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THE SEP

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1997

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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"...SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE..." Eph. 4:15

FASTING IN A WORLD
OF FAST FOOD

NIGHTMARE ON
OAK STREET

OVERCOMING AN
ABUSIVE PAST

*"And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness."*

Isa. 35:8



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Volume 73

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Number 1

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Be Honest with One Another

Situational ethics finds acceptability in a society that does not believe in moral absolutes. However, pastors must stand out in vivid contrast against the dark, prevailing moral climate. Pastors, preachers, staff ministers, ecclesiastical administrators, and missionaries must have impeccable honesty.

The apostle Paul insists, "Do not lie to each other" (Col. 3:9). Whether true or not, I have heard laypersons claim their pastors didn't tell the truth. The hint of dishonesty totally disrupts relationships within the church body. We who proclaim Jesus as Lord must be "squeaky clean" with impeccable honesty. God requires it!

Impeccable honesty demands that we never deliberately, consciously misrepresent the truth. Our people deserve for us to be stalwart contenders for truth in every arena of our lives. Our word should be our bond! Abraham Lincoln insisted, "If a man is going to be a liar, he had better have a good memory." If we pastors will keep faith with the truth, we don't have to remember what we said and we don't have to hide anything.

Students were once asked if a lie is ever justifiable. Most answers expressed fell into one of five categories: Yes, in business; yes, in politics; yes, to save a life; yes, in war; yes, if in behalf of a great cause. Some students thought the ability to lie well would be an asset. Honesty is the only way to survive in the Christian ministry. God never winks at people lying for Him or for His cause.

In Christian ministry, never twist the truth by exaggerating. That in-



by Randal E. Denny

Editor/pastor, Spokane, Washington

cludes ecclesiastical reports. Never exaggerate statistics, though we often get pressure to do so. Oscar Wilde noted, "There are three kinds of lies: ordinary lies, white lies, and statistics." Refuse to live on the wrong side of the facts!

One fellow admitted, "I've shed barrels of tears over my tendency to exaggerate."

In Christian ministry, never twist the truth by saying one thing and doing another. For example, any Christian minister who teaches the biblical truth of tithing must be above reproach in his or her own giving. Periodically I hear from people who insist their pastors and staff don't tithe—somehow they consider themselves exempt because they serve in ministry. (I have no way to verify the truth of the accusations. Yet I have a sense of how damaging even the perceptions of lacking honesty in tithing and giving can be.) If you preach it, practice it—so you can lead your people in the joy of stewardship.

In Christian ministry, speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Never

wield truth as a weapon to hurt, but to help.

In my earlier ministry, I remember once aiming at a few stubborn old goats—and I probably only wounded some tender lambs. A former pastor who attended the church and was my very good friend said to me, "Pastor, I think you preached today from frustration, not from inspiration." He hit the bull's-eye! I purposely have tried never to do that again. As Paul said, I really desire to speak "the truth in love." Honest truth can be received when spoken in love!

In Christian ministry, speak the truth with grace: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). Impeccable honesty is "seasoned with salt," meaning it speaks with purity of heart and without corruption. Speak honestly.

In Christian ministry, speak the truth in Jesus' name: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (3:17). If you can't say it or do it in Jesus' name and to God's glory, then don't say it or do it at all. Being honest with one another, we must only say what we could speak directly into the face of Jesus. We must only do what we could do with Jesus standing right in front of us. Let there be no gray shadows in our honesty—in committee meetings, in business meetings, in worship services, in counseling, and in private conversations—especially at home!

Impeccable honesty marks the true Christian. If we love one another, we will be honest with one another—after all, we are family!

Overcoming an Abusive Past

Bill was born in 1910, the son of an alcoholic father. He was one of six children. Bill's mom was heavy into the ideologies of the Christian Science religion. She actually became what authors today call a codependent: someone who actually participates in another person's addiction. She made excuses for her husband when he was too drunk to go to work. Bill grew up in what authors now call a dysfunctional family. Are you familiar with that word? Who thought up that word anyway? Do you remember when "maladjusted" was in style? Not now, *maladjusted* is out; *dysfunctional* is in! When I was a child growing up, we didn't know those fancy words. We were just messed up, big time!

Bill grew up and got married. He and his wife had a baby boy. But before that boy was three years old, Bill's wife died. Then Bill remarried. In the first year of that marriage, Bill and his second wife had a baby boy. But before that baby boy was even a year old, Bill's second wife died, leaving him less than 30 years of age with two boys.

Then Bill met Edith. She was born in 1922, 12 years younger than Bill. Edith had her own "baggage" from the past. She was her mom's first-born. But things didn't work in her parents' marriage. Her mom and dad split up. Although Edith's mom didn't want to do it, it seemed that her best option was to place Edith in an orphanage. Edith also had occasional visits to the home of an abusive aunt in a nearby city.

Later, Edith's mom remarried and had children from her second husband. Eventually Edith was reintroduced into her mom's household. Although she was the oldest of the children, she was an "outsider" and unwanted. She experienced verbal



by Norman Moore

*Itinerant evangelist;
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Vista, California*

abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and even sexual abuse from her stepdad from the age of 10 to 18. Bill and Edith got acquainted. And to Edith, Bill and his two boys seemed like a whole lot better deal than the abuse she was suffering in her home. So Bill and Edith got married. They did the only thing they knew how to do: to continue to live in a vulgar, violent, abusive, and dysfunctional family.

I am Bill and Edith's third child. I grew up in a vulgar, violent, dysfunctional family where there was physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.

How do you handle the negative effects of chronic abuse? Chronic abuse develops into "toxic shame." What in the world is "toxic shame"? Oh it's different from "healthy shame." Well, what's that? Healthy shame is when your conscience clicks in and says, "What you did was bad and wrong." Thank God for a built-in conscience. As crazy as this world is now, think what it would be like if we didn't have a God-given conscience to help retard wrong behavior! Healthy shame operated when as a child I stole a candy bar from the corner drugstore and my conscience said, "What you did was bad and wrong."

However, toxic shame doesn't say that what you did was bad and wrong, it says, "You are bad and wrong."

Toxic shame, having grown out of my years of abuse, left me with a very low self-image. If I was running for dog catcher, I wouldn't have voted for myself, even if I was the only one on the ballot.

Then at age 10, a layman from a small church in town knocked on our front door. He invited me to play softball on the church team. He promised that I could play my favorite position: first base! They were hurting for players. But there was a hook: "If you want to play on the team, you have to do your time in Sunday School." To me it seemed like a good trade; at least I got to get out of the house for a while.

On a Sunday morning this caring layman drove up to the curb at the side of our house and honked the horn on the old yellow bus (six cylinders, running on five on a good day). I jumped off the back porch steps, ran across the side yard, and climbed aboard the old bus. A few minutes later I was the new shy boy, staring at the floor in the junior boys class.

Well, on a hot summer night in 1958, during the second verse of "Softly and Tenderly," I stepped into the center aisle of that little church, walked forward, and received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. From that point, I grew spiritually. Although I had many stumblings and failures, I tried to serve God the best I could as a born-again, sanctified Christian.

But even though I was a Spirit-filled believer, I was dysfunctional and emotionally wounded from both past and ongoing abuse.

Chronic abuse can contribute to compulsive and addictive behavior

that is self-sabotaging. Have you ever known an alcoholic, a drug addict, or a chain smoker? Addictive behavior is an attempt to take an external stimulus to ease the pain of an internal problem. Have you ever heard of food addiction? That's just another way of taking an external stimulus to distract from internal discomfort. Have you ever stood in front of an open refrigerator door 10 minutes after dinner and asked yourself, "What in the world am I doing here?" I must admit that sometimes when I'm out "on the road" and return to my room after the evening service, I am nearly overwhelmed with an enormous urge to eat everything chocolate in the whole town! In a few towns, I think I almost succeeded!

Have you ever heard of *shopaholism*? Some people can't get through the day without going to the mall. The inner motivation goes something like: "I'm not sure what I'm looking for, but if I find it, it might give me a boost because I feel like a real zero. And it might even be on sale!" Both food addictions and shopaholism are further examples of taking an external stimulus to solve an internal pain.

Do you know what would be a mind-blowing statistic? How many American men are secretly addicted to pornography or other forms of sexual addiction. That's just another way of taking an external stimulus to distract from an unresolved internal pain.

Have you ever known a workaholic? The problem with this malady is that it is affirmed and reinforced by modern society. We have all heard a man described: "Boy, he sure is a hard worker." In many cases, the inner motivation is, "If I hit it hard, and succeed and make it to the top, then I'll finally get the approval from my dad or mom." A lot of American men are neglecting their wives and children, burning the candle at both ends, craving the approval of their parents. It's another manifestation of seeking an external stimulus to solve inner pain.

So, how do you handle the negative effects of chronic abuse? *Face it. Forgive it. And forge ahead!*

First, we need to face it.

We must quit living in denial. Whatever happened, happened. As embarrassing as it was, as smelly as it was,

as humiliating as it was, as wrong as it was, as much as it hurt: face it. The good news is that we don't have to face it alone! God is there with us. In Rom. 8:26-31, Paul writes some encouraging truth:

**Toxic shame
doesn't say that
what you did
was bad and
wrong; it says,
"You are bad
and wrong."**

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

These verses are very encouraging! At verse 26, Paul says: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for." The Spirit intercedes for us. That means He appeals to the Father on our behalf. Later, Rom. 8:34 says that Jesus "is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

The Holy Spirit is in us interceding for us. Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Father also interceding for us! So when we face the abuse of our

past, we don't have to face it alone! "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (v. 28). God takes even the most undesirable ingredients of our lives, stirs them into His divine recipe, and brings about something absolutely delicious. Remember verse 31: "If God is for us, who can be against us."

