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Randal E. Denny (Editor)  
*Olivet Nazarene University*

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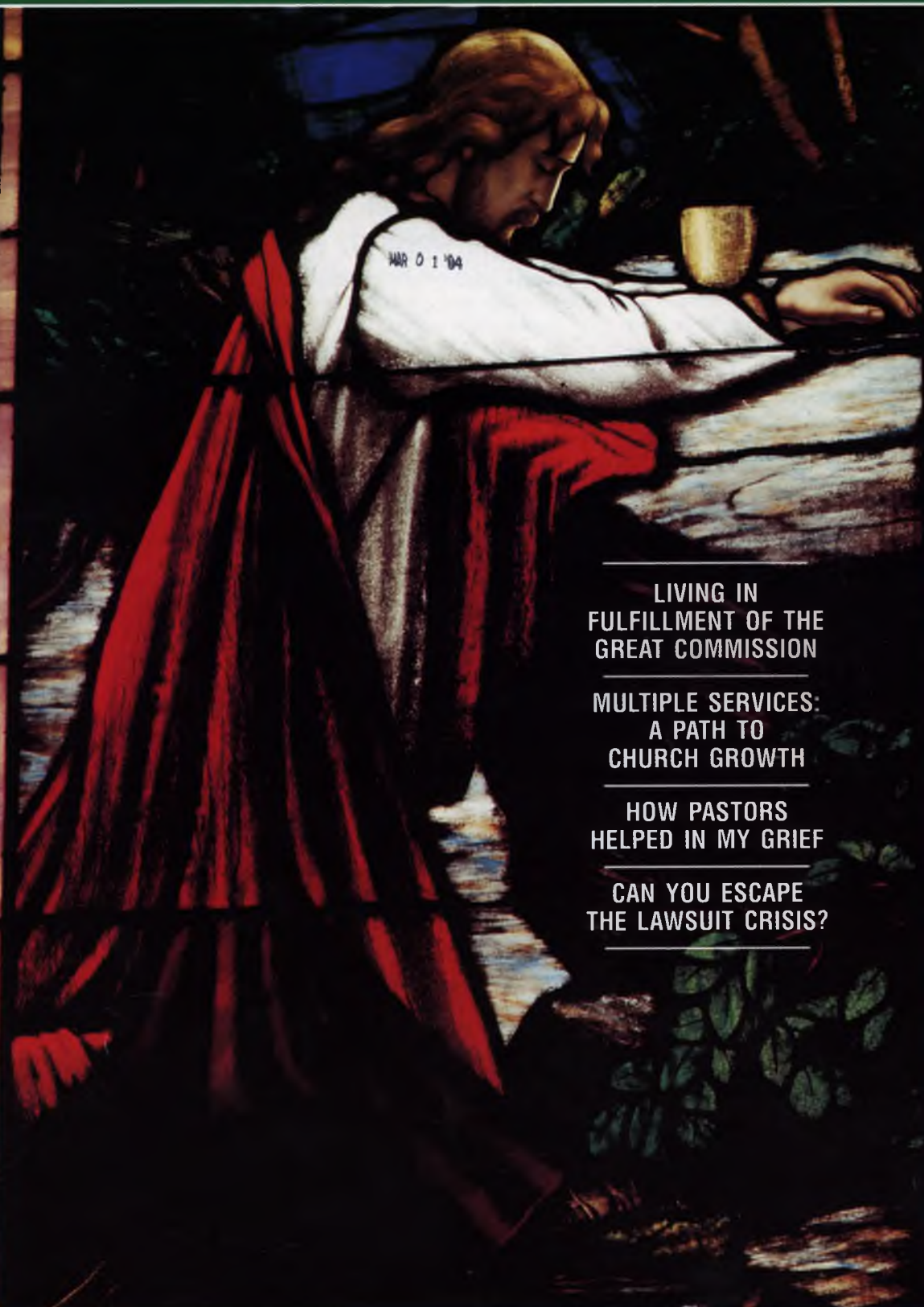


THE

# Preacher's

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## MAGAZINE



LIVING IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE  
GREAT COMMISSION

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A PATH TO  
CHURCH GROWTH

HOW PASTORS  
HELPED IN MY GRIEF

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# We Preach Christ Crucified

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.



**T**he birth of Jesus brought God to us, but it took the cross of Jesus to bring us to God. The telling of Jesus' crucifixion sounds gruesome and gory, but in those terrible hours God opened the way for you and me to come to Him. You may wonder, Why not emphasize Jesus' life instead of His death? Paul would say, "You don't know what you're asking. That would tear the heart out of the gospel. 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'" (Gal. 6:14).

Samuel Rutherford said, "There are some who would have Christ cheap; they would have Him without the Cross. But the price will not come down." The Cross shows us how terrible sin is to God and how powerful Jesus' vicarious suffering is in liberating us from sin. Paul insists that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19).

**We must preach the priority of the Cross.** Paul wrote, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17).

We live in an era that views Jesus as bad or mad. Surprising numbers of people see Jesus and the message of the Cross as the enemy—someone to despise and ridicule. Others pronounce Jesus as irrelevant—a crazy man with illusions of grandeur and without meaning today. We must proclaim that Jesus is the unique, eternal Son of God. Paul declared, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Too many preachers and churches have let the mighty cross of Jesus drift into symbolism without rele-

vance. People admire the simple life of Jesus, but they avoid the death of Jesus. They nod assent to the example of Jesus but deny the demands of Jesus. They do not object to the cradle of Jesus, but they vigorously oppose the cross of Jesus. Why? "The Cross means death to human effort."

**We must preach the superiority of the Cross.** Paul wrote: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Cor. 1:25).

The message of the Cross takes you beyond the limits of intellectual evidence and impeccable logic. The message of the Cross came as a revelation from God's wisdom, while philosophy is an invention of human wisdom.

The message of the Cross has never fit with the American dream. The theology of the Cross doesn't sell well in an ascending economy. However, since our culture is in dark travail, we can offer hope through the cross of Christ. It reaches beyond human wisdom.

People who expected God to prove himself and enhance His credentials with visible power felt disappointed with the Cross. To them the Cross demonstrated weakness and failure—a loss of dignity. So, to this day, people are attempting to defy God and deify man. However, people are discovering that we do not have the moral resources within us to live out our ideals. Only persons who come to Jesus, the Christ of the Cross, find moral and spiritual stability.

**We must preach the reliability of the Cross.** Paul writes: "For 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. . . . God was pleased through

the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:18, 21).

Paul didn't raise doubts and questions. He didn't peddle probabilities. He delivered the message of the Cross revealed from God himself. Naturally it doesn't fit the preconceived ideas of the non-Christian. Therefore, he despises the message at first. He would rather try to save himself than to let Jesus save him.

Pastor Dave Wilson was asked by a bride who wished to be married in his sanctuary, "Would you put a drape or a veil over the cross in your sanctuary? The young man that I am marrying comes from a family to whom the Cross is offensive."

His mind flooded with scriptures and hymns of the Cross. Finally he explained, "No, I can't cover the oak cross in the sanctuary. It stands for the Calvary cross." Pastor Wilson prayed, "Oh, God, let nothing in my life and . . . church hide Your cross—not attitudes, not ambitions, not programs, not plans. To the cross let me be true."<sup>2</sup>

Whoever believes our announcement of the Cross will be saved! God takes great pleasure in saving whoever believes. People may think the message of the Cross is crazy, but God says it is His power at work.

C. Neil Strait, Michigan district superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, and six of his pastors have served as an editorial board. With preaching as the theme of this issue, these pastors help us to remember our high privilege: "We preach Christ crucified!"

1. Roy L. Laurin, *First Corinthians: Where Life Matures* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987), 30.

2. Dave Wilson, "Would You Cover Up Your Cross?" *The Wesleyan Advocate*, July 17, 1989, 7.

## Preaching from the Lectionary

**P**reparation is an important part of the preaching process. Without a plan or a purpose, the preacher is tempted to do one of two things—dig into his barrel of past sermons and polish it a bit, or put something together that has little rhyme or reason, with very little justice to Scripture. What are some options?

The lectionary offers a good option. This article attempts to discuss its possibilities.

What is a lectionary? Webster defines a lectionary as “a book containing lections or a list of lections to be read at church services.”<sup>1</sup> Andrew Blackwood identified the lectionary as a list of Bible reading for use in public worship through the year, usually at morning worship. . . . A good lectionary exalts Scripture by singling out passages suitable for worship; ranging over the Book, never aimlessly; following the Christian Year, not slavishly; emphasizing the New Testament, not exclusively; and encouraging the minister to preach from the Bible, with the paragraph as the unit.<sup>2</sup>

Someone has written that “the intent of lectionaries is to provide for the church over a given period of time—usually three years—large units of Scripture arranged according to the seasons of the Christian year and selected because they carry the central message of the Bible.”<sup>3</sup>

Lectionaries are published by various groups with formats that lend themselves to thematic approach, following the Christian year (Advent, Lent, etc.) or to reading that covers the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles. The intent is usually to bring together a collection of scriptures, Old and New Testament, that have some relational context. The overriding purpose is to give a collection of scripture from which wor-



by C. Neil Strait

District Superintendent, Church of the Nazarene, Grand Rapids, Mich.

shipers can read or from which pastors can preach with some continuity and, if followed for a period of time—usually a year—would cover the significant points and themes of the Scripture.

### ADVANTAGES OF THE LECTIONARY

This article will discuss some of the advantages of the lectionary and will have a concluding section dealing with its disadvantages.

As for any format or resource for preaching, the lectionary can be misused and abused. It was not intended to do the preacher's work in the area of research but to be a supplement and a tool to aid in such research.

With this background, let's look at some of the advantages of the lectionary as it relates to preaching.

#### First, the lectionary insures a well-rounded approach to Scripture.

Where one follows the lectionary format in week-to-week preaching, he or she will cover the major themes and thoughts of the Scripture over a period of time. This fact, alone, insures that one will not go back, ever and again, to one's favorite subjects with which one feels familiar and at home. The discipline of the lectionary forces one to plow new ground in study and prayer, in preparation and

research, expanding not only the preacher's heart and mind but also that of the listener. Horace T. Allen, Jr., in his book *A Handbook for the Lectionary*, comments that “[the] lectionary leads to an orderly and comprehensive approach to the full range of scripture in all its richness and variety.”<sup>4</sup>

William Skudlarek, speaking of the lectionary format, says this about those who prepare the Scripture portions—“They ordered them in a certain way because of the point they wanted to make.”<sup>5</sup> He is suggesting that certain points might be missed in a preaching program without the aid of a lectionary. Again, the safe, comfortable themes are inviting, and to them some preachers return much too often. But the lectionary invites us into the unknown, to deal with certain points, and wrestle with new truths.

A writer in the book *Preaching the New Common Lectionary* writes that “ministers who preach from the lectionary find themselves stretched into areas of the canon into which they would not have gone had they kept to the path of personal preference.”<sup>6</sup> Anything that stretches the preacher to move outside his comfort zone and to walk in new areas that cause growth cannot be all bad.

#### Second, the lectionary aids our planning.

When a preacher follows a prescribed lesson or format of scriptures, the planning for future Sundays is virtually complete. The advantage, here, is that one can give greater time to research, in-depth concentration, and study, when the focus of scripture is known. Some people would assume that this takes away from the direction one would seek from the Holy Spirit. I will discuss this under disadvantages, for there is caution here. However, some believe that the Holy



Spirit stands ready to bless His Word anytime it is adequately researched, studied, presented, and prayed over.

In busy parish life, planning ahead is often impossible. But where there is such a possibility, it is relished. The lectionary not only allows one to plan ahead but indeed encourages it. Perry H. Biddle, Jr., states that "many preachers find that keeping a file for each Sunday with text and theme for six weeks in advance allows them to collect images, illustrations, and ideas for the sermon."<sup>7</sup>

### **Third, the lectionary is a great aid to worship.**

Especially is this true in churches where the members are encouraged to own their own lectionary. In such churches, the people are reading and studying and discussing the same scriptures. So when they come to worship, the sermon is dealing with thoughts and truths with which they have been wrestling all week. Skudlarek has observed that "when we assemble in worship, we do so in response to a word that calls and gathers us; and the very words by which we give expression to our longing, our sorrows, our praise and thanksgiving are inspired by the words we have received."<sup>8</sup>

Because the people have been living with the Word through the week, they worship in response to a Word that has been playing itself out in their minds and hearts and now seeks definition and perspective in the midst of community and from the sermon.

There are other advantages of the lectionary for the congregation and for worship. Skudlarek states that "groups can meet to meditate, pray, and prepare their hearts for the preaching-event."<sup>9</sup> It would please any preacher just to think of such a prospect, but maybe it needs to be encouraged more. Skudlarek also states that "the lectionary contributes to make worship and preaching a co-operative work between clergy and laity by providing them with a common basis in the Word of God from which their reflection and planning can proceed."<sup>10</sup> Horace Allen makes the point that "the authoritative place of scripture in the community of faith may become more obvious to both preacher and people under the impact of a commitment to use a lec-

tionary."<sup>11</sup> It is a thought worth pondering.

The lectionary creates the possibility for the Scriptures to be studied, either by individuals, by groups, by families, etc., on occasions other than public worship or study groups, like Sunday School. Christian discipleship must have a way to allow the Scriptures to pour themselves into life, lest the lone source of scripture become the public events. Pope Paul VI expressed a wish that with the lectionary, "Sacred scripture will become a perpetual source of spiritual life, an important instrument for transmitting Christian teaching and the center of all theological formation."<sup>12</sup> It is a word the evangelical church and Christian needs to hear.

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ground.

### **Fourth, the lectionary allows for advance planning with musicians and others who will be sharing in worship.**

It is only natural that where worship participants know the theme or the context of scripture that will be the focus of the sermon, they will be able to prepare their own hearts and their presentations. There can be a flow in a worship service that steadily, and with purpose, leads the worshipers to the thought of the sermon, with thought somewhat ready to continue the flow through the sermon. Probably all of us have, at some time, witnessed a service where the flow was disrupted by a presentation, a thought, a song, or some expression that seemed to be a deterrent, not only to the experience of worship but certainly to the sermon.

### **Fifth, writers in the book *Preaching the New Common Lec-***

**tionary state that "the lectionary encourages more disciplined study and advance preparation."<sup>13</sup>**

This is true, in the first place, because one cannot go back over ground previously plowed. Also, it means that one must constantly be stretching his study to encompass these areas. One must develop a discipline if he is to preach from the lectionary. Where one will allow the lectionary to be a part of his preparation and plan for preaching, it will challenge one to work ahead, looking for ideas, illustrations, etc.

The value of disciplined study, as that challenged by the lectionary, is that it keeps one focused on the scripture at hand, rather than searching for scriptures that support one's thought. To deal with a passage of scripture means that particular scripture speaks to the preacher and, eventually, to the hearer in a certain, profound way by the Holy Spirit. In *The Word in Worship*, William Skudlarek states:

Stay with the difficult text, think about it, study it, pray over it, because it is out of those texts that your best preaching is going to come. It is from such troublesome verses that you are going to hear a new word of the Lord that will speak to your deepest needs and those of the people you will be addressing.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sixth, the lectionary offers a rich collection of resources for study related to the scriptures to be studied.**

This is a great study aid, as one knows immediately that these books and commentaries have something to say about the scripture under discussion. While they should not be all the resources used, they can form a great beginning to the preparation process.

### **DISADVANTAGES OF THE LECTONARY**

It is only appropriate that we consider some of the disadvantages of using the lectionary in preaching. In this area, let me share the following:

**First, and perhaps the one heard most often, is that it takes away the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or the possibility for the Spirit to lay a scripture upon a preacher's heart for a particular Sunday.**

All of this may be a possibility.

Where such would happen, it would be a grave danger.

Authentic preaching must always be under the mandate and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There is a danger that one could get "locked in" to the lectionary pattern and allow that pattern to dictate what one preaches. The Spirit-led preacher must never be a slave to the lectionary or any other system that would govern what one preaches. So, even if one uses the lectionary on a rather consistent basis, the door must be open for the Holy Spirit to come, on any Sunday, and lead to a scripture other than that suggested by the lectionary. One must be open to lay aside the lectionary, even at a late hour, and be obedient to what the Spirit prescribes.

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area of  
research.

Where a preacher has this intent and desire, the lectionary will not be a hindrance. No preacher should ever apologize to any congregation for a change prompted and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. Where there is such freedom, the lectionary could be used in a most useful way.

Plus, one must allow that the Holy Spirit could also bless the lectionary offerings. I have a deep belief that God will bless any scripture or sermon that has been bathed in prayer, thoroughly researched, and prepared and preached with right purpose. What we must guard against is using what we misjudge to be the leading of the Spirit when, in reality, our preparation has been faulty and our discipline has been wanting. Thus, facing a deadline for preaching, we turn to a few crumbs and disguise the

shoddy work as ordered by the Holy Spirit. It is neither fair to the hearers nor to God.

What the use of the lectionary calls for, then, is balance. One must balance a plan with what he knows the Spirit is endorsing or what direction the Spirit is moving. One can be so dependent upon the inspiration of the Spirit that he does no preparation but simply waits for what one interprets to be the nudging of the Spirit. The other fault is to be so dependent upon the lectionary that it dulls or silences the insights and inspiration of the Spirit. Both are wrong. The correction is to bring balance to the preaching task.

**Second, William Skudlarek states that "for that preacher wanting to preach life-situation sermons, it limits his selection of scriptures. . . . The reason this pastoral principle is so strongly defended by many preachers is that they insist, and rightly so, that it is for the preacher to decide what the Word of God is for this people, this week."<sup>15</sup>**

This is a good argument and one with which I strongly agree. Hopefully, no one will know the hurts and issues of a congregation like the pastor/preacher. So, there must be occasions, even if one is using the lectionary, when the preacher steps out of the lectionary pattern and preaches to the needs of his people.

There are three ways to combat this dilemma. One, have a mind-set early on that if you use the lectionary, you do not become slave to its offerings. Instead, be open to step out of its pattern and preach to a particular need/issue. Two, plan sections of the year where you preach life-situation sermons or have sections of the church year reserved for preaching that is not lectionary-based. Three, it is not totally impossible to do both—not only to use the pattern of the lectionary to keep continuity but also to weave other scriptures into the fabric and purpose of the sermon. I do not mean by this to stretch a scripture to say whatever you want it to say, but to tie the thoughts together in ways that are appropriate and true to Scripture.

**Third, the lectionary becomes the selector of what congrega-**

**tions will hear, rather than the preacher or the Holy Spirit.**

While this was covered in the first point under disadvantages, there is an added thought. Those who select the scriptures for the lectionary have no way of knowing the needs of a particular congregation. Does this choice take something from the preacher in terms of enthusiasm? Will the choice leave the preacher cold a lot of the time? Both are possibilities. William Skudlarek comments that "to be bound to a format [lectionary] may indeed do justice to 'covering scripture.' But it may not be good for preaching. One must 'feel' the scripture with which one deals, and an arbitrary method, such as the lectionary, may prohibit or inhibit this."<sup>16</sup>

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preaching must  
always be  
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inspiration of  
the Holy Spirit.

The caution here must be that which has been stated before—if one is not comfortable that there is a truth burning in one's heart, affirmed and watered by the Holy Spirit, then that preacher must be ready and willing to turn aside from the prescribed scriptures in the lectionary and to search for that which will be honored by the Holy Spirit.

**Fourth, a disadvantage of the lectionary is that it might lead to mediocrity in the preacher.**

If one is not disciplined in the pursuit and excellence of preaching, the lectionary could invite apathy. The scriptures are selected; ready resources are listed. Such a tendency could tempt one to settle into a pattern that would, in time, take the sharp edge off of preparation. An im-

portant part of the preaching-event is fervent prayer for God's message. Where the lectionary provides part of this—the scriptures—it might dull the intent search and the journey of discovery. Whatever method one uses, there should be constant guard against that which invites or promotes mediocrity, the curse of good preaching.

**Fifth, a disadvantage of the lectionary is that it does not allow for series preaching or for special days—Mother's Day, Father's Day, among others.**

If one elects to do series preaching or to cover special days, then one must lay out that schedule well in advance as he plans a year ahead. There is no rule that says the lectionary must be used, if it is at all, all the Sundays of a year. Again, flexibility is the key.

#### CONCLUDING WORD

This article is not promoting the use of the lectionary. It is only one tool, among several, to aid in effective preaching. The determining factor with the lectionary is how it is used. The first caution is that the preaching should not become slave to it, to the point of blocking out the bidding of the Holy Spirit.

The lectionary has possibilities and problems. Where the preacher knows both, he is equipped to handle it as a plus for his preaching ministry. ✠

1. Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary, s.v. "Lectionary."

2. Andrew Blackwood, "Lectionary," in *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955), 651.

3. Fred Craddock, John H. Hayes, and Carl R. Holladay, *Preaching the New Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 10.

4. Horace T. Allen, Jr., *A Handbook for the Lectionary* (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1980), 9.

5. William Skudlarek, *The Word in Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 13.

6. Craddock et al., *Preaching the New Common Lectionary*.

7. Perry H. Biddle, Jr., *Preaching the Lectionary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 13.

8. Skudlarek, *Word in Worship*, 12.

9. Ibid., 6.

10. Ibid., 31-32.

11. Allen, *A Handbook for the Lectionary*, 38.

12. *The Gospel in the Church*, ed. Quentin Quesness (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 1.

13. Craddock et al., *Preaching the New Common Lectionary*.

14. Skudlarek, *Word in Worship*, 55.

15. Ibid., 14.

16. Ibid., 15.

# A Parable for Pastors

by LaNelle C. Stiles

Free-lance writer, Waynesburg, Pa.

And it came to pass that a certain congregation built a lovely sanctuary on a green hillside. It wasn't a steepled white chapel, nor was it a columned structure of red-brick colonial charm. Though comfortable and inviting, a stranger would find it unremarkable. Yet it was a beautiful church.

It wasn't a rich church, but it was far from being a poor one. As years passed by, needs were always met, budgets were paid, and the people never failed to reach out and share with others. It was a beautiful church.

It wasn't a perfect church. Not by any means. As in many churches, too few members were sharing the responsibilities. Some plans and programs were struggling. There was a hunger for revival. But through a myriad of ministries, the work of the Kingdom was being done. Good things were happening. Yea, it was a beautiful church.

The beauty of this church was not in its building, not even in its ministries. Its special beauty lay in its unity. This is not to say there was always agreement. No indeed. Ask members of the Building Committee. Drop in on board meetings. Discuss, argue, iron it out—and then go out together for fellowship. Though there was rarely una-

nimity, there was always unity.

Verily, they loved one another.

And it came to pass that this loving church opened its arms to a new pastor. Fearing complacency, seeking new challenges, they welcomed hard-hitting sermons. "Just what we need," they said.

But straightway the challenge turned to chiding and then to chastisement. Sunday after Sunday, sermon after sermon, the accusing finger pointed: "You have cliques." (We do?) "Troublemakers." (Since when?) "Church bosses." (You've got to be kidding.) "Bad attitudes." (Get to know us.) "Hypocrisy." (Trust us.)

Slowly, subtly, the insidious seeds of discord are sown. "Someone said . . ." "I heard . . ." First bewildered, then distressed, then by turn angry and heartbroken, the people begin to wonder just who can be trusted. Lines are drawn and sides taken. Misunderstanding, confusion, rumor, and mistrust spread like tares among wheat.

And so it is that, after months of anguish, a new pastor arrives and is welcomed into a congregation where, under a thin veneer of niceness, a brittle crust of over-politeness, there are cliques, church bosses, unchristian attitudes, and carnality.

We have become what we were told we were. ✠



# Preaching Holiness to a Contemporary Culture

**A**s holiness preachers, our day demands that we be exegetes of the Word and the world. Having received the call to preach, we understand that one of our primary tasks as preachers is to unlock meanings. This revolves around communication—specifically, the goal of communication. God has delivered a message that must be not only communicated but obeyed.

A prerequisite for preaching holiness effectively in our day is to continue as students of the Word. We have been called to “rightly divid[e] the word” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). We are theologians by the nature of the task that God has given. God’s Word is the Source from which sermons arise. If this is true, then a serious and systematic study of the Bible is a must. A biblical understanding of God’s call carries with it the idea of wrestling and digging with the Word and inside the Word. Thorough knowledge of God’s Word is a must. As a result of your study, preach with excitement—excitement that comes from learning and discerning God’s Word. After that, our task is to become contagious about the discoveries we have made.

Encountering the Bible should shape our lives as preachers in the following ways:

1. As an exegete, we dig to find the meaning of the biblical writer. Through study and prayer, we must seek to understand what God was communicating to them in His Word. Start-



**by Ronald J. Blake**

*Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene,  
Kalamazoo, Mich.*

ing at this point ensures that the Holy Spirit can use us as a communicator to the congregations where we serve.

2. As a person of God, we need to allow the Word to make changes in our spiritual lives. Just as examining the Word is crucial to preaching, allowing the Holy Spirit to examine our lives is crucial to Christian living. Spiritual preparation is as important to our sermonizing as it is for our spiritual health and vitality.

3. As a minister, this leads us to the preaching moment. What does God want to say to our congregation? I discussed the importance of interpreting the biblical writer above; this led me to ask, “What does God wish to communicate to me?” Now we have to ask, “What is God wishing to communicate to the body of Christ that is gathered in the sanctuary?”

God desires to communicate with His people; this is a given in our understanding of preaching. As preachers, we must ponder seriously this idea—not, “What do *I* wish to say to the people?” but rather, “What does *God* desire to say to the people?” If we understand that this is a part of our task, we will desire to communicate effectively and correctly the whole counsel of God.

If we are to preach holiness effectively today, we have to believe and understand the doctrine of entire sanctification. Dr. John A. Knight, in his book *The Holiness Pilgrimage*,

makes this statement: “Entire sanctification is a God-given moment or crisis of faith and covenant, which issues in increasingly responsible discipleship and immersion in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.”\* Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). The supreme goal of the Christian life is to have single-minded love for God. To serve God with an undivided heart is the essence of a holy life. Entire sanctification is a biblical doctrine.



It is a magnificent doctrine within God's great plan of redemption. It is God who stated, "I . . . am holy" and "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16).

In our preaching we can state confidently that God offers what He requires. He offers the means to accomplish that cleansing and perfecting if He requires that His people be holy.

Communicating this message to our culture requires biblical understanding of sin. If I know your definition of sin, I know how you build your theological belief system. If you include mistakes, human nature, emotions, faulty intellectual or reasoning attainments as sin, then you are hard pressed to believe that you can be cleansed and delivered from these by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

As Wesleyans, we believe that as the sin of Adam reaches out and pollutes the natures of all individuals, Christ's atoning blood reaches out and purifies our sin nature. We must understand what the Bible says about sin and its remedy. Again, we return to a recurring theme: We must be grounded in Scripture.

Language and terminology describing a biblical doctrine should strive to explain itself, using the same words that the Bible uses. If what we preach is not saturated with and grounded in Scripture, will we be heard by our congregation? Or do we simply deserve to be heard simply because we are preachers? Understanding is one of the goals of preaching. Communicate God's Word so that the Holy Spirit can energize the Word and bring understanding and transformation to the congregation.

No matter how effective I become in communicating the Bible, it is vital-ly important that I have the experience that I believe is both biblical and necessary for others to have. If, as holiness preachers, we want people to experience the Holy Spirit in their lives, we cannot preach to others what we do not believe or experience. How can we hope to lead others where we ourselves have not traveled? We must likewise allow God's perfect love to have full rein in us.

Sanctification implies servanthood. However, servanthood seems contrary to the spirit of our times. Biblical holiness must sound forth with a clear call to service. Holiness should be preached

as the goal of the life in Christ and as single-minded love for God. This definition comes from the greatest theologian ever: Jesus. All aspects of preaching biblical holiness are meaningless unless the truth of sanctification is obeyed and experienced now.

One great challenge for the holiness preacher is the systematic (verse by verse or chapter by chapter) preaching of the Bible. Preaching through a book of the Bible requires great discipline for the preacher as well as being helpful to the congregation. People begin to see the truth of the Scripture in its biblical context. Systematic study transforms their biblical understanding from seeing Scripture as unrelated verses taken from the text in a cookie cutter fashion to seeing biblical truth as a continuous string of pearls related and fashioned for one beautiful purpose.




Our task is to  
become  
contagious  
about the  
discoveries we  
have made.



Allow me to share an example when I preached sermons on entire sanctification in the context of preaching a series of messages. This example comes from a series leading up to Easter (John 13—17). I divided these chapters into eight messages. When I arrived at chapter 17, the doctrine of entire sanctification presented itself in the context of Jesus' pilgrimage toward Calvary. In verse 11, Jesus describes God as Holy Father. This is the only time in the Book of John that God is described as "Holy Father." It presented a wonderful opportunity to describe the holiness of God. Holiness as the essential

nature of God and His desire that His people be holy were two points conducive to a great introduction to the doctrine of holiness. In verse 17 Jesus says, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." This led to a discussion of the biblical meaning of sanctification—separateness, ceremonial and moral. I discussed that sanctification is a beautiful doctrine and is a part of God's revealed truth. Since this is Jesus' last night of His earthly ministry, His words take on heightened significance. He would not talk about something that was not vital. Realize then that sanctification is not just one of many options. It is a necessity, provided for by the atonement of Jesus. In verses 18-19, Jesus says, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." This led me to preach the consecration aspect of sanctification. Jesus committed himself to God's will for His life, even though it involved a cross. Are we willing to commit ourselves to God's will for our lives (1 Thess. 4:3)?

I preached through the Book of 2 Timothy on Sunday evenings. In my studies, I came to 2:20-21, which led to a sermon titled "Sanctification: To Be Made Fit for Service." Verse 21 lent itself to a discussion on cleansing. God desires to cleanse our sin nature. We can be cleansed from sin in this life. We are told in verse 21 that we will be made holy. After spending some time explaining this information, I preached that holiness of heart makes us useful. It makes us versatile. God can use cleansed, filled vessels for His divine purposes. The biblical idea of usability depends upon our complete consecration and entire sanctification.

Holiness of heart and life is a doctrinal message that our world desperately needs. It should be proclaimed often, systematically, enthusiastically, and biblically. If we seek to communicate to those who live in our culture, we should not compromise our doctrine. Rather, we should present the doctrine as is, rooted and woven throughout the pages of the Bible. Preach biblically balanced sermons, for the inspired Word is alive and able to communicate to the hearts of every generation and culture. 

\*Dr. John A. Knight, *The Holiness Pilgrimage* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 8.

# The Task of Exegesis

**T**he task of preparing sermons from week to week is one of the most significant things the pastor/preacher does. It is sobering to think that as the preacher prepares and delivers a sermon, he or she is involved in a very ancient and sacred process—the process in which the Word of God is being made manifest through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the act of preaching. Donald Miller states:

To preach is to become a part of a dynamic event wherein the living, redeeming God reproduces his act of redemption in a living encounter with men through the preacher. True preaching is an extension of the Incarnation into the contemporary moment, the transfiguring of the Cross and the Resurrection from ancient facts of a remote past into living realities of the present. A sermon is an act wherein the crucified, risen Lord personally confronts men.<sup>1</sup>

By preaching, the preacher is involved in an awesome, life-changing, life-giving event. This event cannot be taken lightly or haphazardly but must be approached with the greatest of care and preparation.

The ways of accomplishing the task of putting sermons together are numerous. Various methods, theories, and systems of sermon construction can be perplexing, if not exasperating, as the preacher attempts their practical application. One must try to utilize the best of all the different methods, continually improving them, modifying them to meet one's needs, and cultivating them in such a way as to achieve the goal of making the gospel come alive for present-day hearers. It is a desire of the preacher to deliver the Word of God in such a way as to call for decision just as it did for its original audience. This is



**by Randall W. Rucker**  
*Pastor, Church of the Nazarene,  
New Lothrop, Mich.*

not an easy assignment. As daunting a task as it may be, it is good to remember that the Holy Spirit inspires His servants just as He did when the biblical passage was originally written.

The most significant, necessary, even sacred duty of the pastor/preacher is to interpret the text, discover the originally intended message, and then make contemporary application. All this is an attempt to drive the original meaning home to one's present society with the same impact that it had when originally written. The process of interpretation and explanation is known as "exegesis." Exegesis is the homework the preacher must do before the sermon can take form and the various methods or systems of construction and delivery be utilized. Exegesis is the critical link between biblical text and Sunday morning sermon. It is the indispensable connection between the message of the original author and contemporary application of that message.

From time to time all of us could use a refresher course on the basics. Here is a summary of the exegetical process.

## **I. The Scripture Text and Background Data**

It is necessary to understand, as

much as possible, the background of the passage. This is accomplished by asking and answering the following questions:

**A. The Writer**—Who wrote the passage? What type of person was he? What is his importance? Are there any writing characteristics? The authors of *Steps to the Sermon: A Plan for Sermon Preparation* comment on the importance of understanding the writer of a given passage. They state:

The author and his situation should be known and understood. The author of a passage had certain mental habits and distinctive views. He had his heritage of ideas. He wrote or spoke out of an immediate environment. All of these factors affected what he said and helped to determine the significance of what he wrote. To understand the man and his situation is to discover significance in the passage which could not otherwise be known.<sup>2</sup>

**B. The Speaker**—Is he different from the writer?

**C. The Addressees**—To whom was it written? To whom was it spoken? Does this have any significant effect on the message? The same can be said of the first readers as was said of the author. It is important to understand their character, habits, and environment.

**D. The Time**—What day, month, or year?

**E. The Place**—Where did this occur? Where was it spoken or written? Does this have any significant effect on the message?

**F. The Occasion**—What caused this passage to be written? Take, as an example, the letter to the Colossians. The apostle Paul wrote the Colossian church to offset false and very threatening teaching. This false teaching probably was associated

with some early form of gnosticism. This false teaching stripped Jesus Christ of His exalted position as Son of God. The Gnostic teaching that Paul was combating discounted Jesus' unique place in the Godhead and considered Him as only one of many created beings that emanated from the Godhead.

**G. The Aim**—What was the purpose of the speaker or writer, or both?

**H. The Literary Form**—Is the passage prose, poetry, parable, history, legislation, exhortation? Biblical dictionaries, lexicons, word studies, and commentaries are important tools in the process of establishing the literary form. It is a mistake to assume that history can be interpreted in the same manner as prose or parable. Each literary form has its own unique way of being understood.

**I. The Historical Setting**—In what historical milieu is this passage set? What bearing does this have on the interpretation of the passage?

## II. Exegetical Data

What is the true text, the right translation, the proper interpretation? Examine some of the pivotal words of the passage. Plenty of material is available for those who do not handle the Greek or Hebrew language. It is important to know which kind of language exists in a particular text. Is the passage prose or poetry? If dealing with a figure of speech, what kind? Figures emphasizing comparison, figures involving association, figures emphasizing a personal dimension, figures demanding additions to complete the thought, figures involving understatement, figures involving an intensification or reversal of meaning, figures involving fullness of thought, nebulous figures of speech. The passage may be a parable, an allegory, or metaphor; it may be typology, prophetic, or apocalyptic in nature. The chosen text may be a major theological work, doctrinal teaching, or an Epistle. Whether it be the de-

scriptive language of creation or the declarative language of the gospel, understanding it is important to making it relevant to contemporary hearers.

## III. Structural Data

The thought structure of the passage must be analyzed. What are the subject and themes of the passage? How can you outline the passage? This is not the sermon outline, but one will use the material to develop the sermon outline.

## IV. Contextual Data

What is the relation of the passage to surrounding data? This is particularly important to interpretation. The context of a passage consists of the immediate context or the unit of thought, the outlying context, and the larger context. The immediate context deals with words, verses, and paragraphs immediately preceding or following the text. The outlying context may encompass paragraphs, sections, chapter(s), and book(s) of the Scriptures. The outlying context also includes other writings by the same author. The larger context may include the Testament in which it is found, the biblical theological whole, and the cultural context. Failure to include the wider context of a particular passage can produce faulty interpretation. By leaving out the context in one's investigation of scripture, one may inadvertently twist the passage and misinterpret the meaning.

## V. Theological Motifs

What great confessions of faith are found in the passage?

## VI. Exposition

Place the outline in proper rhetorical form for communication.

## VII. Bibliography

List reference tools.

