. THE GIVER

- A. The *receivers* of the promise stretch out over the generations of time like beads strung on the thread.
- B. The *content* of the promise is forever defined by Jesus, the Savior who lived, died, and rose again to save them and us.
- C. Paul reminds us that the promise is not fulfilled by keeping the Law but by faith and obedience to the “Promise Keeper.”
- D. When I think about those words, I think about *calling, forgiving, cleansing, liberating, healing, and empowering*. And in Christ, God says yes to every one of them, for you and for me.

III. “MAY GOD HIMSELF, THE GOD OF PEACE, SANCTIFY YOU THROUGH AND THROUGH.”

- A. We expect children to be children, but there is something very disturbing, sad, and tragic about 30-year-old “babies,” who continue to talk, act, think, and live like infants. God intends for us to grow and mature and to be holy and conformed to the likeness of Jesus.
- B. Nothing inhibits and frustrates growth in grace like a divided heart.
- C. Make no mistake; God intends to fulfill His purpose, and it is a holy purpose: to conform them to the likeness of His Son Jesus. The sanctifying process has begun, but Paul writes, “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith” (3:10).

- D. Paul continues and reminds them in chapter 4, verse 3, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” In other words, they are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, totally, entirely, and wholly, so that their *whole being* is the dwelling place of God, fully filled with the promise of the Father—the *Holy Spirit*!

CONCLUSION: “THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL AND HE WILL DO IT.”

1. In no other area of the Christian life is the “me do it” mentality of self-sovereignty exposed than in those seasons of our life when we attempt to save and sanctify ourselves.

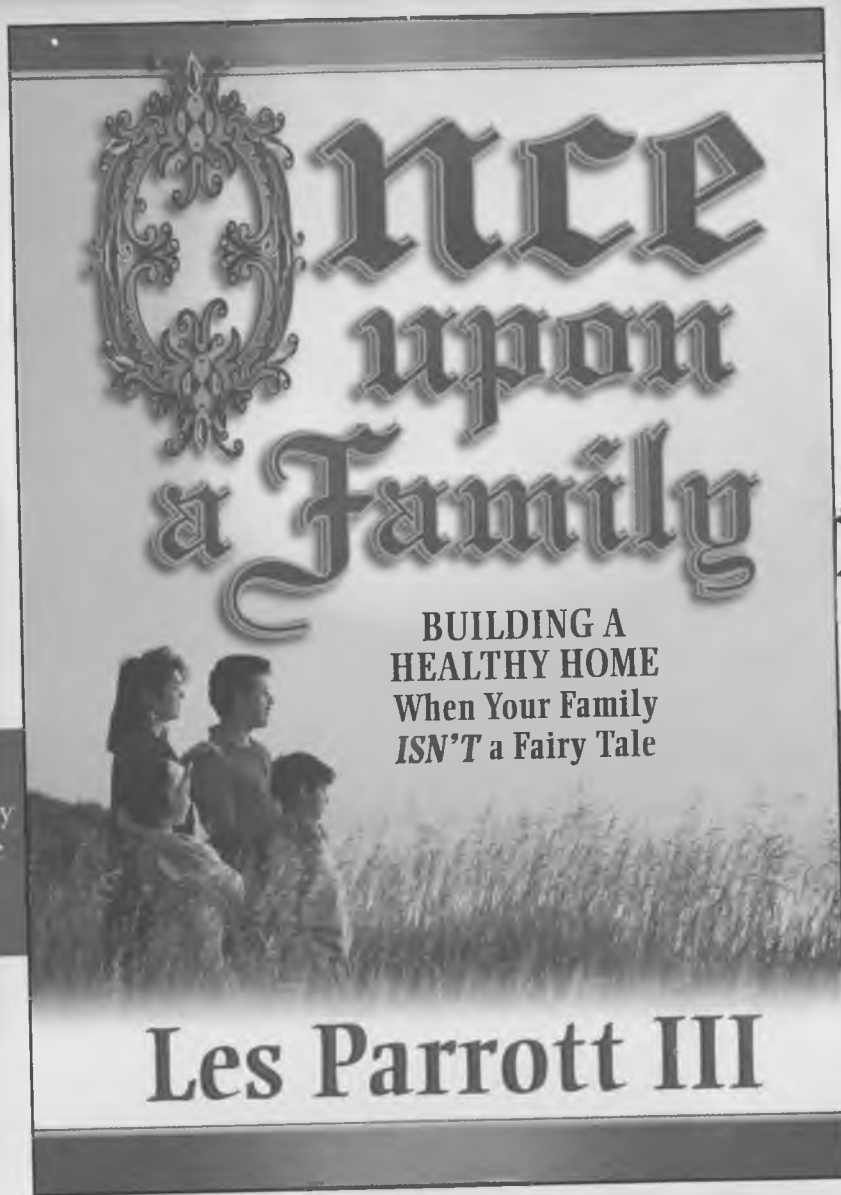
2. Ultimately and finally the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart, a heart liberated from other gods and free to love God *totally* with all our *spirit, soul, and body*.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 13

Sacrament Sunday:

1. Baptism of believers can be a highlight of your church’s life together. Sunday evening is a great time to baptize new believers. Tie the Christian baptism and the testimonies of candidates into your sermon preparation.
2. Holy Communion, by recommendation of the *Manual*, is to be celebrated at least once a quarter. Plan to serve this sacrament at least once during this sermon series.

Strengthen the Family



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