So how do we handle the negative effects of chronic abuse? First we must face it and quit living in denial. But let's realize that we don't have to face it alone. God is for us! Praise the Lord!

I've often wondered, "If God is love, why didn't He step in and stop the abuse?" I don't have all the answers, but part of the answer is that God has chosen not to interrupt the far- and full-reaching affects of the fall of Adam and Eve. When those two messed up in the Garden of Eden, they caused a whole lot of trouble for a whole lot of people. And if we were in the garden, we probably would have done the same thing.

Second, we must forgive it.

Once we face it, we must forgive it and realize that forgiveness is not a quick fix. It's a process. Paul writes: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32).

Here the Bible teaches us how to forgive: "Just as in Christ God forgave you." In the exact quantitative and qualitative way God wrote off our sins, we are to write off (forgive completely) the sins of others perpetrated against us.

But we have a problem here. We live in an impatient and impulsive age. We like fast food from a drive-up window. We like instant cash from a bank machine. And we like microwave popcorn. We like a quick fix. But forgiveness on our part is not a quick fix; it is a process. It's not a microwave oven deal; it is a slow simmer all day, Crock-Pot deal. But we have to start somewhere, sometime. Maybe a good place to start is to admit to yourself and to God that you really are angry for what happened.

Was there physical abuse? Was there verbal abuse? Was there emotional abuse? Was there sexual abuse?

Was there religious abuse? What's that? Any teaching or preaching that is unbiblical, either extremely conservative rigid legalism or extremely liberal worldliness constitutes religious abuse that results in a warped concept of God and His Word.

How do you handle the negative effects of chronic abuse? Face it. Quit living in denial. Then forgive it and understand that forgiveness is a gradual process. Maybe a good prayer for you would be, "God, I am now willing to become willing to forgive."

Do you have any idea how I felt as a junior high boy, trying to live a good Christian life, when I lied to my physical education coach? I said, "Coach, I can't suit up for gym today. I think I've got the flu." The truth was that I didn't want to put on gym shorts and a T-shirt where the guys in the locker room would see the stripes on my legs and back from the belt whipping I had received the night before.

The good news is that by God's grace, the Lord has led me all the way from an original position of white-hot anger to a current position of: "It's all forgiven; no hard feelings. They did the best they could, for who they were and where they were coming from." Forgiveness is a process.

Third, we must forge ahead.

But once we break through our denial, face the painful abuse of the past, and get forgiveness in process, we need to forge ahead! Paul writes:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (*Phil. 3:12-14*).

How do you handle the negative effects of chronic abuse? *Face it. Forgive it. And forge ahead!* We cannot afford to drop out of life and pout and feel sorry for ourselves and blame all of our problems on somebody else who hurt us in the past. We must take responsibility for our lives and for our behavior and for the consequences of our choices.

It is possible to "change lanes" and go around the wreckage of the past and watch the mess of the yesterdays shrink in your rearview mirror. You can get on down the road, enjoy victory, and becoming a blessing to others!

One of the benefits related to facing it, forgiving it, and forging ahead is that you can become a "wounded

Addictive
behavior
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problem.

healer." Having recovered from an abusive past, you can empathetically minister to others who are hurting. By listening and caring and loving and sharing, you can make a significant difference in many lives who need your help.

Are you the victim of past abuse? You can face it, forgive it, and forge ahead! Otherwise you may suffer from unnecessary negative results. To ignore the abuse of the past is like locking a half dozen hungry Doberman pinschers in your garage: sooner or later they will get out and bite you. And what is worse: "If you don't deal with it, you will pass it on."

I think the whole process is like pulling the plug in the bathtub. Have you ever watched the water leave the tub after you pulled the plug? The water doesn't all leave immediately. It slowly swirls and bubbles and gurgles until finally it is all gone.

That's the way it is in overcoming an abusive past. But sooner or later, you have to decide to pull the plug.

I conclude with these thoughts put in verse:

FACE IT, FORGIVE IT, AND FORGE AHEAD

by Norman Moore

*For some of us, in our past,
There's pain and much abuse.
The hurt is great and scars are deep,
And we wonder, "What's the use?"*

*As anger boils down deep inside
From suffering in our past,
Sometimes we react in harmful
ways,
Needing victory that will last.*

*We read and pray and seek advice,
Trying hard to cope.
"How do we handle our abusive
past?
Is there any hope?"*

*"Face it, forgive it, and forge ahead,"
His Spirit comes to say.
We can recover from old hurts
And enter a brand-new day!*

*To face the hurt and forgive the
wrongs*

*Is not an easy task.
But only then can we forge ahead
To real victory that will last.* ✠

A Gift of Life in the Face of Death

The young mother tenderly held her 16-week-old son and whispered softly to him: "Did you hear that? You're going to help another little boy get well." The child she held in her arms no longer lived. He had died as the result of a severe head injury. The baby had just come back from the surgery area. A medical team had carefully removed vital organs for transplant into other seriously ill children.

For several hours after being declared brain dead, the baby remained on life-support equipment. Doctors, nurses, chaplains, social workers, and a case worker from an organ donor organization worked through the numbing pain of the family's grief to arrive at this point.

The parents' ability to think through their pain and make such a



by Rick L. Williamson
*Chaplain, Alliant Health System,
Louisville, Kentucky*

gesture meant that other children would receive desperately needed new organs. They had decided that their child who could not live would bestow the gift of life upon other children. Though no miracle came to them, they chose to make miracles happen for others.

While the warmth of life faded from the body of this child, the donated liver was already on a flight to Philadelphia, the heart valves en route to New York, other organs to destinations yet being worked out. The liver recipient was a young boy who certainly would have died otherwise. When the mother heard that a young Philadelphia boy was the liver recipient, she uttered the poignant words to her still, small son, "You're going to help another little boy get well."

Are enough people helping others get well? Currently in the United States over 37,000 people are on waiting lists for vital organs, with someone new added every 30 minutes.¹ Apparently only a small percentage of the present U.S. population has been designated as potential donors. The to-

tal number of donors each year is far below the need.²

Why the lack of organ donors? Some people, in the trauma of losing a family member, simply cannot think of further medical intrusion into the body of their loved one and so decline to donate. Many families have never discussed their wishes about the matter. Without clear directives from loved ones, families are at times reluctant to grant permission.

Organ donation is also hampered by occasional inconsistency in informing families of their right to choose donation. Some people mistakenly think donation will add to their hospital bill. There is no charge to the donor family.

While many do not consent to donation, a number of individuals find in the prospect of organ donation a way to inject some sense, some meaning, into a nearly senseless scenario of loss. "If it can help someone else to live, then use whatever you can," seems to be their thinking. Parents, in the face of a child's death, are often especially interested in sparing other parents a similar grief. Such a gift both honors the deceased, in a sense extending his or her life, while affording a precious gift of life to another.

What is a Christian to think and do around the issue of organ donation? Organ and tissue donation is supported, either explicitly or in principle, by virtually all Judeo-Christian faith groups.³ Organ procurement/donation does not violate the collective conscience of the church. It need not violate the conscience of the individual believer.

We understand our bodies as a "temple of the Holy Spirit" and are admonished to "honor God" with our body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). But does this prevent Christians from being organ donors? Clearly, Paul was speaking to



practices of discipleship for the Christians while alive. Even if we extend the principle to how the body is treated upon death, it need not exclude anatomical gifts. Organ donation does not involve disfigurement. The body is handled respectfully, with care and tenderness. The possibility of an open casket and a traditional funeral remain unaffected by donation procedures.

Doesn't a deep commitment to reverence and support life argue for us to be among those who are willing to "lay down [our] life for [our] friends" (John 15:13) in the form of organ donation? Our consistent support of the yet-to-be-born child and opposition to euthanasia can be understood as, in principle, supporting life-affirming acts like organ donation.

In most states an individual can identify willingness to be an organ donor by signing the back of his or her driver's license or by filling out an organ donor card. Making our feelings known to family members, clergy, physicians, and attorneys can facilitate donation. Indicating our wish to be a donor in our will is another helpful way to ensure donation wishes are honored. Most hospitals can assist in contacting an area organ donor organization.⁴

When faced with the death of a loved one due to sudden, traumatic injury or illness, we can offer the chance for life to another of God's children. Our tragedy, which can never be undone, can become the occasion for answered prayer for another, helping a little boy or girl or mom or dad get well. In the face of death, we can bestow a gift of life. ✠

1. *Factsheet*, Kentucky Organ Donor Affiliates, 1994 information.

Up to 80 percent of the U.S. population express willingness to donate, however, only 15 percent have signed donor cards. Charles J. Dougherty, "Our Bodies, Our Families: The Family's Role in Organ Donation," *Second Opinion*, October 1993, 58.

3. Each sponsoring church of the *Preacher's Magazine* were consulted about this article. Most did not have a position statement on organ donation but supported the right of their members to follow their conscience in the matter. The following might fairly represent their remarks: "The Church of the Nazarene encourages its members who do not object personally to support donor/recipient anatomical organs through living wills and trusts. Further, we appeal for a morally and ethically fair distribution of organs to those qualified to receive them" (1993-97 *Manual*, paragraph 904.2).

4. For information contact the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations, 1250 24th St. N.W., Suite 280, Washington, DC 20037 (202-466-4353).

Saying Farewell to Your Church

by Ponder Gilliland

Bethany, Oklahoma

Editor's Note:

A peek into a wise pastor's ministerial ethics.

October 1, 1962

Members and Friends
First Church of the Nazarene
Torrance, California

All too soon we come to a time of parting. This coming Sunday will be my last Sunday as your pastor. And partings of happy people are never easy.

For only a brief two years you have called me "Pastor." This is my favorite of all titles. This title and fellowship has involved me with you in life's deepest relationships. And it has been good.

But this Sunday, all of this changes. Drastically. There is no way you can be taken from the hearts of Floy and me and our children—nor us, we hope, from yours.