The process of exegesis is essential to sermon preparation. It is also important to approach the passage with

as few preconceived ideas and opinions as possible. Admittedly, it is not humanly possible for the preacher to totally dismiss his preconceptions. However, the more open one is in approaching the passage, the more likely one will be in arriving at the true message.

Once the exegetical homework is done, the preacher must develop the sermon concept or idea. If biblical preaching is the goal, the preacher should first represent the chief truth of the passage in a plain, brief, declarative sentence. Once all of the homework is finished, the preacher may employ one of the various methods of sermon construction for delivery and application to his unique situation. Powerful, successful preaching is not accomplished simply by doing the right things; it is not accomplished by merely doing all the homework and all the research. One may be masterful in construction and delivery, but real power and success comes from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The authors of *Steps to the Sermon* state:

The power of the Holy Spirit belongs to the minister who abolishes self. The Spirit of God is a stranger to the proud, self-reliant man. The minister must place no basic confidence in himself. He must take no side glances at his own success. Rather, he must forget self in his complete surrender to God. The power of the Spirit rests upon dedication to Christ. The minister must be caught up out of his petty orbit into the eternal purposes of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

With all of the tasks the modern preacher/pastor is expected to do, remember that the most significant part of his calling is preaching. The contemporary preacher must discover ways to invest his life in the primary task of his calling.

1. Donald Miller, *Fire in Thy Mouth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 17.

2. H. C. Brown, H. Gordon Clinard, and Jesse J. Northcutt, *Steps to the Sermon: A Plan for Sermon Preparation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 54.

3. Ibid., 196.

# The Power of a Pastor's Words

## Basic Persuasive Preaching

**W**hether you are a newly ordained pastor, beginning your first assignment, or an experienced veteran who has preached hundreds of sermons, your words are powerful. You are privileged to communicate God's truth every time you stand to preach or teach to your congregation. What a responsibility! Think about the power of a pastor's words. If we are dedicated to feeding our flocks, we want to prepare and deliver nourishing meals from the Bread of Life. As bread is baked from basic ingredients—flour, yeast, water, sugar, and eggs—every message we preach should have some basic ingredients as well.

Paul, the scholar-tentmaker turned apostle, understood preachers. He knew the problems of being misunderstood or maligned by his hearers. Through the power of his words, Paul could move an audience to repent or incite a riot! An eloquent speaker and writer, Paul understood the basics of persuasive preaching. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote: "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Using the word *basic* as a guide, let's observe five ingredients of persuasive preaching.

### The Bible— the Basis of Our Authority

We live in changing times. For good or bad, our culture strongly influences the way people view their pastors. Today's average pastor won't effectively communicate on the basis of his pastoral position. Simply because we stand behind a pulpit does not assure our hearers that every word we speak will be the gospel truth.

We struggle with issues of authority and common respect. We must earn credibility from listeners or face the cruelty of being relegated to the box labeled "Doesn't apply to real life." In his article "Why Should They Listen to Me?" Tim Timmons suggests three ongoing handicaps to effective



by **D. Phillip Pinckard**  
Pastor, United Church of the Nazarene,  
El Dorado, Ark.

communication that may prevent us from speaking so that people listen.<sup>1</sup>

*First, "The world is listening to everything else."* Overcommitment, a variety of choices and activities, and competition for time nearly overwhelm people. Confusion about right and wrong, the future and the past, personal relationships, and moral issues seems to plague our neighbors. Most don't recognize the Bible as their prime authority; it's just another voice in the confusion.

To overcome this confusion, we must offer clear, reasoned answers to the world's greatest needs. We must demonstrate that the Word of God remains relevant and down-to-earth.

*Second, "The church is talking to itself."* Christian bookstores sell evan-



gelistic books. Christian stations air evangelistic programs. Only a few visionary leaders have broken this "self-talk" cycle. Communicators like Robert Schuller and Billy Graham are taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christian, secular people around the world, through mass media and printed page.

Once again we must become salt and light, critically participating in our world. We must stop judging the world and talking to ourselves. We need to begin judging ourselves and talking to the world in language they can understand!

*Third, "Preachers are in a box."* Many Christian groups have a "holy huddle," primarily to perpetuate their institutions. Timmons says we must love people, care for them, and listen to them, but we must never allow our message to be managed or determined by the world.

As pure, whole wheat flour is a major ingredient for life-sustaining bread, so authentic Christian character forms the basis for legitimate authority in preaching. We must not only discuss love but also demonstrate God's love. John Maxwell says: "People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care." Aristotle called this quality *ethos* or in New Testament terms, maturity and integrity.<sup>2</sup> Christlikeness should characterize us, even when no one is looking. Jesus knew the importance of *being* over anything we are *saying* or *doing*.

### Audience Approach

A second major ingredient for basic persuasive messages includes our approach to listeners. Yeast makes bread rise. How will we "get a rise" out of our audience? What will appeal to the needs of our people and hold their interest?

In the unsearchable riches of God's Word, many texts we choose to preach may have more than one point of view. In Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, for example, will we



identify with the man who was beaten and left for dead; or with the priest who passes by without stopping; or with a Levite who crosses the road to avoid personal involvement; or with the Good Samaritan who stops to care for the wounded? Our stance determines the direction of our particular message.



Simply because  
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the gospel truth.



I once heard a powerful message from Luke 15, commonly preached from the perspective of the prodigal son who wasted his father's resources. One thoughtful preacher, C. S. Cowles, approached the text from the viewpoint of the older brother. He skillfully pointed out that we don't have to travel to "the far country" to be lost; it's possible to be lost in your own backyard!<sup>3</sup>

How will you develop your attitude toward the audience? What direction or angle will you use? Jesus preached directly to the needs of His hearers. To the woman at the well, He used the angle of the Water of life. To the man born blind, Jesus spoke of the Light of the World. Jesus offered unconditional acceptance and redeeming love to persons, while confronting sinful behavior without compromise. Jesus' attitude demonstrated pure humility. Though equal with God, He set His eternal glory

aside and stooped to our level. Persuasive preachers must meet audiences on their level, at the point of their personal need!

Haddon Robinson, professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, suggests ways to help pastoral communicators connect with our audiences. We preachers must show people in the pew that we understand their life situations. Effective communicators give words to an audience's feelings by identifying with listeners. Work at speaking for people before trying to speak to them.<sup>4</sup>

As I prepare a message, I mentally surround myself with several specific people who will hear me preach. I try to imagine their responses to scripture texts, illustrations, and other sermonic materials. Each one is a real person in my very real congregation. There's a new believer with little background in the Bible. Will my message confuse or upset her? There's a teen wondering how long I'm going to preach. How can I grab and hold his attention? There's a faithful widow whose simple faith inspires me. Will this message raise troubling or difficult questions for her? By gathering an imaginary team to reflect your messages, you will preach with greater integrity.

#### Structure— the Substance of the Message

Every message needs substance and structure. As a skeleton supports muscle and flesh, so the sermon structure and outline give form and substance to the truth. Like the mixing bowl in which bread ingredients are prepared, or a bread pan where the bread rises and is baked, structure gives substance and form to the Bread of Life.

For the past 14 years, I've written full manuscript sermons. This discipline, begun early in ministry, continues to this day. The author of Hebrews reminds us: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11). Admittedly, writing full manuscripts at first seems unpleasant, painful hard work. However, consider the harvest of benefits. Sermon manuscripts can be reduced to memorable outlines that preach

with greater ease and freedom. Manuscripts help us carefully choose words that communicate, especially when addressing sensitive ethical or moral issues.

Share the skeleton of your message with worshipers. Keep the sermon from sounding like a lecture by memorizing the main points of the message. Use a printed outline as a tool for recapping main points that you have already covered. Many effective speakers now use outlines with key words or significant ideas omitted so that audiences can take interactive notes by filling in the blanks.<sup>5</sup>

#### Illustrations

A fourth major ingredient in pertinent messages are major illustrations. These windows shed light on the truth that we want to present. Don't fall into the trap of weaving a good story into the message simply because it is a good story. Carefully chosen, meaningful illustrations add flavor and interest to our messages.



The best  
speaker turns  
ears into eyes.



The best illustrations come from historic incidents or our personal experiences. *Leadership* journal's "To Illustrate" column is an excellent source. True-life stories enhance our credibility and give persuasive power to preaching! Don't be afraid to show some passion about your illustrations. This pathos shows a communicator's intensity. Excitement is contagious. Enthusiasm about the truth that you're illustrating convinces audiences.

Jesus usually illustrated truth by moving His hearers from concrete, visual examples to more abstract principles. His method deserves imitation.

Use sharp, clear images. The late Peter Marshall, chaplain of the United States Senate, often spoke of "news-reel preaching." We should create vivid pictures in the minds of our listeners. The best speaker turns ears into eyes. Illustrating messages is one of the most challenging, yet satisfying tasks for any persuasive speaker. Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and *almost* the right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug."<sup>6</sup> May God's Spirit help our messages strike lightning, not swat at lightning bugs!



We must offer  
clear, reasoned  
answers to the  
world's greatest  
needs.



### Concluding Remarks

"In conclusion . . ." With these words, our message hits home or misses the mark. The last factor in making nutritious bread is the time spent in the oven. Overcook a loaf, and it becomes hardened and dry. Undercook the ingredients, and they will be doughy and unappetizing. So it is with preaching conclusions. Allow your listeners to make their own discoveries. Let your audience "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8). Drawing conclusions for hearers is like eating their serving of bread for them. They leave the table hungry and unsatisfied while we choke on our own words.

As I begin preparing a message, I determine a desirable response. What

do I want to happen in the message today? Am I preaching for a decision? Do I want to teach or expand on some aspect of truth? Am I motivating my audience to action?

Defining your purpose will direct your conclusion and appeal. Earl Palmer makes two valuable points in his article "Letting Listeners Make the Discoveries."<sup>7</sup> First, "*Let the truth sell itself.*" As you approach your conclusion, avoid the temptation to say too much. People come to church already prepared by the Holy Spirit. We must cooperate with God in leading them to a decision. I am constantly amazed—although I shouldn't be—by how the Holy Spirit applies truth to human hearts through "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21, KJV).

Second, "*Let people bear their own applications.*" Don't impose artificial spirituality on others. Let them make their own scriptural applications. Allow time for the application to form in their minds. *Logos* is a persuader's intelligence; *pathos*, his intensity.<sup>8</sup> Sound conclusions are intense *and* intelligent; that is, they have emotional appeal and logical content. Like a nail, logic fastens truth to the mind of the hearer. Emotion is the impact of the hammer. Placing the nail of logic without the force of the hammer will never cause lasting spiritual decisions. Using emotional hammers may make lasting impressions but will never effect long-term changes in behavior. As sharpened nails of logic are driven home by targeted hammers of emotion, life-transforming commitments will result!

On an October Sunday evening in 1871, Dwight L. Moody preached to the largest audience to that point in his ministry. His text was "What will you do with Jesus?" He concluded the message saying: "Think over what we have discussed tonight. Next week, we will come back and decide what to do with Jesus."

But it was not to be. In the early morning hours, alarms rang and fire wagons rolled. By late Monday, much of Chicago lay in ashes, the result of the great Chicago fire. Later, Moody confessed that he never again allowed a congregation to leave without pressing for decisions.

Pastor, we must always remember: "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2, KJV).

Henry Ford stood at the church door, shaking hands with his pastor. "It was a good sermon, Reverend, but you didn't ask for the order!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Ford?" the minister replied.



Avoid the  
temptation to  
say too much.



"You showed me the need, offered alternatives and a Christian solution, but you didn't ask me to buy!"

Persuasive preaching demands that we "ask for the order!" Pastor, your words have power to teach, motivate, and persuade to action. Let's call our people to commitment by "asking for the order!"

Attention to the basics of persuasive preaching—Bible, audience approach and appeal, skeletal structure, illustrations, and conclusion—will make rookie pastors and seasoned speakers more effective communicators of the Word. To God be the glory!

1. Tim Timmons, "Why Should They Listen to Me?" *Leadership* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Christianity Today), Fall 1985, 90.

2. James Watkins, *The Persuasive Person* (Indianapolis: Wesley Press, 1987), 14.

3. C. S. Cowles, sermon: "Lost in Your Own Backyard," preached at College Church of the Nazarene, Nampa, Idaho, June 1990.

4. Haddon Robinson, "What Authority Do We Have Anymore?" *Leadership*, Spring 1992, 26.

5. J. Grant Swank, "Making Public the Outline in Preaching," *Clergy Journal*, January 1993, 12-13.

6. Mark R. Littleton, "Raisins in the Oatmeal: The Art of Illustrating Sermons," *Leadership*, Spring 1983, 63-67.

7. Earl Palmer, "Letting Listeners Make the Discoveries," *Leadership*, Spring 1992, 38-39.

8. Watkins, *Persuasive Person*, 14.

# The Evangelistic Sermon

In his book *Homiletic*, David Buttrick inaugurates the first chapter with an illustration from the musical comedy *My Fair Lady*. Lead character Eliza Doolittle, exhausted and discouraged with elocution lessons, sings, "Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words!"

Buttrick comments, "Whatever the cause, today words are suspect or, if not suspect, then dismissed as impotent mouthings . . . sermons are labeled 'preachments.'"<sup>1</sup>

Many consider preaching to be nothing more than innumerable words. The minister worthy of his pay understands that this message must be from a heart filled with wisdom and power stemming from the Holy Spirit's leadership and presence. Not by merely opening his mouth can he rest assured that the Spirit will speak, but it comes from the overflow of the pastor's devotional life, his connectedness with God.

Vance Havner reminds us, "It is not the business of the preacher to fill the house. It is his business to fill the pulpit."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the minister's responsibility rests in preaching the words that God inspires him to say to a waiting, searching, needy congregation. His evangelistic preaching calls for a life change to take effect under the transforming work of Christ.

Luis Palau stated, "An evangelistic sermon, if based on the Word of God and anointed by the Holy Spirit, can effect the greatest possible life change. In the sovereignty of God, it can speak to an unbeliever and turn his or her heart to faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Basic questions should be asked and resolved to contemplate preaching evangelistically to congregations who need God's message communicated to them.

The definition of preaching and



by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor, Three Rivers Church of the Nazarene, Three Rivers, Mich.

evangelism must be examined. Then, to whom does one preach with evangelistic emphasis? Why preach evangelistically? What does one preach? What style, language, illustrations, content, focus, and structure must be met to be classified as "evangelistic preaching"?

What is preaching? Dr. G. B. Williamson wrote, "Preaching is the mediation of the truth of God to men through human personality."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Eugene L. Stowe penned, "Preaching is the timeless, God-given strategy for the proclamation of the Good News."<sup>5</sup> Craig Loscalzo relates in his



book, *Preaching Sermons That Connect*, that as a youngster the church he attended did not emphasize preaching. The confrontation of God's truth through biblical preaching appeared in his adult life. "The sermon was not an impersonal lecture *about* God but a relevant encounter *with* God."<sup>6</sup>

Funk and Wagnalls dictionary defines evangelism as demonstrating "zealous preaching or spreading of the gospel."<sup>7</sup>

The goal of evangelistic preaching becomes simply the communicating of the gospel—good news of Jesus—to a lost and dying world in need of Him. The local parish preacher can grasp that as he or she looks into the eyes of each person sitting in the pew for a Sunday service.

Paul's declaration to the Romans states *why* we preach evangelistically: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). The minister preaches to the sinner who has yet to accept Christ as Savior. The message of evangelistic preaching draws the sinner to God, who has the love and capability to forgive. John, the apostle, wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

The story is told of Robert Louis Stevenson at age 12 looking out into the dark from an upstairs window to watch a man lighting the streetlamps. His governess entered the room and questioned what he was doing. Stevenson replied, "I am watching a man cut holes in the darkness."<sup>8</sup> This is a tremendous picture of the preacher whose task brings God's light to sinners. The minister must be

busy "cut[ting] holes in the [spiritual] darkness" of his congregation.

The clergyman also preaches to the saints in the pew as a *reminder* that God's grace and mercy continually reach out to everyone. Each person desperately needs God's forgiveness. The Christian sitting in the church can rejoice that Jesus has forgiven and redeemed him. The Christian's responsibility exists to pray for the redemption of the sinner listening to the Word with him in a specific sermon.

The minister should preach to the congregation as if his own family were sitting in front of him in need of Jesus and as if he were the only one to challenge them to accept salvation!

The clergyman's evangelistic preaching must be done with an enthusiasm for God's liberating Word, not merely to top last year's numbers of seekers. His preaching should challenge people to witness about the resurrection of Jesus, to bring the congregation to citizenship in the kingdom of God, and to call for radical life-style changes. As the world becomes darker, the light of Jesus becomes brighter. Evangelistic preaching points to Jesus as the Light. Evangelistic preaching must be biblical, should be empowering and exciting, distinctively challenging, and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will speak from the overflow of the pastor's devotional life.

According to an old joke, preaching is the act of talking in other people's sleep. Preaching evangelistically awakens the sleeper to his need for Jesus. Accomplishing that task involves work, thought, preparation, prayer, and divine unction. It includes the message, style, language, illustrations, content, form, and structure.

Palau wrote, "The core of any evan-

gelistic sermon has to be Jesus Christ's work on the cross. Otherwise the message is not evangelistic, ignoring the Gospel."<sup>9</sup>

The message should clearly demonstrate that the Cross and the empty tomb dominate the pulpit regularly, not simply during the Lenten season. The evangelistic sermon articulates the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the hearer.

In an interview with Mike Duduit of *Preaching* magazine, Max Lucado said, "The cross deals with failure, the cross deals with futility and finality. Failure, my mistakes, futility, my reason to be here; finality, my grave. Unless I can deal successfully with those three elements of life I haven't lived."<sup>10</sup>

Evangelistic preachers saturate their listeners with God's truth. Once it is planted in the minds and hearts of people, the Holy Spirit will grow the fruit for eternity.

Church jargon can confuse people unaccustomed to attending church. The minister must present a clear message. It is necessary to find and use contemporary terms that do not diminish the depth of meaning of the biblical counterparts.

Evangelistic preachers must be certain that difficult words of the sermon can be understood by all listeners. That may be accomplished by changing the words, defining the terms, or illustrating the thought.

Loscalzo quotes Harry Emerson Fosdick: "The preacher's business is not merely to discuss repentance but to persuade people to repent; not merely to debate the meaning and possibility of Christian faith, but to produce Christian faith in the lives of his listeners; not merely to talk about the available power of God to bring victory over trouble and temptation, but to send people from worship on Sunday with victory in their possession."<sup>11</sup>

Illustrative material encourages identification of the message with the listener. John MacArthur, Jr., in *Expository Preaching*, gave seven "Whys" of illustrating.

1. To interest the mind and secure the continuing attention of the audience.
2. To make our preaching three-dimensional and lifelike.
3. To explain Christian doctrine

and duties in a clear understandable manner.

4. To communicate convincingly to those who respond better to pictures than to facts.
5. To ensure that the message is unforgettable.
6. To involve all the human senses in the communication process.
7. To catch the hearing of the disinterested.<sup>12</sup>

"It is not the business of the preacher to fill the house. It is his business to fill the pulpit."

Use illustrations that relate to your listeners. When preaching to an inner-city crowd, don't use rural-type illustrations—and vice versa. Be cautious in using canned or commonplace illustrations. Also, avoid using illustration merely to move the congregation to tears emotionally. Consult a wide variety of sources to connect with your hearers. God can use and bless illustrations that effectively deal with people, and so can you!

The evangelistic message differs from other sermons as it seeks specifically to confront the listener with the gospel and to invite a conscious decision to accept Jesus into one's heart. Stemming from that conviction comes the importance of the climax, often called by the old-timers "drawing the net."

Many churches exclude the invitation to accept Jesus from the service. Palau mentions that this exclusion happens for several reasons, including:

1. Some preachers don't want to tarnish their well-groomed image.
2. Other pastors feel that if no one made a public commitment then he has "failed" as a preacher.
3. Still other clergy believe salvation is solely God's responsibility, so they don't try to persuade anyone to trust Christ.<sup>13</sup>

The men who taught me preaching—Paul McGrady, James McGraw, and Oscar Reed—shared the urgency of the invitation at the end of the sermon.

Some practical suggestions for an effective altar service are:

**1. Be straightforward.** Challenge the people to make a public commitment to Jesus Christ. I have heard Billy Graham say many times, "Jesus never called people privately; He always called them publicly." Don't hesitate to give an invitation if the Spirit leads. You may not be aware of someone in the audience who needs that challenge to come forward and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

Preaching is  
the act of  
talking in other  
people's sleep.

**2. Be specific.** If you want people to confess their sins to be saved, say so. If the challenge of the moment is sanctification, be sure that it is crystal clear. If the appeal is for backsliders to be reclaimed, state it purposefully. A general appeal can be used effectively provided the congregation understands the plea.

**3. Be sincere.** People are dying without Jesus, and ministers must sincerely share the gospel with compassion. Sincerity, caring, and concern must shine through the message and the invitation.

If a message demands a decision to follow Jesus, then by all means present the challenge. Let the Holy Spirit convict and bring the seeker to the point of decision. Be willing to show concern and to present the challenge for the people to respond.

An *Illustration Digest* writer

shared that when he was in high school, his father took him to Athens, Greece. There they walked around the Acropolis and stood on the Areopagus, where Paul spoke to the Epicureans and Stoics almost 2,000 years earlier. As they looked around, they noticed tourists picking up marble fragments from the ground. The author wrote, "I wondered how these ancient wonders had survived such pilferage through the centuries."

The Athenians had been aware of the problem for years and had come up with a plan to keep their ancient wonders intact. The marble chips came from a quarry at Mount Pentelikon many miles away. The tourists were not picking up real fragments from the monuments, but fake ones. However, the tourists were happy with their souvenirs, and the Greeks are happy that their ancient treasures are spared.

The writer noted, "How often in this world are we offered something, only to find out later that it was bogus. Everyday someone promises us happiness or meaning, but there is only one source of true meaning and purpose in life."<sup>14</sup>

The evangelistic sermon offers people genuine meaning and purpose to life in Christ. Pastors, be evangelistic preachers!

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# To Lift Up the Fallen

(Dedicated to my pastor)

by Hazel Goodman

*On Sunday, January 12, 1992, an elderly lady walked behind a car. The automobile driver began backing up. The impending tragedy scared the elderly lady. She froze and was knocked down by the unsuspecting driver. She sustained no injuries. Her pastor, R. Steven Bramblett, reached down and picked her up, much aware of her stout size. The lady was covered with mud and sand from the street and a bit shook up.*

*A few days later he received the following poem written by the grateful lady about her pastor:*

To rescue the perishing and lift up  
the fallen  
Are part of a pastor's calling, 'tis  
true.  
But to lift such "dead weight" is truly  
appallin',  
But my pastor did what he had to  
do.  
On her clothes, the mud and stink of  
the street.  
But he saw what he had to do, and  
he did it.  
And the weight he lifted was a  
tremendous feat;  
But through the mud and the mire,  
a candle was lit!  
So easy it is to stumble and fall;  
So few who ever extend a helping  
hand;  
So easy to turn from "the long, hard  
haul";  
Too few who ever join "God's Car-  
ing Band."  
Yes, to lift up the fallen is no easy  
task—  
One without glory, honor, or  
praise;  
But the mud and the mire of the  
street cannot mask  
The love and peace that fill my pas-  
tor's days.



# On the Edge

**P**astor, I really enjoyed that sermon this morning," she reported while shaking my hand and offering a warm smile. "But please, next time, don't stand so close to the edge of the platform! I'm afraid you will fall!"

"It keeps you right on the edge of your seat, doesn't it," I replied. "I find that when I'm on the edge, you're on the edge too!"

How can we preachers keep our listeners "on the edge" during the delivery of a sermon? Be sure that if we fail in the delivery, much of the hard work done in planning and preparation of the sermon will be lost.

Recently, at a holiness youth camp, the senior high campers responded to a survey that was taken during registration in preparation for a nightly game based on the television game show "The Family Feud." One of the questions asked, "What is the most boring part of a church service?"

Ninety-seven percent of the teens responded, "The preaching."

Preachers, we must find a way to deliver our message in a captivating way! "You don't know my audience," you reply. Indeed, I do! God is the true audience of our worship service. As leaders of worship, it is our responsibility to arouse the interest of worshipers so that they will also seek audience with God. The following acrostic spells out the vital elements of effective delivery:

**Attitude:** Protect your quiet time before delivery.

**Relevance:** Present the timeless truth in a timely fashion.

**Outcome:** Preach for decisions.

**Uniqueness:** Perfect the talent that you possess.

**Sincerity:** Possess the Spirit of Christ.

**Expedience:** Profit by timeliness.

## Attitude

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The place to begin is with a self-examination of our attitude toward the



by **Todd C. Pierce**

*Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene, Battle Creek, Mich.*

preaching of God's Word. Do we consider it a "necessary evil" or a "difficult burden"? Or, do we approach preaching as our highest calling? Jeremiah proclaimed, "[God's] word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones" (20:9). The desire to deliver God's message in a captivating manner must be paramount in the heart of the preacher.

Before God's eternal truth can be revealed in the center of the preacher's message, the preacher must first truly experience the joy and peace of fellowship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must worship and pray privately before the beginning of a preaching service.

How many times does the pastor find hours of quiet time during the preparation of his sermon but fail to find even a moment of quiet prayer before the delivery of that same sermon? The wrong attitude at the time of delivery can destroy even the most

well-prepared sermon. Imagine trying to preach a sermon on the judgment of God immediately after hearing another person's criticism or grievance. Think how tainted a message on stewardship might be if the pastor attempts to hold a board meeting to discuss church finances before the preaching service! The preacher must allow nothing to distract him or her before entering the pulpit. The pastor is going to speak for God and needs to hear the voice of God once more—just now—before speaking on His behalf.

## Relevance

One night I went out with an evangelism training team, knocking on doors and looking for an opportunity to share the gospel. At one home, we encountered a bitter woman who used to attend a church regularly but who felt excluded from the fellowship following a divorce. Using a "questionnaire" format, I asked her a question that I had asked hundreds of others: "What do you think the church should do for people?" The vast majority simply answer, "Help them in time of need."

However, this woman replied, "The church should take the Bible, God's Word, and make it relevant to the lives of people. I'm tired of hearing answers to questions no one is asking."

I never forgot that encounter. I have determined to make every sermon relevant and applicable to today's issues and concerns.

If we are concerned at all with arousing the passionate interest of our listeners, we must also be concerned with the content of our message. Is it relevant? Does our message speak to the need of our own lives and families? How has this passage from God's Word spoken to us? These are questions the preacher should answer before the delivery of any sermon. The challenge before the pulpiteer is to take the timeless message of the Bible and apply that message in a timely manner.

The effective preacher reads the



newspaper along with the Bible. The people of our communities hurt from the effects of sin. We have the good news of Jesus to deliver. If we speak that Good News in an antiquated fashion, using our evangelical language full of "God-talk," the Good News that we herald will be lost in the culture gap. Teenagers need to hear God's plan for pure sex while being exposed to the modern lie called safe sex. Men and women need to know that their secular work matters to God and provides them with an opportunity to witness. Parents listen for a word of encouragement and instruction regarding Christian marriage and home. Those persons trapped in the habits of sin and hurting from their destruction need to hear of the Savior who can set them free.

The preacher must know his congregation if he wishes to maintain relevance. A pastor can receive no greater compliment on his sermon than to hear a layperson respond, "Pastor, it seems like you must have been following me around this week! I really needed to hear that." God's Word contains the answers to the dilemmas and difficulties of modern living. Our responsibility is to show that the Bible remains relevant. We must learn to apply its timeless truths to today's needs.

### Outcome

The preacher targets his congregation with a relevant message. He will hold their attention if and when that congregation feels the intensity of his desire for a response. The preacher with such a passionate desire will insist that his congregation feels concern as well. He will not wander but will get to the point. What is the proper response? What decision must be made today? What are the alternatives? We must preach for decisions!

To merely dispense information about the Bible is never enough. It is not enough to identify a human need and the corresponding biblical response. The listener must understand clearly what he must do about it! An invitation to pray at the altar, while always an appropriate and often best response, is not the only proper response to every sermon. If we really want to keep people on the edge, we must consider beforehand the best response the worshiper can make after

hearing our message. Then we must offer that response to the congregation.

You probably heard of the pastor who dreamed he was preaching. When he awoke, he discovered he was! If we preachers are bored with our own messages, our listeners will be disinterested. What response have we made? What decision has the text demanded from us? What sacrifice did God demand from us? What promise did God tell us to claim? What difference has His Word made in our lives? If we have no answer to these questions, we are not ready to deliver our sermon. When we know the answer to these questions, like Jeremiah, we will find the message like a fire shut up in our bones. Then we will eagerly tell of the life-changing power of God. Our eagerness will translate into interested listeners.

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## How can preachers keep listeners "on the edge" during a sermon?

### Uniqueness

The preacher must always act and talk naturally when preaching. The worst mistake any preacher can make—one often made by inexperienced preachers—is trying to imitate another preacher. God has given you unique talents and gifts for the presentation of the gospel. I offer you the words of Socrates: "Know thyself!"

I dare you to make a tape of every sermon you preach for a three-month period. Then sit down and listen to each one! Videotaping is even better if you have access to such equipment. What do you like about your own preaching? What do you dislike? What are your strengths? Once you discover your strengths, develop these strengths as you discover your unique style of delivery. The best style for you is the one that is most

natural. Some are more comfortable behind a pulpit; others feel it is a barrier. Some preach extemporaneously with no notes; others would be lost without their outline or manuscript. Discover your own style and develop it.

Some have an easy way with humor. Such wit can be used effectively to add color and life to a message. Jesus certainly used such a device when He spoke of those who would strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. You can almost hear the children giggling between the lines! From time to time humor can maintain interest, but it can also backfire if it is unnatural.

Some have a talent with drama, an excellent avenue for sermon delivery. Others have a very natural way of weaving a story. Jesus remains the Master Storyteller. This method can still reach children and adults.

Whatever your method of delivery, be sure that it is your own. Only then will your preaching point to Jesus Christ rather than to yourself. We are not showmen, seeking to entertain our listeners. Rather, we are servants showing the seeking listener the way to Jesus. The preacher should say through his attitude, his message, and his delivery, "Don't look at me; look at Jesus. 'Behold the Lamb of God!'"

### Sincerity

No preacher holds the attention of his congregation for long without speaking earnestly. This does not mean speaking loudly or stridently. The voice may sound calm, in fact, subdued, but the hearers must know that the preacher means every word spoken. We must speak from our hearts as well as from our heads. Faticism results from doubling our efforts after we have forgotten our aim. The sincere preacher knows where he is going and why. Speaking from the heart compels the preacher to maintain the direction of the message. At the same time, the preacher must truly believe everything he declares from the pulpit. Anything less is pretense.

Once a pastor listened to the piano mover complain that his job was a difficult one because pianos, being so heavy, were very difficult to move. After grumbling for some time, the piano mover asked the pastor, "What do you do for a living?"

The pastor aptly replied, "I am also

a mover. I move people's hearts. Believe me, that is much more difficult than moving pianos!"

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## What is the most boring part of a church service?

So it is! This challenge meets the preacher every time he begins to speak. Nothing moves people's hearts like sincerity. At the same time, nothing cools hearts like hypocrisy.

### Expedience

Finally, let me offer a word about timeliness. For better or for worse, hearers respond gladly to sermons that are delivered like pizzas—in 20 minutes or less! Especially, pastors, "ring the bell" with your message. If you fail, try again next time rather than go around again during the same sermon.

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## Will evangelical "God-talk" be lost in the culture gap?

One of the hardest things for preachers to find in a good sermon is the conclusion! Ask someone in your congregation this question: "At what time in my sermon did your heart feel the most impact?" Whatever the response, that would have been a good time to end the sermon. Finish your message with the greatest impact possible.

An evangelist was eating dinner at the parsonage on a Sunday afternoon during a revival campaign. The 10-year-old pastor's son asked the evangelist, "Do you practice what you preach?"

The evangelist felt his integrity


was being challenged. He charged the boy, "What do you mean by that?"

The boy replied, "Well, you deliver your sermons so well, I just wondered if you rehearsed them before you delivered them."

The best way to know how long your sermon runs is to practice it aloud. What a shame to offer the best portion of your message 10 minutes after you have lost everyone's attention. Time matters to people, preacher. So make the most of every opportunity by keeping your message to a suitable length. When the congregation comes to trust you to finish on

time, they will more willingly listen to what you have to say during that time period.

### Conclusion

Let the apostle Paul challenge your heart today with these words: "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). May we preach with hearts possessed by Jesus' perfect love until the demonstration of the Spirit's power has aroused the hearts of those who hear us. 

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Cindy Osso

---

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# The Skunk in the Kettle

## Measuring Successful Preaching

**W**e've been hearing a lot about frogs in kettles. But what about a skunk in a kettle?

Imagine a skunk in a kettle. We have no idea how it got there—but it is there. The kettle sits in the middle of the dining room table. It just so happens that the ladies from the community are gathered in the front room to plan the annual Garden Club Extravaganza. At that precise moment, the skunk in the kettle becomes frightened by the sound of a gunshot. It makes no difference that it is actually the chairperson of the Garden Club, Aunt Sophie, gaveling the meeting to order. The skunk in the kettle becomes frightened and does what it does best. Very quickly the meeting is dismissed and the house cleared of everything except a pungent odor and a skunk in the kettle.

Was that meeting a "success"? Certainly the ladies would not use such a word to define their meeting! But what of the skunk? Was that meeting a success for him? Absolutely! He successfully eliminated the threat that had frightened him.

Defining success can be slippery business. What may be defined as success for some will be labeled failure for others. We find this true in many arenas. However, few activities are so hard to define as "successful" preaching.

Early in my ministry, coming to grips with success in preaching caused sleepless nights. After all, it was much different from determining success in seminary, where success was measured to the nearest percentage point in a brilliant shade of red.

Exactly what is success in preaching? How do you know at the close of each sermon if you have successfully fulfilled your duty to "preach the Word"?

The obvious temptation will be to measure our preaching by the altar response. The equation for some is simple: The amount of seekers at the



**by Randall K. Hartman**  
*Pastor, Church of the Nazarene,  
Hastings, Mich.*

altar is directly proportional to our success in preaching. This measure of pulpit success leads to the following gradations of success. If the altar becomes filled—best sermon you have ever preached! If the altar fills to one-half capacity—a truly great sermon. If the altar call brings a small response—you did all right. However, when the invitation brings no response—you have failed miserably!

Of course, we immediately see through that erroneous measure of successful preaching. Or do we? Have you decided that the camp meeting evangelist rates as a more successful preacher than you because his preaching lines the altar and yours does not? As you think back over your preaching for the last quarter,

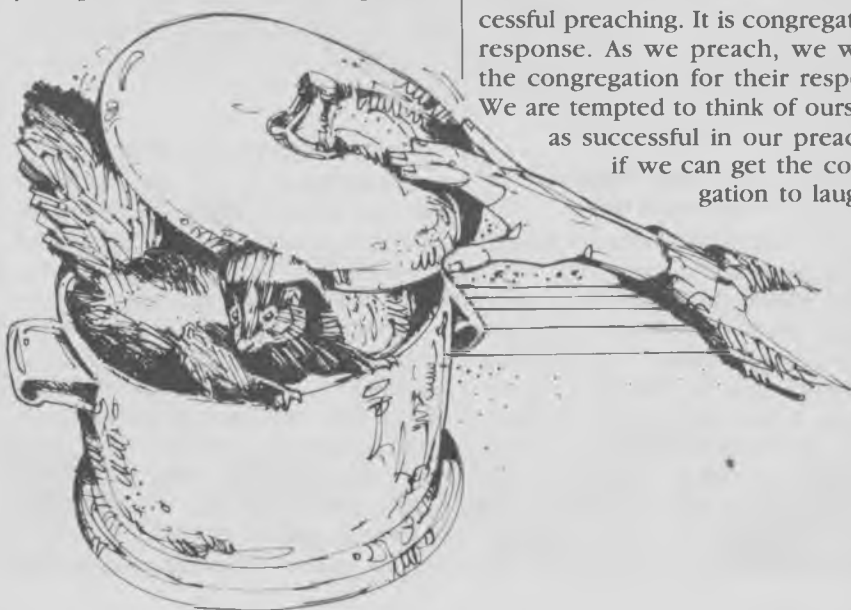
do you have a twinge of guilt at the poor altar response? Does it cause you to doubt that the term "successful preaching" can be applied to your preaching?