After Sunday, I will no longer be your pastor. These wonderful privileges I have enjoyed as your pastor now pass to the Rev. Wallis Kornegay. You will enrich his life in these relationships as he will yours.

- He, not I, will minister to you God's Word.
- He, not I, will guide you when you need counsel.
- He, not I, will direct the planning and ministries of this church.

- He, not I, will dedicate your babies, marry your young, and comfort you in sorrow and grief.

I shall not return for any of these, nor will you ask me. You will always go to your new pastor. I will not be writing you—nor will Floy.

We are moving only a few miles away from you. This could be a problem, except for your respect for my own integrity and principles of ethics. None of you will follow me to Long Beach. Your place is in this church. If I have built and ministered well, you will continue to strengthen and support this church and your new pastor.

You will not (except perhaps on vacation) leave this good church to even visit our services in Long Beach.

I know you will understand this—and will realize that just as you now give your love and support to your new pastor, I must now turn all my attention, energies, and love to my new congregation.

And now, may our wonderful Lord, who does all things well, give you peace, vision, and energy for the great work He has for you to do in this church.

In great thanksgiving for your love,
Ponder Gilliland ✠

Transition Summit at Glen Eryie

Editor's Note:

This article came as a result of selected pastors meeting to discuss problems and solutions for pastors in transition.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of pastors are experiencing times of crisis in their personal lives and ministries resulting in life-changing transitions. One anguishing example illustrates some of the issues pastors face when in transition:

It was a "classic" story of the struggle for power and control in the local church. The forces at work remained behind the scenes for some time. When the conflict surfaced, it erupted with a vengeance. It occurred in the midst of the most productive two-year period of the church's history.

A church vote was called. The pastor did not receive the required two-thirds majority. The district superintendent gave the pastor the maximum 180 days to relocate. According to the pastor, this was the longest six months of their lives.

Their youngest daughter bore the brunt of much pain and anguish. Her daddy was "fired" at the end of her junior year in high school. She had attended that school district since the third grade and looked forward to graduating with her senior class. That would not be. Her dad finally accepted a pastorate that he believed God had provided for him. Yet his daughter felt hurt, angry, and frustrated with God, but even more so with "the system."

The circumstances of the move worked out so that she, her dad, and her small poodle traveled alone to the new church in order to get



by Wilbur Brannon

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her started in her new school. One member of the family flew. The others came later. Their trip was scheduled with an overnight stay, but they finally decided to make the 17-hour trip in one day.

"It is a trip I will never forget," the pastor confessed. He continued, "It is forever burned into my memory as it represents the pain that pastors' families must endure because of the profession of the father and husband."

They made the long trip in silence. The dad tried to converse. He attempted to get her to talk about her feelings, but to no avail. During that painful day of traveling, the pastor-in-transition had to admit that there wasn't 15 minutes of conversation with his daughter. The radio played and occasionally a cassette tape played. Other than that, only the continual, gentle sobbing of a 16-year-old daughter broke the silence—an experience neither will forget.

Thankfully, the daughter came through the crisis of change as a committed Christian. She has finished her freshman year at a Holiness college. Does the fact that she "came through it" justify the hurt and anguish that she and the rest of her family endured?

The sensitive pastor, still in process of healing, responds, "In my wildest thoughts, I cannot imagine that this event was even remotely related to what God wanted for me and my family—or for that church. If you ask whether or not God has used these events in our lives, I would say an unqualified "Yes!"

"However, for me," he concedes, "there has been a loss of innocence concerning 'my church.' I will never again be as trusting. . . . I will never again be as open. . . . I will never again expect 'my church' to take care of me as I had always been told it would: 'Pay your budgets, support the district, show some growth each year, and keep your character clean, and the church will take care of you.' I will never again be as 'innocent' as before."

Such stories cannot leave the sensitive church leader unmoved. Yet the above narrative is not unique. It identifies some common threads that run through all the stories of those who are suffering the trauma of being forced to move or feeling the need to move without a place to go.

A group of 10 pastors met to discuss the most salient issues they believe their denomination needs to address from their perspectives. The following observations and recommendations are submitted with a desire to be redemptive to those currently going through such times. These suggestions are for those who may go through such experiences themselves in the future or who will be working with such persons.

The group of concerned pastors centered their focus on the following areas with reference from the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*. Perhaps each Holiness denomination in

the *Preacher's Magazine* has similar issues in each of their denominations.

- I. Biblical Understandings
- II. Clarifying Spiritual Issues
- III. Lessons Learned
- IV. Planned Interventions
- V. Sabbaticals and Retooling
- VI. Standardization of Review Process

I. BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

A. The Role of the Pastor

1. *Manual* 401—"The perpetuity and efficiency of the Church of the Nazarene depend largely upon the spiritual qualifications, the character, and the manner of life of its ministers."

401.1—"The minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left" (2 Corinthians 6:6-7, NIV)."

B. The Rights of the Pastor

1. To be financially supported (1 Cor. 9; Phil. 4:10-14)
2. To be respected (Heb. 13:7, 17)
3. To be followed (Paul admonished "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" [1 Cor. 11:1].)
4. To be prayed for (1 Thess. 5:25; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:7)
5. To be treated kindly (Gal. 6:17; Rom. 16:17-20)
6. To be confronted personally in situations of disagreement or relational stress (Matt. 5:23-26; 18:15-20; James 1:26; 3:3-18)

C. The Character of the Relationship Between Pastor and Church

1. Partners in the gospel (Phil. 1:3-6)
2. Faithful brothers and sisters (Col. 1:2)
3. As parent/child (Gal. 4:19-20)

4. As field hands/field (1 Cor. 3:5-9)

5. As teacher/student (Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-2)

D. The Biblical Call to Relational Unity as an Expression of Authenticity

1. John 17:22-23
2. 1 Cor. 1:1-3
3. 1 Cor. 12:12-13
4. Eph. 2:13-22

II. CLARIFYING SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Recognize that all issues are not spiritual issues. Some are issues of personality, some are issues of leadership style, some of personal preferences. The ability to discern whether or not the issue is spiritual is important to develop.

In the quest for self-knowledge the pastor should be aware of the following:

- A. Spiritual directors, disinterested outsiders, and coaches can help bring a more realistic perspective.
- B. Listen carefully to those affected by the transitional process; meet them with no agenda other than to see the issue through their eyes.
- C. We need to recognize that those who disagree with us are not evil/carnal by nature of their disagreement with us. Every disagreement is not an indication of sinfulness.
- D. The nonanxious presence of the pastor calms chaos. (Cf. Edwin Friedman, *From Generation to Generation*.)
- E. Journaling can be an important tool in maintaining perspective.
- F. Follow the trail of anger as a trustworthy guide to personal sin or sin in others that needs to be confronted.
- G. Find a place of worship where you are fed and ministered to during this time of need.
- H. Give the Lord a good day's work. Trust Him for the rest.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

- A. It is important to recognize the truth about "political process." Avoid overspiritualizing. Use caution in suggesting, "God told me" or "God

said." Spiritual platitudes can thwart working through issues.

- B. It is important to have the courage to deal with spiritual issues. At times we are dealing with "principalities and powers." It is important to recognize the reality of spiritual warfare and develop the skills for dealing with it.
- C. As difficult as it is in the midst of crises, the importance of maintaining personal spiritual health cannot be overemphasized.
- D. Recall and draw on the reinforcement found in spiritual disciplines (e.g., reflective praying, journaling, spiritual retreats, etc.).
- E. Remember that we live ultimately under the authority of God. Do not allow people to have too much authority. Remember that God is in charge.
- E. Maintain a sense of humor.
- G. Find a support group and/or a trusted friend who can be trusted with confession.
- H. Remember that "who we are" is more important than "what we do." As difficult as it is when going through the crises, remember that our reactions have far greater consequences than the hurt inflicted. "What people say about me says nothing about who I am. What I say about other people says everything about me."
- I. Be a "Second Coming person," especially in ethical conduct. That is, seek to conduct life in a manner that reflects the desires one would have in eternity. As difficult as it is, seek to give the other person the best possible chance to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).
- J. Listen to the perspective offered by spouse, friends, and counselors.
- K. Gain perspective on yourself. Ministers need to recognize that they may not be as important as they think. Even personal failure will probably not result in the collapse of

the entire Kingdom! The minister must not take himself or herself too seriously!

- L. Gain perspective on one's leadership style as it relates to working with other people. Are there things that need changing? Are attitudes coming across pejoratively?

An increasing number of pastors are experiencing times of crisis in their personal lives and ministries resulting in life-changing transitions.

- M. Recognize the need for some people in the minister's life who know nothing about the church. A "reality check" should be taken from the outside world.

IV. PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

We are concerned about the hurt experienced by pastors' families, especially spouses and children. Situations where the pastor and members of the local church find themselves in disagreement/conflict that escalates into open hostility inflicts irreparable loss on the pastor, the pastor's family, and the church. In such situations, we recommend planned intervention with the objective of reconciliation between pastor and congregation.

We use the term *planned intervention* as used in sociological circles where an issue/problem/conflict is addressed in a holistic or systemic approach by persons with training and

experience in conflict resolution. This approach recognizes that conflicts between individuals often flow from problems with the organization as a whole. These problems need to be resolved or conflict will continue, although the players will change from time to time.

We recommend that . . .

- A. Districts provide for planned intervention using outside consultants where feasible. It may be best to move outside denominational circles.
- B. Lists be made of retreat locations to districts where pastors and their families can go for spiritual direction, counseling, and healing with district support in such critical situations.
- C. The ministry mentoring or internship used.
- D. Help be made available in securing a new ministry assignment when transition times occur.
- E. Where possible, a public service of reconciliation and affirmation be conducted.