If we use results as the defining feature for successful preaching, we automatically eliminate some of the Old Testament prophets from being in the category of successful preaching! Men like Jeremiah would be labeled a miserable failure in their preaching according to this scheme of measuring success.

Yes, results in preaching are important. We preach so that lives may be changed. We need to realize, however, many realities other than the preacher and his message determine altar response. A crying baby, a hot sanctuary, "CB" (citizen band radio) interference over the church loudspeakers, and hard hearts all affect altar response. Additionally, each pastor has preached in churches where the preaching of Billy Graham could not have budged complacent worshippers to the altar!

Take results in your preaching seriously, but never allow them to be the deciding feature in ascertaining your ability to preach successfully.

There is another strong temptation that cries to be our measure of successful preaching. It is congregational response. As we preach, we watch the congregation for their response. We are tempted to think of ourselves as successful in our preaching if we can get the congregation to laugh or



cry or stay awake. For example, seeing someone shed a tear during our sermon can feel like an Olympic judge waving a scorecard with a "10" plastered on it. Furthermore, as we stand by the back door after the sermon, shaking hands with members of our congregation, we listen for positive comments. How many of us have failed to be excited by the comment, "Great sermon, Pastor"?

Caution is needed! Kind words regarding our sermon may do little to help us determine the success of our preaching. "Great sermon!" may mean it was shorter than usual or that the point of the sermon "missed" them. A loudly applauded sermon rarely changes lives. The applause and accolades often fade when sin and sinners are brought into the presence of the Living Word through the proclamation of the written Word. Rarely will parishioners meet you at the door after the service and thank you for preaching them under conviction.

Defining  
success can  
be slippery  
business.

Having dismissed these two popular temptations for measuring the success of our preaching, what measurement tools remain? Let me suggest three questions, among many other possible ones, which may be helpful as you strive to ascertain whether or not your preaching is successful.

#### First, were you faithful to the Word of God?

A preacher who wants to preach successfully must be true to the Word that he tries to proclaim. Regardless of lined altars and glowing compliments, a sermon that compromises the gospel must be labeled as something far less than a success. Chuck Colson reminds us that "the task of the church is not to make men and women happy; it is to make them holy."<sup>1</sup> The same could be said for preaching.

The bane of much preaching today can be found in a watered-down gospel designed only to give people a good feeling. Some pulpiteers are reluctant to preach the reality of sin and hell for fear of offending the contemporary congregation. Frederick Buechner, however, asserts that "the Gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner . . . that he is evil in the imagination of his heart."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there can be no salvation without this kind of realization.

Successful preaching must lovingly deliver a full plate of undiminished theological realities. In his helpful book *Preaching in the Spirit*, Kinlaw bluntly warns: "If the preacher is to be faithful to the spiritual needs of his people, he must be willing to offend them at times. No sincere pastor wants to be offensive. Yet no pastor is truly free if he is not free to offend."<sup>3</sup>

Successful preaching ignores the idea that preaching about sin and standards will offend some in the congregation. It condemns that which angers God. Successful preaching will preach against popular and cherished beliefs held by members of the congregation if they are contrary to God's Word. For example, preaching on the subject of Christian stewardship must be done even if there exist powerful and influential members in the congregation who do not tithe.

Yes, this type of successful preaching must be done tactfully, carefully, and lovingly. The phrase "with fear and trembling" (see 1 Cor. 2:3) may take on new meaning. But, if your preaching can be called successful, it must be done.

#### Second, did you do your best?

Gregory the Great said: "It is for the love of Him that I do not spare myself in preaching Him."<sup>4</sup> Successful preaching demands we give it our best because we are doing it for Him.

At times it may be helpful to remind ourselves that God has called us to *preach*. Most who read these words have not been called to teach or administrate or counsel. Of course, these are all integral parts of our ministerial task. But, first, we are called to be preachers of the Word.

How much time do you spend

each week preparing to do what you have been called to do? In the ministry today, we face the real pressure of a lack of time to prepare adequately for the preaching moment. While I was taking a graduate course on expository preaching, my professor was asked by a student how it was possible to find the time to prepare adequately for two sermons a week. The professor laughed and replied, "Don't ask me. I'm Presbyterian. I preach just once a week!" For those of us in the holiness tradition this is rarely the case. In our tradition, two sermons a week and a Bible study in the mid-week service are the norm. Adequate preparation time remains a significant concern.

Can the term  
"successful  
preaching" be  
applied to your  
preaching?

The temptation to take short-cuts can be found all around us. Ready-made sermons on our shelves beckon us as the haunting melody of Jason's sirens. The popular *Handfuls on Purpose* often wears out before the study Bible. Complete sermons are available on discs. We can now pop them into our computer and quickly tailor them to fit our needs.

Experience, however, teaches that giving in to shortcuts rarely produces our best. The sermons that successfully inspire and infuse are those that are forged on the twin hot anvils of inspiration and perspiration. Naturally there may be those rare times when circumstances demand time-saving methods. These, however, ought to be the exception and not the rule. We must never forget that "the message to be shouted is the one that has been heard in a whisper."<sup>5</sup> Whispers from God cannot be heard in the busy traffic of a hectic work schedule.

It is also important that we give preaching our best at the moment of



delivery. Immediately before the Sunday morning service, you may discover a key family of your congregation plans to move out of state. Successful preaching somehow climbs into the pulpit and does the best it can. Distractions, worries, and problems must take a backseat to the preaching moment. For it is in the dynamic moment of preaching where God and man are brought together for a spiritual encounter. The probability of this happening successfully greatly increases as we give the delivery of the sermon our best possible effort.

Hugh Latimer went to the royal chapel to preach. He heard a voice within him whisper, "Be careful what you preach today because you are going to preach before the king of England."

Almost immediately he heard another voice whisper, "Be careful what you preach today because you are going to preach before the King of Kings."<sup>6</sup> That ought to exemplify our attitude as we prepare and deliver our message!

Successful preaching happens as we give our best effort to what we have been called to do.

### Third, is there the feeling of divine unction as you prepare and preach?

The meaning of the term *divine unction* has been somewhat of a mystery to many preachers. Recently the meaning of this enigmatic term became clear to me. Divine unction is nothing more and nothing less than the "amen" of God.

Many preachers appreciate the crowd that showers the message with a rain of "amens." However, some of those "amens" are insincere or mind-

lessly uttered. Some say it every so often just to keep themselves awake. But when God says "amen," it is a sign of successful preaching. Only the "amen" of God counts. All other "amens" pale by comparison.

Have you heard the "amen" of God as you have been preaching? As you deliver the sermon, do you hear the voice of God shouting, "Amen! Yes! That's what they need to hear!"

**Successful  
preaching must  
lovingly deliver  
a full plate of  
undiminished  
theological  
realities.**

When that happens, your preaching almost transcends the idea of "successful." It moves into the realm of the divine as God himself cheers you on. You discover that the words flow almost effortlessly. You become fearless in the proclamation of truth. You fade into the background, and He begins to shine through you. Divine unction, the "amen" of God, is the final characterization of successful preaching.

It would be naive to think this happens every time one steps into the pulpit. There are days when we give it our best, but we hear no "amen" from

God. However, on those occasions when we feel the divine unction, we need no one to hold up a scorecard as we preach. Nor do we need to hear compliments from the congregation as they exit. We do not even need to see seekers at the altar to know that the preaching moment has been a success. For God himself was blessed and said "amen." There can be no more successful preaching than this!

Successful preaching elicits the "amen" of God.

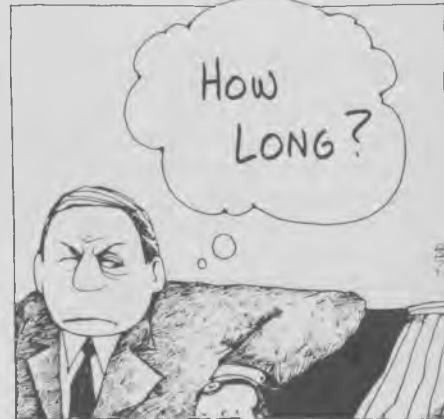
Successful preaching may not be easy. It may not be crowd-pleasing. It may not even result in filling the altar with seekers. But, if you are faithful to the Word, do your best, and hear the amen of God, then you can lift up your head! You are preaching successfully.

Aunt Sophie timidly went back into the dining room. As she peeked around the corner, she saw the skunk climb out of the kettle. At that moment, she knew what had caused all the commotion at the annual planning meeting of the Garden Club.

This week as you prepare to preach, dare to be a skunk in a kettle. Determine you will be a successful preacher regardless of the commotion you may cause. For success in preaching, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. And ultimately it is only God's beholding that counts. 🦔

1. Charles Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 46.
2. Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 7.
3. Dennis E. Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor Press, 1985), 26.
4. David Larsen, *Caring for the Flock* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 64.
5. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 63.
6. George E. Sweazy, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 68.

## Beyond Belief



# The Power in the Presence

**T**oday is Pentecost Sunday. Does that mean anything to your congregation? Does it mean anything to you personally? It should.

Samuel Chadwick wrote:

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as He had never come before. Jesus said, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you." The inference is that the presence of the Spirit is *better* than the bodily presence of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is Christ without the limitations of the flesh and the material world.

To give witness to this presence is to tell the world that we have been overcome with a new *power*. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the disciples that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit" came upon them.

What is the thrust of this dynamo? It is to have power over sin, to live victoriously over the devil, to know the practical experience of being set free from self-centered drives. It is the ability in the Spirit to live the holy life.

Before Pentecost, Peter was a weak-kneed embarrassment to the cause. He was up and down, riding a seesaw within his soul. After Pentecost, Peter was strong in the Lord. He was strong enough to climb onto a soapbox and preach in the midst of the festival, an act that could have brought him death from the Temple's crew.

When we are living in the Spirit, we have an awed respect for God, a hatred of evil, and a hunger for daily cleansing from all that would rob us of a close companionship with the One who has saved us.

The presence of the Spirit also gives us a new *proclamation*, just as He brought Peter from cowardice to courage.



by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Pastor, Windham Church of the Nazarene, Windham, Maine

When *we* are filled with the Spirit, we proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus. We lift *Him* up for all the world to see, a vital task in our climate of spiritual confusion and egocentricity.

We can survive without religious celebrities and their large organizations. But we cannot do without our High Priest, the One who offers His Spirit to dwell in us as the fire indwelt the holy of holies of the Temple. The proclamation still remains a Person rather than a program.

In addition, the Spirit's presence brings a new *perseverance* into the believer's life. Willy-nilly Christian living is gone. Hot and cold flashes give way to a consistent burning for God.

Seeking the comfort of the circle's periphery is not tolerated. Instead, Spirit-filled Christians dash headlong into the heart of God.

Consider the examples of perseverance in the early disciples. If early tradition is correct, they gave even to death: Andrew scourged and crucified at Patras; Philip hung on a hook; Bartholomew beaten in Armenia; Matthew stabbed in Ethiopia; Thomas speared in India. There was Thaddeus slaughtered for refusing to worship the sun and moon, James and Simon crucified in Egypt, and Peter stretched on a cross during Nero's persecutions.

Do we dare complain in our age of

luxury? Can we even think of desertion when there is so much going for us—books, pamphlets, research journals, worship opportunities, fellowships, retreats, and communication methods to relay the old story? Or, have these resources pampered us into an apathy that could ultimately destroy us?

Certainly the benchmark of the presence of the Spirit is *purity*. His indwelling of us is made evident in holiness. No wonder the believers of any age stand out from the world.

While the world would remain in sin, Christians are scaling the summits to breathe only the clean air of God. Society will see the difference.

And the more that difference is pressed, the more sparks will fly. Witness today's fight against pornography. Holy ones call a relativistic world back to biblical morality, only to run head-on into the forces of darkness. Holy ones seek to pronounce scriptural convictions in the marketplace, only to be put down by secularists who claim that the ways of the world have legitimately replaced a biblical heritage.

Yet this purity is not monastic; it does not call for isolation. Instead, it takes its pattern from Jesus, who longed to be where the people were.

Consequently, biblical holiness is first in the soul, and then in society. It is indwelling in order to be outgoing. Not content with being a reclusive religion, Christianity in the power of the Spirit radiates, piercing the world with holy light from the very throne of God.

The Word of God calls the believer to be cleansed from sin and to die to wrongdoing. It calls us to a resurrection in this life to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today we need that powerful presence, the same indwelling that came on the first Pentecost.

# Multiple Services: A Path to Church Growth

**A**t Church Growth Institute, a question we are frequently asked by pastors is, "How can I go to two worship services?" They realize that it is a path to growth.

Multiple services were first introduced by Roman Catholics when they established early Mass. Later, mainline churches began using multiple services, especially in metropolitan areas. Now churches all over the United States are beginning to use multiple Sunday morning services to expand their outreach, eliminate overcrowding, meet the scheduling needs of their people, and reduce financial overhead.

In the past, pastors thought of a larger auditorium as the means to growth. But a new auditorium usually involved paying a higher mortgage, finding and purchasing land if the current site was too small, developing parking that matched seating capacity, and resolving a host of other problems. Today the first step to growth is instating multiple worship services (also called "split-level" or "flip-flop" services).

In the fall of 1981, David Rhodenhizer, the young pastor of Calvary Road Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., realized that he faced an overcrowding problem. The church auditorium seated only 250 persons, but attendance was reaching 500.

Rhodenhizer planned an 8:30 A.M. service for adults. He organized the early service as another ministry outreach, not just a schedule technique to save space. Because he was not certain that people would come automatically, he challenged members to use their seat for an evangelistic purpose. "Give up your 11 A.M. seats for an unsaved person," he encouraged them. "Your space may allow someone to get saved."

He further asked for a core of peo-



by Elmer L. Towns

*Seminar speaker and author, Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg, Va.*

ple to commit to attending the early service. They did so, and immediately the service was filled. Attendance jumped to more than 700.

When Rhodenhizer realized how popular the early service was, he began a third service during the traditional Sunday School hour. Attendance then spiraled to 1,000 in the spring of 1982. The church currently holds services at 9:45 A.M. and 11 A.M., and Sunday School at 8:30 A.M., 9:45 A.M., and 11 A.M.

Scott Memorial Baptist Church of El Cajon, Calif., has three services and three Sunday Schools concurrently at 8 A.M., 9:30 A.M., and 11 A.M. The pastor, David Jeremiah, preaches all three services. The time between services is

used to promote fellowship. Coffee stations are set up in the church patio for members to fellowship before or after a service, and staff pastors mingle among them. The auditorium seats about 600, but attendance averages 1,450 on a typical Sunday.

Some people have objected to a second service, thinking that it would divide the church into two congregations. However, multiple services produce a larger attendance with a greater evangelistic outreach.

A second objection is that with two worship services, members would not know everyone. Statistics show that the average church attender is on a first-name basis with only 59 people. So those who enjoy the intimacy of a small church will not lose contact with their friends when two services are held.

We must remember that the purpose of a church is not that everyone know everyone else, but that the church carry out the Great Commission.



## Living in Fulfillment of the Great Commission

### A Required Course

The comic actor, W. C. Fields, was once found by a friend reading the Bible. Asked what he was doing, Fields replied, "Looking for loopholes."

I suspect that is the way many of us have approached the last command of Christ to His disciples, particularly as it relates to the obligation of every believer to join Him in making disciples.

But try as we may, there are no loopholes. The mandate simply underscores a life-style incumbent upon the whole church. There are no escape clauses, no substitute options. As we might say in the academic world, the Great Commission is not an elective course; it is part of the required curriculum.

### His Command

The directive, issuing from Christ's authority, comes out in the action portion of the Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

In the original text, there is but one verb, "Make disciples." "Go," "baptizing," and "teaching" are participles, which means that these activities do not stand alone. As in English, so in Greek: participles derive their force from the leading verb. The implications of this are quite significant for ministry, for it means that the reason for going anywhere, whether next door or across the ocean, is to make disciples. Similarly, the evangelistic imperative to preach the gospel and to bring persons into baptism aims to make followers of Christ, just as teaching has its objective in the building up of these disciples. The whole thrust of the Great Commission—giving direction and validity to every ef-



by Robert E. Coleman

*Trinity Evangelical Divinity School,  
Deerfield, Ill.*

fort—is the discipling of all nations.

Notice that the command is not to make converts. In other contexts, of course, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of conversion (e.g., Matt. 18:3; John 3:1-36). Tragically, however, too many converts, if indeed they are born again, fail to go on with Jesus, and His plan for reaching the world through their witness is never realized. The irresponsible way that the church has accommodated this situation, I believe, explains why so much of the world's population still languish in darkness.

A disciple means learner or pupil, as in the sense of an apprentice. Such a person is more than a convert, though turning to the Savior in repentance and faith certainly must take place. But disciples do not stop with conversion; they keep moving on with Christ, ever learning more of His grace and glory.

Here is the genius of His plan to win "all nations," raising up a people in His likeness. For disciples of Christ grow in His character, and by the same virtue, they develop in His life-style and ministry to the world. By making this the focal concern, Jesus assures an ever-enlarging labor force, and in time, through multiplication, workers will bring the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Christ's disciples were only asked

to live by the same rule that governed His time among us. That is what the Commission is all about. It simply enunciates the strategy implicit in His own ministry while He was with us in the flesh. Just as the Lord ordered His life on earth, now His disciples are expected to follow in His steps.

### His Visible Pattern

To understand what this means, we must look closely at the way Jesus made disciples. His pattern of doing it becomes the interpretation of the command. Though our understanding is encumbered with all the limitations of fallen intelligence, it is reassuring to know that in the Son of God we have a perfect teacher. He never made a mistake.

Adaptations of His approach to ministry, of course, must be made to our situation. The way Christ worked in His culture nearly 20 centuries ago does not mean that He would use the same techniques in our situation today. Methods are variable, conditioned by the time and circumstances, which are constantly changing. But principles, inherent in His way of life, remain constant. They provide guidelines for making disciples in every society and every age.

### Becoming a Servant

One does not have to observe Jesus very long without being made aware that He lived by a different value system from that of the world. Renouncing His own rights, He "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil. 2:7). Though He possessed all the glory of God, for our sake "he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

His lowly birth in a manger accentuated His chosen way of life (Luke 2:7). When it is considered that He is the

only person ever born into this world who controlled the circumstances surrounding His life, it makes His decision the more startling.

Most of His incarnate life was lived in obscurity in an unbecoming city, where He learned a carpenter's trade. The earthly father of Jesus is not mentioned in the latter portions of the Gospels, so it is generally assumed that Joseph must have died while Jesus was still a young man, probably in His teens. He was left with the responsibility of taking care of not only His mother but also His younger brothers and sisters. One may be sure that He experienced the struggle of raising a family.

At about the age of 30, having fulfilled the obligations of the eldest son, Jesus left home to pursue His public career. He was then accosted by Satan and tempted with the allurements of the world. "Get what you deserve—turn stones into bread to satisfy your appetite, then jump off the pinnacle of the Temple that the angels of God might lift you up"—the arch deceiver taunted (Matt. 4:1-7; Luke 4:1-4, 9-13). How these feats of power would have invoked the crowd's applause! In fact, Jesus was promised all the kingdoms of the earth if He would only accommodate "the god of this age" (Matt. 4:8-10; 2 Cor. 4:4). But our Lord would not be diverted from His mission; His work cannot be accomplished by indulgence of the flesh, however legitimate the appeal.

Jesus came to serve, and in that role He went about doing good. Whenever He saw need, "moved with compassion," He reached out to help (Matt. 9:36, KJV). He fed the hungry; He healed the sick; He opened the eyes of the blind; He cleansed the lepers; He bound up the broken-hearted; He delivered the demon-possessed; He raised the dead. And through it all, He held forth the Word of Life, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom.

Little wonder that multitudes were drawn to Him. People always respond to love when it finds practical expression in ministry, the more so when it is empowered by the Spirit of God. Though His fearless preaching often invoked the disdain of the religious gentry, it generally was received with appreciation by the masses

(Mark 12:12; Matt. 21:26; Luke 20:19). In fact, so great was veneration for Him among the common people that they once intended to "make him king by force" (John 6:15; cf. 3:26; 11:47-48). Indicative of His popular following, the last time He entered Jerusalem, crowds turned out to welcome Him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (12:13).

### **Problem of the Multitudes**

But as Jesus looked upon the city, tears filled His eyes, for He knew that the people did not really understand who He was, nor did they comprehend the kingdom that He had come to establish (Luke 19:41-44). They wanted a Messiah who would use his mighty power to overthrow their enemies and satisfy their temporal desires. Good people, generally respectful, they, nevertheless, were utterly self-serving in their interests. Neither the love of God nor the love of neighbor motivated their actions.

Making the situation worse, the masses had no one to show them the way. They were like aimless sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). Oh yes, there were many leaders who were supposed to give direction, like the scribes and priests. The problem was that these persons were themselves blind to the truth (Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39), nor did they truly love the people. Jesus called them "hirelings"—persons who are only in it for what they get out of it. In the time of crises, when the sheep were under attack, they would run away and leave the sheep prey to wolves [John 10:12-13, KJV].

You can see why Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The multitudes were lost. Confused by their own waywardness and the victimization of self-serving religious professionals, they were an easy prey to the beguilements of Satan. When it appeared to them that Jesus would bring in a new era of freedom and prosperity, they were eager to declare His praise; but a few days later, when it was obvious that His kingdom was not of this world, they cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar" (Mark 15:11-15; Matt. 27:22-26; Luke 23:20-21; John 19:15).

We blink our eyes in dismay, wondering how people can be so callous,

so fickle in their allegiance. Of course, to openly take the side of Jesus in the judgment hall of Pilate would have met retaliation from the chief priests and officers. It might have brought ostracism from the Temple, perhaps even the loss of employment, if not arrest as a troublemaker. Under these conditions, it seemed expedient to play it safe and follow the crowd. It is a commentary on human nature!

Understand it, for unless you come to grips with this condition, you will never be relevant to the Great Commission. A fundamental transformation must take place in the human heart, a change so radical that self-indulging sheep become self-giving shepherds, willing, if necessary, to lay down their lives for the sake of others.

### **Concentrate on the Answer**

For this to happen, the sheep must have shepherds to lead them. Jesus was doing all He could to help, but in the Incarnation He assumed the limitation of His body. He could not give attention to all of the people. It was obvious that unless spiritual leadership could be raised up who could multiply His ministry—redeemed men and women with the heart of Christ—there was no way the waiting harvest could be gathered (Matt. 9:37-38).

So while ministering to the multitudes, Jesus concentrated upon making disciples who would learn to reproduce His life and mission. In doing so He loved the multitudes no less. Indeed, it was for the sake of the masses that He had to devote himself to a few willing learners in order for the world ultimately to be reached.

His first disciples were found largely within His home environment in Galilee. In culture, training, and religious orientation they had much in common. To be sure, they were not generally the most socially astute people, perhaps not even the most religious. None of them, for example, appear to be members of the Levitical priesthood. By any standard of sophisticated culture, they would be viewed as a rather unpromising aggregation of souls.

Yet Jesus saw in these untrained laymen the potential for turning the world upside down. In spite of their

limitations, they were willing to follow Jesus. That is all He asked (John 1:43, 46; Mark 2:14; Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27; cf. John 18:19). Though often superficial in their comprehension of spiritual reality, with the exception of the traitor, they were teachable. Such persons can be molded into a new image.

### Staying Together

As their numbers grew, Jesus "appointed twelve" to "be with him" in a special apostleship (Mark 3:14). He continued to relate to others as the fellowship of believers increased through His ministry, but it is apparent that He gave a diminishing priority of attention to those outside the apostolic circle. Even in this select group, Peter, James, and John seemed to enjoy an even closer relationship to the Master.

All of this impresses me with the deliberate way that Jesus proportioned His life to persons in training. It also illustrates a basic principle of teaching: The more concentrated the size of the group being taught, the greater the opportunity for learning. In a profound sense, He is showing us how the Great Commission can become the controlling purpose of every family circle, every small-group gathering, every close friendship in this life.

For the better part of three years, Jesus stayed with His pupils. Together they walked the highways and streets; together they sailed on the lake; together they visited friends; together they went to the synagogue and the temple; together they worked. Have you noticed that He seldom did anything alone? Imagine! He came to save the nations—and finally, He dies on the Cross for all mankind. Yet while here He spends more time with a handful of disciples than with everybody else in the world.

### Giving an Example

In this close association, the disciples were given a demonstration of His mission. His life was the object lesson of His doctrine. By practicing before them what He wanted them to learn, they could see its relevance and application.

Take, for example, His habit of prayer. Surely it was no accident that Jesus often let His disciples see Him

conversing with the Father. They could observe the priority of this spiritual discipline and the strength it gave to His life. Inevitably the time came when they asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They were ready to learn. Having awakened their desire to pray, He could show them how. Notice, though, in this beginning lesson, He did not preach them a sermon, or assign them a book to read; He gave them an example (Luke 11:2-4; Matt. 6:9-12).



## Disciples do not stop with conversion.



In the same way, He taught His disciples the importance and use of Scripture, the meaning of worship, stewardship of time and talents, social responsibility, and every other aspect of His personal life. All the while, of course, He was showing them how to care for the needs of people, bearing their sorrows, carrying their grief, ever seeking their ultimate welfare in the gospel. In the process He was also demonstrating how to make disciples, though it may not have dawned upon them until they actually received the Great Commission.

### Getting Them Involved

As they were able to assume responsibility, He got them involved in activities suited to their gifts. First duties were small, unassuming tasks, like providing for food and shelter of the group. Since Jesus was unmarried and had no house of His own, it was natural for Him to accept graciously their hospitality (Matt. 8:20; Mark 1:29; Luke 8:3). What a beautiful way to help some people get involved where they could help! As far as I can

find, our Lord never turned down an invitation to dinner. I was glad when I discovered that!

After a while He began to have the disciples assist Him in ministry. They were employed, for example, in baptizing persons who responded to His preaching (John 4:2). In another setting, He has them distributing food to hungry people that came to hear Him (Mark 6:30-44; 7:31-8:9; Matt. 14:13-21; 15:29-38; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13).

The work assignments increased with their developing self-confidence and competence. Before long they were sent out to do much the same kind of work that Jesus was doing with them—healing, teaching, and preaching the gospel (Matt. 10:1-10; Mark 6:6-9; Luke 9:1-3; cf. 10:1-16). Lest they forget the priority of training leadership, however, He stipulated that above the public ministry they were to search out "worthy" persons to spend time with wherever they went (Matt. 10:11-15; Mark 6:10-11; Luke 9:4-5). In effect, the disciples were told to concentrate upon the most promising people who would be able to follow up their ministry after they were gone.

### Continued Supervision

From time to time Jesus would get back with them and see how things were coming along. Continually checking up on their assignments, asking questions, responding to their queries, He was building in them a sense of accountability. Experiences the disciples were having in ministry thus became illustrations for Him to teach some new or deeper truth (e.g., Luke 9:37-43; 10:14-24; Matt. 15:37-16:12; 17:14-20; Mark 8:10-21; 9:17-29). It was on-the-job training all the way.

Problems were dealt with as they came up, which was quite often. Certainly the disciples were far from perfection, and their spiritual immaturity was constantly coming out. To note just one instance, recall the time James and John wanted to call down fire on the heads of some disrespectful Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56). When Jesus saw their impulsiveness, He rebuked them but also seized the occasion to emphasize again the saving purpose of His mission. "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.



For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56, KJV).

Here, as all the way through their training, the disciples were pointed to the redemptive purpose of Christ's being in the world, and their function in continuing that mission. Though their progress was painfully slow, especially in comprehending the meaning of the Cross, Jesus patiently kept them moving toward His goal. He did not ask more from them than they were capable of giving, but He did expect their best, and this He expected to improve as they continued to follow Him.

### **Reproduction of Life**

Life inevitably reproduces its own kind. Careless persons who let the lusts of this world choke the Word of God will reap the folly of their ways. On the other hand, those living in conformity to Christ's Word develop the qualities of His life and ministry.

His parable of the vine and the branches is a beautiful illustration (John 15:1-17). Jesus likens himself in this analogy to the vine and His disciples to the branches. The branches are conveyors of the life in the vine and, when properly functioning, produce a harvest. Any branch not fulfilling its purpose is cut off by the ever-watchful gardener. Even producing branches are pruned by the gardener in order that they will be more fruitful. "This is to my Father's glory," Jesus explained, "showing yourselves to be my disciples" (v. 8).

When fruitbearing is seen in this larger context of producing Christ-likeness, first in ourselves and then in others, practically everything Jesus did and said pointed to this truth. The Great Commission simply brings the principle into focus, phrasing it in terms of discipling.

Jesus taught His followers to live with the harvest in view. "Open your eyes and look at the fields!" He said, noticing the men coming to hear Him in Sychar. "They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). The disciples could see what He meant, and could also appreciate its spiritual application when He added, "Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life" (v. 36). Whether one sowed or reaped, He wanted the disciples to realize that their work had impact upon eternity, ultimately

culminating in the gathering of the nations at the throne of God.

The key to the final harvest centers in the quality and the supply of laborers obeying the mandate of Christ. It does not matter how few their numbers are in the beginning, provided that they reproduce and teach their disciples in turn to do the same. As simple as it may seem, this is the way His Church will ultimately triumph. He has no other plan.



**People always  
respond to love  
when it finds  
practical  
expression in  
ministry.**



Our Lord did not come in His incarnate body to evangelize the world; He came to make it possible for the world to be saved through His atoning sacrifice. But on His way to Calvary, He made sure that His disciples were equipped by strategy and vision to gather the harvest.

### **A Pattern for His Church**

He has given us a model that in principle every believer can follow. Too easily we have relegated His work to organized programs and special clerical vocations. Not that these ministries are unnecessary, for they are vital, and without them the Church would not function as she does. But unless the Great Commission directs the daily life of the whole Body, the Church cannot function as she should.

Here the priesthood of all believers comes alive. Whatever our place of service, we live with a sense of destiny, knowing that each day moves us

closer to the consummation of the Kingdom. Making disciples is not a special calling, nor a gift of the Spirit; it is a life-style—the way that Jesus lived while He was among us, and now the way He commands His people to follow.

### **Begin Where You Are**

Since this is best accomplished with a few people at any one time, at least in depth relationships, you will never lack an opportunity for ministry. You may be sure, too, that some of those who feel the warmth of your servant heart will also want to know more about your Lord.

Notice them. They are the answer to your prayers. Likely many of them will belong to your own peer group. That reminds me of a man down in Texas who was arrested for horse stealing. The police gave him the choice of being tried before the judge or a jury of his peers. "Peers," he replied, "what's that?"

Whereupon they explained, "That means someone just like you."

"Well," said the man, "I'll take the judge. I don't want to be tried by a bunch of horse thieves."

If you look around, you will see persons with whom you already have much in common, beginning with your own family, and reaching out from there to neighbors and friends. Within this natural sphere of influence you will probably have the greatest potential for changing the world.

With those persons who do not yet know the Savior, your relationship becomes a means of clarifying the gospel, bringing them to a place of decision. The same servanthood pertains to believers needing encouragement and direction in their Christian life. Though you are not the only person responsible for their discipleship, for a period of time, you may be one of the most significant influences in their Christian growth.

### **Learning Family Style**

Like Jesus, you do it by being together. The more informal and unpretentious the association the better, like playing a round of golf. What a happy way to have some meaningful conversation! The exercise and recreation on the course is just a bonus. Who would ever want to play this game without the joy of fulfilling the Great Commission?

Such casual activities, of course, do not take the place of formal church services. Both are needed and serve the same purpose of making disciples. But learning comes more naturally in relaxed family-like settings.



## Those living in conformity to Christ's Word develop the qualities of His life and ministry.



Some of this fellowship can be arranged in small-group meetings. These periods incorporate times of testimony, Bible study, prayer, or anything else deemed important to the participants. In my own experience, for more than 35 years, a meeting like this every week with a few students at 6:30 in the morning has been one of the most rewarding disciplines of my life.

Such close association is especially crucial in preserving the fruit of evangelism. Like newborns in the physical world, beginning disciples must have spiritual guardians to help them in their Christian growth. Meet with them as often as possible, inquire about their needs, answer their questions, encourage their witness, and make them feel a part of the Body of Christ.

### Give Something to Do

Maturing disciples with you will find in such follow-up a way to get involved in ministry. Many of the programs of the church also afford opportunities for service. Early assignments can be in areas where they are already equipped, perhaps helping in the nursery or driving a bus. As they grow in grace and knowledge, they may as-

sume leadership roles in the Sunday School or youth activities, eventually becoming deacons and elders of the congregation.

According to their gifts and level of ability, everyone can do something. To illustrate, I think of a riding academy in west Texas that advertises that they have a horse to suit every taste. For fat people, they have fat horses; for skinny people, they have skinny horses. For fast people they have fast horses; for slow people, they have slow horses. And for people that don't know how to ride at all, they have horses that have never been ridden before!

I don't know what your taste is, but when it comes to the Lord's work, there is a horse you can ride. Best of all, whatever the form your ministry takes, be it structured or informal, whether in the church or out in the marketplace, it is a way to help a few daring ones get involved in making disciples. When the Great Commission is seen as a life-style, nothing becomes insignificant, and everything that happens helps us know more of the grace of God.

### Never Stop Learning

Whatever has been experienced thus far, there is more to learn. Keeping disciples pressing on is not easy. Anyone trying to help others is sure to face frustration. As I heard a colleague say, "Ministry would be easy if it were not for people." Innumerable things can happen to sidetrack the best of intentions, and unless these matters are faced realistically, young disciples can easily become defeated. Persist in checking. Ask how they are coming along. Sharing out of your experiences may encourage greater openness, as well as show your own accountability.

Probably the most deceiving problems in human relations come out when the ego is offended, giving rise to various expressions of self-centeredness, like pride or bitterness. Where these fleshly traits are recognized, they must be brought to the Cross. Rebuke will not be resented when given in love, especially if we build self-esteem in them through consistent commendation of every evidence of progress in their developing priesthood.

Giving this kind of leadership puts us on the spot. Perhaps that is why we

have such difficulty equipping disciples, for it means that we must be prepared to have them follow us, even as we follow the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1).

It makes us vulnerable, of course. Persons whom we let into the inner working of our lives surely see our shortcomings and failures. But let them also see a readiness to confess our sins when we understand the error of our way. Let them hear us apologize to those we have wronged. Weaknesses need not impair discipleship when there is transparent sincerity to follow Christ. An honest exposure may tarnish our halo, but, in seeing our humanness, others may more easily identify with our precepts. Furthermore, if we learn from our failures, as abundant as they are, there is no end to the lessons we'll derive.

Though we are a witness, let us make clear that Christ is the Authority, not ourselves. Avoid any authoritarian role of a master guru. Jesus alone commands. In subjection to Him, discipler and disciple together learn at His feet.

### Leave with a Vision

Aided by your example, those persons close to you will begin to realize how Christ has ordered your steps. Now you can share with them specifically your philosophy of ministry. They will be able to understand, for in some measure they will have seen its interpretation in your investment in them.

You can dream together about their place in the harvest, and how God will use their unique personality and gifts in ways far beyond your own. As they get their vision focused, encourage them to set some goals for the future as to where they would like to be in 10, 20, 30 years hence. With these projections in view, the next step is to help them map out plans to achieve their aim. It is in these hours of dreaming that a long-term strategy of discipling really takes shape.

The time will come, as with all physical relationships, when it will be necessary to withdraw from an active role in their lives. A bond of love, though, will remain and perhaps even deepen. As they move on, others will take their place, and the process begins again. With each succeeding spiritual generation, anticipation of the harvest grows, looking joyously to the day when disciples will be

made of all nations, and there will be a reunion in the sky.

### A World Christian

My mother made this real to me. She was truly a world Christian, living in expectation of the coming Kingdom.

I remember once her saying that as a girl she wanted to be a foreign missionary. As it turned out, though, that was not the way God led, and her ministry largely unfolded in our modest home in Texas. We were poor, and there was never enough money to buy a new car, nor to travel far from the city where the three children were born.