V. SABBATICALS AND RETOOLING

- A. We recommend that financial structures be put in place that will provide financial support for pastors to take a sabbatical. In instances where sabbatical is not understood well, terms such as "study leave" or "leave" might be more descriptive. The group shared a strong feeling to have a minimum of three months once every five years, if possible, or one week for each year of ministry up to a maximum of four weeks. We further recommend that the issue of a sabbatical leave be discussed and agreed upon at the time of the pastor's employment by the church. The district superintendent should initiate such discussion at the time of review or call. We recommend that the pastor report back in an accountable fashion for his or her use of sabbatical leave.
- B. We recommend the collec-

tion of documents and agreements currently in existence dealing with sabbaticals/leaves from ministers such as Dr. Bill Birch, Dr. Russell Metcalfe, and Dr. Keith Wright as well as resources from other denominations that are available.

- C. We recommend that besides what is being recommended on districts, information and recommendations on the sabbatical leave program be disseminated through the Church Growth Research and Resource Center coordinators on Nazarene college campuses.
- D. We recommend the exploration of the possibility of establishing a program of extended pulpit exchange.

VI. STANDARDIZATION OF REVIEW PROCESS

- A. Develop a demonstration video to be shown at district assemblies and especially in local churches, in which the proper format for review process is modeled. It could provide a time for the reaffirmation of the bonding.
- B. Encourage local, district, and general leadership to reiterate that the purpose in establishing the current review process was affirmation of the relationship between pastor and church. The district superintendent was envisioned as being a part of the support system for the pastor. The review should be a church review and not simply a pastoral review.
- C. We recognize and affirm the importance of keeping in focus the need for laypeople to be given opportunity to express concerns and dissatisfactions they are feeling. A properly conducted review process affords these moments without being destructive.
- D. Introduce *Manual* or other denominational disciplines that will facilitate help for pastors.

Marks of Effective Preaching

2 Tim. 4:1-4

Timothy was the pastor at the church at Ephesus and apparently was struggling in his assignment. This was not the first time Timothy agonized over an appointment. His failure to quell an uprising in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17) caused Paul to turn to Titus to resolve the matter (2 Cor. 8:16-17).

The reasons for Timothy's inability to carry out an assignment were perhaps twofold: One, his natural disposition of timidity (2 Tim. 1:7). Acts 16:1 throws a flood of light on this subject. Two, Timothy was the product of a mixed marriage. He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Both nationalities being very proud and boastful, perhaps they held him in contempt. One thing is certain: Timothy's timid nature was of major concern to Paul. If Timothy allowed those feelings of inferiority to seat themselves in his psyche, his preaching would become ineffective. Intimidation of the preacher is one of Satan's most effective tools!

What Is Ineffective Preaching?

"Giving hearers what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear."

Two major concerns facing the modern preacher are (1) the temptation to acquiesce to hearer demands and (2) numbers at any cost that make us appear successful and acceptable (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

In 2 Tim. 4:2, Paul reminds Timothy of his responsibility to "Preach the Word."

What Should a Preacher Preach?

"Preach . . . the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2, KJV). The preaching that God bids His preachers to do must be first and foremost "sound"—free from any admixture of error (2 Tim. 4:3)! It is still the truth that sets people free (John 8:32). The preacher



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must preach the "Word"—the whole body of truth as revealed in the Bible (2 Tim. 4:2).

Effective Preaching According to 2 Tim. 4:2 Must Consist of Several Things

I. "*Rebuke*"—warning especially against error concerning the immortality of the soul! That saint and sinner alike will inherit eternal life is axiomatic (Dan. 12:2; Luke 16:25). The question is this: "What *quality of life* will we inherit?" Will it be a life of torment and the gnawing memory of what might have been (Luke 16:23-24)? Or will it be of peace, joy, and happiness bathed in the eternal presence of Jesus Christ (John 14:6)?

II. "*Reprove*"—conviction "being convicted by their own conscience" (John 8:9, KJV) when their sin came to light. Conviction has a threefold purpose:

(1) *Conviction produces guilt and shame for wrongdoing* (John 4:16-18).

(2) *Sin, once brought to light, produces repentance—a change in attitude, opinion, and lifestyle* (Luke 13:3).

(3) *A repentant heart leads to conversion*. "Be converted" (Acts 3:19)—to turn around and start going in the opposite direction.

"Pastor, I am a hypocrite," said the board member. "When my wife and I were married, I went to the altar because she wanted me to—not because I felt a need. I have been deceiving her, my church, and, worst of all, the Lord, for 15 years. I can no longer stand the guilt. My wife has served me with an ultimatum, get help or our marriage is history. Please help me."

The preacher spoke the truth. Conviction was heavy. He prayed, he repented, he turned around and started walking in the right direction.

III. "*Exhort*"—To implore the effective preacher must help his hearers understand that *their bodies were not included* in their redemption (Rom. 8:10). They will be redeemed in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50-52). What should they do with their bodies while here on earth? A paraphrase says: "I beg you, place your bodies, i.e., hands, eyes, feet, tongue, lips, minds, at God's disposal. As alive but under the spirit's control" (Rom. 12:1-2).

He posed a pathetic figure cowering in the shadows of the church steps. At 2 A.M. he had just paid a street whore five dollars for a "favor." "My wife is out of town," he said. "If she finds out what I have done, our marriage will be over."

"How long has this been going on? This kind of behavior did not develop overnight," said the pastor.

He answered, "Pastor, I grew up in the church, and this behavior began when I was a teenager. I know the hour is late—but can you help me?"

His preacher, with "long-suffering" (not quick to blame) but in truth and compassion preached the Word! Jesus came and set him free (John 8:36).

Today he is away at school preparing to become a preacher. May he be a preacher of the Word!

Forgotten Giant of the British Pulpit

London's Victorian Preaching Sensation

In Victorian London, the south bank of the Thames at Southwark was a dark, grungy locale in the world's largest city. In that dreary community stood a large, ornate, dilapidated Baptist chapel. New Park was famous in old Baptist history and had once been a prosperous congregation. It was in decline with its structure down-at-the-heels and in disrepair. In despair the church investigated and brought to the city an unlettered young preacher from rural Cambridgeshire. Within 12 months, New Park was revitalized, and for 40 years the young preacher dominated religious life in London.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon stood as a 19th-century phenomenon. The sensational Baptist boy-preacher did not fizzle out as a passing spiritual meteor. For years the unconventional and talented pulpiter had his Sunday sermons translated into 23 languages with 10 million distributed during his lifetime. His voluminous writings were equal to 27 volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Spurgeon became the supreme preacher in an age of preaching giants.

Of Dutch descent, Spurgeon came from a family of independent preachers in Essex. He converted to Jesus Christ in 1850 at age 16 when he wandered into a Primitive Methodist chapel in Colchester during a snow storm. The regular preacher could not be present so a layman took his place. The man endlessly repeated to his small congregation an Old Testament text from Isaiah: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22, KJV). After ten minutes he suddenly singled out Spurgeon and called, "Young man, you look very miserable." Lifting up his hands, he shouted with Primitive



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Methodist enthusiasm, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live."

Spurgeon heeded the exhortation and was baptized into the Baptist faith later that year in the River Lark. A year later he began work as a lay preacher near Cambridge. At 18, with no formal seminary training, he served as pastor to a small independent Baptist congregation at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. Two years later he accepted the call to London's New Park Baptist Church.

On December 18, 1853, the 20-year-old preacher stood in the New Park pulpit for the first time. The country rustic had a congregation of 80 who smiled at his giant cravat and rural mannerisms. However, Spurgeon's sermons soon began to attract overflow crowds and were published weekly, a practice that continued throughout his ministry with consistent success. In two years the church building was enlarged at a cost of 2,000 pounds sterling. Two years later Sunday night services were being held at Exeter Hall until the manager decided that he did not want his edifice renowned as Spurgeon's church. Anyway, at a capacity of 5,000, Exeter

Hall was too small. The congregation moved into the 12,000-seat Surrey Music Hall, a place renowned for its zoo and worldly entertainment. The young preacher became so popular that admission to services was by ticket with Metropolitan Police constables in attendance to control entry and the vast crowds inside.

A tragedy occurred at the music hall in October 1858 when someone in the audience screamed, "Fire!" The congregation stampeded. There were 7 deaths and 30 injuries. Because there was no fire, Spurgeon's flock thought that the incident was the work of pickpockets wanting to practice their trade in the confusion. Spurgeon felt devastated, and the media became critical. He recovered but always remembered that terrible evening.

New Park decided to erect a large new facility of their own to accommodate the crowds thronging to hear their preaching sensation. Sixty-two sets of drawings were submitted for the proposed facility, and the one chosen followed in the Grecian style. At the laying of the foundation, Spurgeon opined that "every Baptist place of worship should be Grecian and not Gothic." The style of the day had church architecture in the austere Gothic fashion. Spurgeon, who even despised being called "Reverend," felt that churches should appear as bright, cheerful edifices. Hence, he opposed melancholy Gothic architecture.

In 1861, when Spurgeon was 27, he and his congregation dedicated the magnificent new Metropolitan Tabernacle at Newington Butts near the celebrated Elephant and Castle public house. The preacher called his church building a tabernacle because "God's people are still in the wilder-

ness." He referred to the biblical chronicle of the Jewish nation, wandering in the Sinai wilderness for 40 years after their deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

Someone referred to the Baptist preacher as "the most hardworking man on the Surrey side of the Thames River." In person, however, he was not impressive. Charles Spurgeon was only 5 feet, 7 inches in height and inclined to being fat, giving a stodgy appearance. This homely physical appearance hid the dynamic Spurgeon. He had immense creative energy and his work extended beyond weekly pulpitering. Associated with Spurgeon's church was a preacher's college that opened in 1855 where hundreds of young men trained for the ministry. In 1867, Spurgeon also opened the Stockwell Orphanage, a boys' residence, that was said to be "all beauty and love." Stockwell Girls' Home opened in 1879. The Tabernacle also operated a London inner-city mission.

Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon was unmoved by the adulation of those who consistently thronged his services. His pulpit successes created no conceit. When he began to be lampooned by the press and criticized by fellow preachers ("kicked about as a football," as he put it), he was not unduly upset.

Those who thronged the tabernacle each week came expecting Spurgeon's Puritan theology and got it in spades. This "last of the Puritans" who "mouthed rolling periods, piling metaphor upon metaphor" was an unabashed Calvinist in his theology of total depravity and original sin. This insistence upon Calvinist belief caused controversy, but the preacher held to it. He also strengthened the cause of the religious dissenters and the purposes of the free churches in Britain. The free churches were those denominations and independent congregations outside of the state-controlled Church of England.

Spurgeon had a remarkable capacity to absorb the contents of theological journals and translate them into the language of the people in the pew. One contemporary said, "He took in the contents almost at a glance and his memory never failed him as to what he had read." The preacher had a personal library of

12,000 books and "he could have fetched almost any one of them in the dark." It was also claimed that Spurgeon could name, as he sat upon his platform, every one of his 5,000 regular church members.

While a serious preacher, Spurgeon did not hesitate to use humor. Spurgeon instinctively knew that the ordinary people understood truth best if it was presented in a comic manner. His appeal was greatest among the working and middle classes, and they flocked to his services.

The Baptist preacher was not profound, but neither was he a theological lightweight. He took his pulpitering seriously. He prepared assiduously for services that centered around his lengthy biblical expositions. Worship at the Metropolitan Tabernacle had no professional musicians. Spurgeon loathed choirs and anthems, so he had no church choir, organ, or soloists. A presenter led the hymn singing.

The preacher, though a Baptist, believed in open communication between churches. He selected a Congregationalist as the first tutor and later principal of his preacher's college.

Spurgeon's style of worship also excluded any public appeals for converts, which was becoming the evangelical mode. He distrusted statistics, public appeals for religious decisions, and the use of inquiry rooms for seekers. He believed that such practices led to spiritual superficiality. Spurgeon questioned the use of church statistics, remarking in an 1887 sermon, "Long ago I ceased to count heads." Spurgeon took issue with the popular American evangelists Moody and Sankey over their statistical publication of crowds and converts. He would have been astounded to hear Billy Sunday later boast vulgarly that his converts only cost two dollars a head. Considering the odious modern ecclesiastical trend toward statistics rather than individuals, Spurgeon's aversion seems prophetic.

The gentle family life of the preacher contrasted with his stern Calvinistic approach to religion yet was consistent with his public utterances. The Spurgeon of the pulpit was essentially the Spurgeon of the home parlor. When he was 22, the year of the Surrey Music Hall tragedy, Spur-

geon married Susannah Thompson and by all accounts they had a contented union. The couple had twin sons, Thomas and Charles, both of whom followed their father as Baptist clergymen.

It was inevitable that a public figure like Spurgeon would invite periodic controversy, especially because he was not averse to speaking out on public issues. Hyper-Calvinists criticized Spurgeon for deviation from Reform theology, but his unrelenting opposition to Methodist theology with its emphasis on human freewill and universal atonement also brought censure.

The brief Tractarian controversy of 1864 had a hurricane-like effect upon English religious life. Free church clergy were suspicious of the threatened intrusion of the state upon their church life. They became especially dubious of the Anglican Church trend toward baptismal regeneration. Spurgeon's sermon of June 5, 1864, on Tractarianism and the subsequent 350,000 copies in print sparked a multitude of replies, both from defenders and evangelicals offended by his refusal to differentiate between Catholics and Anglicans.

The final noteworthy controversy before Spurgeon's death was the downgrade dispute about the rise of biblical higher criticism in Protestant churches. Spurgeon felt that the decline in church attendance reflected clerical skepticism. He asked: "Have these advanced thinkers filled their own churches. Have they . . . prospered through discarding the old methods?"

Spurgeon withdrew the Metropolitan Tabernacle from the Baptist Union in 1887 because the denomination refused to challenge liberal theology. He was disturbed because some evangelicals were indifferent to theological liberalism.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon died at age 58 in Mentone, France. His funeral on February 4, 1892, was the largest seen in London for years. Vast crowds thronged the road to Norwood Cemetery. Today, over 100 years after his death, there is renewed interest in the "last of the Puritans." His renowned Metropolitan Tabernacle sermons have been reprinted and his autobiography is once again popular.

Who's Going Back to the Cities?

Renewal Through Social Outreach: Practical Guidelines

Part Three

Criteria for Pastoral Competency in Renewal

One of the key issues in renewal is developing leadership that will break down barriers caused by different social and religious cultural values.

Embedded in many, if not most, people in this society is a naive but tenacious belief that all one has to do to overcome cultural differences among people is to bring them together and, rational creatures that they are, they will more or less automatically strive to reach harmony. The fact is that most cross-cultural contact is likely to create *disharmony*.

At the heart of this discord lies prejudice. The *Oxford American Dictionary* defines prejudice as, "an unreasoning opinion or judgment before a proper inquiry is held or before full information is available."¹ Prejudice is usually followed by discrimination or



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acts intended to harm, injure, or suppress another person.

Preachers have been known to use the pulpit for sermonizing extreme views ranging from acceptance of racial inequality to the complete eradication of prejudice when one is filled with the Holy Spirit. The truth must

lie somewhere between these extremes.²

To overcome natural barriers raised by cultural differences, we must purposefully train multicultural pastors and Christian workers. Adaptability is the key characteristic in pastors who wish to give the type of leadership necessary to free the Holy Spirit to renew His people.

Although there are reams of literature written about the competency of cross-cultural workers in the secular and religious scenes, there is no general agreement as to what components should be included to bring unity among Christians.

I have drawn from a number of sources to bring the following outline that I hope will be helpful:

A. Personality—The focus is on the kind of person who is socially and psychologically adaptive in a variety of cultural environments. Many experts agree that this personality type would include the following:

1. They are psychoculturally adaptive. That is, they adapt to any situation according to the individual and/or culture with which they live or work.

2. They are willing to undergo personal transitions. They have a willingness to give up what has been familiar to them without losing the foundation that is found in their own culture.

3. They realize that their own self-boundaries are constantly subject to expansion or retraction. This is possible whether the situation is predictable or not.

Change—that is the key word to the renewal pastor.

But these concepts are rather general and abstract. They need to be



more specific if we are to understand these characteristics.

B. Effective Skills—These are primary modes of response to people different in culture from us and response to new and different experiences.

1. One list includes

a. open-mindedness toward new ideas and experiences.

b. empathy (sensitivity, responsiveness) toward people from other cultures.

c. accuracy in perceiving differences and similarities between the host culture and another.

d. being nonjudgmental—a willingness to *describe* behavior rather than *evaluate* it.

e. astute noncritical observation of one's own and others' behavior.

f. relationship-building skills.

g. freedom from ethnocentricity.³

**Most
cross-cultural
contact is likely
to create
disharmony.**

2. Another writer suggests seven behaviors as indicators of intercultural competency, such behaviors as the ability to

a. express respect and positive regard for another person through eye contact, body posture, voice tone and pitch, and general displays of interest.

b. respond to others in a descriptive, nonevaluating, and nonjudgmental way.

c. recognize the extent to which knowledge is personal in nature (i.e., that one's perceptions of an object have more to do with individual view than with the object itself.)

ILLUSTRATION: The eye is able to distinguish 7.5 million colors and the ear 340,000 tones. It is no wonder that we need to be careful as to how language is influenced by culture.

One Eskimo language has 86 words

for "snow." The Samoan language has only one, "sinou," an adaptation of the English language. This is probably because Samoa is located on the equator, at sea level.⁴

d. put yourself in someone else's place.

e. function in a variety of appropriate roles within group settings, and the capacity to avoid highly authoritarian and/or manipulative roles.

f. Respect other cultural viewpoints especially when governing one's role in cultural interaction.

g. not visibly react to new and ambiguous situations.⁵

C. General Knowledge of Anthropology and Linguistics

Anthropology is the study of *man*. Linguistics is the study of *his languages*. Although it is not necessary to be highly trained in these areas, one must at least

1. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of the races and their impact on America. A large number of Americans cannot correctly define the term "race." Surveys have shown, for instance, that a significant number believe Jews are a race. Others, despite significant education to the contrary, still state they would hesitate accepting a blood donation from someone who is not their skin color (for color reasons and not for concern about AIDS).⁶

Multicultural workers need to know somewhat of a basic outline of the history of America without the white overtones that are written into so many history books. Ask, "What contribution has each race made to the culture now known in America?"

2. Read, evaluate, adapt, and develop materials regarding multicultural principles. Many materials are available through Intercultural Press, Inc. Use them and adapt them to your situations.

3. Be able to recognize languages spoken in the geographical area of ministry.

4. Be willing to assist other ethnic groups in developing a pride of their mother culture while they learn and adapt themselves to the American culture.

D. Willingness and Ability to Teach Others.

Items to teach others:

1. People should demonstrate an understanding that others generally act the way they do because their culture teaches them to satisfy basic physical and psychological needs.

2. Social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence affects the way people speak and behave. An Armenian from Beirut (middle class, respected, etc.) will have different cultural distinctives than an Armenian from Russian Armenia (lower socioeconomic class).

3. Know conventional behavior in common situations. A leader should be able to demonstrate approximately how people act and react in typical situations within the cultures represented in the church.

4. Understand the key English words that are often misunderstood by the various cultures. Study these and teach people to avoid them when communicating to someone that speaks English as a second language.

5. Understand and be able to discuss the generalities and prejudices made about each culture and cultural groups as a whole.