But in our imaginations we learned to project our thoughts to all the peoples of the earth. Mom was always talking about her missionaries, some of whom she knew personally, and out of her meager resources she gave much to their support. Before she died in the arms of my sister, one of the last things she said was, "Be sure my missionary pledge is paid up."



## Jesus taught His followers to live with the harvest in view.



Something of her priorities rubbed off on her family, a realization that has grown on me as I have tried to understand Christ's Commission as a relevant way of life for every believer.

### The Call to Prayer

I have also come to see that the greatest expression of this vision will be seen in our prayers. It is here, in communion with the Spirit of Christ, that we enter most deeply into that love that drove Him into the world, and now that constrains us to beseech "the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest

field" (Matt. 9:38). Indeed, this was Christ's first missionary command. Whatever we do begins by waiting on our knees before the throne of grace.

Jesus calls His disciples to get priorities in order. To pray is to confess our own utter inability to do anything in our own strength. At the same time, it is an affirmation that God is able; nothing is too hard for Him. As He commands, so He provides.

How He expects us to entreat God for harvesters can be seen in His own prayers. In these conversations with the Father, the deepest concerns of our Lord's life find utterance. For this reason, I believe that the 17th chapter of John is the most profound insight we have of the mind of Christ, for it is His longest recorded discourse on prayer.

Have you noticed that most of the prayer concerns His disciples? After rejoicing in His relationship with the Father (John 17:1-5), He turns His attention to those men "given" to Him out of the world (vv. 6-10). He prays for their protection from the evil one (vv. 11-15); He prays that they might have His joy in doing the will of God (v. 13); and as they are sent into the world on a mission like His own, He prays that they will be sanctified—completely set apart for God's purpose—even as He sanctifies himself (vv. 17-19). Nothing must be allowed to distract them from the work to which they are called, for "through their message," the world will believe on Him (vv. 20ff.).

Think of it! Though He knows that in a few hours they will forsake Him, even His chief spokesman will openly deny that He is a friend, yet His love will not let them go. He believes in them when they cannot believe in themselves.

This is the test of a true Shepherd willing to give His life for the sheep. However weak and faltering His disciples may be, Jesus cherishes for them the highest that He knows in spiritual communion, "that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:26). Nothing greater in experience can be conceived. That He could have such faith in these beaten, cowed, and bewildered disciples leaves us breathless in wonder.

### Our Ultimate Ministry

Aren't you glad that He held on for

them, for in a real sense He was also praying for us. Had it not been for His intercession on our behalf, we would not know Him today. That is why our most enduring ministry will not be in the time spent talking with disciples, but in our prayers for them.



## His disciples were equipped by strategy and vision to gather the harvest.



Thank God for those faithful servants who held us up to the Father when our faith was weak—moms and dads, wives, husbands, Sunday School teachers, church elders and deacons, pastors, missionaries, faithful men and women who invested their lives—and their prayers—in us. In the same way, let us lift up those persons entrusted to our care. Even when it does not seem that they understand, still we can pray and believe God for them. He is faithful who has promised.

While the ultimate dimensions of the Kingdom are not yet visible, we know that our labor for the Lord is not in vain. The seed planted and nourished in the lives of disciples will someday bring forth a harvest. Our joy is in knowing that in generations unborn these prayers will still bear fruit through them in an ever-widening circle to the ends of the earth and to the coming of the Lord.

May I ask, is this your life-style? If so, you will walk on tiptoes and live every day in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. †

Taken from *The Great Commission Life-style*, by Robert E. Coleman, Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Book House, 1992.

# Size Seven Shoes

**G**od's ways are mysterious. His purposes remain hidden until all the parts fall in place. Why? Because God builds our faith by causing us to trust Him completely in times of uncertainty. He brings us to the end of ourselves to show us without a doubt that "It's true! He 'will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5, NKJV) God desires that all-important truth to ring true in our hearts.

I hate uncertainty. Don't you? I usually embark into uncertain waters with the best of intentions. However, when the rations begin to exhaust themselves, I cry out on my bed, "Lord, where are You in all this?" (cf. Ps. 63:6).

The Lord leads us out into the deep waters that may seem bottomless, but He always sends a fish to get our attention (cf. Jonah). God crafts us in a beautiful way. He leads us into the desert and then writes His message in the sky.

Here is where the "size seven shoes" came in. One rainy morning my social work job led me to a dark apartment complex located in a high crime area of the city. The foster mother of the teenager I was visiting had told me her neighborhood was dangerous. One time she watched from her window as her son rode his bicycle into a shootout in her courtyard. Often on these monthly visits I thought, "Lord, do I have to be here? I mean, right here, Lord? Today, Lord?" On one of those days my mind was everywhere but "here." I thought about the church I served as pastor and why it hadn't grown in six years. I thought about the many faces that had come and gone. I thought about whether or not I was wasting my time. I walked in uncertain waters, and my fears were ever before me.



**by Claude T. Stauffer**

*Pastor, Bellmore Church of the Nazarene,  
Bellmore, N.Y.*

Climbing up to the stairs, I went through the motions of my visit. As I was about to leave, I was shown a pair of brand-new Nike shoes. "Can you use these? Marvin has so many pairs that it's a sin to keep them all lying around in his room."

I thought, "All right! Just what I need, Lord—a brand-new pair of sneakers! Way to go!" Then I asked, "What size are they?"

The response came, "Size 7." I did a double take in my head. "Size 7?! I'm size 11! That's the wrong size, Lord!" I masked my disappointment as best I could and said I could probably find someone who could use them. Then I left.

Little did I know how soon I'd find someone for those size seven shoes. I made my way to the car in that cautioned hurry that people use when they walk in areas like this. I didn't give a thought to those size seven shoes. They were useless to me. I fought off my cynicism as the thought tempted me, "Another disappointment."

I drove away in the rain on automatic pilot. Almost back to my office, I stopped at a busy intersection and stared into the deep. A man caught my eye as he crossed in front of me. I noticed he had layers of dirty clothes

on, characteristic of street life. He was dark with dirtiness. His appearance was magnetic; I couldn't take my eyes off him. Then I noticed something peculiar. This man had no shoes. He didn't even have a pair of socks on!

Humph, I thought. No shoes, not even a pair of . . . of . . . shoes! In a flash I knew in my heart without asking that this man wore size seven shoes.

Sure enough, when I pulled up next to the man and asked him his shoe size, he responded loudly and clearly, "Size seven!"

I gave him the shoes and a blessing: "These size seven shoes are from God!" I drove off happier than the recipient of those size seven shoes.

Why was I so happy? Because when those shoes fit, I heard God say, "See, I am working in this world. And I am using you."

Though we don't often realize it, God is working in our lives. If God could work in this incidental way, perhaps He was putting the pieces together in other areas of my life, and His purposes are just around the corner.

Those size seven shoes encouraged me. I was encouraged because I saw God provide for that homeless man. I was encouraged because God put His arm around me, a nearly hopeless fellow, and said, "You may not always feel I am there with you, but I am."

"Thank You, Lord."

*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed*

*That I would see the goodness of the Lord*

*In the land of the living.*

*Wait on the Lord;*

*Be of good courage,*

*And He shall strengthen your heart;*

*Wait, I say, on the Lord!*

*(Ps. 27:13-14, NKJV).*

# Helping the New Broom Do a Good Job

by Betty Thompson

*Pastor's wife, Mahomet, Ill.*

**A** new broom sweeps clean, but the old one knows where the dirt is!"

That old Irish proverb was quoted to my husband and me very early in our ministry by our neighboring pastors. They had been missionaries to China and were forced to leave. They came back home and accepted the pastorate of a church in a town near us.

We were young and enjoying the blessings of God with our new congregation. We wished our neighbors would not say that to us. We even found ourselves wishing they would not visit us. They had planted a seed of suspicion, and it began to grow.

New pastors have an enthusiasm for the work God has called them to do. They have a love that "makes up for many of your faults" (1 Pet. 4:8, TLB). Looking back over the 25 years since that statement was made to us, I am aware that we do gain wisdom through experience. We learn to spot the dirt right away. However, I also recognize that suspicion is a tool of the enemy to hinder us in our effectiveness in ministry.

A trust is broken when the "old broom" thinks it has the ability to recognize trouble or a problem even before it arises. Often an unpleasant situation is created because of a judgmental attitude that has been fed on suspicion.

We are not called to be judges and lords over our congregations but to have the oversight and be an example to the flock that God has entrusted to our care (see 1 Pet. 5:2-3). It would have been so much better if we had received positive input about the role of a pastor and the joys of the ministry.

Those who are beginning in the pastoral ministry need support. As "seasoned" pastors and wives, we have the joy and responsibility of giving support. I know a man who has

never served a large church, but one of his greatest delights is to help a young minister get established. Much of his help has been behind the scenes. Perhaps he will never be recognized for his efforts by his superiors. However, I am convinced that to those young men he has been a Barnabas. They appreciate him. He is not threatened by their successes and is not condemning of their weaknesses. Each of us can be a Barnabas, too, if we look for ways. I have observed a few.

### 1. Be a listening ear.

We who have been over the road can let them know we really do care. We can encourage them to let their real needs be known, to let us know when they hurt. There are surface needs, usually financial, and there are inner needs. We are able to detect a surface need and supply that while the inner man is struggling and about to go under if no one hears their cry for help. We can't afford to wait for them to drown to offer a life jacket.

Neither my husband nor I came from pastoral homes. At times, things were overwhelming in the early years of our ministry. Often we wished for someone whom we could trust. We needed someone who understood the ministry to listen to our frustrations without judging us. Especially wives need that. We take on a dual role, motherhood and copastor, at about the same time. The days aren't long enough to get everything done. It becomes a juggling act. There is no one to cheer us on and, if we drop the ball, to say, "Who cares?"

One of the most encouraging things I heard came from a wife in ministry. When asked how she, the mother of five children, got everything done, she said that she just let a floor go unmopped. I thought, If she

can do that, so can I. I only had one child then. Since then I have had to let the floor go unmopped several times, especially by the time our family increased to four children.

We have the privilege of lifting up the hands that hang down by being good listeners. No lecture is needed—usually not even any advice, just genuine concern and an understanding heart.

### 2. Share personal experiences.

By relating personal experiences, we help them know that they are not different nor alone.

A young couple accepted a church, and it began to grow. Ideally it should have kept growing, but the plague of many churches, the back door disease, took hold. She said to me, "Do other pastors go through this—gain a few, lose a few?"

When I assured her that almost every pastor we know experiences the same thing, she felt better. Fine young men and women have dropped out of the ministry because of discouragement and false guilt that grips like a leech, draining vision and dedication to the work of God.

Pastoral ministry is not all smooth sailing. Someone has said, "Jesus Christ is no security against the storms, but He is perfect security in storms. He has never promised you an easy passage, only a safe landing." Sharing personal experiences as well as God's deliverance and intervention is like getting in the boat with the hurting, discouraged friends and helping them row to safety.

### 3. Seek to restore instead of condemn.

Even if one has been wrong in the way a situation was handled or in an unwise decision, condemnation is not the way our Lord would commission


us to deal with it. Jesus said, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17, KJV). Each of us is subject to mistakes. We often do make mistakes. Age is no security blanket. I find God's Word exhorting me to be sure of my own spirituality before I try to restore one who has been overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1). Then I'm to do it in a spirit of meekness, lest I be tempted. That leaves no room for condemnation but makes provision for restoration.

#### 4. Initiate times of fellowship.

Fellowship is a vital part of the "lifting up" process. We have found Monday morning to be a good time to meet for breakfast with the new pastors in our city. Monday is the day most pastors mentally resign their churches. Meeting together over a cup of coffee offers an opportunity for sharing victories and defeats. It is a perfect time for cheering the young pastor on. We can learn a lot from each other as we allow the Holy Spirit to direct us. Those who live in a parsonage are vulnerable, especially the beginning minister. By building their self-esteem through fellowship, we are building a stronger defense against potential attacks of despair and potential dropouts.

A negative attitude is not conducive to positive results. Enough dirt will turn up without a well-worn broom to point it out. God's work is the greatest thing in which we can be involved. God is pleased when we build up and edify one another in the work to which He has called us.

Paul took Timothy under his wing and played an active role in his spiritual development. In at least three of his Epistles, Paul refers to Timothy as his beloved son. Paul declared him to be faithful in the Lord. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul said, "Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day" (1:3, KJV). He could hardly be anything but faithful with prayer support like that. Prayer is the foundation for any help we may offer.

I wonder how many of us have had a Mr. Timothy or a Mrs. Timothy in our ministry. I'm sure there are many out there, waiting for a Paul to touch them and encourage them. 

# Aim High




by Celia Jolley

*Pastor's wife, Hallwood Community Church  
of the Nazarene, Marysville, Calif.*

**T**he new parsonage was lovely but surrounded by dirt. In the momentum of excitement that every new pastor generates for about a month, volunteers turned out for a workday to plant a new lawn. We carefully nurtured that baby grass as if our next vote depended upon its success. One evening, I was late watering. Dusk was fast becoming night as I fumbled with the nozzle of the hose, accidentally setting it full blast. A scream came out of the darkness. I had squirted a young man as he rode innocently by on his bicycle around our corner. Turning to apologize to his vanishing form, I was surprised to meet my neighbor lady coming up behind me in time to witness the whole affair. The appearance of the situation must have looked suspiciously purposeful if judged by the accuracy of my aim. Quickly I tried to switch gears in order to be convincingly friendly to this stranger I believed had come to meet the new parsonage inmates. I was cut short by a curt introduction followed by the true nature

of her call: our dog had been making unwanted visits to her yard. Her son was there to confirm the condemning evidence. Practically speechless, I managed to point out the cement-embedded studs that represented the bare bones of our promised fence.

Paul did not conceive of squirting bicyclists when he wrote, "For we take thought beforehand and aim to be honest and absolutely above suspicion not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21, Amp.). I should have aimed higher to stay above reproach, but accidents do happen. Even parsonage fish-bowl life gets murky waters at times.

Again we read, "Take thought for what is honest and proper and noble—aiming to be above reproach—in the sight of every one" (Rom. 12:17, Amp.). Remember to aim high, "but if you think you are above reproach, sell the family parrot to the town gossip!" Yet, I am grateful that God is above all, sees all, and judges the motives of my heart when my aim is a little off. 





# How Am I Supposed to Handle All This Stress?

**S**tress is an important issue. It can result in a defeated life, robbed of the joy God intended and controlled by circumstances. However, stress can also bring victorious living regardless of our circumstances, and it becomes a source of growth and strength. Dr. Vance Havner said in one of his sermons about stress that we need stress to function properly. "Did you ever try to play a tune on a limp fiddle string?" he asked. Stress helps in developing an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The Scriptures offer great hope, insight, and even blessings for those who are willing to learn and obey God's principles for handling stress and trials.

The term *stress* shows up in the Bible as "distress" and tells us how to be victorious in trials. Distress, used throughout the Bible, describes people feeling anguished because of difficulties. It is first used when Jacob speaks of God who "answered me in the day of my distress" (Gen. 35:3).

Stress is our mental, emotional, physical, and behavioral response to anxiety-producing events such as time pressures, family and other relational problems, financial difficulties, disappointments, heartbreaking circumstances, physical problems, and other situations that result in strain, pressure, or tension.

Stress begins mentally when we consciously or subconsciously "perceive" something as stressful. This makes a significant difference. Positive thinkers simply do not perceive most circumstances as stressful, so they automatically elimi-



**by Wayne Rose**

*Pastor, Olathe, Kans.*

nate most of their stress. A person who dwells on negative thoughts turns most circumstances, good or bad, important or unimportant, into stress. The Bible tells us, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatso-

ever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8, KJV). It is not circumstances that cause stress, but how we perceive circumstances. Some people are joyful in the worst of circumstances, and others complain in circumstances that many would find enviable.

Emotional response to stress depends primarily on our mental response and our emotional maturity. The way we process and express our emotions increases or decreases stress and affects our emotional development and maturity. Those who never learn to rule their emotions live in bondage to circumstances and feelings. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28, KJV).

One's physical response to stress can affect his nervous system, blood pressure, and breathing. This can be helpful or harmful, depending on how you perceive and manage stress and how physically fit you are. Effective stress management frees your physical coping mechanisms to work for you rather than against you.

People respond to stress by adapting with increased effectiveness and performance or by behaving in erratic, unconstructive, self-defeating ways.

To manage stress effectively, we need to improve our understanding of stress. Stress can be positive or negative. The Bible presents many examples of people experiencing victory and peace in extremely stressful circumstances. But improv-



erly managed, stress can have serious consequences.

Most stress is self-created. Stress comes from stress-producing circumstances and our own stress-producing behaviors. While we tend to attribute most stress to circumstances, our own behaviors are, by far, the bigger culprit. How we cope with stress depends on our habits. Habits, good or bad, come from practicing behaviors until they become normal ways for us to behave. Fortunately, we can significantly improve our ability to manage stress by practicing new and more effective ways of coping.



## It is not circumstances that cause stress.



Not all stress should be avoided. We naturally try to avoid or escape trials that cause stress. However, if we are living in God's will and are experiencing trials or difficult circumstances, we are exactly where we should be! While there is no virtue in self-inflicted trials, we should not avoid situations that God has allowed to train and perfect us. We should also be careful not to protect or rescue others from trials they need for their growth.

God uses trials that cause stress for our training and completion, and for His purpose and glory. Few issues are more important to our spiritual growth than how we respond to stressful situations and trials. Yet many Christians know little about the purpose of these stressful situations to come. Some of God's purposes for us going into these stressful situations are:

1. To test the genuineness of our faith (1 Pet. 4:12-19).
2. To test the maturity of our faith (1 Pet. 5:6-10).

3. To experience God's strength in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
4. To strengthen our faith and keep our hopes on God, not circumstances (Hebrews 11).
5. To build character, to perfect and to complete us (2 Tim. 2:1-15).
6. To prepare us to help others (2 Cor. 1:3-4).
7. To learn contentment in all circumstances (Phil. 4:11-13).
8. To teach us to be bold and not fearful (Ps. 27:1-3).
9. To provide a positive witness to others (Acts 20:18-24).
10. To change our perspective (1 John 2:15-17).

No matter what our circumstances are, how stressed we presently feel, or how badly we have mismanaged stress in the past, the Scriptures show the way to turning difficulties into opportunities and defeats into victory. Here are four ways to help us be victorious in managing stress.

### FIRST: PREPARE YOURSELF FOR EACH DAY

What we do first thing in the morning determines whether or not we will be able to manage the stressful situations that come. An unprepared person is easily defeated in any endeavor. When we are spiritually unprepared, we are easy prey for Satan as he "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8, KJV). Like soldiers going into battle, we are commanded to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11, KJV).

There are several ways to prepare for the battles and challenges of the day:

1. Start the day in spiritual balance. Begin each day with devotion, prayer, and study of the Scriptures, worshiping God, and discovering who our God is.
2. Begin and live the day filled with the Holy Spirit and moving in the realm of the Spirit. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:17-18) and to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18).
3. Choose to have a joyful attitude re-

gardless of circumstances. A joyful attitude eliminates most stress. The Scriptures tell us to be joyful in our trials (James 1:2) and content in our circumstances (Phil. 4:11-13).

4. Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Strong, mature men and women of God are always warriors in constant communication with God.
5. Saturate your mind with God's Word! It is very difficult to stress or confuse a Christian armed with God's truth.
6. Keep your eyes on Jesus, not your circumstances. This principle integrates all of the others. Understanding this principle is the key to managing stress and to a transformed life as well.

### SECOND: CHANGE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CAUSE UNNECESSARY STRESS

Realize that your life is to be ruled by the Holy Spirit, not other people. We must learn to say no and not feel guilty. This is particularly difficult for the person who likes to please other people. He thinks people will not like him as much if he says no, so he agrees to almost everything, and at the end of the day he frequently finds himself exhausted. His head aches and he tries desperately to figure out how he will get everything done that he agreed to do. He has created his own dilemma because he has let other people, instead of the Holy Spirit, direct what he will do.



## Not all stress should be avoided.



The way to avoid being caught in this "pleasing people" syndrome is to pray. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, plan your week and your days of the week. Using a week activities and priorities guide, list those things that must be done in smaller

segments of a day. Then put those in order of priority. When this is completed, you know exactly what you must do, beginning with today, if you are going to become the person you want to be and do what you think is best. Some may need a larger block of planning time, beginning with a year, then month, week, and day.

When you adopt this plan, you will see where your time is spent. You will be able to say no and not feel guilty. Remember in your daily planning to plan time for those things mentioned in our first objective for time management: prepare yourself for each day.

Some of the happiest, most successful people I know are those who have learned to control their stress levels by learning to say no and not feel guilty. They have learned to focus upon what is really important in life.

### THIRD: LEARN TO LAUGH

"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Prov. 15:13, KJV). "All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast" (v. 15, KJV). "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (17:22, KJV).

Too much tragedy and trials can leave us depressed, feeling as if a weight hangs upon us and is pressing us down. We need a change. We need to laugh.

One of the best stories I have read to illustrate this was a story about a man by the name of Norman Cousins, found in the book *Anatomy of an Illness*. At the end of an exhausting trip Norman was to attend an important dinner in Moscow. He left early in a taxi. He assumed the driver knew where to go once the address had been given, but that was a mistake. Cousins arrived at the dinner three hours late. He was furious; the evening was ruined.

The next day Cousins, still agitated and by now physically ill, boarded a plane bound for New York. By the time he arrived his temperature was 104 degrees. He felt awful.

Cousins' condition continued to worsen. His temperature remained elevated. He was becoming weak in his back and legs and he hurt all over. He

had to be hospitalized. Numerous tests were done, but the physicians could not determine what was wrong. His condition was steadily deteriorating despite therapy.

One physician wrote a note to another doctor: "I think we may be losing Norman." Cousins saw the note and was badly shaken. He began to relive his past, and he made a startling discovery. For the past few months he had been under a lot of stress. Perhaps it was affecting him now. He studied literature on stress, looking for some insight into his condition. He concluded that negative emotions produce negative chemical changes in the body. Therefore positive emotions, he reasoned, must produce the opposite: positive chemical changes.



## An unprepared person is easily defeated in any endeavor.



Cousins then decided to do something. He checked out of the hospital, stopped taking drugs, ordered a movie projector, and began watching some old Marx Brothers movies and "Candid Camera" programs. Norman Cousins began his own therapy: big doses of laughter. For hours he watched those films, over and over, laughing deep belly laughs as he did.

As Cousins watched, he discovered something about himself. Ten minutes of belly laughter gave him at least two hours of pain-free sleep. The more he laughed, the better he felt. His fever subsided, his sedimentation rate returned to normal and the paralysis left him. Norman Cousins' physician could not explain what had happened. But Cousins believed he had laughed himself back to health.\*

So, moderate your stress level. Put some laughter and humor into your

life. You'll feel a lot better when you do, and you'll be healthier too.

### FOURTH: MANAGE YOUR LIFE ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

An effective way to reduce the harmful effects of stress is to have a reasonably balanced life. Balance provides confidence, security, a sense of worth and control, and enables a person to experience minimal stress even in high-stress situations.

Balance comes from "life management" and is achieved by intuitively or purposefully doing your best to keep balance internally and externally.

The simple formula for life management is to lead a God-directed life. Here are some basics:

1. Live your life solely for the glory of God (Matt. 6:33).
2. Plan your life relying on God's direction (Prov. 16:9).
3. Do all as a representative of the Lord (Col. 3:17).
4. Forget past failures (Phil. 3:12-14).
5. Realize you are a servant for the Lord and not man (Col. 3:23).

### SUMMARY

Stress is a major source of victory or defeat. The way we manage stress remains an important spiritual issue. It is a testimony of our faith and how we view God. Do we view God as all-powerful, able to do superabundantly above anything we ask (Eph. 3:20), or weak, unable to take care of our stress?

The key to stress management is to manage stress in the spirit, not the flesh. Are you willing to manage stress God's way? If so, you can confidently look forward to God turning your stresses into victory, hope, and blessing.

We should memorize: "Be joyful in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. Be known by all the people for your considerateness; the Lord is near. Entertain no worry, but under all circumstances let your petitions be made known before God by prayer and pleading along with thanksgiving. So will the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7, NBV).

\*Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1979).

## Christ and Politics: An Examination of "My Kingdom Is Not of This World" (John 18:36)

**I**n the interchange with Pilate, Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36, NASB).

Does this statement shed light on the nature of Christ's kingdom and its relation to this world order? The possibility warrants our careful inquiry.

Quite obviously, Jesus' statement indicates two radical differences between the kingdoms of this world and Christ's kingdom. First, humanistic kingdoms are "of this world"; Christ's kingdom is not of this world, implying that it is from heaven. Second, earthly kingdoms resort to the sword; the heavenly kingdom does not.

Implied are profound differences in *kinds* of kingdoms—the earthly being humanistic, materialistic, earthy, and militaristic; while the other is unique in origin, spiritual in nature, and also spiritual in its mode of both defense and propagation. Let us look first at

### The Kingdoms of This World

What, then, did Jesus have in mind by the designation "of this world"? The emphasis is first of all on source, as indicated by *ek*, "out of." The kingdoms of this world rise out of the unregenerate mass of humanity and necessarily are impressed with the qualities of unregenerate human nature. As such they are incapable of producing a heavenly kind of kingdom, the kind Jesus came to establish. No amount of tinkering with a spud will produce an orange. No amount of developing an earthly kingdom will transmute it into a chrysalis for the



by **Richard S. Taylor**

*Retired elder, former editor of the "Preacher's Magazine" and professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Bremerton, Wash.*

metamorphosis of a heavenly kingdom. We are dealing with profound differences in kinds of kingdom.

The statement we are considering was made by Jesus in answer to Pilate's question, "What have You done?" (John 18:35, NASB). Jesus implies that the jurisprudence of Rome does not fit the case. It would be inappropriate for Jesus to answer Pilate's question either by denial or confession, for the issues at stake are outside of Pilate's jurisdiction, as well as outside his competence. As Rome's lackey he is in an alien situation and confronting a kind of person and kingdom of which he knows nothing. There is no meshing, no interface; nothing Pilate is thinking bears any one-on-one relationship to the realities before him.

We are compelled to conclude that the kingdoms of this world are essentially out of step with God and holy things. "You are from below, I am from above," Jesus said to the Jews; "you are of this world, I am not of this world" (John 8:23, NASB). He consoled His disciples by telling them, "If you were of the world, the

world would love its own" (15:19, NASB). The disciples had to learn by hard experience that because they were in Christ's kingdom, they would never feel entirely at ease in the world's kingdoms.

### The Place of Earthly Kingdoms in God's Order

Yet it would be a mistake to interpret Jesus' statement to Pilate as a total negation. The kingdoms Jesus had in mind are "of this world," not only in the sense that they are products of an unregenerate society, but also in the sense that they are boons of God's merciful providence, as a necessary means of achieving order and community. Humanity's infirmity as well as its sinfulness needs the supervision of civil law.

The fact, therefore, that the kingdoms of this world are comprised largely of unregenerate people and constitute an institution marked by man's fallenness does not mean that human government, per se, is thereby "of the devil." According to Paul, these political entities are ordained by God as necessary instruments for achieving some semblance of law and order. They would, therefore, belong in the category of common grace. Christians are not to despise them, simply because they are in a disjunctive relationship to Christ's kingdom. Rather, believers are consistently instructed to respect rulers and submit to them as servants of God.<sup>1</sup>

We may say then that Jesus was referring to the political structures that mark this world of unregenerate men, in principle ordained of God, but in nature incapable of being harbingers, certainly not facsimiles, of the kingdom of God.

## The Bearing of the Sword

What about the second characteristic of non-Christian kingdoms, which is that they resort to the sword? Jesus said, "If My kingdom were of this world"—worldly in origin and modality—"then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews." What Jesus is saying seems to be that fighting to defend one's king belongs inherently to the nature of an earthly kingdom. It is not only what would be expected but also what would be entirely proper.

Certain questions arise at this point, however. Is sword bearing, including entering into the kind of defensive warfare that Jesus' statement implies, so expressive of humanity's sinfulness that sword bearing itself is always sinful, and hence never endorsed by God? Or rather, is sword bearing a kind of governmental action made necessary by the sinfulness that is so bent toward violence and lawlessness that only force will maintain some semblance of order and forestall anarchy? In this latter case, sword bearing should be seen as essential to any form of legitimate governing and is, therefore, not a vice but a virtue, even though its necessity is occasioned by sin. Especially would the defense of one's king be seen, by implication, to be commendable, not condemnable.

That Jesus implied the second understanding rather than the first, that is, that He was implicitly sanctioning military defense of one's earthly king, is supported by (1) the entire military history of the Old Testament and (2) the clear implications of Rom. 13:1-7; Matt. 22:21; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; and related passages. The thrust of these passages is that we are to live in subjection to human governments, paying taxes, respecting authority, and observing the laws of our respective lands.<sup>2</sup>

Paul, as is well known, makes the flat and unequivocal declaration that the governing entities that *are* have been assigned their place by God's arrangement. "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom. 13:1, NASB). "Established" translates *tetagmenai*, which is perfect passive of *tasso*, to arrange.

We recoil from the idea of existing governments having been "arranged" by God when we ponder the brutality,

bloodshed, and rapine that brought some of these entities to power. This inner revulsion, however, is ameliorated when we read Paul's description of their function, which is to serve as God's minister for the punishment of evildoers and the defense of the righteous (vv. 3-4). The implication here is that God's endorsement is on them only on the assumption that this is what in fact they are doing. History is replete with examples of governments governing well after obtaining their power by questionable means. Rome itself is an example, though certainly not a perfect one.

## The kingdoms of this world are essentially out of step with God and holy things.

However, the particular relevance of Romans 13 to Jesus' pronouncement lies in Paul's endorsement of the sword. Speaking of the authority, he says, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it [the government] does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (v. 4, NASB). Clearly, sword bearing belongs to the kingdoms of this world as a proper, God-ordained function. It would be withholding the sword that would be blameworthy, not using it. We are reminded of Eccles. 8:11—"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil" (NASB). A sheathed sword is no governmental virtue.

By logical extension, we can also say that if sword bearing is a proper function of government in controlling its own citizens, it would be equally proper to fight to keep the king from being turned over to his enemies (as represented by "Jews" in Jesus' statement).

It would seem, therefore, that in Jesus' statement to Pilate He is saying something very fundamental not only about the radical *dissonance* be-

tween His kingdom and earthly kingdoms but also about the proper *function* and modality of these kingdoms in their own carnal sphere.

## The Kingdom Not of This World

But what was Jesus saying about His own kingdom? "My kingdom is not of this realm" (cf. Barclay). Perhaps we can draw out some implications.

*First, His kingdom has a different origin and source.* It does not arise out of the political tides of human history, as simply a new and better form of government. The source of His kingdom is the same as the source of Jesus himself. He is directly from heaven and bears heaven's badge of authority.

*Second, not only is Jesus' kingdom different in origin and source, but also it is different in form and modality.* Because of this difference His servants will not fight. It is not the kind of kingdom that can be, then or ever, either defended or propagated by the sword. The sword can compel external action or restrain external action; it cannot compel love or heart allegiance. It can compel right behavior, but it cannot compel right behavior for the right reasons. The sword can make people conform; it cannot make them transform.

The *authority* of Christ's kingdom is of a different kind. It is an authority of divine sovereignty accepted by subjects energized by love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. This creates an obedience out of devotion. The corollary is an obedience to human rulers out of goodwill, without the need of the sword.

Its *form* is also different. Instead of a political and visible realm, locatable geographically, it is a spiritual realm into which the twice-born enter. It is a new kind of kingdom made up of a new kind of people, people who have been regenerated and internally conformed to the rule of God, with Jesus the Son as their King.

Furthermore, Christ's kingdom is *established* not by the sword but by a cross: His own first, by which He wins the right to lead captivity captive and acquires the power to set prisoners free. But it is established not only by His own cross, but also by cross-bearing subjects who love not their lives unto the death and who will brave the swords of men—even Rome's—to gain

access to the souls of men for this new kind of kingdom.

It is, thus, a kingdom that requires not a change in geographical location but a change in heart, a kingdom that is within when Christ is within, and a realm into which we enter by faith.

**Believers are consistently instructed to respect rulers and submit to them as servants of God.**

#### Some Practical Issues for Today

Perhaps this verse will give guidance in threading our way through some very intricate issues that confront the Church today. Here are some of the issues:

1. *Is it proper to fault the kingdoms of this world because they act like the kingdoms of this world?* Are pastors confused when in the pulpit they pontificate about how their government should handle problems in a "Christian" manner—viz., nonviolently always? Was Jesus addressing Caesar when He said, "Resist not evil"? (Matt. 5:39, KJV).

2. *Is it proper for the Church to endeavor, before the Lord comes, to take over the kingdoms of this world for the purpose of reforming them into a political arm of the Church?* Can our present governments be "Christianized" by the infiltration and control of regenerate persons?

3. *Are we misunderstanding the Church's role when we try, in Christ's name, to reestablish an Old Testament style of theonomy, as the Reconstructionists seem bent on doing?*

4. *Is it ever proper to use the sword as an aid in propagating the gospel?* What about abetting military ventures that show promise of opening doors for the preaching of the gospel?

5. *Does being in Christ's kingdom take us out of the kingdoms of this world in such a way that their mode of activity is now off-limits to us?* Is military and/or police service incompatible with the love nature of Christ's kingdom and our primary allegiance to it?

6. *If our answer to the above question is negative, how can we relate to these earthly kingdoms, so foreign to the new kingdom that now carries our primary love and our supreme loyalty?*

7. *Short of a complete takeover by Christ's people, how far should the Church go in seeking to legislate Christian standards of morality and behavior?*

8. *By what means can we expect that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, according to Rev. 11:15, KJV?*

#### Some Concluding Observations

Out of the foregoing analysis and these questions, two very crucial issues demand special attention.

*What is the proper interrelationship of church and state?* This wording of the issue does not presume an equation of what Jesus called "my kingdom" with the Church. It does, however, dare to suggest that the Church is Christ's temporal and visible representation of it. In this dispensation, at least, the Church is His primary instrument for its extension. Therefore, in looking at Jesus' word to Pilate, the issue of church and state can hardly be avoided.

The second nagging question is *the proper way those who are in Christ's kingdom by the new birth can relate to the kingdoms of this world.*

Let us look briefly at the first question—the issue of church and state. In view of our Lord's sharp and unyielding distinction between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world, it is little short of amazing that for some 1,500 years the church and state were intertwined, at times merging civil and ecclesiastical powers, at other times wrapped in bloody struggles for supremacy one over the other.

The fatal plunge into this confusion was the action of Constantine in giving to Christianity favored status and

even becoming involved in attempts to settle its quarrels and guide its destiny. At this point the distinctives of the two orders of kingdom began to be blurred. While evangelism was now free from threat of persecution, at the same time it seemed less urgent. From this turn of events it was only a short step for the church to rely on the civil power to compel an allegiance by force that the church was unable to win by preaching.

The problem of disentangling ecclesiastical functions and prerogatives from civil authority had by Luther's day become acute. By this time many bishops held small fiefdoms as well as their ecclesiastical powers. The Augsburg Confession, drawn up by Melancthon in 1530, struggled with these issues. One paragraph is pertinent here:

**The sword can make people conform; it cannot make them transform.**

Wherefore the ecclesiastical and civil powers are not to be confounded. The ecclesiastical power hath its own commandment to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. Let it not by force enter into the office of another; let it not transfer worldly kingdoms; let it not abrogate the magistrates' laws; let it not withdraw from them lawful obedience; let it not hinder judgments touching any civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to the magistrate touching the form of the republic; as Christ saith, "My kingdom is not of this world." In this way do our teachers distinguish between the duties of each power one from the other, and do warn all men to honor both powers, and to acknowledge both to be the gift and blessing of God.

This clearly is a rebuke to a meddling church. It is also an affirmation of the divinely endowed rights of



both entities, the church (as the earthly focus of Christ's kingdom) and the state, on the assumption of clear lines of demarcation between their respective roles, spheres, and authority. In contemporary terms, this is the problem, for instance, confronting church-operated day schools within the framework of state laws governing the education of children. At what point does the state overstep its mark and at what point does the church overstep?