6. Give a general understanding of the cultures represented in the congregation and their characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. Research is a necessity. Most libraries have excellent resources for a basic understanding of almost every cultural group. Be able to locate the material (even if you do not have it memorized) from the library, media, people, and personal contacts.

7. Observe the reaction of each culture to other cultures in the church and/or neighboring cultures. Who do they like? Who do they dislike? This type of observation should find a balance between curiosity and empathy.

Keys to Renewal

The Cross points both vertically and horizontally. This is a key to the relationship of renewal that is necessary for a Christian to have a revitalized connection with God. Christianity is most relevant when the life of unselfish love and compassion is infused into all areas of human existence. When people are living in Christ, they are to be godly in all their relationships. Christians are called into a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with their neighbors. These two connec-

tions are inseparable. God's callings to horizontal and vertical relationships are twin dimensions of the Christian experience. This is evident

1. in the prophets,⁷
2. in Christ himself,⁸
3. in Paul,⁹
4. in James,¹⁰
5. and in John.¹¹

The key items in scriptural renewal, then, are spiritual and social reconciliation, bringing people back into an experience of unity within and unity with all humankind. Because humans are made in the image of God, it is only natural that they be completed by a right relationship with God. Even if the Church was able to solve all the social problems on the planet, there would still remain a gnawing hunger for a sense of completeness. Holiness and the resulting internal unity are the spiritual glue that holds the Church together. They are the essence of commitment and dedication to discipleship, of living out the Christian life in fellowship and likemindedness.¹²

**To overcome
natural barriers
raised by
cultural
differences,
we must
purposefully
train
multicultural
pastors and
Christian
workers.**

Social concern is completely linked with evangelism in that it helps people understand the love of God. In addition, social ministries remove barriers such as hunger and emotional problems. When Christians pursue

justice and peace, they overturn oppressive forces that destroy people's lives and reduce their ability to respond to the person of Christ. But most important, social concern mirrors the caring love of God in the heart of the individual Christian.¹³

Churches and denominations must take their mandate seriously. They must transcend social barriers—racial, economic, linguistic, cultural, sexual, and age—in order to meet the challenge. To do this reconciling, the church must construct new roads directly to where people are living. Howard Rice points out that if we are serious about taking the gospel to people, then we have to go to the cities where most of them are.¹⁴ For the church this means locating in and among the poor. All too often, however, the path of middle class Christians is out of the city, following the cultural trends of the age. Then they go back as missionaries to try to evangelize those left behind. It is little wonder that transplanted missions to the cities have little effect or respect when conducted by those who did not want to live with them in the first place.¹⁵

There is progress to be made within the boundaries of the holiness denominations. However, a new tide of renewal is taking place. All teaching given by Old Testament prophets and New Testament writers would indicate that spiritual renewal will follow close behind social renewal.

Implications for Practitioners

God does not require that all churches be integrated. However, He does instruct all to be involved in renewal. This naturally leads into social outreach and programming. The results are felt individually and within the church as a whole.

Second Corinthians 9 promises rewards for those who give themselves to the cause of sowing and reaping. There are four promises given to the faithful.

1. The reward will be personal in blessings (vv. 6-8).
2. The reward will be to the nations of the world (v. 9).
3. The reward will be to persons and to the church in the form of seed for the sower (vv. 10-11).
4. The reward will be the expression of praise to God by many people (vv. 12-13).

There are, however, other rewards for those seeking renewal through social outreach:

1. The reward of learning appreciation of the cultural blend in society.

**Social concern
mirrors the
caring love of
God in the
heart of the
individual
Christian.**

2. The reward of fulfilling the Great Commission right in our own backyard.

3. The reward of resources effectively and efficiently used. There is a joy in knowing that our buildings and resources are used to their fullest.¹⁶

Successful social ministry linked with life-changing evangelism is the key. We must love and care for the poor just as Jesus did. But let us find our greatest gain in the changed life, the new soul, and the lost that are found.

1. Eugene Ehrlich et al., *Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Avon, 1980), 704.

2. Jerry Appleby, *Missions Have Come Home to America* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 54-56. These pages give a more thorough treatment of this subject.

3. S. Bockner, "The Mediating Man and Cultural Diversity," in *Topics in Culture Learning*, vol. 4. (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1976).

4. Appleby, *Missions Have Come Home to America*, 39.

5. Irene Ruben, "Effects of Institutional Change upon a Dependency Culture-Commune Council 275," *Asian Survey* (1973), 13:270.

6. Appleby, *Missions Have Come Home to America*, 47.

7. Isa. 1:12-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8.

8. Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37.

9. Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Gal. 5:22-23.

10. James 2:8, 14-17.

11. 1 John 1:3-4, 7; 3:14-18; 4:20-21.

12. William Leslie, "God Loves the Inner City," *Christian Life*, July 1973, 33.

13. "The Mission of the Church," early position paper of LaSalle Street Church, Chicago.

14. Howard Rice, "Toward an Urban Strategy," *Cities* (July 1981), 1-9. JM 622.

15. "Mission of the Church"

16. Jerry Appleby, *The Church Is in a Stew* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990), 106-114. These rewards are expanded and explained in this section of this book.

Evangelicals and the “Homosexual Problem”

They are rude, lewd, and obscene!” a friend shared with me when concerned about many gay protestors marching down the city streets.

A parishioner handed me a video tape of gays staging scenes publicly in order to get attention for their goals.

A political leader asked me to assist in “cleaning up our society” of the gay debris.

I visited a church in Texas recently. The bulletin informed me that the congregation was “inclusive” and championing “diversity.” The two buzz words welcoming homosexuals without a critical attitude leveled against them are “inclusive” and “diversity.” I immediately picked up the code language.

I read daily letters to the editor of our local city paper. They are a mix, but the war goes on: those for homosexuality and those against it. A cousin of mine is dying today of AIDS. He contracted the disease by way of bad blood transfusions; nevertheless, he has had to deal with the stigma.

The dean of the cathedral in our city goes on television to endorse pro-gay agendas before the voters.

An all-gay chorus is invited to sing in a popular sanctuary nearby. A clergywoman will provide the invocation to the proceedings.

Religion and homosexuality.

It puzzles me why all the fuss. I am a Christian. I can deal with this. I do not need a seminar to clarify my ethics. I do not need to listen to some speaker from California clean out my head on the subject. Nor do I need all those books from publishing houses setting forth moral positions.

So being a Christian, I concluded that I would have a prayer service in my evangelical church for AIDS persons and their caregivers. I mailed the



by J. Grant Swank Jr.

*Pastor,
Windham, Maine*

news release to surrounding newspapers, particularly the liberal weekly freebie. Then I announced the invitation to my parishioners.

I thought it was the only proper gesture to give. After all, with all the yelling and screaming going on between pro and con, I thought it was simply time to pray, to reach out, to love, to care. Was there any harm in all that? Was it anti-Bible? Could I be called on the carpet by the denominational elite? I took my chances. After all, I figured that I was merely doing something Jesus would do.

Then I wondered: does the evangelical community snarl at others with whom we disagree? Do we put up our dukes against the alcoholic, the promiscuous teen, the thrice-divorced man five pews back?

The Christian does not snub these people. He or she does not conduct seminars on how to despise them. The Christian does not write newsletters ad infinitum to uncover all their secrets.

Instead, the Christian puts out the carpet for the lost and weary, the sinful and wayward. The Christian begs them into the house of prayer. The Christian even trains other believers in how to compassionately relate to those in search of God's heart.

Then why not treat the homosexual in such a way?

So when the newspaper blasted the evangelical community for its aloofness regarding the gays, I immediately wrote that we were welcoming them. Why? Because we have indeed an alternative lifestyle that they just might want to consider. Not all of them, after all, are totally convinced of their way. Some of them are even embarrassed by the shenanigans put on by their own kind. And there are others who are just plain confused and lonely. They may even be quite tired.

Then the Christian cannot afford to put up fences or pass by on the other side of the road. The Christian cannot simply play denial by saying: “I don't see a homosexual; do you see a homosexual?”

Granted, there is sin on all sides: gossip, live-ins, bickering in churches, intemperance with food and alcohol, practicing homosexuals and fornicating heterosexuals, meanness on church boards, pornography and illicit sex on some church-affiliated campuses.

So what does the Christian always do when confronted with a spiritually fallen world?

The Christian puts out the welcome sign: “Come on in, all you who are weary and burdened down. There is another way. Jesus can provide it for you. He has come to reveal the way of light and love and peace—holiness.”

Now is that compromising the gospel message? I think not. It is implementing the gospel message.

And no one knows the wonder that can come about when a Christian actually tries it out. Surprise! It works! For, in fact, it's God's way of saving us all, including you and me, regardless of our sin.

How I Know I Am Filled with the Spirit

I know the day and hour I was born again. I can show you the exact place. I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but at that moment my eye saw Him; and I knew for sure it was I, even I, for whom Christ died. No longer did I wonder if I were really a Christian. After our marriage, I suggested to my wife that the date of my new birth was much more worthy of celebrating than the date of my physical birth.

No longer did I labor under the weight of condemnation for sins past. But for the present and the future I was still in need of guidance and strength. Preachers intrigued me with glowing descriptions of life gloriously filled with the Holy Spirit. They said the infilling could be received by faith, upon complete commitment to the will of God. I knelt and told the Lord I was wholly His and that I believed He would fill me with His Spirit.

Yet no emotional experience followed. I could not point to a day or hour of transformation. That bothered me. I longed for some kind of afflatus such as others talked about.

Then I got to thinking. I had met other Christians about whose relationship with God I had no doubt who could not tell when or where they were born again. I began to understand that the proof of my being alive is not to be found in the possession of a birth certificate. The surest proof is seen in my daily activity. As the philosopher said, "I think; therefore, I am." A Christian's genuineness is manifested not in memories of a past experience, but in a present assurance it is well with his or her soul.