In contrast to the stance of the Augsburg Confession, John Calvin optimistically saw the state as virtually the handmaiden of the church. While he eloquently affirmed the supernatural victory of Christ's kingdom by nonhuman means ("with the mere rod of His mouth"),<sup>4</sup> he inconsistently called on the "earthly kingdom" of Geneva to enforce ecclesiastical law with the sword.<sup>5</sup>

This interweaving of church and state, of king and bishop, prevailed in England also, in that nation's tortuous struggle toward Protestantism. In fact, the role of the state in religious, moral, and ecclesiastical matters was so taken for granted that the Puritans planted the colonies firmly on this principle—much to the discomfiture of Quakers and Baptists. The principle of separation that was finally written into the United States Constitution was indeed a radical innovation.

**At what point does the state overstep its mark and at what point does the church overstep?**

We cannot totally ignore the second major issue, that of the proper way a Christian in Christ's kingdom can relate to the secular kingdoms of men. We begin by acknowledging a dual citizenship. While Paul reminded the

Philippians that "our citizenship is in heaven" (3:20, NASB), he was nevertheless proud of his Roman citizenship and made full use of it. Four times he used it as a ground for legal appeal (Acts 16:37; 21:39; 22:25; 25:10).

Therefore, using our secular citizenship as a framework of action—as when a missionary travels on a passport—is certainly compatible with our primary allegiance to the heavenly kingdom. But what about involvement?

Perhaps Daniel provides a paradigm. Daniel did not hold high office in Israel as part of the Old Testament theocracy, but in the thoroughly pagan Babylonian-Median kingdoms. Daniel was the most effective prime minister those kingdoms ever had. His primary allegiance to God did not permit him to be careless in his earthly duties or abridge his freedom to achieve professional excellence. But, at the same time, he was equally adamant in making sure that his primary allegiance to God remained primary. It was this that cost him a night in the lions' den.

The Christian, also, will be a better public servant by being a Christian. Yet if Christians are to remain Christian, they must ever remember who they are, and to whom their primary allegiance belongs, and hold the perquisites of power lightly. They would be well advised never to forget that at any moment the political world around them may throw them to the lions, not because of malfeasance in office, but totally because of their God.

And so we get back to an earlier statement: No matter how involved politically Christians may become, they will never feel totally at ease in the kingdoms of earth, but always like strangers in a foreign land. And their involvement in the politics of men will be seen by them as a divinely appointed way of serving the kingdom of Christ. Their position in government will not be used as a means of erasing the distinction between the state and church, but of attempting to control the environment within which the church can prosecute its mission with the greatest freedom and the least improper interference.

longing to the "ordinances of creation." In view of this he says that the issue of "the legitimate respect owed to human government" is "unchanged and unchangeable" ("Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald K. McKim [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 137).

**The principle of separation that was finally written into the United States Constitution was indeed a radical innovation.**

2. An interesting comment is made by Kaiser respecting the problem some conscientious Christians have of paying taxes that are going to be used in ways that are disapproved. He says: "The moral responsibility for deciding whether or not a believer should pay his taxes or give tolls to a government that he has come to believe is in opposition to accepted moral law, is lifted from his shoulders. Rom. 13:7 puts these taxes in the same category as debts paid for services rendered by men who are in service professions. We pay plumbers, electricians, or others for their services to us, but do not thereby aid and abet any false beliefs or immoral practices they be guilty of" ("Hermeneutics," 137).

3. Craig Keen speaks helpfully to the question of whether or not Christians should be seeking to infiltrate human institutions for the purpose of Christianizing them. "Therefore those people who are gathered together in Christ, i.e., the church, will inevitably undertake the task of transforming the cultures in which they move, whether they know it or not. They will inevitably see not only that the world as it is now given is the focus of God's profoundly redemptive resolve, but also that the world as it is now given is passing away and is far from ultimate.

"The course to be taken in this transformative enterprise must follow the lead of what emerges in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What emerges there is (1) the nihilation of everything that is, and (2) the embrace of everything that is. What emerges is redemptive love in the midst of absolute loss" ("Church and Culture: A Little Reflection on the *Assumptio Carnis*," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 [1989]: 95).

4. A phrase taken from Calvin's preface to the first edition of his *Institutes*, dedicated to Francis I of France.

5. Henry S. Lucas says: "Calvin and his followers held that the church could inflict no punishment beyond driving offenders out of its fold, it being the duty of the officials of a secular state to proceed against them at the bar of justice. In general the Calvinist clergy claimed authority to instruct the state as to its moral and religious duty. It was the duty of the state to purge its citizenry of erroneous dogmas. Heresy was treason against God, and in the case of the most obstinate assertion of heresy the death penalty was justified, as in the case of Servetus" (*The Renaissance and the Reformation* [New York: AMS, 1934], 581).

1. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., speaks of the state as be-

## A Sanctified "Swan"

**A**mong the great preachers of the 17th century, none ranks above Francois De Fénelon, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Cambrai. The Swan of Cambrai, as he was known for the eloquence of his pulpit style, defended Madame Guyon, mystic and hymn writer of that era: a saintly, greatly gifted, and much-persecuted Christian. This defense and his famous book, *Maxims of the Saints*, brought upon him the condemnation of Pope Innocent XII and the wrath of his fellow Romanists. Fénelon died in a road accident at the age of 63, January 7, 1715, 279 years ago.

Many Protestants find Fénelon a fascinating figure and his book *Life in the Spirit* an inspiration. He was born August 6, 1651, at the Chateau de Fénelon, the family mansion near the center of Périgord in southwest France. "My young days," he wrote, "were pleasant and unrestrained, taken up with congenial studies and friendships." His father was a rich and influential man in the prosperous farming country of the area. His mother was "a woman of poise and judgment, diligent in duties domestic and religious, the guiding spirit of the whole house."

Private studies at home preceded classical studies at college, in which he was most successful. This led to seminary training at Saint-Sulpice under the direction of the saintly, spiritually-minded Louis Tronson. The young prodigy was ordained to the priesthood and appointed to a society for the instruction of young Huguenot ladies in the doctrines of the church. During his 10 years supervision of the society, 1678-89, he wrote the famous treatise *The Education of Girls*, for a duchess



by Albert J. Lown

Deceased elder, Church of the Nazarene, pastor, and evangelist, British Isles

who had eight daughters. The sensible instruction and shrewd counsel was published so that all families could benefit from it.

### Professor and Prince

Attracted by Fénelon's wisdom, Louis XIV appointed him tutor to the heir to the throne, his grandson the duke of Burgundy. The king paid this

tribute: "He has the finest and most visionary mind in my kingdom." Fénelon did not spare himself, seeking to make the young duke "a prince after the heart of God," although in himself Burgundy was "cruel, vain, fierce, pleasure-loving, and brilliant." Fénelon's influence turned him into a patient, modest, humane person intent upon serving his people.

Belatedly, with apology for the omission, the king rewarded Fénelon for tutoring the young dauphin by making him abbot of Saint-Valéry, with a considerable income. The next year, 1695, Fénelon was created and consecrated archbishop of Cambrai, a position he held until death. Shortly after becoming archbishop, Fénelon met Madame Guyon, then a widow with three small children. She had come under the influence of the pious Père Lacombe, a devotee of Miguel de Molinos, the Spanish divine

whose doctrines went even further than the Reformers, to the anger of the Inquisition authorities, who sentenced Molinos to life imprisonment.

Madame Guyon accepted beliefs that laid stress upon worshipping God in silence and stillness of soul, complete surrender to one's Maker, and the attainment of a spiritual state where a person neither feared hell nor desired salvation for purely selfish reasons.

### Examiner and Advocate

Fénelon was one of four churchmen ordered to examine Madame Guyon's doctrines and was the only one to find nothing wrong with them. Defending her, he wrote *Maxims of the Saints*, thus incurring the enmity of his closest friend and the pope's condemnation. He publicly submitted to his superiors with this statement:



"We shall find consolation, my dear brethren, in what humbles us, provided that the ministry of the Word which we have received for your sanctification, be not enfeebled; and, notwithstanding the humiliation of the pastor, the flock shall increase in grace before God."

Banished from Cambrai and his cathedral for supporting Madame Guyon's full salvation testimony, Fénelon left the diocese only once in 18 years. He wrote: "I amuse myself, I walk, and find myself peaceful in silence before God. Oh, blissful communion! In His presence we are never alone. Real friends are our greatest joy and our greatest sorrow." His best friend had become his worst foe. In preaching he urged simplicity, no shoddy brilliance or affectation to appeal to men's emotions alone. "Let the sermon be passionate," he pleaded, "but let it preserve grace, gentleness, and harmony, seeking to convince rather than to terrify." Nevertheless, Fénelon alone among the higher French clergy dared to pass a clear Christian judgment upon the established order. He also proposed measures that would have made his church and country much more Christian.

Fearlessly he denounced the failure of French society to live by the Christian gospel. He sought to defend the church and resist evil, looking to the future as his critics did to the past. The Bible was his love and light as he endeavored to keep faith alive in a new kind of world. "Some preachers," he wrote, "quote the Scripture only for the decency of ornament: it is not then regarded as the Word of God, but as the invention of men."

#### Fénelon's Letters

The letters of Fénelon fill 11 volumes and contain some of the finest spiritual wisdom. Timeless in truth, they were written to relatives, royalty, friends, priests, and the many who sought his counsel. He dealt with every type of problem Christians face—doubters, faultfinders, the haughty and humble, the solitary-minded and worldlings, bereaved parents and those with high mortgages—to mention a few. His letters and life diffused the fragrance of Christ. The agnostic Aldous Huxley commented upon the joy of one who might receive a letter

from the archbishop: "What an event, a single favor!" Fénelon was frank, lucid, a Paul in chastening and comfort. His *Reflections for Every Day in the Month* and *Short Meditations from the Scripture* are still read and cherished.

time. Fénelon was lonely in his last 20 years, still in ecclesiastical disgrace and unpardoned by his church superiors. But his faith did not falter, and his patience was exemplary. He was "catholic" in a pure, noble, and rare sense, rising above rites, forms, sym-

"He has the finest and most visionary mind in my kingdom."

He behaved as he believed. Even the pope quoted often from the man he had condemned. He worked unceasingly for Madame Guyon's release from the Bastille. Largely due to his efforts, she was taken from the infamous prison on a stretcher on March 24, 1703, "to take air and be cured." The six months leave was renewed for another six months, then indefinitely. Her hymns and his teaching upon the Spirit-filled life complemented each other.

In every century God has His lights in the world: saints ahead of their

bolts, and traditions with conviction and compassion in pulpit ministry and personal living. In an age of great preachers—Baxter, Bunyan, and Taylor in England, for instance—the Swan of Cambrai was revered by his contemporaries. As death approached, he cast away the agony and grief of his long exile. His soul soared unhindered to meet his Maker and Master, his beloved Friend. "I love Him," he murmured on January 6, "more than I fear Him," and peacefully entered the palace of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. †



"AND A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL YOU FANS OF  
TELEVANGELISM FOR COMING TO REAL CHURCH!"

## So You Want to Move?

**M**inisters want to move for many reasons, which are not always of a spiritual nature. Most of these reasons can be put in four main categories, the first of which might well be labeled "Conflict."

Conflict within the church is a very common reason why ministers leave. Is this a valid reason for leaving?

Before I had graduated from high school, my home church had split three times. While much heartache is wrought in such situations, the greatest hurt is surely felt by the minister.

In some cases, the minister can foresee the inevitable. He moves on to keep from being embroiled in congregational politics and from having his family in the midst of such turmoil and strife, knowing full well that they could not emerge unscathed.

Is this your reason for wanting to leave? If so, *know* that this is your reason. Don't make excuses or give yourself some reason you think more acceptable. Face your reason squarely by doing the following:

1. Examine your methods for handling conflict. Are they objective, positive, and resolution-oriented or are they governed by emotions and pride?
2. Take a really good look at the conflict. Determine what caused it, what perpetuates it, and ideally what it would take to resolve it. Can you do anything to bring about this resolution?
3. Sit down and talk to your wife honestly about the conflict. Explain why you feel a move is in order. Ask her opinion of both the conflict and the idea of moving. After you have both prayed and considered it thoroughly, you may very well decide this is a valid reason for moving.

The second category of reasons for moving on to another church is "Family well-being." Do you feel that you simply are not able to provide for your family's needs where you are?



**by Elizabeth Silance Ballard**

*Free-lance writer, Chesapeake, Va.*

"I know the congregation is paying all it possibly can," said Pastor B. "Yet, when our third little one arrived—well, it just isn't enough."

Even though the church is progressing, the community is being reached, and the pastor and congregation are happy with each other, a time may come when the pastor takes a look at his family status, is dissatisfied with what he sees, and starts looking for greener fields.

Is this your reason for leaving? After all, you want for your family what others want—economic security, a comfortable life-style, and good educational prospects. Is this a valid reason for moving on? If you are wrestling with this question, you might want to take a good look at what your family *does* have as well as what they lack:

1. Talk to your wife. How does *she* feel about the family situation? Does she see the children or herself as being deprived?
2. What about your children? Are they happy in the schools, the surroundings, and with their friends? Are they doing well with school-work and extracurricular activities? Are they happy in the church? Are they treated well by the congregation?
3. Are your living conditions satisfactory for all of you?

If your family seems to be happy and content where they are and have their needs and, at least, some of their wants met, you might want to examine your

reasons for leaving more closely. That brings us to the third category, "Moving up." This reason most ministers would flatly deny, feeling they should be above that sort of thing.

Yet, does your desire to move translate into a desire for upward mobility? Certainly you have the same desire as those in the secular professions: To meet greater challenges, to have opportunities for "advancement," to prove your capabilities to the limit, to improve income, and to achieve recognition.

Oh, you won't voice those desires, but they *do* tend to haunt, don't they? Certainly any person, whether clergy or secular worker, who is intelligent, creative, and ambitious will have these desires.

Is this your reason for wanting to move? If so, you need to sit down quietly and alone to answer these questions:

1. Why are there no more challenges here?
2. What exactly does "advancement" mean to me?
3. What is it that I need to prove to myself? To others?

After you have answered these questions, talk with your spouse. Be sure she understands your needs, that you feel headed straight for burnout if some of these needs are not met. Together you will prayerfully work out the solution.

The final category of reasons for leaving is the only one that most congregations can accept or want to hear: "The Lord is calling you somewhere else."

If this is your reason to move, there aren't any questions to ask because the Lord has already answered all of them. This was best illustrated in the life of a pastor friend of mine who told of his move to a certain church.

He was happy in his present church. There were no problems that he noticed. His work was going well. He had not experienced the slightest thought of making a change.

Then, within a few short weeks, several things happened. First, his daughter's music teacher approached him, saying, "She has the makings of a truly good musician, Pastor. She wants so much to be a church organist. She really needs a good teacher that this area does not offer. There's not even a pipe organ in the whole town."

Of course, he was flattered to learn that his daughter was a gifted musician. He thought of the many record albums of organ music she had bought with her baby-sitting money and how she recorded broadcasts of several church services on the VCR while they were at church on Sundays so that she could watch and listen to the wonderful pipe organs. But, well, there was nothing to be done about it.

Then his wife became seriously ill. He was told he would have to drive her twice a week to a medical center 150 miles away where she would receive treatment.

Then his son was turned down for a much-needed scholarship. He was accepted at the university, but how could he go with no scholarship?

My friend stepped into the pulpit the following Sunday and realized that there was a pulpit committee seated in the congregation.

I must be mistaken, he thought. I haven't even thought about a change.

Could it possibly have been a coincidence that this pulpit committee just happened to be from the city where his son wanted to go to school? Was it a coincidence that in that same city was a well-known teaching hospital where his wife could receive treatment?

Was it coincidence that in that church sat a magnificent pipe organ, played by a music professor who not only taught at the university but also took students from the church at no charge as part of his own ministry?

That church wanted that particular pastor because of his reputation and

solid track record of getting churches "hooked on missions." Everywhere he had served, the churches had strong mission organizations, were solid supporters of home and foreign missions, and had a strong mission outreach in their town.

"What was the pastor's need?" you might ask.

His need was unvoiced, unacknowl-



edged, and unknown, even to himself, until the opportunity was presented to him. It was the need of a greater challenge. His present church was running smoothly. His several ongoing mission projects in the community were stable, with strong leadership.

As he realized the lack of mission zeal and activity in the new location, his energies were renewed and his spirit quickened.

Perhaps your experience won't be this dramatic. But when the Lord calls, nothing will be left to chance; nothing will be left undone.

Yes, "the Lord's call" is the only reason a congregation usually wants to hear, but does that mean the other reasons are invalid?

Doesn't a pastor standing in the middle of great conflict, who has considered carefully and prayerfully and knows there is nothing he can do to resolve that conflict, and that staying might cause even greater harm in his own family and/or congregation, have a right, perhaps even an obligation, to move on, to take another position?

Doesn't a pastor who simply is not able to provide adequately for his family in a present situation and who has ascertained by careful examination and prayer that he is seeing the situation objectively, and has brought the matter before the proper body within the church with no resolution, have a right to move to another church where he can continue his ministry without worrying about the welfare of his loved ones?

Should the pastor move who finds that he has met all the challenges of his present congregation and who finds himself too complacent, certain that he is not overlooking a great challenging need where he is, and that his leaving will not work undue hardship on the church? A pastor who feels challenged and vital will have a church that is challenged and vital in

the community.

Many would contend that only the Lord's calling is a valid reason for a minister to consider leaving his congregation. Yet, the Lord's call may be found in all reasons a pastor might have for moving. God speaks to us many times in and through our needs.

The Lord's call can even be a part of or a basic reason for that "itch" to move on, that vague feeling of dissatisfaction—even when things are going well.

So you want to move? You've considered all the questions, talked with your spouse, spent time in prayer, and you still feel it's time to move? Go. Go with God's blessings. There are people who need you. ✠

# How Pastors Helped in My Grief

## *One Woman's Story*

**T**he nurse gently pulled me aside, away from the metal crib, away from my baby. She held me in her arms as another nurse examined Angie. I watched her reach over the crib and shut off the monitor. The arms around me squeezed tighter.

The other nurse turned away from the crib and faced me. "It's over," she whispered, her cheeks wet with tears. "I'm so sorry."

The memory of Angie's pale face remains with me today. She was just 11 months old, a victim of cancer. Angie's father, my estranged husband, was attending college in another state. The lonely two-week vigil beside her crib left me dazed and numb.

I pulled away from the comforting arms around me and wandered, looking for a place to grieve. I don't know who called my pastor, Jon, and his wife, Linda. They found me in the sun-room on the top floor of the hospital. I stared out the window, not blinking, not thinking, not feeling.

Linda embraced me as Jon paced the floor. Just one month earlier he had held Angie in his arms at a church service, anointing her for healing. With her arm and its tumor draped over his shoulder, he had paced the altar and wept. As he prayed, I saw Linda through the nursery window, holding their infant son tightly. She prayed for Angie too, placing her hand against the glass.

This was the first time my young pastor had ministered to grieving parents or conducted a funeral for a small child. But Jon's inexperience didn't matter to me; his compassion and concern were what I needed.

He didn't say much. He put his arms around both Linda and me and whispered, "She'll never hurt again." That's when the tears started, releasing months of bottled-up sorrow. They helped me sit down, and we



**by Lonni Collins Pratt**

*Free-lance writer, Lapeer, Mich.*

wept together—the three of us clumped in a bundle of grief.

My pastor and his wife ministered to me when I needed most to know God's love. I was comforted, knowing they felt the pain and anguish I felt. But their ministry began long before the day Angie died.

### **Facing Difficult Decisions**

Angie's surgeon suggested that if her arm was amputated, she might have a 10 percent chance to extend her life by a year. It was an excruciating dilemma. Her father and I would have given our own arms to have her with us another year, but we decided against the amputation.

My pastor didn't question our choice. He didn't judge me in the life-and-death choices I had to make. He simply acknowledged our struggle. "I can't possibly know what I would do in your situation," he said. "I know how difficult this decision is for you." And if others in the congregation wondered how we could refuse any treatment, any chance, of extending our child's life, he kept those questions from reaching my ears.

When a child is sick, parents face heartbreaking choices. What if the amputation would have been God's tool for healing her? Had I sealed my daughter's fate? Pastor Jon never tried to answer my questions. He knew any answer would seem trite.

A few days after the funeral he called and said, "It must be some comfort to know her last days weren't spent with the additional pain of a major amputation. Your choice allowed her to go gently. I admire your courage."

I appreciated his thoughtful encouragement.

### **Understanding the Doubt**

I could not understand how a loving God would allow a baby to suffer. Nor could I escape the daily, harsh reality of that suffering. Well-rehearsed religious phrases mean nothing to parents who sob over their screaming, pain-racked baby.

Nights were a rhythm of pain. Two hours after receiving her pain medication, Angela began to whimper. After three hours she was sobbing. I watched the clock and prayed that God would make it speed up. At three and a half hours, Angie's screams pierced the night, her head tossed from side to side, her legs drawn up with pain.

The clock seemed to stop. It never made it a full four hours before I administered another dose. Two hours later the agonizing cycle started again.

I am grateful my pastor didn't tell me I shouldn't doubt. He didn't try to suppress my anger or frustration. "I don't know why Angela must hurt like this," he said once. "But, I know your questions are valid, and I believe those questions will drive you to God, not away from Him."

Once, after Angela had fallen into a fitful sleep, Linda said, "God cries for this planet. This was never what He wanted."

I remembered her words recently when the pastor of the church I now attend said, "We keep hearing people ask, 'Why does God allow children to suffer or go hungry? Why does God allow war?' But God asks, 'Why do



people allow such things? What have you done to yourselves?"

Since no one has the answers, it's OK to say so. We can't put something in the place where awe, reverence, and humility belong. We are mortal, and we have limits.

### Providing Practical Help

Shortly after I told my pastor about my long nights with Angie, several church women took turns spending the night with me. Some came only one night. I understood why they couldn't come back. It's never easy to encounter stark suffering.

Others became partners in our pain. They rocked my screaming baby, sang to her, prayed with me, or just made tea. Their presence seemed to calm both Angie and me. I began sleeping a little more, and the added rest helped me cope.

Rather than scolding me for having doubts, Jon and Linda and the women they recruited were themselves tangible proof that God loved Angie and me and that we weren't alone.

My friends didn't react to my anger or doubts. Instead they responded to my pain with friendship and support. They helped my questions draw me closer to God.

It doesn't always happen that way. About 10 years ago, my friend Alice watched as the body of her 3-year-old daughter was pulled out of the pond at a church picnic. As her husband cradled the blue body of his little girl, a well-meaning deacon said, "You just have to accept God's will." As far as I know, her husband hasn't entered the door of a church since.

Doubting, grieving parents don't need others to question their relationship with God. They need the space to express their doubts and anger. They need others who can share with them in their suffering.

### Helping Grief Happen

I wanted Angie's funeral to run smoothly. I didn't want any emotional displays. And I did not want to see the body. The funeral director was instructed to close the coffin when I entered the building.

I did not trust myself. The pain was so strong, I was certain the sight of Angie in the coffin would send me over the edge of sanity.

I did not cry the first night I accepted visitors. I did not discuss Angie. I asked my friends about their families, jobs, vacations, about anything except the tiny casket in the next room.

The next evening Jon pulled me aside and said, "I understand you haven't seen Angie."

I looked at the carpet and didn't reply. He took my hand. "I'll go with you," he said. "You should see her. She looks like a doll."

It didn't take much encouragement to get me to go with him. As I looked at her frail body, reality set in. My baby was gone. I wept freely into the clean handkerchief Jon gave me. Pastors need extra handkerchiefs for times like that.

### Being Real

A couple from my present church, Laura and Ron, were married eight years when their son, Christian, was born. They had struggled with fertility problems, so the baby was a miracle. If they cornered you, they would praise God exuberantly for their miracle baby. Christian was six months old when an inexplicable brain hemorrhage suddenly killed him.

Our current pastor is a qualified minister who has conducted many funerals. But something about their tragedy shook him as it did all of us. Laura and Ron smiled through their tears and talked about how thankful they were for the short time they had Christian. We knew they meant it.

But still it was evident our pastor struggled with their loss. He hesitated as he spoke; he forgot things; he was unusually quiet.

Laura told me later it was a great comfort to her, knowing our pastor wasn't unaffected. He did not just go through the motions mechanically. He didn't hide his feelings, but neither did they rule him. In short, he was real. He showed Laura and Ron that grieving was acceptable.

At Angie's funeral, Jon listened to me talk a long time about the day

Angie learned to stick out her tongue. I told him about the nurse who taught her how to do it. I told him how delighted she was to perform her new skill for others.

There was nothing Jon could do as I talked. There was nothing he could say. But he didn't have to say anything. He simply stayed there; he listened; he encouraged me to talk. To me, he was being real.

### Continuing Care After the Funeral

Grieving parents receive a lot of support during the first days following a funeral. This support dwindles quickly. That's why they need someone who will stay in touch with them.

Within two weeks, people stopped asking me questions. They stopped talking about Angie. But I found it impossible to shake off my loss in a few weeks or months. My worst period of grief set in about three months after Angie died, when most of my support had diminished.

Pastoral follow-up reassured me that the grieving process was normal. When silence otherwise engulfed me, it helped to know someone understood I still hurt. It helped to know prolonged hurting is normal. When I was encouraged to talk to others and pray about my feelings, I could work through my grief.

Other simple things helped as well, such as a call on Angie's birthday. A call on other holidays or on the anniversary of her death would have meant just as much. These are especially painful times. I needed the time and companionship of others. I didn't want people afraid to ask me how I was doing or if I needed to talk. Their prayers also gave me strength.

The genuine care of others eased my pain and helped me cope with a terrible loss. But I realized my pastor and my friends were only human. They were limited. Sustaining comfort could finally come only from God. He gave me peace of mind when I clung tightly to Him in my grief. I could not expect my pastor to heal my wounded soul, but I'm glad he brought me to the One who does.

✠

## Can You Escape the Lawsuit Crisis?

**T**hou shalt not counsel." It's not a commandment yet, but with clergy being sued for their advice, it could very well become one. Religious leaders are becoming reluctant to counsel their congregations. What's going on?

The very word *malpractice* sends shivers up and down the spines of medical practitioners. The mere mention of the word on a hospital ward sends shock waves throughout the entire health-care system. We have lived under the false assumptions that it's only an American problem and it does not affect the clergy.

Donald Coxe wrote in the April 1986 issue of *Canadian Business Magazine* that the "American way to wealth through Tort Law (malpractice) has crossed the 49th parallel and bids fair to erode our Canadian system of British fair play. . . . In Ontario, where the trend is well advanced, some insurance rates have risen as much as 400% in one year. This is in direct response to the perceived realities of pending court cases."

That same month, ABC's "20/20" brought the shocking reality of pastoral malpractice into the living rooms of North Americans with the tele-documentary "Taking the Church to Court—Terrorism of the Soul."

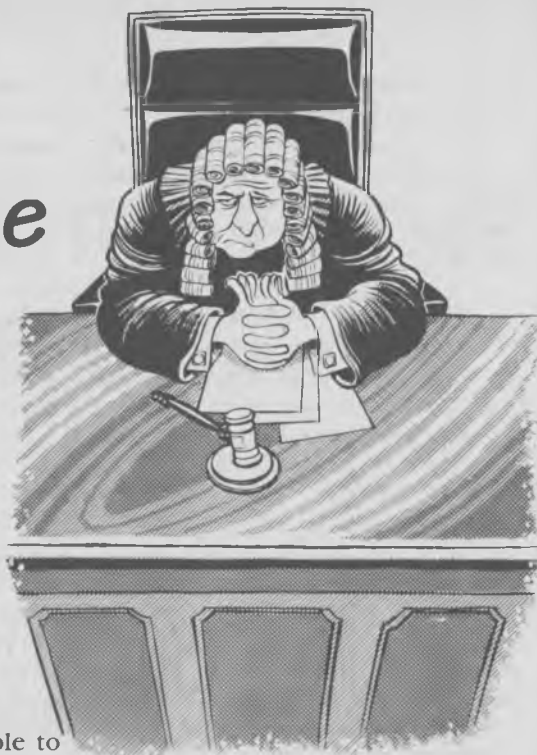
It has been equally alarming to read numerous Canadian newspapers and journals with the following headlines: "Satanist Wins \$10,000 Plus Court Costs in Libel Case" (*Montreal Gazette*, June '88), as well as "A Question of Witchcraft" (*Maclean's*, July '88); both press reports dealing with Lion Serpent Sun versus Len Olsen and 100 Huntley Street Ministries.

Equally disturbing are the following reported incidences. Judith Haines, a psychic, claimed that a CAT scan at Temple Christian University Hospital

by Ray Skelton  
Pastor, Milton, Ont.

in Philadelphia made her unable to use her psychic powers and was awarded \$1 million (*Montreal Gazette*, March '86). Several years ago, there were reports about a pastor who had counseled a woman and suggested a trial separation from her husband. Incensed over this, the husband shot and wounded his wife. Claiming that the pastor had given her bad advice, which led to the shooting, the woman brought a malpractice action against the pastor. According to John Cleary, in his July 1980 article for *Liberty* magazine, an attorney for Church Mutual Insurance Company verified that the incident had taken place.

**We have lived  
under the false  
assumptions  
that lawsuits are  
only an  
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problem and it  
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the clergy.**



Paul's exhortation has taken on a new application for Christian leaders today, some of whom have been accused of malpractice. Most evangelical leaders are familiar with Section 172 of the Canadian Criminal Code, especially the apparent application to obtaining court injunctions against people who chronically disrupt meetings, but few leaders have looked into the maze of malpractice litigation.

One of my examples above was that of Len Olsen. In this case, libel, not malpractice, was involved. According to *Black's Law Dictionary*, defamation consists of injuring a person's character, fame, reputation, or business by false and malicious statements. Defamation may be divided into two categories: slander and libel. Slander is defamation by means of the spoken word, while libel is defamation in writing or recorded by some electronic means such as television. In the Canadian Criminal Code, we have blasphemous libel and defamatory libel, mentioned in sections 260.1—281.3 (8) (c), as well as section 513.1 (1), (2), and (3).

Malpractice, or Tort Law as it is referred to, however, is the law of negligence. This includes giving wrong advice that causes unfortunate results; allegedly causing trauma or psychological damage to an impressionable person; defaming the character of a person; defaming the character of a person in a sermon or other com-

munication; assuming a role for which one is unqualified, such as a pastor acting as a psychiatrist without any psychiatric training; refusing or failing to refer a counselee to a physician, psychiatrist, or other professional when such is needed; or causing breach of affection by urging a husband or wife to divorce his or her spouse ("The Christian Legal Advisor," *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*, February 1991).

### Malpractice Insurance

Recently I had occasion to sit down with a pastor who had just received his new policy covering malpractice. As we went through the policy clause by clause, he made the observation that his policy only covered himself as the clergy, and this was further clarified to be operational only in counseling. Sunday School teachers and volunteers, counselors at the altar, church bus drivers, and board decisions, that is, liability resulting from any wrongdoing, were not covered under this policy.

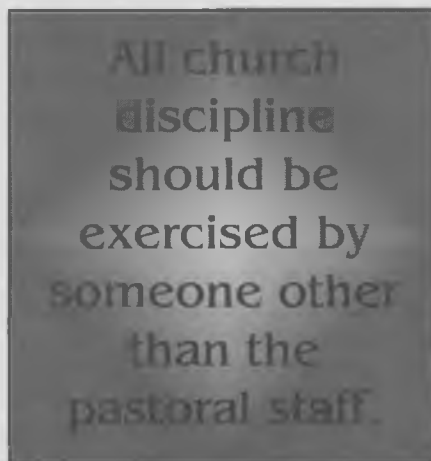
What recourse does a pastor have in trying to avoid litigation? Here are a few basic suggestions to be considered:

*First.* According to Carl Laney's *Guide to Church Discipline*, you should have a detailed outline covering both counseling and disciplinary procedures in your church's constitution. Have it clearly stated that you accept the Bible as the final authority in matters of church discipline and counsel as interpreted by the church leaders (Board of Elders or any regional body). Also state that this action is not intended to substitute nor countervail any criminal investigations.

*Second.* Make this information available to those seeking church membership, and make sure that the Membership Review Committee covers this point with each new prospect. Have them sign it and have it cosigned by at least two members of the committee. Keep the original on file and give a copy to the individual on Membership Sunday. All church discipline should be exercised by

someone other than the pastoral staff, for example, the secretary of the board.

*Third.* Include in your church constitution or covenant a statement to the effect that "we, the members of \_\_\_\_\_, will not pursue legal action or sue the pastors, elders, deacons, or church staff in connection with the performance of their official duties." 1 Cor. 6:1-8.



*Fourth.* Make sure during counseling that the counselee understands that the principles of confidentiality are to be balanced so that you are not placed in direct conflict with the biblical procedures that are designed to bring forth repentance. This is why I have merged pastoral counseling and church discipline together in this article.

*Fifth.* Avoid trying to run other people's lives. You have to share the Word of God and its precepts with them, and lay the possible options before them, but let them choose what action to take.

*Sixth.* Have counselees use forms like the Personal Data Inventory as well as Briefly Answer These Questions, when seeing church members and nonmembers. Keep accurate records. Since I started to use these forms in 1980, I have had only two people refuse to fill them out. Keep accurate counseling records of things covered as well as homework assignments.

*Seventh.* Recognize your limits. Don't develop a messianic complex. Never forbid a counselee from seeking another opinion. Instead, seek others who are trained in areas with which you are not familiar.

*Eighth.* Become familiar with pastoral psychopharmacology, or the study of drugs on the mind and body (*The Family Physician's Compendium of Drug Therapy Annual*; and "Psychopharmacology", *Journal of Pastoral Practice*). Someone who seems out of control may actually be having an adverse reaction to some form of medication. This is also one of the fundamental reasons for referrals to the medical community.

*Ninth.* The possibility that someone might claim psychological trauma or damage due to your preaching or counseling will always exist. The best protection is to preach the whole counsel of God, flavoring every occasion with grace and hope to all of mankind (John Eidsmoe, *The Christian Legal Advisor*).

*Tenth.* We are called to be peacemakers in Matt. 5:9 and even exhorted to teach others to act likewise in verses 18-19. We should do that by reinforcing Rom. 12:17-21, for we have all been called to the ministry of reconciliation. See also 1 Cor. 6:1-8 and 2 Cor. 5:18-19. With the full realization that today there exists a large number of independent churches who may not have the wise counsel of a district executive at their disposal, I would also suggest that they go to a mutually respected Christian leader and agree to binding arbitration; as well as secure the services of the Canadian Christian Legal Fellowship.

Rev. Ray Skelton of Milton, Ont., has been active in many forums regarding social concerns and also in direct action networking with a variety of secular sociopolitical groups in Quebec with regard to ethical issues.

*The Preacher's Magazine* assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the claims or the viability of the suggestions made in this article. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone and should not be seen as representing the opinions of the *Preacher's Magazine*, its staff members, or other contributors.

## Church Employees or Independent Contractors?

Submitted by the Board of Pensions and Benefits USA of the Church of the Nazarene

Dear Sirs:

*"The only employee we have besides our pastor is a part-time custodian [or secretary]. Do you know of any way we could pay them by contract and save the trouble of withholding income taxes and Social Security/Medicare (FICA) taxes?"*

In one form or another, this question has been asked literally hundreds of times in financial seminars, correspondence, and telephone conversations. The questions come as a response to the increasing responsibilities of churches and other employers for reporting employee compensation information to the IRS. Fortunately, the answer is fairly straightforward. However, it is frequently not the answer desired by the questioner.

### Who Are Employees?

There are basically two types of employees defined by the Tax Code: statutory employees and common-law employees. Statutory employees have specifically defined jobs that on the surface might appear to be self-employed positions were it not for the statutes that define the work as that of an employee. The common-law employee is the category that affects local churches most often.

A common-law employee is generally anyone who performs services that can be controlled by the employer. That is, the employer has *the legal right to control* (even if not enforced) the means, methods, and results of the services provided. If the employer/employee relationship is deemed to exist based on the facts in each case, *it does not matter what it is called*, nor how the payments are measured or paid, nor if the services are performed full-time or part-time. The employer must determine any taxable amounts paid, withhold appropriate taxes for *lay* employees, make appropriate tax payments, and report those taxes to the IRS. Virtually

all pastors, associate ministers, church custodians, church secretaries, paid choir directors, paid nursery workers, etc., are viewed by the IRS as common-law employees. Their compensation is reported on Form W-2.

### Who Are Independent Contractors?

Some local churches do hire independent contractors who offer specific services to the general public. Generally, in a year's time an independent contractor will have more than one organization to whom he offers services. Examples would be services provided by a janitorial service, snow removal service, roofing contractor, etc., that are advertised citywide. No employer/employee relationship exists between the church and persons performing such services as an independent contractor. Therefore, no withholding is required. However the local church may still be required to report to the IRS those payments made to an unincorporated, independent contractor. The Tax Code provides that payments for services to an unincorporated, independent contractor in excess of \$600 per year must be reported to the IRS on Form 1099 MISC and transmittal Form 1096.

NOTE: An unincorporated evangelist would be considered an independent contractor. Any payments to him or her of \$600 or more in a calendar year, not properly designated in advance by the board as housing allowance or designated as TSA contributions, would require the issuing of a Form 1099 MISC and transmittal Form 1096.

### What if We Do Not Withhold and Report?

There are criminal and civil penalties for willful failure to comply with requirements for withholding and reporting! In addition, the amount of certain taxes not withheld at the time

of payment from an employee's salary (that must later be paid) becomes the responsibility of the employer! The employee has no obligation to later reimburse the employer for such amount. Further, in some cases, an officer or responsible employee may become personally liable for the taxes and penalties involved.

Recently the IRS has noted, for special review, tax returns of individuals reporting a significant proportion of income on Form 1099 from one source. Many such individuals are being classified as employees rather than independent contractors. This has resulted in additional cost, including penalties, for both the individual and the now-determined employer. It is best to make the proper determination prior to such a review by the IRS.

### What if We Are Not Sure Which Employment Relationship Exists?

The local church should carefully consult IRS Publication 15, *Circular E—Employer's Tax Guide*, and free Publication 937, *Business Reporting (Employment Taxes, Information Returns)*, for examples that might be similar to the church's situation. Both are available from the IRS by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM. Consultation should be made with a local legal and/or tax counselor for advice. If questions still arise, a special form is available from the IRS to request that they determine if such person has an employment relationship with the local church. In no case should the questions be ignored, nor should there be willful failure to abide by legal requirements for withholding and reporting either wages paid to employees or payments in excess of \$600 to unincorporated, independent contractors. ¶

The information contained in this article is of a general nature. It is not offered as specific legal or tax "advice." Each person, local church board, and district should evaluate their own unique situation in consultation with their own local legal and tax advisers.

## Picture Windows for Preaching



### SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Former Surgeon General Everett Koop wrote that his spiritual awakening had a profound effect on his life and influenced everything that happened. Commenting on his decision to be an evangelical Christian, he penned: "I attempted to evaluate everything in the light of Scripture; and in the Bible I found my guide for faith and conduct, always tempered by God's grace and forgiveness."

D. Everett Koop, *Koop* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 115.

### TRUST

The story is told of an agnostic who was working on the roof of his house. Unexpectedly he slipped and he found himself dangling from the drainpipe. He strained his neck to look up and cried, "Is there anybody up there?"

A booming voice filled the sky with, "Trust in God and let go."

After a moment of silent contemplation, the fellow replied, "Is there anybody else up there?"

Most of us can do nearly anything except let go and trust God!

Lee Ezell, *Pills for Parents in Pain* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 132.

### COURAGE

Richard Wright tells the story of a close friend who served in the London police force as chief. He relates that once an unruly crowd gathered in Trafalgar Square. Wright's friend walked slowly toward the crowd, wearing his old fatigue jacket with its three bars of decoration sewn upon it. On reaching the edge of the crowd, and so that all could plainly see what he was doing, he laid the



by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor,  
Three Rivers Church of the Nazarene,  
Three Rivers, Mich.

jacket down on the pavement. He then turned, faced the mob, and walked slowly toward the people. By the time he had reached the other side, the crowd had begun frittering away and eventually dispersed.

Wright said that he had been told that this walking slowly through the crowd was a common police tactic. He asked his friend, "Weren't you afraid?"

"No," the chief stated, "I represent the king, and they knew it."

May God grant us courage like that to face the bullies of life, sin, Satan, temptation, adversity, and belligerent sinners.

Carroll Simcox, *3000 Quotations on Christian Themes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 163.

### SIN

In a sermon titled "All Have Sinned," Richard Pitcher told about a message board outside a church. The message marquee always carried some general words of welcome and then printed out the pastor's sermon title for the upcoming week. One week the sermon was based on the topic, "Cheerful Giving: What It Is and How to Do It."

The next week the pastor's message read, "Sin: What It Is and How to Do It." Doubtless several came that Sunday!

Pitcher commented: "Most Christians don't talk much about sin anymore, at least not using that word. To be sure, we can look at the behavior of individuals or groups of people and describe it in terms like unethical, immoral, wrong, unChristian, or occasionally even sinful. However, in our culture we seem to have lost almost totally our sense of corporate sin."

*The Clergy Journal* (Inver Grove Heights, Minn.: Logos Productions), vol. 69, no. 4 (February 1993): 15.

### ALCOHOL

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop reports: "Alcohol is a toxic, potentially addictive drug, the greatest killer of America's youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Alcohol abuse causes one hundred thousand deaths annually and \$136 billion in economic losses. An estimated 18 million adults have medical, social, and personal problems related to the use of alcohol, as do seven million adolescents for whom alcohol is an illegal drug. Tens of millions of others adults and youths are affected by the alcohol problems of family members, friends, and work associates. The figures do not include the cost of grief and human suffering. How many deficits of this kind can our country afford?"

What is true of America is true worldwide. No wonder the church takes its strong antialcohol stance on moral and ethical reasoning!

C. Everett Koop, *Koop* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 375.

# Today's Books for Today's Preachers



## **MINISTRY BURNOUT**

by John A. Sanford

Westminster/John Knox Press  
117 pages, paperback  
PA066-425-3520, \$8.99

"If we do not pay the price by examining ourselves creatively and carefully, we will have to pay the price later in the form of exhaustion with our work, broken relationships, or a life that has been incorrectly lived."

In this recent reprint of a 1982 title, John A. Sanford says that ministers are especially vulnerable to burnout because of the tiring quality of dealing with relationships and issues of love and morality. He compares the minister to a long-distance runner: success will depend on pacing oneself over a long period of time.

This caring pastoral counselor identifies nine characteristics of the ministerial profession that makes its members prone to burnout. One is that the minister's job is never done. While this is true and the minister must set his or her own limits, Sanford challenges the reader to examine a tendency to overwork, making sure that ministry demands are not used as an excuse to avoid personal relationships.

A sense of failure is another characteristic that leads to burnout. Sanford asks three questions: "Are we failing because of some fault of our own? Are we failing because we are in a situation in which we cannot possibly win? Are we really failing or do we only think we are failing because we are measuring success by the wrong standards?" We must measure success by God's standards, not those of the world.

Other problem areas that Sanford covers are expectations (personal and those of others), the "persona" or mask a minister may wear, and the challenge of meeting egocentric needs of both the minister and the congregation. When a minister claims to be exhausted, he or she is usually referring to spiritual exhaustion. Sanford offers many suggestions for regaining both physical and spiritual energy.

Self-understanding and a careful examination of the unique problems of ministry are keys to both avoiding and dealing with ministry burnout. The profession offers many joys and rewards, but books are not written about those things. Books are written about problems. Sanford's book will help the minister find balance and contentment in his or her work.

—Karen K. Hiner

## **TEACHING FOR FAITH: A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS OF ADULT CLASSES**

by Richard Robert Osmer  
(Louisville: Westminster/  
John Knox Press, 1992)  
PA066-425-2176, \$13.99

Richard Osmer, a professor of Christian education at Princeton Theological Seminary, writes from a commitment to the faith with a desire to assist others in building faith within the church. He builds his presentation on the basic understanding that "God has acted in a unique, unsurpassable way in Jesus Christ and that the Church in its witness to Christ serves as a special instrument which God uses to bring faith to life." With

that as a starting point, Dr. Osmer begins his work to help teachers in the church build a clear sense of purpose in their teaching ministry and to familiarize those teachers with tools that will aid them in accomplishing their purpose.

Osmer sees the goal of Christian education as the creation of a context "in which faith can be awakened, supported, and challenged." In focusing on this goal, he delves into the nature of faith (the cerebral) on the one hand and into the details of diverse teaching methods (the practical) on the other. Selecting from the many facets of faith, the book deals with faith as belief, as relationship, as commitment, as mystery. Then the different teaching methods (such as lecture, discussion, narrative, paradox) are examined in order to illustrate how the dimensions of faith can be best addressed. And in wedding the abstract with the concrete, the author is careful to give ample illustrations and models so that the reader is left with handles and not just ideas.

Osmer is clearly a thorough-going professional. A sense of authority and wealth of information emanates from what he says and the way he says it. The bibliography alone is valuable as a church resource. But the spirit of the author stands above his scholarship. His hope is to help teachers in the church feel their work as ministry and to equip them to lead others into paths of Christian faith. He manifests a clear desire to see the kingdom of God advanced through the labor of devoted Christian education.

—David L. Cox





## The World in Which We Must Communicate

**J**on came from London to spend a summer with his first cousin, Sam. Sam lives in Portland, Oreg. While visiting Sam, Jon sought ways to get to know his cousin's world better. He did everything he could to build personal relations with people he met. But problems ensued.

Sam took him to the International Convention. While there, he wanted to see the big candle-lighting service on Wednesday night. Instead, he saw persons speaking from a giant screen. He was told that he could order a cassette or video of the whole program if he wanted to get the most out of the service.

He called his uncle who lived in Lake Charles, La. The recording said, "Jane and I are out at this time. If you have a message, leave it and we will get back with you when we return. Leave your number, please." He told Sam about this, and Sam told him not to worry—they had an answering machine and, if worse came to worst, they would get at least the voices of Jane and Jack on the recording.

"That's not much, but it beats nothing at all," Sam reminded him.

Jon wanted to go to the local congregation in Portland. While there, two songs were a part of the musicals. He waited patiently while a young lady in her early 20s stood in a blank, puzzled look and waited for music from a sound system. After a long pause, music began. He was never sure whether the songs he was hearing were from the gifted talent of the singer or a mixture of voices from the accompaniment. Her songs lingered

Jon called the metropolitan congregation on Monday to get the name and number of the young lady so that he could consult her personally about her musical ability and her vision of musical ministry. He thought, This will help me get better acquainted with persons in the U.S.A.

The church phone rang loud and clear at 8:30 A.M. that morning. Jon heard the words, "If you want the office manager, push 1; if you want the

minister of music, push 2; if you desire to become a member of the congregation, push 3; if you want to talk with one of the pastors, push 4; if you want to leave a message, push 5." The final message said, "This is Monday, July 3, and we are all out for the pre-Fourth of July holiday; please call at the appropriate time."

Sam took Jon to see the Buick dealership. Jon wanted to learn more about the new design. The office worker told them to go into a darkened room, and she turned on a 13-minute video of the cars. She would be back "very soon

to give you an opportunity to ask any questions." One hour later she came



in his mind that morning. He thought, I'd really like to hear her sing!

by their room and related, "I got caught up on some much-needed fax work and could not get back. If you have any leading questions, here are several colorful brochures that are geared to answer most questions."

Sam had applied for a local university. He wanted to impress Jon with the campus that had the latest technology. When they arrived at the registrar's office, the registrar told Sam, "The dean is out. He said he has faxed your official records and wants you to fax three more recommendations from your high school teachers in order to complete the process of enrollment." Then she hesitated and with a hint of apology, "I must tell you that our computers have been down all day."

Sam drove to Eugene, Oreg., to introduce Jon to a distant cousin. "You will like Jerry," he remarked.

Jerry was at home. It seemed like things were looking up for Jon. His mother met the two youths at the door. "Hello, Aunt Jane! Meet Jon from London. He is distant kin to you and wants to see Jerry."

"Great! Jerry is in his den."

In the den Jerry was busy with a new computer. He was playing "PAC MAN." Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he remarked, "Hey, guys, I have one of the highest scores in our high school. Today, if I continue, I will have the record. I could be done soon."

Exactly one hour later, Jon was still buried in an old issue of *National Geographic*, and the game was still on! Sam looked nervously at his watch. "We must get out of here before the heavy traffic from work begins." And with a quick yank, he pulled Jon out of the beanbag chair and told Jerry good-bye.

On the way to the main exchange, Jon noticed a lady swerving in and out of the traffic. She seemed to have something attached to her right ear. "What is she doing?" he asked Sam.

"I'll pull up as close as I can, and we will be able to get a good look," Sam assured Jon.

There in the Lincoln car was a small blond lady with a cellular phone. She was talking and driving—or talking and trying to drive. All of a sudden, she made a quick exit as though she was preoccupied with what she was doing and nearly missed her turnoff. "We are seeing more and more of those phones

in cars around here," Sam assured Jon. "It's the communication age, you know."

Jon wanted to go to a popular seminar on "How to Win Friends and Influence People." He was interested in political science and thought America was the pacesetter for all this good stuff. The day of the seminar was one he had scheduled in as a "must."

Sam took him early so that they could get a front seat. They could have a good exchange of information, and the seminar would be worthwhile. A good time of talk back would help Jon see the "real American way."

A lady at the seminar entrance responded, "May I help you?"

"Yes," Sam acknowledged.

"And which seminar did you plan to attend?"

"It's on 'How to Win Friends and Influence People,'" Sam replied.

"Sorry, that one is sold out. We had so many registered for it that we ran it twice yesterday. Our management has decided to sell the videos and cassettes. The videos are just \$14.00 each, and the tapes are going for a bargain at \$5.00. If you must have a complete manuscript, that will cost you an additional \$7.00. We have found that getting the materials is as good, if not better, than conferences!"

Jon felt his heart sink. "I came to America to learn how to become a better communicator. If I stay here any longer, I will become totally asocial!"

On Sunday afternoon Jon called his father in London. "Dad, I am so glad you answered the phone. I can't wait to get home to tell you all the things I got to do while in the good ol' United States of America. I know you will just love 'their' country."

As he left for the airport, he found a note from Sam. "It has been so good to have you, and I really spent a lot of time talking with you—much more than I usually do with others. I am sorry for this note, but I received a telegram from the Oregon Board of Regents that said I was selected for a full scholarship in journalism. I think I will be good in that field. And I must get over to the university to meet with the dean about this. Have a great trip back to London. And please come again!"

## The Preacher's Exchange

### WANTED:

*Fervent Prayer and Tongues of Fire*, by Dr. J. Edwin Orr.

### CONTACT:

Luther A. Nelson  
1029 Tucker St.  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
717-322-3547

### WANTED:

A copy of Basil Miller's *The Holy Spirit—What the Bible Teaches About Him* (Beacon Hill Press).

### CONTACT:

Ronald J. Wells  
790 S. Juniper St.  
Prineville, OR 97754  
503-447-1410

### FOR SALE:

*The Preacher's Magazine*, vol. 16 (1941) and 17 (1942).

*The Preacher's Magazine* for the years 1943, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949.

*The Preacher's Magazine* for the years 1965 to 1978 August issue.

### WANTED:

*The Preacher's Magazine*, 1990 to the present.

### CONTACT:

William Thompson  
9 York Dr.  
Shore Rd.  
Belfast, Northern Ireland  
B.T. 15, 3 OY



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WORSHIP

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PREACHING

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Mary Rearick Paul

## March/April/May 1994

Prepared by Mary Rearick Paul  
Pastor  
Church of the Nazarene  
Lynn, Mass.

This series begins at the end of Lent and then covers the Easter season. Recently Lent has become increasingly important in my life. I find the time of reflection and renewal a vital way to prepare for Easter. I use the *Common Lectionary* as a base of my scripture choice, but I am not confined to it. It is a tool, not a jail. I feel that it has been helpful to me in unveiling the richness of the church year.

The Lenten section deals with the role of confession. Confession is to declare the truth about ourselves and about our God. Neither of these are easy to do. It is my hope that these sermons will be helpful in addressing the need for times of different kinds of confession in our churches.

The series then enters into the Easter season. While I did not have room for Holy Week services such as Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, I do think they are central for a full celebration of Easter. The Sundays after Easter continue to unfold the meaning of the Resurrection. There is a slight departure as I included a Mother's Day sermon in the series. The series closes with sermons for Ascension and Pentecost Sunday.

May God bless you as you prepare to preach in this holiest of times. May you know the anointing of the Lord to proclaim the Good News in a way that communicates!

# ACCEPTING THE CALL TO GRACE

by Mary Rearick Paul

Heb. 12:14-29

March 6, 1994

## INTRO:

So often when we talk about receiving the grace of God, we are speaking particularly to those who are new to the faith. We attempt to encourage those who have not accepted Christ as their Savior to do so. This is appropriate and certainly part of our call. As evangelicals we want to encourage all people to come to God and to receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ, to know new life and to accept the call to grace. But those of us who are not new to the faith also need to continue to accept the call to grace. The call to grace includes grace for ourselves and grace for others.

The central theme of this sermon is found in verse 15: "See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God" (RSV).

## I. We Must Accept God's Grace for Ourselves

We who are on the journey of walking with Jesus need the ongoing experience of God's grace. So much of a Christian's life can be spent on berating himself for how he has fallen short that he fails to accept what Jesus came to give, that is, grace. No matter how powerful our sense of personal failure, it is important to recognize the power of God's grace. We need to remember that we have come to "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (v. 24, RSV). In Abel there is condemnation; in Jesus there is grace.

**ILLUS.** I remember one Sunday morning feeling particularly scattered. As I sat on the platform, I was reviewing in my mind all the things I hadn't done that I should have, all the things I had said that I wished I could alter. I am sure you know what I mean. With my mind racing a mile a minute, there was a rising panic as the time to preach kept getting closer and closer. Despite having a sermon in hand, my spirit felt unprepared to deliver the message.

Then the special music began. A young couple with a guitar began to gently sing "Jesus Loves Me." God's grace washed over my soul and calmed my spirit. Their song reminded me of God's grace in the face of my failures. The experience of His grace released me to do His work.

## II. We Must Offer God's Grace to Others

The Bible says, "See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God" (v. 15, RSV). Not only are we responsible for our own acceptance of grace, but also we are to watch out for our sisters and brothers. As we raise our eyes from introspection to look around, we need to ask some hard questions of our church communities. Is grace abounding in our lives? Has anyone gotten lost along the way? Has anyone fallen? Is everybody here?

The inevitable answer in all our churches is that there are people in need of a new experience of God's grace.

Some have fallen; some have gotten lost; surely not everybody is here! As a result, an important part of our ministry is to continue encouraging, forgiving, and loving those who have slipped away from the experience of God's grace. We need to be a community that readily seeks, receives, and gives God's grace.

**ILLUS.** A woman began crying as she told her counselor that she needed forgiveness for some mistakes. The counselor assured her these guilt feelings were not appropriate and began to talk about ways she might find release.

This same woman shared with her friend how she felt so guilty that she couldn't seem to move on with her life.

The friend said, "I don't know why you feel guilty. I would have done the same thing!"

Then she went to her pastor and told him that she was struggling. She shared how she had spoken to other pastors, and they had told her that she had nothing about which to feel guilty. This pastor recognized that no matter what he thought of her choices, she felt the need to experience God's grace. He sat with her and prayed with her as she confessed before God her sins. Then he laid his hands on her head and said simply, "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven." She began to sob with joy as she had finally obtained release.

## III. We Must Accept Grace in Spite of Others

The author of Hebrews goes on to tell us that it is important that we accept the grace of God so "that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled" (v. 15, RSV). It is sad to see a Christian consumed by bitterness. Bitterness destroys one's sense of grace for others, as well as destroys one's personal joy.

Unfortunately, we have each had times when we have had every "right" to be bitter. One of the most difficult "wrongs" to forgive is when the one who has hurt us is from inside the church. Sometimes these are little things. Sometimes they are huge. But they begin to fester and destroy us from the inside. This scripture challenges us to accept the call to grace.

Sometimes the pain has been so incredible it is unimaginable to forgive. Yet it is important to review the language of verses 18-19 (RSV) before we decide that what is unimaginable is also impossible. Images like "blazing fire," "tempest," "sound of a trumpet," "a voice whose words made the hearers entreat" reveal the power of God's grace. The powerful grace of God is available to work in us in such a way that we can offer this grace to others.

To accept the call of grace sets the other person free from our hatred. It also sets us free from the pain and bitterness that once consumed our inner spirit and allows us to be filled by God's grace. Depending on the other person, there can be a beautiful restoration of friendship.

There can be a new understanding. There can be mutual love. There is also the reality of people who, though forgiven, are still dangerous in our lives. While we may be healed of bitterness, it does not necessarily mean that we enter into a restored relationship. Some people have to be released in love into God's hands.

**ILLUS.** "Sandy" shared with me her story of extending God's grace. She had been sexually abused as a child by her father. After years of therapy to deal with horrible ramifications of that experience, she did get to the place of forgiveness.

She shared how others could not believe it was possible, but she had known the work of God's Spirit that enabled her to do so. She healthfully recognized the ongoing potential danger of her father and her children. So she has created safeguards. Even in the midst of those realities, she has found release from the internal pain of bitterness and freedom to be filled with love.

#### IV. We Must Not Throw Away Our Birthright

Grace is the birthright of all who call upon the name of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "See to it . . . that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal" (vv. 15-16, RSV). We need to accept the call to grace when we are tempted as Esau. We too are tempted in many ways to seek the things of this world over the things of the Spirit. We too are tempted to live our lives with little or no awareness of God's desire for us. We too are tempted to throw away God's offering of grace for things that bring immediate satisfaction. We too are tempted at times to live as Christians, to claim Christ as Lord without receiving God's grace and being ministers of that grace. We are being offered an incredible inheritance. To throw away grace because of an insistence that "I cannot forgive" is as ridiculous as throwing away our birthright for a bowl of stew.

**ILLUS.** An older gentleman attended church regularly but did not take part in Holy Communion for years. When asked why this was so, he said that he knew he was not worthy. Even when the pastor shared that it is surely a gift of grace that any of us can receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, he still refused. Stubbornly this man threw away the grace that was being offered.

#### CONCLUSION:

Sometimes we think: "Yes, grace can cover a wrong turn, a little lie; grace can enable me to forgive some wrongs—but grace cannot cover my sin; grace cannot cover my hurts or the pain inflicted on my life." The author of Hebrews wants you to know that we have not come to something that is small, touchable, something in a box. We have come to the amazing presence of God. Let us stop and hear of the holy, of the power, of the awesomeness of God's grace described in this passage.

The author of Hebrews says: "God is a consuming fire" (v. 29, RSV). That means we worship a God who can consume all our sins, all our pain, all our bitterness. This God calls us to grace. Accept His call to grace!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Organ Prelude	
Greetings/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	"O Magnify the Lord"
	"His Praise Fills This Temple"
	"Let There Be an Anointing"
	"Fill My Cup, Lord"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Wonderful Grace of Jesus"
Community Welcome	
Offering/Doxology	
Hymn	"Amazing Grace"
Special Music	
Scripture	Heb. 12:14-29
Sermon	"ACCEPTING THE CALL TO GRACE"
Hymn	"Grace Greater than Our Sin"
Communion	
Prayer	
Benediction	"May the Grace of Christ, Our Savior"

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Communion

Invite people to understand that the sacrament of Communion is a wonderful means of grace. Communion gives an opportunity for each of us to receive forgiveness of sins. Allow a quiet time for confession, then lead in the following liturgy based on the scripture and sermon for today:

**Leader:** The table has been set, and you have all been invited. Come and feast on God's grace.

**People:** But we are not worthy.

**Leader:** Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, has made the way. Come and feast on God's grace.

**People:** Is this grace sufficient for my sin? Can we truly come and feast?

**Leader:** We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.

**People:** By whose name do we come to the feast?

**Leader:** In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

**People:** In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

**Unison:** Praise be to God, in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven. We come to feast on God's grace.



# CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

by Mary Rearick Paul

1 John 1:5-9

March 13, 1994

## INTRO:

The word "confess" can be a difficult one, particularly for those of us in the evangelical church. Apart from the point of our initial conversion, we have for the most part allocated this practice to those of the Catholic tradition. Sadly this has often meant that there has been little place for confession within our lives, let alone in our worship services. Yet it is a biblical concept, one that would be helpful for us to investigate. The Scriptures seem to clearly call us to find places for confession. This does not come in a punitive way but rather a healing way that allows us to move on in Christian growth.

## I. Are You Coming into the Light?

In theory, we like light. Light brings truth and openness. It brings revelations. We can see what is around us and who is around us. It brings understanding and clarity to where we are and where we can go.

When we enter into a dark house, what is the first thing we do? We turn on the light. Why? So that we might see. Therefore, when we hear words like "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5, RSV), we rejoice.

Yet the light can be frightening as well. The light can bring out what or where we are hiding. In the light, our faults and flaws that we have so desperately tried to hide can be seen. The light even increases our own awareness of personal flaws and sin. Sometimes it seems like we would prefer a compromise. Could I walk in the dusk today?

**ILLUS.** A few years ago I returned for a visit to my childhood. My husband and I were resident counselors at a college dorm and all the students had gone home. Several of our adult friends came over, and we decided to take advantage of the situation. We opened up all the rooms and had an incredible game of hide-and-seek. It was very important that all the lights had been turned off as we played the game. There are times when we all prefer the lights to stay out.

## II. Are You Facing the Light?

The light can be initially painful. Like a person who has come from a cave into the bright sunlight, we squint and cover our eyes at the pain of such brightness. We have some choices in the face of the light. We can run from the light, away from truth and openness, and escape back into the dark. We can deny the light, close our eyes and insist that there is no pain, there is no problem. Or we can open our eyes and face the light and in doing so discover that Jesus walks with us in the journey of light. Jesus sees us in all truth and openness and loves us. This amazing love of Jesus offers a way for us to be people of light rather than darkness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins" (1 John 1:9, RSV).

Standing in the light can be horrifying; confessing what we see in the light can be terrifying. But that is what these scriptures are demanding. If we confess what we see—our faults, our flaws, our mistakes, our sins—we truly have allowed the light to enter where there is darkness in our lives. The Greek word for confess means "to agree or declare alike." Our responsibility is to simply confess what God has already seen.

**ILLUS.** A friend of mine had hung her dress to dry down in the basement. Later that evening she found it crumpled on the dirty floor. Ever so calmly she screamed upstairs, "Who knocked my dress over and left it on the floor?"

There was no answer.

After reflecting on the day's schedule, she realized it could have been only one of her sons. Nevertheless, as she asked each one if he had done the "crime," there was an emphatic "No."

The initial frustration about the dress was replaced with frustration that her child was unwilling to tell the truth. He was unwilling to confess to something both he and she knew he had done. What could have been quickly resolved with telling the truth became a three-day ordeal. The mother was hurt that her child would lie to her. The boy felt guilty about his deed.

One night he finally came downstairs and told his mother the truth. It was painful for him to admit what he had done as well as admit that he was lying. There were tears rolling down his cheeks as he confessed. His mom quickly hugged him and said she knew all along but was so glad that he confessed. A simple act of confession brought light where there was darkness.

## III. Are You Standing in the Light?

The Bible calls us to stand in the light. We have to stop denying and begin speaking the truth of who we are. In this state of confession we too will receive hugs from one who loves us and who only desires that we be people of truth. Then we will know forgiveness through Christ and, in knowing that forgiveness, become people of light.

Each day we must come before our God, the God of light, truth, and openness, to confess what we can see in that light. We need to confess where we have failed and then, in that forgiveness, find the empowerment for the future. Each day through Jesus Christ we can face that light and find that when we come out of the cave of darkness, our eyes will adjust. The light will no longer hurt our eyes.

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth" (1 John 1:6, RSV). The only way to walk in the light is to face it, stand in it, be illumined in it, and walk in it.

#### IV. Are You Walking in the Light?

Confessions are not meant to bind us in guilt, to keep us stuck in our past. That is what denial does. Confession frees us for the future. If we are prepared to live by God's light, we will come into fellowship with other Christians and with our God.

As evangelical Protestants, we have mostly experienced confession alone with our God. There are important times for us to confess to others. This has to be done prayerfully and carefully. It can also have wonderful results. Sometimes confessing to a person helps us have a greater accountability.

There is also a time for confession to others that brings a restoration of fellowship, a reconciliation of relationship. As we walk in the light and the more transparent we are, the more the light will be able to shine through to others.

**ILLUS.** During one of the smaller gatherings of the church, a member stood up and asked for some time. He began to confess to his church how he had sinned. He shared with them how he was working on restoring the broken relationships caused by his sin. He also shared how he knew that he had caused the church much pain.

That night was the beginning of his full restoration and the beginning of healing for the church. Afterward there were no whispers of "Did you hear what he said?" There was only much rejoicing over what God had done.

#### V. Are You in the Community of Light?

In any long-term healthy relationship, there is need for confession and forgiveness. This is true whether we are talking about marriage, friend, family, or the people of the church. So often we are stuck at a standstill that kills relationships because no one is willing to make the first move. But if one member would be willing to say, "I goofed," "I failed," "I sinned," there would come great opportunity for healing. Confession releases the relationship from its bondage and frees it to move forward.

One of the difficult things in church life is to become aware of how we fall short in living a life of light and love. Churches can experience years of hurts and unconfessed sin that begins to wear out and kill community life. One of the realities about any church is that the people all have stories, told and untold, of hurts that have been experienced and forgiven. Sadly, there are those who have been hurt and need to be freed to experience God's light and love. For us to be a community of light, we must be willing to confess as well as forgive.

**ILLUS.** Our church felt called to offer an opportunity of healing. A letter of confession was written and sent out to those we knew had been hurt by our community. It was a powerful beginning of healing for the church and the recipients.

Basically the letter explained that we were making plans for the future and recognized that, before doing so, we needed to deal with some of our past. Our church community confessed that we had failed them in word and/or deed and asked for their forgiveness. The responses were not overwhelming but significant. The healing wasn't instant, but I believe the confession began a process of recovery.

As we in the community confess, I know that through Jesus Christ we are forgiven. In that forgiveness, we can move forward to the future and live as a community of light!

#### CONCLUSION:

Let us continue to be people of light, even if it is frightening or painful. As we live in the light, "We have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, RSV). Let the light shine, illuminating our lives and the life of our churches!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Organ Prelude	
Greetings/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
	"He Is Lord"
	"Rejoice in the Lord Always"
	"Praise the Name of Jesus"
	"Spirit Song"
Prayer Chorus	
Scripture	James 5:13-16
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Arise, My Soul, Arise"
Community Welcome	
Offering/Doxology	
Hymn	"I Want to Be like Jesus"
Special Music	
Scripture	1 John 1:5-9
Sermon	"CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL"
Confession	
Hymn	"Just as I Am"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Confession

Invite your people to stand in the light and join in a community confession to God. You may find one in numerous books, or write one yourself to be printed in your worship bulletin. All of us can confess to times of not loving God with all our beings, and not loving our neighbors as ourselves. Allow some quiet time for personal reflection. Be sure to emphasize that as we confess, God embraces us with His forgiveness.

# CONFESSING THE GOOD NEWS

by Mary Rearick Paul

Rom. 10:5-13

March 20, 1994

## INTRO:

From Romans comes the word "righteousness." What comes into your mind when you hear that word?

For many people, that word has a negative meaning. When we think of the "righteous," we think of people whom we may not particularly like to spend time with, let alone emulate: people who are rigid, humorless, condemning, without joy. Someone who does everything "right" and thinks that you should be doing likewise.

Not many of us are saying, "I want to be a righteous person." One reason is that we think in the terms of "self-righteous" rather than a biblical understanding of righteousness. We also think of righteousness as a personal goal that is unattainable rather than a gift of God that is available to all people.

## I. What Is Righteousness and How Do We Get It?

On the simplest yet most meaningful level, righteousness means to have a "right relationship" with God. Receiving this righteousness brings healing in the name of Jesus to your broken relationships. Righteousness results in *shalom*, a peace that pervades us inwardly and outwardly. Seeking God's righteousness is to seek a right relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves. In this sense righteousness is never self-attained or other-condemning. It is filled with grateful joy for what has been given. To seek God's righteousness is to seek all that is good, all that is holy, all that is life-giving, all that is of eternal worth, all that is right and praiseworthy.

If we seek God's righteousness with all our hearts, we will know the purest joy and the deepest peace. Rom. 10:5-13 distinguishes righteousness that comes from the law and that which comes by faith. In Jesus Christ, there is the miraculous gift of righteousness through faith.

How exactly do we go about attaining this righteousness? Do we need to lift ourselves to the heavens? Do we need to be so good, so perfect, so faithful that righteousness will be given to us? Or do we need to hit bottom? Do we need to reach the depths of despair and loneliness in order to recognize the brokenness of our relationships?

Paul asked similar questions in verses 6 and 7: "'Who will ascend into heaven?' . . . or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (RSV). The answer to this question is found in verse 8: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (RSV). In other words, it is as close as our confession of faith.

The question is not, How will I get Jesus to come here? Instead, recognize His presence that is already here. The word is near you. Jesus the Giver of righteousness is right by your side. There is no need to pull Christ down from the heavens. There is no need to pull Christ up from the abyss. Christ is near. Jesus is waiting for you to turn, to see, and to confess!

**ILLUS.** A newcomer to the church came into the pastor's office. He asked the pastor to simply tell him what was required of him in this church. She was a little bewildered by what he meant.

He explained that he had come from a church background that had taught him that if he fulfilled certain basic requirements, he would know God's righteousness and full salvation. He had left that church, but he had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior after a recent visit from one of his neighbors and the pastor. Now that he was back in the church, he wanted to know what was required.

She explained that the only requirement was to accept Jesus as his personal Savior. Salvation was not earned but given as a free gift of grace. The man sat silently, then he began to chuckle until he was laughing with tears running down his cheeks at the pure joy of such a gift.

## II. What Is the Role of Confession?

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9, RSV).

Last week, if you recall, we discussed the word "confess." We talked about the importance of confessing what we see in the light. Here we have step two of that confession. There is both the negative and positive confession of the Christian. We not only confess our sins but also confess the good news that Jesus is Lord. We confess what we have come to believe—that Jesus has been raised from the dead and is Lord of all. In this proclamation of knowledge comes salvation for ourselves and for others. Yet this sounds too simple to some people.

When we declare salvation through faith, we are charged with offering a cheap grace. Many of us still continue to struggle with some way to earn our salvation, some way to personally attain righteousness. Salvation through confession rather than works is hard to accept.

I have heard so many say, "When I get my life together, I'll come to church." Somehow the message has gotten out that God only accepts those who are living a good life, who can come to church dressed up and have everything in order. God's people must proclaim the good news that no waiting is required; no cleaning up is necessary. We need to let our neighbors know that this is definitely a "come as you are" party.

While salvation through faith is free, it is not necessarily easy. To believe and confess Jesus as Lord becomes costly. There are challenges to that confession each day of our lives. For some of us there is outright persecution as the result of that confession. There can be mockery by our family and friends, loss of job and livelihood, even the loss of home. That confession must be worked out in our lives. Each day presents its own challenges to our declaration of faith. It is one thing to sing and proclaim within the church building; it is quite another to pro-

claim our faith in our homes, schools, backyards, and workplaces.

Some days our confession of Jesus as Lord is stronger than other days. The confession is not always out of a faith-filled heart. At the very least, we recognize that our emotional level of religious exuberance does change day to day. That is the wonderful thing about coming together in community. When we gather as the people of God, we join in a corporate confession of "Jesus as Lord" and find our own voice strengthened. Some people can proclaim with a loud voice because they have had a week in which they have seen the Lordship of Jesus at work. Some may proclaim in a weaker voice because they have encountered obstacles, questions, and doubts. Some may proclaim in a whisper, barely audible, because they have been traveling the road of despair and grief.

Yet that confession is life changing. As we join together, we become one voice that proclaims the great confession: "Jesus is Lord!" As we join the community of God's people in that confession, we find our personal faith and voice strengthened.