In time I applied the same reasoning to the question of the Spirit-filled life. I ceased to be concerned about the lack of a spectacular moment in the long ago. The real test was my



by Victor Wellington Peters

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state today. I asked the Lord, "Am I filled with the Holy Spirit?"

Instantly one or two experiences came to mind. The Lord seemed to ask, "How did you behave in those situations?" I recalled the time a minister in another denomination openly spread falsehoods about me and how unperturbed I felt. The Lord almost



literally handed me a Scripture verse to live by: "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle . . . patient" (2 Tim. 2:24, KJV). I felt the Spirit enabling me to remain silent and calm. He gave me a cordial attitude toward the offending minister. Out of the trial grew totally new and unexpected blessings for which I am ever grateful. The whole experience furnished abundant evidence of the Holy Spirit's power to accomplish what human reaction alone could never do.

I had the Lord's answer to my question: "Am I filled with the Spirit?" When I heard a dear brother recently remark, "I was filled with the Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues," I recoiled. I don't doubt his genuine love for the Lord, but the evidence he cited as proof sounded hollow to me. What have unintelligible movements of tongue and lips to do with spiritual realities? Speaking in unknown tongues carries no moral value. Besides, that is a past experience. What of the present?

I'm more impressed when I see fruit of the Spirit being borne. Is my heart full of love at the present moment? Am I gentle? Does a wellspring of peace rise within? Instead of constant inward struggle, am I rejoicing today at inner resources that only God can supply?

It's fine if I can recall the day my anchor gripped the solid Rock. But I must constantly be cognizant of the fact the Spirit-filled life is actually an ongoing friendship with the Supreme Friend of sinners; and friendship thrives on constant renewal. Jesus brings surprises new every day. So let me forget the past and press forward toward my high calling in Christ, assured that the indwelling Holy Spirit is fully capable of supplying every need and presenting me faultless before the throne.

When to Refer to a Psychiatrist

Pastor, have you been introduced to the world of psychiatry? I am not writing from the perspective of an expert who could fill you in on the technical jargon. I am a pastor who, due to some difficult life experiences, has had the dubious pleasure of having to use the world of psychiatry. Most pastors I know have not had that kind of personal experience, yet they are stuck with having to make educated guesses about what psychiatry has to offer their laypeople. And I think they frequently make wrong choices based on an inferiority complex that I have found to be often unwarranted. My observations are very limited, coming mostly from my personal experiences, yet I believe that you will find them helpful as you consider when and to whom to refer people with psychological troubles.

In the last 12 years, I have had two major bouts with cancer, each requiring a year's worth of excruciatingly painful chemotherapy and radiation treatments, as well as a dozen surgeries and multiple life-threatening complications. Through these roller coaster rides, I struggled with a lot of deep depression and used the world of psychiatry to help me cope. I was also given some very strong mind- and mood-altering drugs, such as steroids that had mental side effects. On one occasion I became psychotic, which also triggered a clinical depression. I checked myself into the psychiatric ward of a major metropolitan hospital for a week until I could get my mind, moods, and emotions back to an acceptable balance.



by Rusty Freeman

*Pastor,
Johnstown Presbyterian Church,
Johnstown, Ohio*

During my various journeys I was cared for by ministers, four different secular psychiatrists, a Christian psychiatrist, the staff of a psychiatric ward, and friends. Let me share with you what I found helpful and unhelpful from each.



I found that there are some very legitimate times for a minister to refer someone to the world of psychiatry. In my trials I rediscovered the truth that we are psychosomatic creatures. I was surprised to find that the main treatment for my clinical depression was medication. Research shows that about 24 percent of women and 15 percent of men will suffer one or more episodes of clinical depression during their lives. Clinical depression can be caused by psychological factors such as illness, divorce, trauma, even prolonged stress. But it actually causes a physical imbalance of chemicals in the brain that is very difficult to cure by simple counseling from either a minister or a psychiatrist.

What the world of psychiatry has discovered is that simple counseling has very little effect on these individuals. Rather, they react much better to various types of non-addictive drugs that repair this chemical imbalance. So I found that if a person comes to me for counseling with a deep, stubborn depression, it's a good time to recommend someone who can prescribe these medications. A local doctor can diagnose the problem and prescribe these drugs as can a psychiatrist. My physician repeatedly put me on and took me off these drugs. A psychiatrist can prescribe medication and be more attuned to things like depression.

I found that the world of psychiatry has a lot to offer to people with mental illnesses such as neuroses, and psychoses, which includes schizophrenia. I find that I do not run into these very often in my normal pastoral

counseling. But I did find that when I experienced one of these myself, though I asked for prayer and got plenty of it, I also needed some expert care. Just as when people are having appendix pain, most of us pray for them *and* call an ambulance. So I wanted spiritual help *and* a mental professional. Though it's true that sometimes God instantaneously heals, it's also true that at other times He seems to use normal means.

My stay at the psychiatric ward was a very positive one. I arrived as a confused basket case. It took me 15 minutes just to tie my shoes. I was provided with a safe, controlled, and nondemanding environment. I was under a constant watchful eye and only seconds away from a psychiatric nurse and calming medications as needed. All of the normal stresses of life were removed so that my psyche could focus its energies on healing. Various therapies were used to move me along emotionally as I was ready: physical therapy, small-group counseling, and craft therapy, as well as individual psychotherapy. Medications were prescribed in such a manner that I could deal with my problems incrementally, without being overwhelmed by them. While in the psychiatric ward, I found also that many mental illnesses besides clinical depression have their sources in chemical imbalances and can be treated by medications.

We are psychosomatic creatures.

Let me say to the pastor that this is no time to desert your layperson. A psychiatric ward tends to ignore the spiritual dimension. I believe that most Christians who suffer serious mental disorders also have some important spiritual questions and struggles. After I had my psychotic episodes, I was afraid to think about God. My inner world had become so jumbled that I was afraid if I thought about God, He would no longer make any sense.

After a few days, though, I was will-

ing to explore the spiritual dimension of my being to see if it was still intact. I requested one of the hospital chaplains who kindly reminded me that God still loved me and that He sorrowed to see His children hurting. The chaplain read some scriptures, including the verse "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Josh. 1:5), and then lifted me up in prayer to the Father's throne. I experienced the joy of realizing that in my mental anguish and confusion I had let go of God, but that He had not let go of me. The truth is that we are not just psychosomatic but pneuma-psychosomatic creatures.

On another occasion, I experienced the time when I weepingly confessed, "God doesn't make sense to me." That's a scary place for a person of faith to be. God bless the minister to whom I confessed. He said, "That's all right, Rusty. Don't worry about that right now. He will make sense to you again one of these days." That minister allowed me to rest in the faithfulness of God who, when He begins a good work, promises to bring it to completion (see Phil. 1:6).

The areas that I found highly lacking in secular psychiatry were counseling and psychotherapy. When a psychiatrist or counselor is not a Christian and is trying to counsel a Christian, at best he or she will try to help you explore your inner belief system and will try to help you find a way to integrate your current experiences into that worldview. At worst, and I found this in a couple of cases, they will be suspicious of or in opposition to your beliefs and will, either consciously or unconsciously, try to show you how your faith is inadequate. In some psychiatric circles it is popular to believe that religion causes mental imbalance. While it is true that some forms of emotion-denying or suppressive Christianity do cause problems, many psychiatrists seem to lump all Christians into this category (see David Seamand's *Healing for Damaged Emotions*).

I found this second approach to be not only offensive but also unhelpful. How can a person relax and explore personal feelings about faith when he or she feels that this faith is under attack or suspicion.

The first method was better, but still left a lot to be desired. If the psy-

chiatrist is not a Christian, he or she can bring no Christian help, wisdom, or teaching to the subject. Many psychologists think that this is a good thing, that it will keep them from imposing on you their ideas, that this will guarantee that your cure will come from inside you. It's true that some people get cowed into outwardly acceding to something that doesn't set well with their inner feelings by someone trying to help. It's also true that there is something to the idea of collective societal wisdom and to the wisdom of the Bible as people throughout the centuries have wrestled with the same questions that you and I wrestle with.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel with each individual. Many times the wisdom that someone else has come to clicks with the inner struggle that I'm having. But a secular psychiatrist is cut off from the wisdom of our entire faith tradition. A Christian psychiatrist or minister has the option of choosing when to allow a person to discover a truth and when to help him along.

At one time I was really struggling with feelings that God was not there and that He did not care. A good secular psychiatrist could have asked me some questions such as: "Where do you think these feelings are coming from?" or "In your opinion, is this consistent with the way that you understand God to be?"

But I wanted someone with some experience who could show me a little of the road. I wanted some assurance. I wanted someone who understood the ways of God. I sought out the priest at the Roman Catholic hospital in which I was staying. Even though I was Protestant, our common Christian worldview allowed him to minister deeply to my needs.

He quickly led me to our Christian heritage and began to talk about the sufferings of Job. He asked me directing questions that helped me discover a common spiritual truth in a personal way. He asked me first if Job had ever felt as if God weren't there through his trials. I knew that Job had shared the feelings I was now experiencing. He then asked me if God had ever left Job during all of his sufferings. In answering no, I realized for myself that God had not deserted me either. The priest even suggested, and

I agreed, that it was during his suffering that God was closest to Job.

A pastor can be unhelpful if he wants to make a person feel guilty for the honest feelings that are being experienced. This is part of the sin of Job's three uncaring "friends." However, in dealing with a couple dozen clergy, I did not once run into this kind.

Christian friends can be just as helpful as the previously mentioned priest. But it is true that people untrained in pastoral care or counseling often get frightened at deep feelings. That's when pat answers or statements like "you shouldn't feel that way" turn up. Again, a pastor or Christian psychiatrist or Christian counselor has the best of both worlds, an understanding of caring counseling and the Christian faith from which to draw help and understanding.