**ILLUS.** Usually services at the New York District Camp Meeting ended with "invitation" songs—songs like "Just as I Am" or "Almost Persuaded." One night evangelist Paul Martin asked that the closing song be "He Is Lord." He asked the community of believers to stand and celebrate the corporate confession that Jesus is their Savior. He announced that there would be no singing of all "29" verses. There would be no beseeching of the crowd. He simply asked those who had not committed their lives to Jesus to listen to the celebration and ask themselves if they wanted to join in.

As the congregation began to sing, the people began to come forward to the altar. The more people came, the louder the congregation sang. It was a powerful testimony to the strengthening power of the community confession.

### III. Salvation Is for All

"No one who believes in him [Jesus] will be put to shame" (Rom. 10:11, RSV). This is a powerful message of hope. Paul assures us that whoever comes in confession and belief will know the promises of God in his life. The great equalizer of all people is that we are all invited to join in the great confession of faith. There is no one who truly confesses Jesus as Lord that will be shut out of the kingdom of God. "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (v. 13, RSV).

No matter what our backgrounds, no matter how high we may have thought we have traveled, no matter how low we might have felt that we have sunk, these scriptures tell us that salvation comes to us in our confession of Jesus as Lord. Nothing is as beautiful as the Body of Christ in all its diversity. In Christ Jesus, all distinctions are erased.

### CONCLUSION:

Hear the good news: "If you confess with your lips that

Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9, RSV). Do not be afraid to call out. Do not be afraid to believe, for your God will not let you be "put to shame." Confess your faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and know the righteousness of God. Proclaim your confession to all who will listen so that they, too, may know full salvation.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Organ Prelude	
Greetings/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	"It's Time to Praise the Lord"
	"Jesus, Name Above All Names"
	"He Is Lord"
	"Jesus Is Lord"
	"Open Our Eyes"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Nearer, Still Nearer"
Special Music	
Scripture	Rom. 10:5-13
Sermon	"CONFESSING THE GOOD NEWS"
Closing Chorus	"He Is Lord"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Call to Worship

(Rom. 10:1-4, NRSV)

Leader: Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

People: I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened.

Leader: For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

People: For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

##### Community Welcome

This is a time for the congregation to greet one another. This can be led with a simple direction to "welcome each other to this morning's service" or with specific phrases in mind. For example, in today's service you can ask the people to say, "Jesus is Lord," as they shake hands. Then incorporate the experience as an illustration in the sermon.

##### Benediction

Have the congregation repeat "Jesus is Lord" three times: the first time in a whisper, the second time louder, and the third time in their strongest voice.

# CELEBRATING PALM SUNDAY

by Mary Rearick Paul

Luke 19:28-40

March 27, 1994

## INTRO:

I have often struggled with the meaning of Palm Sunday. First of all, while we sing praises and say, "Hosanna," we are all very aware that the big celebration is next Sunday. After Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, we will get to Easter, when we have the big celebration of the Resurrection. I remember working with a group planning the special music for Palm and Easter Sunday. One of the members kept saying, "Remember the big party, the real celebration, is on Easter!" So while we sing praises, it is an expectant singing of what is to come.

Second, I could never quite understand why we would want to reenact this day. This is the day of what I deemed "false praise." Most churches get out the palms and sing the "Hosannas," we read one of the Gospel renditions of Jesus' triumphal entry, and yet we certainly wouldn't encourage each other to continue to model their behavior. If we did, we would be ending the service by turning against Jesus and having the congregation yell responsively, "Crucify Him!"

I have often pictured Jesus riding on the donkey, looking at the crowds and the disciples with great sadness, knowing there was no depth to their praise, no true understanding to their acclamations. Perhaps we should mark this day with ashes and sackcloth, mourning humanity's participation in the coming Crucifixion. Perhaps it should be a day of dirges rather than praise.

**ILLUS.** One year, I worked with a worship committee. We decided to reenact in a small way this Palm Sunday story. We began the service with the congregation singing songs of praises. The choir entered with palms, followed by a man dressed as Jesus. When we imagined this idea, the songs were sung lustily, the choir marched confidently, waving their palms with much enthusiasm; and Jesus entered the sanctuary triumphantly in the midst of this glorious praise.

In reality, the congregation sang sleepily, the choir very shyly held their palms down by their sides, and a man dressed in a robe walked with confusion and acute embarrassment on his face, turning brighter and brighter red as he processed down the aisle. Not quite the triumphal entry that I was anticipating.

In retrospect, it did reflect my confusion and perhaps the congregation's confusion regarding Palm Sunday. Is it a day for dirges or praises?

## I. On Palm Sunday, Should We Give Silence or Praise?

Reading through Luke's story, I discovered that there were characters who joined me in my desire to hush the crowds, to silence the celebration. I was struck by the command of some of the Pharisees who said: "Teacher, rebuke your disciples" (Luke 19:39, RSV). They did not want this celebration to continue through the streets of

Jerusalem. They too understood, for different reasons, that the words, the songs, and the palms had little real meaning.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees' command and to my questions with these words: "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (v. 40, RSV).

I get the feeling that it would be terribly wrong for me to lead you in a dirge this morning or to show up covered in ashes. If I were to do this, the stones of our city might begin to tremble. The first Palm Sunday, despite the lack of understanding of these early followers, and this Palm Sunday, which we are celebrating despite our limited understanding, are filled with meaning that is not dependent on our total knowledge. The fact that these early followers turned away from Jesus in less than a week does not change the truth of the words: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (v. 38, RSV).

## II. Jesus Is Worthy of Praise

Even if we miss the point, Jesus is still the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Our lack of understanding does not change the fact that Jesus Christ, our Messiah, has come to fulfill the prophecies, to break down the old barriers, to provide reconciliation for all the children of God. Jesus, our Messiah, has come!

Therefore, there has to be loud hosannas, jubilant praises, singing voices proclaiming the good news! "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad" (Ps. 118:24, RSV). All our uncertainties, rebellions, misunderstandings, and sins do not negate the meaning of Palm Sunday.

## III. Jesus Moves with Purpose

Jesus did not go into this day unaware, uncertain, or in any way embarrassed. This was not some impulsive action—jumping on the nearest colt and riding through Jerusalem. This took a carefully planned act of defiance, courage, and proclamation!

Jesus Christ was defiant regarding all attempts to confine His ministry, to limit His words, to control His destiny. No matter what the religious or political leaders did to stop or hinder, Jesus continued on His mission. Not only did He continue on, but also He specifically made plans to fulfill His calling. Jesus sent the disciples to get the colt; He planned His entrance into Jerusalem. While the people sang His praises, He knew the truth of the words they proclaimed. He held His head high, not bowing to any earthly authority.

Jesus Christ was courageous. He entered into Jerusalem in this dramatic way when it was known that there was a price on His head. He could have entered quietly, through a back alley. But He chose to enter with crowds proclaiming His entrance, knowing full well the cost of such an entrance.

Jesus came and I don't think He looked at the crowds with sadness anymore. I think He looked upon the people with great love, knowing that He had come that they might know God and the good news of God's love. Jesus came that all people may have life and have it abundantly. No matter what the future cost, there is joy and love and much reason for celebration in the Palm Sunday procession.

Jesus Christ proclaimed in His actions the truth of His identity. He set up the scenario to reveal once more that He was their King. He deliberately fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah that says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass . . . he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (9:9-10, RSV). The whole atmosphere was laden with messianic expectations. This was and is a time of exaltation, rejoicing, and celebration.

#### IV. Accept the Jesus Who Came

Why was there ever any confusion? Why was I going to let the stones have the fun of celebrating? Perhaps because I, like the Pharisees, still struggle with the images of a humble Messiah. Perhaps I too continue to hope for some powerful military Hero who marches through Jerusalem, destroying His enemies and taking over the city. Perhaps I too struggle with this God who loves all people, who didn't come to destroy a group of people to save the others—namely me and my loved ones. Instead He came in such a way that redemption is offered to all.

**ILLUS.** We enjoy stories that have clear battle lines. There are good people and bad people. We cheer for the good and moan at the bad. When the movie *Dick Tracy* was made, the creator talked about his attempt to present this kind of simple story line. He kept the colors black and white and primary to reflect this simplicity. The good folks were good. They were true to those they loved. They were consistently kindhearted. The bad people were bad; they consistently showed their lying hearts and mouths. Of course, the hero saved the day, destroying the bad people while the good rejoiced!

#### V. Palm Sunday Is More than a Simple Story

Sometimes we tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in simple hero story style. Where the images are black and white, it is clear who were the good guys and who were the bad guys. The disciples are the good ones. The Pharisees and Herod are the bad ones. We practically rush over Holy Week so that we can get to the big finish, the Easter Resurrection. But this is not completely what I see.

Truly, Jesus does vanquish all! Jesus is all that is pure and good and lovely. Jesus is our great Savior. Jesus is the ultimate Hero. But, we are not the good people versus the bad people. In reality, our Hero, our Savior, came to rescue all of us! Not because we were so good that we

deserve it, but because of the abounding love and mercy God has for all of us. Jesus looked with love, not only on the praising disciples but also on the silent members of the crowd, the rebuking Pharisees, and the plotting politicians. He knew that each person needed His love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The victory of Jesus was not to destroy any of the people, but to set them all free!

#### CONCLUSION:

Jesus looks upon us with love—those of us who profess our faith in moments of enthusiasm and at times deny our faith in moments of stress, those who are silent, those who are rebuking, and those who are plotting. So this Palm Sunday is truly a day of celebration. Today we celebrate a God who came not to destroy any of us, no matter how "bad," but to encircle us with His love!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Organ Prelude	
Greetings/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	<p>"Clap Your Hands"</p> <p>"I Will Enter His Gates"</p> <p>"All Hail King Jesus"</p> <p>"His Name Is Life"</p>
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"All Glory, Laud, and Honor"
Special Music	
Scripture	Luke 19:28-40
Sermon	"CELEBRATING PALM SUNDAY"
Hymn	"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"
Prayer	
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Call to Worship

Leader: Let us praise the God of our salvation.

People: Let us burst out with song!

Leader: If we do not, the very stones of the earth will cry out.

People: Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel!

All: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!

##### Chorus Time

Have children up front to help lead the choruses with exuberant voices and waving palms.

##### Closing Benediction

We cannot help but proclaim with awe: Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!



# EASTER CELEBRATION

by Mary Rearick Paul

John 20:1-18

April 3, 1994

## INTRO:

Easter is a day of celebration, a day of great joy! The church relinquishes the darkness and the somber attitude of Lent and springs forth in exultation. Flowers appear; salutations of praise are exchanged; we wear bright clothing. The people of God gather together. Our voices sing out that Jesus our Lord has risen, that death no longer has the sting of victory, that sin no longer binds us. Our wonderful God has intervened into the lives of the people. There is good news of great joy for all! There is a wonderful unison of praise among all the Christian churches this morning as we sing and proclaim the message of our risen Christ. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Yet, some of you may not have awakened singing this morning. Some of you may struggle with all this brightness and praise. Some of you may feel like you are the only person that Easter has passed by. Do not be alarmed. Many begin the morning of Easter in darkness. I invite you on a journey this morning, back to that first Easter morn.

## I. Sense the Darkness

One dark morning a woman named Mary Magdalene was not dancing for joy or singing praises. She did not wear bright clothes or exchange greetings. She was engulfed with a wracking, shattering grief.

I can imagine her trudging to the tomb in which Jesus was buried. Wearily she walked the lonely path after a sleepless night of grief. She could not resist the place where her Lord was laid, perhaps desiring to touch Him one more time, wishing that she could see His face again, knowing that she would have to confront the unbelievable horror that He was dead and gone. As she walked, she remembered the first time they met. He had lifted her out of emptiness, degradation, and sorrow. He had given her a new life that was filled with meaning, love, and joy.

## II. Be Remembering

Each step brought back memories of the previous week. Who could have guessed what would happen? She recalled the singing and praising as Jesus entered Jerusalem. That exciting, magical day it seemed like the whole city was crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" She had danced with joy!

Mary remembered Jesus' teachings and prayers. There were times of confusion, but mostly His words warmed her heart. The way Jesus looked at people and spoke to them assured her of His deep love. She had heard of Jesus' strange practice of washing His disciples' feet. How furious she was that they had let Him do such a menial task. Why hadn't those disciples taken care of His feet? She cried at the thought of Jesus' unwashed feet lying in the tomb.

Now that Jesus was gone, she remembered His strange mood. Jesus had talked of death and betrayal as if He knew that this was going to happen, as if He were trying to prepare them for this gloomy day.

Mary Magdalene remembered the Cross. The horrible Cross where Jesus had hung, dying in front of her, and she was powerless to help! Her body ached in its desire to take Him down, to set Him free, to stop the horror! She remembered the expressions of love. Jesus had talked tenderly to those who had gathered at the foot of the Cross. She remembered His anguish as He cried out of being forsaken, of being thirsty, of being finished. She remembered the sounds of sobbing echoed through the still air.

[Either quote or have a soloist sing the first three stanzas of "Were You There?"]

## III. Hear the Fury

As Mary Magdalene arrived where they had placed Jesus, she looked—and saw the unbelievable! The stone had been rolled away! The Lord had been taken! She furiously ran back to tell His disciples. All her grief focused in anger. She was outraged as she thought, Who could have taken him? How could they? Why would they? She burst into the room and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:2, RSV).

She was shaking with fury, as the disciples looked at her with disbelief. Then they started running to the tomb. They went, they saw, and they returned to their homes. Mary couldn't believe it. Return to their homes? Weren't they going to do anything? Weren't they going to get the Lord back? She stood outside the tomb, weeping. Weeping at her loss, her grief, her fury, her powerlessness, weeping that even her right to bury a friend had been stolen away.

## IV. See the Light

As Mary Magdalene stood weeping, she bent over to look in the tomb. Two angels were sitting there, and they asked, "Why are you weeping?" (v. 13, RSV). In her grief, she disregarded their appearance. What do angels matter, if Jesus has been taken away? She turned away, and the "gardener" said, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" (v. 15, RSV). In her grief, fury, and panic she held on to Him and cried for Him to give her back her Jesus: "Give back my beloved Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Mary" (v. 16, RSV).

In that moment, her pain melted away. Darkness was gone. Her grief turned to joy. Her anger turned to sweet release. Her panic gave way to unsurpassing peace.

## V. Make the Application

In the midst of our pain, sorrow, anger, fury, and panic, we too must answer the question, "Why are you

weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Are our tears blinding us from the face of Jesus? Is a deep chasm of grief and fury blinding us to the presence of our risen Lord? Have we stopped looking or are we looking in the wrong places for the missing Christ? Can we hear the risen Lord calling our name this morning? What separates us from knowing the presence of Christ?

In the midst of Mary's confusion, she continued seeking. She did not return to her home. She did not swallow her grief and continue on with her life. Mary wept, she fought, she sought, and she was found. She had the great honor of being the first of Jesus' followers to witness the resurrected Lord. She was the first to receive the good news of great joy, that all is not lost, all is not gone. Her Jesus was not dead; He is alive!!!

There is hope for those who mourn and help for those who seek. Jesus calls our names. The loving Shepherd, the risen Christ calls your name. Recognize His voice filled with compassion, forgiveness, and mercy calling your name. May each of us find our grief replaced with joy, our anger replaced with sweet release, our panic with unsurpassing peace.

**VI. Respond to the Invitation**

Like Mary we enter into a new relationship with our Lord and Savior. Jesus is more than a beloved friend, teacher, or leader who has returned from missing in action! Jesus died that we may know in the fullest sense God's love for us. Easter does not return Mary or the disciples to their past relationships. They do not pick up their lives as if Holy Week did not happen. Easter morning dawns on a new future.

God intervenes in the lives of His people. He is the Blessed One who has come, lived, died, and rose again that we might know new life. Before the resurrection of Jesus the curtain of the Temple was torn in two. The holy of holies was opened so that all may have access to God.

Jesus is asking, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Jesus lovingly calls us from our grief, our anger, our panic. Let us hear Jesus' words of love.

**CONCLUSION:**

Mary Magdalene returns to Jesus' disciples. She entered their door a totally different woman than they had known before. She proclaims the Easter message, "I have seen the Lord" (v. 18, RSV). Then she shared with them all that Jesus had told her.

[Sing or quote the last stanza of "Were You There?"]

May you share Mary's testimony this morning: "I have

seen the Lord!" Jesus has risen. Jesus calls our names. By faith we can rejoice, "I have seen the Lord!"

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Hymn	"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Children's Special	"He Has Risen"
Choruses	"This Is the Day"
	"Jesus Is Lord"
	"He Is Lord"
	"Because He Lives"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Christ Arose"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Special Music	
Scripture	John 20:1-18
Sermon	"EASTER CELEBRATION"
Hymn	"He Lives!"
Benediction	

**Creative Worship Ideas**

**Call to Worship**

Leader: Christ is risen!

People: The Lord is risen indeed!

Leader: Glory and honor, dominion and power be to God for ever and ever.

People: Christ is risen!

Unison: Alleluia!

**Holy Week**

I think it is important that Holy Week be celebrated by the church. Find ways as a local church and in ecumenical gatherings to worship on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. The Easter celebration is more meaningful when we have traveled the last days of Jesus rather than skipping from Palm Sunday to Easter. I have found a book titled *Handbook of the Christian Year* to be extremely helpful in planning these services:

Hoyt Hickman, Don Saliers, Laurence Stookey, and James White, *Handbook of the Christian Year* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) (PA068-716-575X, \$18.95).

# THE PEACE OF JESUS

by Mary Rearick Paul

John 20:19-31

April 10, 1994

## INTRO:

Have you ever had one of those weeks when everything goes wrong? Sometimes everything seems to get out of control. Whatever you say is taken in the worst possible way. Whatever you touch falls apart. Whatever you do backfires. If you go, you should have stopped. If you talked, you should have kept quiet. If you sit down, the chair breaks.

Please tell me that I'm not the only one who has these kinds of weeks.

Multiply one of those weeks by 100, and we get closer to the state of mind of Jesus' disciples in John 20. People hailed Jesus as King, but He claimed to be a servant. The disciples talked about who is the greatest, but Jesus insisted that the greatest is the least. The disciples claimed victory, but they felt the sting of defeat. They insisted that they would follow Jesus anywhere, but they forsook Him. They taught that Jesus brought life, but Jesus was dead. After a week like that, what do you think you would do?

## I. Personal Chaos Is a Challenge

The disciples did what most of us do when we are faced with defeat. We go home and hide. We find the most comfortable place in the house, pull up a blanket, and refuse to come out until something has changed. In John 20, the disciples are hiding, huddled together, trying to come to some understanding of what has occurred.

Even in hiding, they cannot escape the chaos. The chaos is within them as much as in the world around them. When chaos rules inside and outside, fear can be overwhelming. The disciples locked the doors, hoping to secure peace of mind.

## II. Jesus Enters the Chaos

It is amazing how grief brings us together. A wide spectrum of Jesus' followers gathered in this house—the apostles, the faithful women, children, others who had been touched by Jesus. Perhaps they all silently felt the grief and rage and panic. Some cried softly; some sobbed with great wailing. The shock of Jesus' death stunned them. They shook their heads at the strange reports that Mary Magdalene had brought.

Into this chaos, Jesus came and stood among them. He wasn't stopped by the locked doors. He wasn't stopped by the emotional chaos. He wasn't stopped by fear or confusion. Jesus stood in the middle of their chaos. He stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you" (v. 26, RSV).

## III. Jesus Brought Inward Peace

"Peace be with you" was a common greeting for that time, yet it had a profound meaning on this particular day. It was profound because Jesus the resurrected Christ

said it. Jesus spoke these words to shaky disciples. As He spoke these words, something had changed. Threatening forces were still outside those walls. Chaos still ruled in their world. But something changed. "Peace be with you." This peace is not dependent on outward circumstances. This peace speaks to the inward life of the people. At the sight of Jesus and the hearing of His words, the inward chaos and warring was no more. This peace is like the stillness found in the eye of the storm. This peace says, "Where Jesus is present, all is at rest." This peace our world cannot understand.

**ILLUS.** An elderly man's testimony spoke of peace. As an Afro-American, he had lived his entire life in a racist community. For survival, he learned that there were times and places to speak or to be quiet. His son could not always understand his choices.

One day his son asked him how he could be quiet during certain painful episodes. The man first explained his wisdom. As a father, he knew who the dangerous people were that would kill his child if given any "excuse."

He also explained that in those times of degradation he held on to the knowledge that he was a child of God. He knew who he was in Christ Jesus, no matter what other voices may say. He had an inward peace in the face of outside chaos.

## IV. Accept the Peace Jesus Offers

There seems to be a little hesitation in the disciples to accept this peace. When overcome by chaos, the inner warring and conflict, Jesus' offer of peace seems to be an impossible illusion. We ask Him who offers peace, "Are You for real?" "Is Jesus' peace real?" Or are we deluding ourselves? Jesus comes and stands in our midst, in the middle of the confusion, chaos, and conflict, and shows us His wounded hands and riven side. He says, "I am real."

Jesus' post-Resurrection appearance proclaims His reality for us today. This Jesus knows confusion, chaos, war, and death; but He has conquered and stands in our midst, saying, "Peace be with you." Whatever we may be personally facing, whatever community havoc we are dealing with, Jesus offers a peace that does pass all understanding. Accept His offer and join the disciples in rejoicing.

## V. We Can Have Personal Peace for World Chaos

Obviously this peace is not simply for the personal well-being of believers. The peace comes with a commissioning. Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (v. 21, RSV). Jesus sends His disciples forth. The Church represents the presence of Jesus in the midst of the people. The Church is called to be Christ's Body—the mouth proclaiming peace, the hands doing the work,

the body being the visible presence. We are called to represent the presence of Jesus in the midst of chaos.

To the Church Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22, RSV), and He sends us out to proclaim reconciliation. We are given the responsibility of shining light where there is darkness, of giving hope where there is despair, of offering peace where there is chaos. Our calling is founded on the presence of peace through Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

**ILLUS.** During the recent Los Angeles riots, one of the most poignant images was that of a lone minister. He wandered through the streets in the height of danger, praying with the fearful, touching the hurt, being the very presence of peace. He represented the very presence of Jesus in the midst of that awful chaos.

## V. The Doubters Can Find Peace Too

"But Thomas" (v. 24, NRSV)—that portrays him well. He was left out of the amazing revelation of the risen Lord. Are there some of you here this morning who feel like Thomas? For some reason, Thomas had gone off alone. But when he came back, the mood had suddenly shifted. The mourning group whom he had left behind were now celebrating. Like Mary they were telling him that they had seen the Lord! Thomas was probably thinking that it was time to unlock the doors and let a little fresh air into the house.

Thomas had not experienced the presence of Christ in the midst of his chaos. He remained in his grief and confusion. His confusion had only increased in the light of the changed attitudes of his friends. The Scriptures tell us that this all changed in a week's time! But what a long week that must have been. Thomas stubbornly disregarded the testimony of his friends. Thomas was racked with inward and outward chaos.

A week later they were all in the house again. The doors were shut, though not locked. Again Jesus came and stood in their midst. Again He offered the greeting of peace. This time Thomas was there. Thomas's whole perspective shifted as he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28, RSV).

## CONCLUSION:

If our doors are locked or simply shut, Jesus is in our midst proclaiming peace. If we are overwhelmed with the chaos of the world's situations or overcome with our personal crises, Jesus still offers His peace that passes understanding. We need only to open our eyes of faith and see. Reach out to Jesus—touch and believe!

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	
	"Song of Good News"
	"Greater Is He That Is in Me"
	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
	"Come, Holy Spirit"

Prayer Chorus	"Spirit of the Living God"
Open Altar	
Hymn	"The Solid Rock"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"
Special Music	
Scripture	John 20:19-31
Sermon	"THE PEACE OF JESUS"
Closing Chorus	"Open Our Eyes"
Benediction	

## Creative Worship Ideas

### Call to Worship

(1 John 1:1-4, NRSV)

**Leader:** We declare to you what was from the beginning,

**People:** What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

**Leader:** This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.

**People:** We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

**Unison:** We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.



"I'm afraid you're riddled with righteous indignation."

# A PLACE OF REST

by Mary Rearick Paul

by Luke 24:30-48

April 17, 1994

## INTRO:

A growing number of articles in newspapers and magazines have appeared about the need for rest. Statistics suggest that we people of the '90s are not getting enough rest. If people are not complaining about the need for more physical rest, they certainly have need for emotional rest. Who hasn't felt overwhelmed and emotionally raw and cried out for a place of peace? Included in rest is the need for spiritual rest. Where is the place of *shalom* in our lives? Where and how do we feel right with our world, with ourselves, and with God? Where do we find complete rest?

## I. Destructive Places and Ways People Find Rest

We see the destructive ways that people seek for rest. The prevalence of alcoholism reveals one such path. Perhaps the recent growth of the New Age movement is a reflection of this search for rest. People realize that when the busyness of life fades, when running after our wants and desires slows, a small voice within speaks. The voice exposes our need for this *shalom* (peace). The New Age movement has garnished some of the good things from traditional Christian disciplines such as silence, meditation, listening, and even reordering priorities. But it has missed out on real *shalom*. Followers of the New Age movement miss out on what is offered by and through Jesus Christ—redemption, reconciliation, assurance, rest.

**ILLUS.** A certain man totally exasperates his family. They said that they have tried everything—loving, confronting, intervening, threatening—but his drinking goes on. Obviously this man is on the verge of losing everything, yet he keeps drinking.

Certainly we understand alcoholism as a sickness with many causal factors. However, when you speak with those who have drinking problems, their description of its attraction reveals the empty search for rest. They talk about the deadening of emotions, a general sense of well-being, a sense of happiness and guiltlessness. It sounds as though they have found a place of rest (albeit ever so temporary).

## II. Touching and Seeing Jesus

The only way we experience redemption, reconciliation, and assurance is to experience what the disciples did in Luke 24.

As we review the story of Jesus' appearance to the disciples, we see some very interesting parallels to our own lives. First, Jesus enters into their midst and proclaims, "Peace be unto you" (v. 36, KJV). Sometimes, when we hear these words of peace, we think that we should be instantly filled with a sense of well-being and rest. Instead we see that Jesus' disciples were startled and terrified, as though they were seeing a ghost. Those were not exactly restful reactions. Yet Jesus' words to the disciples do

seem especially poignant for most of us. Jesus said, "Why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see" (vv. 38-39, RSV).

Over the Lenten season and into Holy Week, we have spent time remembering Jesus' journey. By faith we have looked at the hands and feet of Jesus. But, to touch and see demands more than a passive observance. Touching and seeing demands an active response. Do we sense the presence of Jesus? We do not seek a temporary sedation from alcohol or a trick of meditation. We seek to know and experience the presence of Jesus Christ. We accept Jesus as our Savior, confessing our sins, accepting His forgiveness, and know His full salvation. In this touching and seeing, we begin to know and apply the promises of God.

## III. Faith in the Midst of Doubts

Even with touching and seeing Jesus, the disciples did not experience total rest. They still harbored some disbelief and wonder in the midst of their joy. If you find yourself struggling with joy tempered by disbelief, do not despair. There will come challenges that raise questions about the presence of Jesus Christ in our world.

Jesus does not chastise us for our mixed emotions. They are to be expected, for doubt is part of the reach of faith. Jesus knows the circumstances that bring these doubts upon us. Knowing His disciples were filled with mixed emotions, Jesus stood before them fully resurrected and proclaiming peace. How does Jesus respond to their confusion? He doesn't tell them to "stop it." He doesn't mock their feelings. He simply asks for something to eat. As Jesus bit into His fish, the very act of eating before their unbelieving eyes establishes the reality of His presence. Each bite, each chew, each swallow chips away at their doubts.

## IV. The Wonder of a Christ Who Eats Fish

In a sense, Jesus still eats among us. How does He confirm His presence?

When we participate in the sacraments of the Church, Jesus is here. As we witness Christian baptism, His presence is made known. As we affirm our vows of entering into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He identifies with us.

As we participate in sharing Communion, Jesus is here among us. We sit at Jesus' feet as we take the bread that was broken for us, as we drink the cup of suffering that was given for us. Jesus stands among us here as we participate in these means of grace.

Jesus is here in the praises of God's people. When we gather as the children of God, share our testimonies, lift our voices in song, join in prayer, Jesus' presence is made known. As we proclaim Jesus Christ, our vision becomes clearer, and the more certain we become of His continu-

ing presence. Christ is here in this sanctuary, chipping away at our doubts.

Jesus is here in the ministry of His children. When in the name of Jesus, we hold a hand, wipe away a tear, offer our shoulders to lean on, share whatever we have, celebrate with a laugh or a hug, Jesus is known in a wonderful way. It has been said, "The only Jesus some people will ever see is the one they see in you." That is more than a cliché. The truth continues to hold true. We represent the bodily presence of Jesus, assuring others of His reality.

As we read from the Word of God, Jesus is here. He is here as we seek to do His will. Christ came among us to chip away at our doubts. Christ is very close today—right here.

**ILLUS.** There was a time when Christ's presence seemed almost unreal to me. There was a time when I felt little rest. I had been seeing things as a social worker that horrified me and caused questions of faith to arise. Nevertheless, I continued to maintain my Christian disciplines of worship, devotion, fellowship, etc. In those places, I began to sense and see the presence of Jesus. Sometimes through the eyes of another, I could glimpse Jesus in my world. In those growing glimpses, a rest returned to my spirit.

## CONCLUSION:

The more that we reach out to touch and see, the more we will know the presence of Christ. We need to grapple with our spiritual journey each day. The more that we expose ourselves to the places where we know the presence of Christ can be sensed, the more we will be assured of His ongoing presence in all areas of our lives. The more that we know Jesus' presence, the more we will know genuine rest.

The people of the '90s do need more rest. Almost everyone is aware of the need for physical and emotional rest. Let us remind each other to reach out for the spiritual rest that we can enjoy in the presence of Jesus.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	"Jesus Christ Is Alive" "In This Very Room" "Jesus, Name Above All Names" "Alpha and Omega"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Jesus, My Strength, My Hope"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Blessed Assurance"
Special Music	
Scripture	Luke 24:30-48
Sermon	"A PLACE OF REST"
Hymn	"Near to the Heart Of God"
Benediction	

## Creative Worship Ideas

### Call to Worship

(Ps. 4:1, 6-8, NRSV)

Leader: Answer me when I call, O God of my right!

People: You gave me room when I was in distress.

Leader: Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

People: There are many who say, "O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!"

Leader: You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

Unison: I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

### Open Altar

During the pastoral prayer emphasize the presence of Christ in the sanctuary. Offer moments of silence in your prayer to allow reflection on the fact that the resurrected Christ is present. Celebrate that all who would reach out and touch and see will know a new rest in Jesus' name.



## Pontius' Puddle





# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

by Mary Rearick Paul

John 10:11-18

April 24, 1994

## INTRO:

It is interesting that the image of shepherd continues to be meaningful, even though the majority of us have little, if any, direct experience with a shepherd. Despite our lack of experience with fields and pastures, or any of the realities of caring for sheep, we are continually soothed by the image of a good shepherd.

Perhaps the image of the shepherd is due to Psalm 23. This psalm with its promises of comfort, presence, strength, and hope has an overwhelming popularity with people. It is amazing how many people claim this passage as their favorite. It crosses denominational lines. Most of us seem to find a sense of peace when we hear those familiar words: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (v. 1, KJV).

## I. I Am the Good Shepherd

Jesus, in John 10, does more than retell Psalm 23. He uses the image of shepherd and gives it new implications. The Gospel of John is filled with "I am" statements. These statements proclaim Christ as Lord. Jesus makes such statements as "I am the bread of life" (6:35, RSV); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, RSV). For Jesus to say, "I am the good shepherd," means He is also saying, "I am the Lord."

Jesus' words would tell the original audience that He is identifying himself with their faith tradition's understanding of Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel. Jesus takes this common image and fills it with a new understanding in light of His life, as well as His coming death and resurrection.

By the strength of their reactions we realize that the original hearers of these words knew what Jesus was saying. Again a division arose among the Jews (v. 19). Some believed that Jesus had a demon. Others did not. While these words are soothing to our ears, they were disturbing when first heard.

## II. Jesus Had Some Disturbing News

In reality Jesus' words are an interesting mix of soothing and potentially disturbing messages. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but it is clear that there are false or bad shepherds. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus says that He as our Good Shepherd will inevitably do so. Jesus is our Shepherd, but He also says that He has other sheep that are going to be joining the fold. The challenge comes in receiving both the soothing and the disturbing messages and to hear what they might have to tell us.

## III. The Roles of the Good Shepherd

Jesus is our "good shepherd." This has manifold meaning. Jesus means that He is our Provider. A shepherd daily must provide sustenance, food, shelter, places of growth, and play.

Jesus is our Leader. The shepherd guides his sheep to places of nourishment and rest. The shepherd shows the best way. The shepherd leads them on their way home.

Jesus is our Protector. The shepherd will fight anything or anyone that threatens the life of his sheep—that means from natural disasters to the inward compulsions.

Jesus loves us. The shepherd loves his sheep. We sense a loving intimacy between the shepherd and his sheep. The shepherd knows each one by name. The shepherd knows the particular characteristics and needs of each of his sheep. Not one of the sheep is insignificant or unimportant. All of us are important to our Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The shepherd loves his sheep. How wonderful it is to know that we have a good shepherd who desires to provide, lead, protect, and love us.

Jesus spoke soothing words, yet we all know that God's provisions, leadership, protection, and love are not always given in ways that we understand. Questions of evil and justice arise in our minds. Yet Jesus' sheep continue to testify to the ways that God does love and provide, lead and protect even in monstrous situations. One of the powerful benefits of our missions program is the testimonies we hear from across the world.

**ILLUS.** I recently heard one voice raised from the country of Mozambique. The people of this land face real hardships. Their average life span is 45 years. They have an infant death rate of 147 per 1,000 births. Their average yearly salary is \$320 U.S. Yet one of our fellow Christians named Jerry Vincent Mbanze wrote a wonderful song of praise out of that bleakness. He sang beautiful words of praise for the joy that God has given him. In the midst of a painful life came a testimony that proclaims that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

## IV. Jesus Guards Us from the Bad Shepherds

Referring to Jesus as the Good Shepherd implies that there are other kinds of shepherds. The role of Protector also includes guarding us against those who would seek to destroy us. Jesus desires to keep us from traps of deception set by false shepherds.

Plenty of unscrupulous people would love to provide and lead and supposedly protect us. People out of a desire for personal gain or from personal dysfunction try to find ways to fill the place that only Jesus can truly fill. The horror of the Waco, Tex., disaster gives one more example that there are many false ways that a sheep can be led if it does not choose its shepherd well. Victims of this horror are often devout people, earnestly seeking a good shepherd.

## V. The Shepherd Lays Down His Life

The Jews who felt that Jesus was a demon should not be quickly dismissed. Their hesitancy came from a respectable amount of desire not to follow a false shepherd. Jesus' arrival as Messiah did not exactly fit what

they had imagined. They expected a conquering hero who would displace all the political, economic, and societal confusion with the reign of God. A humble Nazarene proclaiming himself Lord would create some hesitancy in most of us. But Jesus has shown us that He came with the ways of God. He did not come to conquer by swinging the sword and killing those who disagreed but by dying and rising and proclaiming God's love.

The ways of Jesus were not as instantaneous as the popular image of the conquering hero, but His salvation is more complete. His will be an everlasting victory.

On the other hand, the image of the Good Shepherd would prepare the way for Jesus' self-sacrifice. Shepherds commonly put their lives on the line to protect their sheep in the face of danger. To shepherd His people, Jesus laid down His life out of His love for His people. In response to His love, we trust and follow the Good Shepherd.

## VI. There Is One Flock

Jesus offers to be the Good Shepherd for all people. He says: "There will be one flock, one shepherd" (v. 16, NRSV). It is comforting to know that the Lord is my Shepherd. However, I do not have exclusive rights. Jesus came, lived, died, and rose again so that everyone might know His loving, protecting, guiding, providing presence. We cannot be true sheep of the Good Shepherd if we prevent others from joining His flock.

No person, no culture, no nation can insist that Jesus is for us alone. Exclusivity is not of God. We are all sheep in need of a shepherd. While it is comforting to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," the Lord is also your Shepherd and their Shepherd. I am simply one more sheep who has entered the fold in the name of Jesus Christ.

**ILLUS.** I was flicking through the television channels and came upon a talk show with people debating a new movie; the controversy stemmed from Jesus being portrayed as an Afro-American in the movie. People in the audience were outraged over this image for differing reasons. Then a word of truth came through when a minister spoke up. He said, "I have no idea what color Jesus Christ was. I really don't even know the likelihood or unlikelihood that He couldn't have been black. But, frankly, if this portrayal helps one person to hear the message of

Jesus Christ and encourages him to know that Jesus can be his Savior, then I have no problem with it."

## CONCLUSION:

The Good Shepherd invites us to enter into His fold. We have been invited to know His love, His provision, His protection, and His guidance. False shepherds call us to entice us to follow roads that lead only to darkness. Wait and listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. He seeks each one of us out and calls us to follow His leadership.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Greetings/Announcements	
Call to Worship	Psalm 23
Prayer	
Choruses	"We've Come into His House"
	"A Perfect Heart"
	"Bless His Holy Name"
	"The Lord Is My Shepherd"
	"Gentle Shepherd"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"My Savior's Love"
Community Welcome	
Children's Time	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Surely Goodness and Mercy"
Special Music	
Scripture	John 10:11-18
Sermon	"THE GOOD SHEPHERD"
Hymn	"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"
Benediction	

## Creative Worship Ideas

### Children's Time

Ask for some children to volunteer for an improvisational play. Assign them the roles of Shepherd, sheep, and several as the flock. Read the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 as they act out the parts. They may need some direction. The more props you have available, the more fun it will be for them. It can be done without any props. Incorporate the experience as a visual aid for your sermon.

# THE TRUE VINE

by Mary Rearick Paul

John 15:1-8

May 1, 1994

## INTRO:

When my parents moved into their new home, they had to tear down vines that had been permitted to grow wildly all over the outside of the house. The vines had nearly destroyed the siding. Whenever I hear the word "vine" in the Bible, I think of these kind of ivy vines. Those vines, while they look nice in certain settings, really have little redeeming quality to their existence. With this image in my mind, Jesus' proclamation of being the "true vine" (v. 1, RSV) did not have deep meaning for me. Jesus did not use the image of any ivy vine but the grapevine, which blessed the people to whom He was originally speaking.

## I. The Centrality of the Vine in the Life of the Community

The metaphor of the grapevine was important to early believers. The grapevine was central to the ancient community. The vine was a major provider of food, drink, and economics. When Jesus said, "I am the true vine" (v. 1, RSV), His message suggests that Jesus is essential to us.

## II. The Old Testament Background of the Vine as a Symbol

When early followers of Jesus heard this metaphor, they would instantly know how essential the vine was to life. They understood the image of the vine in Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout the Old Testament there are references to the vine: in the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. The image always refers to Israel as a vine in need of restoration. A vine had become corrupt and reckless and in need of gardening care.

For example, in Jeremiah the Lord says: "Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?" (2:21, RSV). When Jesus says, "I am the true vine," He stands in contrast to this wild, degenerate house of Israel that has consistently throughout the ages needed pruning, trimming, and caretaking.

## III. The Love and Care of the Gardener

Jesus says, "My Father is the vinegrower" (15:1, NRSV). He introduces us to a powerful image of God. God is the Gardener who prunes so that the fruit-bearing branches may bear more fruit. He also removes every branch with no fruit. The gardener also gathers, throws away, and burns the cast-off vines. Jesus used rather scathing language. Cutting off, removing, and certainly burning sound pretty harsh. What does this mean and how do we deal with our fears of removal?

It is helpful to realize that our Gardener is not a vindictive, crazy man with a flaying machete, chopping with glee. God is our Vine Grower who cares after His vine and all its branches. Pruning is performed to encourage fruition. A good gardener never hinders growth but al-

ways prunes in the right season at the right time. A good gardener recognizes seasons of rest, repair, and preparation. The good gardener doesn't seek to destroy but to cultivate, encourage, nourish, and enable to grow. Our Heavenly Father is the greatest of all gardeners. He gardens with a love that seeks the greatest good of all the branches. The Good Gardener provides a healthy, incorruptible Vine from which the branches enjoy life and do so abundantly.

## III. The Joy of Abiding in the Vine

In the gardener's care, God's love is expressed with the emphasis not on pruning or removing, which evokes fear, but on fruit bearing and Jesus' call to abide in Him. Jesus desires that His disciples will continue in close relationship with Him. He says, "Abide in me, and I in you" (v. 4, RSV). The word "abide" occurs 10 times in these first 11 verses (RSV). "Abide" describes Jesus' relationship to God, Jesus' relationship to His followers, and His followers' relationship to Him. As we learn the lessons of abiding, we begin to understand how essential Jesus the Vine is for abundant living.

"Abiding" suggests constant connection. When you abide in a home, it is your base of operation. Home is your place of renewal and rest. Home is the place from which you go forth to work and serve. Home is a place of love. To abide in Jesus is to make Him your home. Then you arrange your prayer, silence, fellowship, celebrations, work, and activities with Jesus in mind. You spend time reflecting on the words of Jesus.

A branch remains connected to the life-giving, life-sustaining vine. No branch is responsible for the life of the vine. The vine is the life-giving source. The gardener provides the healthy atmosphere for growth. The vine provides the nutrients for life. Branches don't strive and strain. The branch simply abides in the vine. Abide in Jesus, and you will live to bear fruit. Stay connected to the Source of Life, Jesus.

**ILLUS.** Astronauts know that their lives depend on staying connected to their shuttle. They are not going to be able to do anything of significance and live to tell about it unless they stay connected to their life source, the shuttle. They go out into space knowing that the shuttle isn't going to take off on them. It won't go around for a quick orbit and pick up the astronauts if they are still alive for the trip home. The astronauts depend on the shuttle to stay. They don't have to worry about its independent actions; they only need to stay connected.

## IV. What It Means for Us to Be a Branch

God's children are branches, called to bear fruit, experiencing times of pruning, called to dependency on the Vine. Therefore, we connect to each other through the Vine. We originate from the same place and receive our

sustenance from the same One. We depend on the care of our Gardener.

There are no greater or lesser branches. There's no pastor branch, president branch, or leader branch. We are simply branches of the Vine. Jesus is the Vine from which all branches originate. When you look at a grapevine, you can see the vine stem from which the branches grow. Jesus is our Stem. All the branches grow from the same vine stem, and all are cared for by the gardener.

**ILLUS.** We have entered into the season of yard watching. Do you do that? What makes you stop and admire? I have never heard anyone say, "Look at this branch. It is absolutely stunning!" None of us are awed by an outstanding branch. We are awed by a beautiful plant. The whole is eye-catching, not individual parts. Then the gardener gets the praise.

### CONCLUSION:

God will not abandon us. Jesus won't pull away from us. The Vine will not wither. Don't be concerned about God's relationship to us because His love and availability to us is never-ending. We, the branches, must simply stay connected to the Vine, Jesus. "Abide in me, and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches" (15:4-5, RSV). We find both a rest and a responsibility in Jesus' words: "Abide in me" rings throughout this passage. Jesus is saying, "Stay with Me. Stay connected. Feed from My nutrients. Receive the life I have to offer." With this request comes the promise, "I will abide in you." When we, the branches, stay connected to the Vine, our beauty will be eye-catching, and our Gardener will get the praise.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	Read Ps. 22:25-31 responsively
Prayer	
Choruses	"Brothers Come, Sisters Come"
	"I'm Just a Branch"
	"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"
	"His Name Is Wonderful"
	"Set My Spirit Free"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
Children's Chorus	"He Is the Vine"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"
Special Music	
Scripture	John 15:1-8
Sermon	"THE TRUE VINE"
Solo	"This Is My Body"
Communion	
Chorus	"Thank You, Lord"

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Children's Time

Have either a grapevine or a picture of one to show to the children. Talk about the importance of the vine for the people in biblical times. Have them sing the children's chorus "He Is the Vine," with the motions.

#### Communion

When preparing the congregation for Communion, work with the images of the scripture. Connect the receiving of the elements to the feeding on the Vine. Work with the image of the branches becoming one because of their connection to the Vine. Invite the congregation to receive the element reflectively, meditating or abiding in Christ, receiving new life, giving God glory.



"NOW THEN, FARNSWORTH, WHAT'S THIS NONSENSE ABOUT ME HAVING LOST TOUCH WITH THE CONGREGATION?"

# THE MOTHER EAGLE

by Mary Rearick Paul

Deut. 32:10-14

May 8, 1994

## INTRO:

Today is a special day for mothers. We celebrate the wonderful things that mothers have done for us. Usually we hear about the nurturing side of a mother's love. We talk about tears that have been wiped away, scrapes that have been kissed to make better, all the big and little ways we have experienced our mothers' love. Actually, a mother's love includes much more than the comforting hugs of early childhood. A mother's love includes many things not included in Hallmark greeting cards.

While today is Mother's Day, we have not gathered to glorify or exalt our mothers. We have come to worship God. With today's Scripture lesson, we can talk about our experiences with mothers in such a way that it illumines our worship of God. While the image of God as Father prevails in the Scriptures, there are images of God as Mother. There are the metaphors of birth and suckling throughout the Scriptures. There are images like a mother hen and a mother eagle.

## I. The Image of God as a Mother Eagle

The image of the mother eagle provides a description of God's provision for Jacob. Listen to the verbs of this passage: "sustained," "shielded," "cared," "guarded," "stirs," "hovers," "guided," "nursed" (all NRSV); "protected," "teaching" (both TEV); and undergirds. (See KJV.) Did any of these verbs catch your thoughts? Did any of them sound a little unusual in reference to mothering? What about "stirring"? That is not usually one of the attributes included in the usual Mother's Day poetry. If we have been healthfully raised, we have occasionally been stirred.

What do I mean by stirring? It is those times when we have been pushed out of our comfort zone. It is those times when our mothers helped us with a little gentle shove to take some steps into maturity. It is the times when it seems like God has pushed us into the deep end of the pool and said, "Swim!" While these times of stirring are important to our personal growth, we do not often give thanks for them. Why? Because we hate being stirred!

**ILLUS.** While my mother nurtured, comforted, kissed, and protected us, she also did a lot of stirring. When I was a little girl, I loved my training wheels. I went all over the neighborhood riding my two-wheel bicycle as long as those training wheels were attached.

After several attempts of encouraging me to go without training wheels, my mother decided to take them away. I was horrified. I didn't touch my bike for at least a week. While everyone else rode around the neighborhood, I stayed home because I didn't have my training wheels. Eventually the desire to ride my bike became stronger than my fear of riding without training wheels. I finally got out there and began to ride. After a few spills, I was well on my way to becoming the "official" rider of a two-wheel bicycle.

## II. Stirring, The Task of Good Mothering

Imagine little eaglets, snug in their nest, cuddled down, warm, full stomachs, getting ready for a midmorning snooze. All of a sudden, their beloved mother seems to have lost her mind. She starts stirring them up! She pecks and pokes and disturbs the peace of the nest.

Do these eaglets look up and say, "Thanks, Mom"?

No! They are terrified. They fight to stay in the nest. Perhaps they peck and poke back. General mayhem is caused by the stirring of their mother.

Have you ever gotten a good stir? At times, we go through major life circumstance stirrings. Sometimes all of our relationships are changing. With those changes come the reidentification of who we are and how we relate to others. These kinds of stirrings come at certain life stages: when you leave home, or get a job, or have children, or your children leave home, or you retire, or you face death. All of these stages create moments of stirrings in which we react much like the eaglets. We are terrified. We fight the changes. We peck and poke back.

There are also philosophical stirrings. These stirrings come within our minds. There are times when we are confronted with new information to assimilate. We have life experiences that we need to process. While we may desire to cling to our previous identification or set of beliefs, we have been stirred. We have no choice but to explore. Such stirrings can be the work of the Holy Spirit. Thoughts may unsettle you and speak of change. That inner voice pushes you out of those comfortable places of living and ways of thinking. Again, we may choose to fight the stirrings and hold on to the sides of our nest. But somewhere deep within is the acknowledgment that we have been stirred.

Some of these stirrings are simply a part of life. They are not necessarily sent to us from God, but His presence remains with us in the midst of them. Other stirrings are sent from God. God often calls, guides, and directs us with an occasional good stirring.

**ILLUS.** A couple of years ago I received a major stirring. One of my best friends was killed instantly in a boating accident. I returned from the funeral and said good-bye to a beloved uncle who was moving but who was also dying. A month later another close friend was diagnosed with cancer. It seemed as if death's shadow was my constant companion. I was stirred in every possible way. I didn't like it. I certainly didn't thank God for it, but I did know His presence throughout that time.

There have been times when I have felt God stirring my nest. When I made my last pastoral move, I was very happy in the church where I was serving as an associate pastor. The senior pastor couldn't have been more supportive. My ministry experience continued to be positive. We served a loving congregation. There was no reason to move.

Yet I continued to feel this sense of uneasiness. I didn't want to leave. I had all sorts of good reasons to stay. Finally, I spoke to our church leaders and the wheels began turning. Eventually, I was stirred right out of my very comfortable nest. The lessons, the growth, the opportunities of that move have been incredible.

### III. Learning to Fly Because of a Mother's Love

My natural timidity and shyness sometimes make me a ferocious nester. Generally I do not like to be stirred. What gives me strength to go with the disturbance is the image I have of God as the mother eagle.

The eagle stirs up her nest. She gets those little comfortable eaglets totally uncomfortable. She gets their lazy wings flapping. All the time, she hovers over them, ready to come when they are in need. If a little eaglet begins to falter, she spreads her wings, "whooshes" underneath him, and bears him up. The stirring of the mother eagle, like our God, is not some cruel outlet for her dark side. It is an expression of her love, encouraging growth. Listen to this passage from a book titled *The Love Exchange*:

Following several graceful passes in view of the eaglets, the mother perched again at the nest. Now with an aggressive approach, she nudged one of the young from the nest. Instantly it struggled to remain in the security of the nest only to find itself being brushed off the ledge. Plummeting through the air, the eaglet struggled to fly with little success, its untrained wings flapping vigorously while screeching for help. . . . The mother eagle watched with a calm calculating eye, while I nearly lost my footing as I strained within to catch the flailing eaglet. Just at that moment the eagle exhibited her maternal prowess by swooping down to catch the offspring lovingly on her great wing only moments before it would have been too late. She returned the eaglet to the nest so the others might experience the same lesson in flight. And they all experienced another lesson—a lesson in love.<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSION:

I hope that this lesson of love brings peace in the hearts of those who are being stirred at this time. I hope it will bring a renewed sense of abandon and will encourage each of us to try our wings when the stirrings come. I hope it brings the assurance of God who loves as a mother eagle, ready to act on our behalf with all those verbs: sustaining, shielding, caring, guarding, hovering, protect-

ing, teaching, undergirding, guiding, nursing, and even stirring.

So on this Mother's Day, we thank our mothers. We thank them for their nurture and care as well as their stirring. More importantly, I hope that we would reflect on God's mothering and find sweet rest in the lesson of love.

1. Margaret Therkelsen, *The Love Exchange: An Adventure in Prayer* (Wilmore, Ky.: Bristol Books, 1990), 24.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	"Thy Loving-kindness" "I Will Call upon the Lord" "Give Thanks" "Jesus Is Lord of All"
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"All Creatures of Our God and King"
Children's Time	
Community Greeting	
Tribute to Mothers	
Offering/Doxology	
Hymn	"O to Be like Thee"
Special Music	
Scripture	Deut. 32:10-14
Sermon	"THE MOTHER EAGLE"
Hymn	"My Wonderful Lord"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Children's Time

Read the children's book, *Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman (New York: Random House, 1960). Use it as an analogy of how we all search for God.

##### Tribute to Mothers

Ask the oldest and the youngest mother to share a few thoughts on motherhood.

##### Benediction

Tune: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

*God's love is like a mom's*

*Who cares, stirs and provides.*

*Dwell in God's nest and know this love*

*That teaches us to fly.*



# A DAY OF PROMISE

by Mary Rearick Paul  
Luke 24:46-53; Acts 1:1-11  
May 15, 1994

## INTRO:

Today is Ascension Sunday. According to the Scriptures, Jesus remained on earth for 40 days after His resurrection. He appeared, explained, and proclaimed that He had risen. Reconciliation to God through Christ would be available for all. Jesus reasserted His promise of a Comforter. Compared to the number of appearances Jesus must have made in those 40 days, we have very few accounts. As I read the accounts of the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension, it seems so fast. We get a picture of Jesus' love for His followers in the time that He spent among them. He explained what had happened and why He must go.

This must have been a difficult time for these early followers. They had moments of incredible faith and belief when they knelt as Thomas did and proclaimed Jesus as Lord! Perhaps they also had mundane times when they wondered if they were losing their minds. In the middle of their doubts, Jesus would appear, or they would hear another report of His appearance. Once again they would feel assured of the truth of their beliefs.

## I. Holding On to the Old Can Inhibit Receiving the New

Forty days, depending through what you are passing, can be incredibly short or painfully long. The time of Jesus' bodily presence came to an end. Luke describes Jesus' last appearance to His disciples. Jesus explained what had happened and what was going to happen. He blessed them and ascended to heaven.

There would be a mixture of emotions at that moment. The disciples were filled with great joy and worshiped the risen Christ. Do you wonder if they had a little fear for their future? In the Ascension account of Acts 1, two men in white robes came to assure Jesus' followers that He will someday return. Assurances usually come to counteract fear.

The Ascension is an incredible event. God's work is veiled from our fullest understanding. Whatever we perceive as good, we naturally want to stay the same and continue forever. Going 40 days with the disciples, we sense that they may have been willing to skip over this incredible event. But they would have missed the promise to have Christ's presence continue within.

Perhaps we would have chosen to continue the physical presence of Jesus Christ, enjoying His peace, His good news, His joy, His assurance instead of the unknown promise. The good in the disciples had to change so that the greater could come.

As I read of the Ascension, part of me would prefer the 40-day experience of Jesus. Occasionally, I wish Jesus would physically come into our gatherings, bolstering our wavering faith. Those natural feelings reflect that I don't fully comprehend God's work.

The ascension of Jesus is a mysterious event. We cele-

brate, but we have difficulty fully comprehending it. This unbelievable event requires a leap of faith. It is a difficult event that entails endings and beginnings.

**ILLUS.** Major events have a way of holding those two meanings at the same time. Recently, I attended a college graduation. I noticed that when the graduates were receiving their diplomas, all the graduates had big smiles and exuded joy. Yet afterward, I noticed those same faces contorted by sadness and tears. They were experiencing a moment of beginning and ending. They were glad to be finished with school. They were proud of all that they had achieved and were generally pleased with the promise of the future. Yet, this day also marked the end of their college experience. It marked the end of the certainties that surround college days. They shall head into a world where they face uncertainties of an unknown future.

## II. The Ascension Event as Both an Ending and Beginning

The Ascension is an ending and beginning event. It does bring to an end some very good things. It is the end of being able to see, talk with, walk with, cry with, and laugh with Jesus in flesh and blood. It is the end of seeing the manifestation of God, the incarnated God, in the midst of His people. This ending can bring sadness and melancholy.

The Ascension is also a beginning. It is the beginning of being linked to Jesus, who is forever independent of space and time. Jesus is present wherever we go. Our heavenly Friend walks and talks and laughs and cries with us. It is the beginning of a great joy as we grow in our knowledge of the Resurrection. We Easter people celebrate the blessings of the revealed and resurrected Christ. We also can apply the fulfillment of Jesus' promise: the coming of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us, comforts us and brings us peace.

**ILLUS.** Some things cannot begin until others end. Some friends told me about an event. They were preparing to leave home, as it was obvious that the arrival of their first child was imminent. They were excited and eager to meet their baby. As they walked through the door, they both paused and looked at each other for a moment. They realized that something precious was ending. The formative stage of their marriage, of focusing on each other, was at an end. They could not have the joy of a child without sacrificing the idea of just the two.

## III. A Time to Recognize and Celebrate God's Wisdom

The Ascension is a day of rejoicing. It prepares the way for the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus, who had so powerfully loved us, who died and rose again, now ascends so that His powerful life may continue to unfold in its fullness in a new life for all who look to Him in faith

and obedience. While Ascension Day may have an edge of sadness, it is a day of great celebration. Our wonderful Savior lived, obeyed, revealed, and glorified God. Jesus had accomplished His work of the Atonement so that all may know the forgiveness of sins. This Jesus conquered death and the powers of darkness, not to be some ethereal presence on earth, but to be our glorified King! This Jesus took 40 days to appear among His followers, banish their doubts, teach them the Scriptures, build them up, and call them to Jerusalem. This Jesus assured them that they would know the "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4, RSV; cf. Luke 24:49). They must await the Holy Spirit. Ascension is a day of celebration.

The apostle Paul underscores our celebration:

... remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (*Eph. 1:16-23, RSV*).

Paul caught a picture of the joyous meaning of the Ascension. Let us know this hope. Let us receive these riches, our glorious inheritance. Let us be the Body of Christ, filled with His fullness. Let us remember the promise that we read earlier in Acts: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth" (1:8, RSV).

## CONCLUSION:

The early followers were sent to Jerusalem to the Upper Room to await the promise. God's promise is the fullness of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, that enabled them to live the walk that Jesus has called them to walk. The Ascension is a wondrous event filled with great joy and blessing. The Ascension celebrates Jesus' work on earth and the completion of His mission. It celebrates the work of the Spirit to come. Jesus' ascension is directly

tied to the promise fulfilled at Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today we, like those early disciples, receive the blessing of Christ. In faith, we celebrate the ascension of Jesus in joyous worship!

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	Responsive Reading of Psalm 47
Prayer	
Choruses	"Clap Your Hands" "Let There Be Praise" "There Is a Redeemer"
Prayer Chorus	"Beautiful"
Open Altar	
Hymn	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Community Greeting	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Open My Eyes, That I May See"
Special Music	
Scripture	Luke 24:46-53; Acts 1:1-11
Sermon	"A DAY OF PROMISE"
Hymn	"Arise, My Soul, Arise"
Benediction	

### Creative Worship Order

#### Open Altar

Lead the congregation in a "bidding" prayer. You present an area of need and allow silence for the members of the congregation to name their concern. If you have not done this before, you may want to speak to a few leaders so that they can lead the way. An example of this is: "Lord, we lift to You the areas of our world that are suffering under famine, war, sickness, and strife. We bring these areas to You." Then a silent time allows the congregation to simply respond to those needs in their hearts.

#### Community Welcome

Encourage the congregation to exchange the traditional church greeting, "Peace be with you," and response, "And also with you," during the "Community Welcome" time.

#### Scripture

Have several of your more dramatic people involved in reading the scripture. Position them across the platform and encourage them to read it as if they were eyewitnesses to the ascension of Jesus.

# THE PENTECOSTAL POWER

by Mary Rearick Paul  
Acts 2:1-21; Rom. 8:22-27  
May 22, 1994

## INTRO:

We celebrate Pentecost Sunday this morning. Traditionally Pentecost was the 50th day after Passover. It was "the day of the first fruits" (Num. 28:26, RSV), marking the beginning of the barley harvest. How significant it is that Paul reminds us that we have received the "first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23, RSV). On this particular Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus, the promise of the Lord was fulfilled. The Church was formed as the people of God received the firstfruits, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The modern church has difficulty at times believing it has received these fruits. Today a sense of powerlessness does not reflect the reception of these fruits. Christians need to be reminded that our God is a mighty God, that our God fulfills His promises in Scripture. God has poured out the Holy Spirit that we may live victoriously. In Acts 2, is an incredibly dramatic event. Wind, fire, and proclamation are the main points of interest. What do these points tell us about what happened on the Day of Pentecost? Do these events tell us about what can happen in our hearts and in our church?

## I. The Holy Spirit Comes as a Wind

The Hebrew word for "spirit" and "wind" is *ruach*. Wind has been an important and consistent metaphor for the Spirit of God. In the "dry bones" passage of Ezekiel, we find these words: "Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (37:9, NRSV). This passage portrays the people of God—Israel—as a defeated, dejected people in need of God's renewal.

Do you feel any connection to this image? There are other places in the Scriptures where wind is synonymous with the Spirit. The hovering wind at the time of creation and the references to wind in the Nicodemus story are some other examples. So it is perfectly consistent to recognize that wind represents the coming of the Spirit of God.

Once again the gathered people of God could be aptly described as dry bones. This time it is the followers of Jesus Christ. In the Upper Room they gather in unity, obedient to the command of Jesus. Certainly they must be filled with concern over the mission assigned to them by Jesus. Then comes the rush of a mighty wind, so violent that it created a sound that filled the room. With the coming of the Spirit, the disciples received the firstfruits, enabling them to begin to know the newness in Christ Jesus.

**ILLUS.** Jack Hayford, in the book titled, *The Heart of Praise*, had this thought:

We were gathered for a retreat in a beautiful setting that impressed us all with God's power as expressed in creation. The wind was blowing through the trees,

and, recalling that the Hebrew word for wind also means "spirit," it seemed that the Spirit of God was telling us something about another creation. He seemed to be saying, "I want you to be equally impressed with the New Creation that I can bring about when you allow the wind of My Spirit to breathe through the branches of your lives."\*

## II. The Holy Spirit Comes as a Fire

Fire is also a powerful metaphor used for the Spirit of God. John the Baptist refers to fire when he says, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming . . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16, RSV). Fire also symbolized God's presence in the burning bush and at Mount Sinai. Fire proclaims God's presence as well as symbolizes His cleansing.

Fire consumes, fire purifies, fire cleanses away the impurities, so that only what is left behind is pure. We often sing of the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit. It is also important to remember that the work of the Holy Spirit is at times violent as well. Just as the wind turns things upside down, the fire burns through all the nonessentials of our lives. When we pray, "Create in me a pure heart" (Ps. 51:10), we are asking for the burning presence of God to cleanse away that which is not of God.

Fire not only purifies but also produces malleability. Many elements when heated become bendable and shapable. When the Spirit settled upon the Church in the Upper Room, they were reshaped into a new people.

**ILLUS.** It is an amazing thing to watch a glass-blower at work. The person raises the glass to the temperature level at which it is movable but not liquid. With their breath, their tools, and their skill, they create a work of art. Sometimes it may be a simple pitcher; other times it may be an ornate vase. The fire's power has formed a malleable substance by which the creator can make something beautiful.

## III. The Presence of the Wind and the Fire in the Church

Sometimes we hinder the work of the Holy Spirit because we do not want the wind-and-fire experience. We do not want God's fire to burn the nonessentials. We admit in our honest moments that we lack power. Yet we fear the coming of the Holy Spirit. Is it a control issue?

As long as we try to manipulate the wind and the fire, we inhibit the work of the Holy Spirit. Our indwelling Lord desires to create an empowered people to do His work. He desires to come with power and renew our dry bones.

The wind and fire, though violent, do not represent anger. The work of the Holy Spirit is the work of love. The Holy Spirit comes as a wind to refresh us, to renew our souls. The Holy Spirit comes as a fire to burn away all

that debilitates us. The wind and the fire come to allow the great Creator to re-create in us the image of God. He will help us become the persons and the churches that we were meant to be.

#### IV. The Results of the Wind and the Fire in the Church

The first action of the Spirit-filled disciples was to go out of the Upper Room to praise God and proclaim the good news of Jesus. The wind and the fire of God had gripped the fearful disciples shut up in the Upper Room and turned them into a bold, courageous people eager to tell the world that the Day of the Lord had come!

Before the Day of Pentecost, the disciples focused on their own survival. After the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they focused on the people of the world. They were filled with the Spirit and began to speak to others. Freed from all that had bound them, they were empowered to fulfill their calling from God. The good news of Jesus Christ was spilled out for all to hear.

The multiple languages reflect the universality of the Good News. It also speaks to us about our exclusive use of language. We may not have Parthians, Medes, and Elamites on our streets, but we do have a growing amount of diversity to which we must respond. We do have people on the streets of our towns and cities to whom we must find ways to communicate God's love. Our communities need to be shocked until the people ask, "How is it that these Christians are communicating to me and to you and those people over there?"

#### CONCLUSION:

Sometimes we try to imitate the actions of the Early Church. We want to have the boldness of Peter as he addressed the crowd. We long for 3,000 converts to fill our churches. We desire to be a humble people who share all they have with each other. We want to arrive at point B without having stopped at point A.

We cannot have the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23, RSV) without being filled with the Spirit. Oh, may we ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit! May the nonessentials be burned away! May we be created in God's image! May we be the Church triumphant! For the prophe-

cy has been spoken: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit" (Acts 2:17-18, RSV).

\*Jack Hayford, *The Heart of Praise* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1992), 117.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	<p>"This Is the Day"</p> <p>"Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"</p> <p>"Create in Me a Pure Heart"</p> <p>"Come, Holy Spirit"</p> <p>"Spirit of the Living God"</p>
Prayer Chorus	
Scripture	Rom. 8:22-27
Open Altar	
Hymn	"Holiness unto the Lord"
Community Welcome	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"
Special Music	
Scripture	Acts 2:1-21
Sermon	"THE PENTECOSTAL POWER"
Hymn	"Pentecostal Power"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Scripture

Have two people read the passage from Acts. Have one read the narration and the other read Peter's address.

##### Benediction

"To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21, TEV).

# WHERE DOES GOD LIVE?

by Mary Rearick Paul

Eph. 1:16-23

May 29, 1994

## INTRO:

One writer referred to the message of Ephesians as the "outworking of holy love in the inner life of the church."<sup>1</sup> That phrase can be fairly meaningless unless it is unpacked and applied to our lives. So in Ephesians let us see what this phrase can mean.

We begin to get a picture of this message in Eph. 1:3-14. Paul writes a hymn of praise. This hymn expresses praises to God for what He has done for us out of His holy love. We praise God for the spiritual blessings given to those who would believe. The words of the hymn celebrate what we find new in Jesus Christ. Paul leads the people of Ephesus in praise for the inward gift that is offered in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul talks about the gift of "redemption." Redemption is the spiritual blessing that has reached a new stage in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This passage unfolds redemption to us in three ways.

## I. God Is Praised for Predestination

We shy away from the word *predestination* in the Wesleyan tradition. Yet we cannot read this passage without understanding that it has a biblical basis. To speak of election or predestination points out that redemption begins with God. God's call and God's initiative makes it possible for us to know redemption. Our repentance does not save us. Our faith does not save us. God saves us through His gracious call. Predestination does not mean that God exclusively chooses some to be saved while others are not. It also does not mean that God's call is effective whether or not the people respond. God's call extends to everyone. Everyone who responds to that call may be saved.

**ILLUS.** It is like throwing a big party and inviting everybody in your neighborhood—all have been called, but only those who respond and come will actually participate in the party. The host or hostess has invited everyone and therefore has "chosen" or "predestined" or "elected" that all would attend the party to enjoy the food and fun offered. However, only those who actually respond in word and action will eat the food and enjoy the fun.

## II. God Is Praised for the Gift of Adoption

Each of us has been chosen and called to know God as our loving Parent. A special relationship of love, strength, nurture, and comfort is offered to us.

In a Bible study a while ago, we were discussing the image of God as our Father. Some shared that their experiences with their own fathers made this image difficult to accept. One woman spoke up and said, "When I was a little girl, I was devastated when my father ran off, never to return. Yet I have found comfort in the image of God as Father because God is the Father who does not run

off, who is faithful, loving, and always present." We are each offered an adoption by a God who loves us for always. Adoption is offered to each of us that we might know the wonders of being a member of the family of God. As with all families, we will become recognizable as one of God's children.

**ILLUS.** Families are recognizable by their characteristics. In many families similar facial features get passed from one generation to the next. At the very least, there are shared perspectives, experiences, and language.

My husband's grandmother has many phrases. One of them is, "That's the main thing." It is humorous how many times the rest of us catch ourselves saying this "family phrase."

In God's family, there are characteristics as well. We share common phrases and experiences. Mostly we have the common foundation, that is Jesus Christ, and common attitudes such as love, forgiveness, patience, kindness, seeker of justice and peace. We are each called to know the wonders and gifts and privileges and responsibilities of being God's child.

## III. God Is Praised for the Gift of an Inheritance

God's redemption comes with not only a loving call, an offer of adoption, but also an inheritance. Redemption originally implied the price paid to free a slave. Not only does God's redemption free us from our jails, but also as we receive our inheritance, we receive an empowerment to live as children of God.

**ILLUS.** Those who work with people who have been incarcerated have discovered that to simply free a person from jail almost guarantees that he will end up back in jail. A person who has been freed must be given the tools to live the life that is expected of him.

God not only frees us from slavery to sin but also gives us the tools that we might live for "the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14, RSV). God not only opens the prison doors but also gives us an unending inheritance upon which we can draw and live.

## IV. Paul Prays for the Church

Paul packs into this hymn of praise a foundational understanding of what God offers to each of us. We have heard within this passage the mighty works of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit as seen in predestination, adoption, and inheritance that is offered to each of us! Out of this praise of all that God has done, Paul breaks into prayer. He says to the church: "Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (1:15-16, RSV).

Paul goes on to tell the people of Ephesus that he prays for them to know the fullness of God's gifts. Paul

wants the people to know the hope to which God has called them! Paul wants the people to know the riches of the glorious inheritance that is offered.

Paul's prayer is that we do not settle for what we have received but to push on. God has more love, more power, more redemption, more to give us than we can imagine. What is the inheritance? The inheritance is that through the Holy Spirit we will know the immeasurable greatness of God's power as we talk, and walk, and live!

What power? Paul is clear that we are being offered the very same power that raised Christ from the dead, established Him in glory, and put all things under His dominion.

## V. Do We Know This Inheritance?

Has Paul's prayer been answered? It can be. Whatever we face—the obstacles, the struggles, the pains—God wants to give us the power to endure and overcome to be victorious! We are not called to live as defeated children of God. God will fill us with the love and power to give praise to His glory. Have we heard the call? Have we accepted the adoption? Have we accepted our inheritance? Are we marked with the characteristics of God, such as love, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and peace? Have we been set free? Have we been empowered to live as God has called us?

**ILLUS.** "A famous rabbi once surprised some learned men who were his guests by asking, 'Where does God live?'"

"They laughed at him: 'What are you saying? Surely the world is full of His glory!'"

"But he answered his own question: 'God lives where people admit Him.'"

"In Gerd Theissens's words, 'If we recognize that God is where we admit Him, then our question changes. In that case we no longer ask "Where is God? Where can God be experienced? Where do we encounter him?"'"

"But we notice that we are being asked, 'Where are you? Where do you admit God into your life? . . . Where do you make room for God?'" (*The Open Door: Variations on Biblical Themes* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 107).<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

Not one of us has received all that God has to offer each of us! Not one of us has exhausted His resources. If there is an area in our lives from which He seems absent, we must ask ourselves: Have we truly invited God in? Do we truly want His way? Not one of us has reached the pinnacle of our Christian living.

As the adopted children of God, we have received the firstfruits of what He has to offer. However, there is so

much more! So we ask the question of the rabbi: "Where does God live?"

The right answer: "God lives where people admit Him!"

1. H. Ray Dunning, ed., *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching: From Text to Sermon*, vol. 2 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1993), 338.
2. Stanley Purdum, ed., "Kingdom-L-I-K-E," *Homiletics* 5, no. 3, 17.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome/Announcements	
Call to Worship	
Prayer	
Choruses	<p>"Isn't He Wonderful"</p> <p>"Every Day with Jesus"</p> <p>"I've Got Peace like a River"</p> <p>"Spirit of the Living God"</p>
Prayer Chorus	
Open Altar	
Hymn	"I Will Sing of My Redeemer"
Community Welcome	
Children's Time	
Offering	Doxology
Hymn	"Jesus Is the Joy of Living"
Special Music	
Scripture	Eph. 1:16-23
Sermon	"WHERE DOES GOD LIVE?"
Closing Chorus	"Spirit of the Living God"
Benediction	
Postlude	

## Creative Worship Ideas

### Call to Worship

Leader: We have gathered together on this Lord's day,

People: To praise our God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Leader: We have gathered together in this sanctuary,

People: To confess our shortcomings, to be renewed by God's Spirit, to go forth in the knowledge of God's grace.

Leader: We have gathered together as the people of God,

People: To ask our questions, to share our burdens, to yield our lives, to rest in the palm of God's hand.

All: We have gathered. O God, meet us, mold us, fill us, use us!



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