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The following shows the double help that a minister or Christian counselor can be: After the initial shock and numbness wore off, one of my first reactions to cancer and the pain of chemotherapy was anger at God. One night I shared with a minister friend what I was feeling. He didn't scold. He didn't try to defend God. Rather, he drew deep from the biblical understanding of God and said,

"Rusty, it's been my experience that God is a big enough God for you to be angry at Him and for Him to still love you." Doesn't David find the same thing in the Psalms when he cries out in anger to God? It was a great comfort to me that God was still loving me even when I, like a hurting child, was lashing out at Him.

One of the great deficiencies of psychiatrists or psychologists, both Christian and secular, is that they do not know you as an individual, and it takes them a great deal of time to do so, often at excessive fees.

One night during my treatments, I had a bad drug reaction and thought I would die in a matter of seconds. At age 25, it was quite a shock to my system to come so vividly face-to-face with my mortality. I dove into a deep depression. A psychiatrist was called in to help me. But after an hour, he only had a bare sketch of my problem and a little family history. He had no words to offer me, only the prospect of more sessions.

The next day I called an old friend, Dr. T. Nease, professor of pastoral care at Columbia Seminary in Atlanta, who has since passed away. After about five minutes of explaining my situation, I asked him, "What's wrong with me, T? Am I having a nervous breakdown?"

He laughed gently and said, "I don't know about a nervous breakdown, but it sure sounds like you had the 'stuffings' scared out of you."

I had to laugh, too—the first time in 48 hours. In about 15 seconds, T had put his finger exactly on the spot. I was just really scared at the thought of dying. In that instant, it became a little easier to deal with the thought of dying without also wondering what strange psychological ailment I had. Though T was certainly a wonderful pastoral counselor with much training, I attribute much of this to the fact that he knew me as a human being already. It made it much easier to see into the window of my soul. We pastors who know our people, in my opinion, have a built-in advantage over a professional stranger.

From these experiences I have developed my own set of guidelines for referral to psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors. I refer to psychiatrists for the prescription of medications (a psychiatrist, as opposed to

a psychologist, can prescribe medications). When more than a prescription for medication is needed, I refer my flock to Christian psychiatrists, psychologists, or counselors. When I do have to suggest that someone get care in a psychiatric unit, I try to be gently available to supply spiritual needs. Psychiatric units are usually locked units and permission must be given to enter them, but visitors are usually welcome.

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I have seen many ways in which an ordinary pastor's assistance is superior and other times when a pastor is a helpful supplement to a secular psychiatrist. A secular psychiatrist or psychologist, though trained in areas a pastor is not, is lacking in knowledge of the Word of God and the whole wisdom and history of our faith tradition. A pastor who knows how to rightly apply the Bible and to put theology where the rubber hits the road can be a remarkable soul doctor.

I recognize many areas in which psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors have more training and are better able to deal with situations. But I have also seen how helpful a Christian perspective can be. Therefore, I have developed my own network of Christian counselors and psychiatrists to whom I feel very good referring my people. Through my experiences, I am more confident about when and to whom I refer. ✠

Critics—Leave 'Em or Love 'Em

Stick-and-stone words had been hurled at my pastor husband and had hit me too. I limped around all week, nursing a bruised ego, hurt and offended enough for both of us. All too soon Sunday came. "How could they have been so unkind, and how can I possibly worship with them today?" I moaned as I dressed in a huff and stuck on a fake smile.

I plopped down on the padded pew that Sunday and mentally built a 10-foot wall around myself. My unforgiving spirit, still replaying the recent offense, ill-equipped me to worship or to love.

Nothing penetrated my wall. Dutifully I sang, passed the offering plate, greeted visitors. Then my pastor invited us to bow our heads in prayer. I sensed the Lord's presence as though He had climbed over the wall and sat next to me. He was compassionate, uncondemning.

"I, too, had opportunity to collect rocks and offenses," the Lord confided. "I, too, was tempted to think primarily of protecting myself instead of serving others. Instead, I dumped the stones in the sea and forgave the ones who had cast them. Then I stretched out My arms for them—and for you, Jan."

In that moment I saw myself through God's eyes: a woman wrapped so tightly in her own pain that she had no arms to genuinely enfold another. The offense had been a minor one; others had suffered much worse. The measure of the offense was not the problem. The problem was that I wanted to hold on to my attitude toward the offender.

The following week, the Holy Spirit followed me around and whispered these six words: "love covers a multitude of sins—love covers a multitude of sins." Finally, using a concordance, I located the passage:



by Jan McNaught

Pastor's wife,
Honolulu

"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:7-8).

I read the *Amplified Bible* which expands the eighth verse to read: "forgives and disregards the offenses of others." I was weary of clutching a grudge and ready to release it. The Scriptures illumined three steps for me:

1. Look at Your Critic

I hate conflict and have perfected avoiding it. Yet God was instructing me: "Don't turn away from conflict. Instead, move toward the one with whom you have the conflict. Look—really look—at the person. That one is just like you, with warts and crooked teeth and fears."

God can reveal our distorted perception and correct our vision. We can realistically expect to receive disapproval and criticism along with applause and affirmation. The enemy will try to paralyze us with fear of criticism and of the critic, but God can prevent paralysis. He changed me by renewing my thought patterns and my habits. While writing this article, I realized I no longer can remember the words or the name of my offender.

2. Pray for Your Critic

The ancients defined prayer as "a climbing up of the heart unto God."¹ I'm learning to run to my *Abba* and climb into His lap. The Father invites me "to tell Him all; to talk over all anxieties and occurrences with Him; to speak with Him aloud as to a familiar and interested friend; to ask His counsel or advice; to stop to praise, to adore, and utter words of love; to draw heavily upon His resources, as the branch on the sap and life of the vine."²

And there, near to the Father's heart, I take not only myself but the one who has hurt me. I watch as God welcomes us equally. I ask Him to teach me how to pray for this one. My Redeemer changes my anger to compassion.

3. Love Your Critic

The Lord himself is released now to love that person through me. Where I have been unable—yes, unwilling—to love, God has placed a new desire. He has given me a deep love that can cover over offenses. Now I can call my neighbor, even the grouchy one. Now I want to forgive "you-know-who" for "you-know-what." Maybe I won't want to take my critic on vacation with me, as one evangelist said, but now I can ignore the critical remarks.

A friend of mine recently asked the Lord, "What do You want me to do now that my pastor-husband is gone?"

He replied to her, "You are here to pour out your life in love."

Look at your critic. Pray for your critic. Love your critic. Above all, love.

1. Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds., *Devotional Classics* (Harper San Francisco/A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 135.

2. F. B. Meyer; Charles Cook, ed., *Practical Prayer Portions for Daily Reading* (Moody Press, 1978), 108.

The Problem with Ego

I was sitting in a Miami airport waiting for my flight to Chicago when I saw him. "Where's the guy I was supposed to meet?" he growled into his portable phone. "I was in Fort Lauderdale, and he wasn't there."

After several more calls he folded his phone, placed it in his suit coat pocket, and loosened his tie. His suit had missed a pressing; his hair was as disheveled as his temperament. He took out the phone once more and called the wife of his contact, inquiring why her husband hadn't showed up. He seemed to be trying to impress people with his importance—his office coworkers, the man's wife, people like me in the waiting area, perhaps even himself.

Almost before he had finished his calls, I saw someone I thought I recognized. How could that be? He was from the Chicago area, not Miami. "Yes, it must be him," I thought as I recognized his wife. I crossed the wide corridor to greet them. We were not close friends, but we would meet occasionally at religious or publishing functions. He is the founder of one of the largest Christian publishers in the Midwest. They had been to Europe to attend the wedding of a granddaughter and were coming through Miami to take the same flight as I to Chicago. He wore a sport shirt, now a little wrinkled from the trip.

When my turn to board the flight came, I thought surely I would see him and his wife in first class. After all, he was in his retirement years and certainly could afford to travel in comfort. They traveled coach.

But I did recognize someone in first class—the man in the wrinkled suit.

Egotism Is Difficult to See in Ourselves

On the flight back to Chicago, I thought about the image we as church members project.



by Wayne Kiser

President,
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Glen Ellyn, Illinois

I remember the pastor of a small church who addressed a small group of colleagues some years ago. He talked about the ministry of Rev. Billy Graham, but his main objective seemed to be to impress his colleagues. "I talked to him about this matter," he said. "I said to him, 'Billy. . . .'" I remember that almost every time I'm tempted to drop a well-known name to impress my peers.

I don't know why egotism is so prevalent among so many of God's people, but it seems so. This summer I was part of a team of radio amateurs providing communications for a bicycle race. My job involved sitting on a corner and watching for accidents. If one happened, I would call the paramedics on my radio for assistance.

I selected my spot on the lawn of a church. Eventually a distinguished older man stood next to me and began a conversation. I thought that was nice of him, since he had never seen me before. It didn't take long for me to learn that he was the pastor of the church on whose lawn I was sitting. For nearly an hour he told me about himself, his wife, his children, and grandchildren. It seemed his only interest in me was to verify his importance. I wondered if I do that to other people.

Falling Is Only a Footstep Away

"Whoever thinks he is standing firm," says the Bible, "had better be careful that he does not fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, TEV). Most people acknowledge that it is better to be humble and to be promoted than to seek glory and to be rejected. It was said of King Uzziah, "When King Uzziah became strong, he grew arrogant, and that led to his downfall" (2 Chron. 26:16, TEV).

Somehow self-centeredness seems to be more ugly in those of us who declare ourselves Christians. It violates Christian ethics when the "I" becomes more important than the "you."

How to Conquer Self-Importance

You can do three simple things to keep your ego in check.

1. *Practice the art of listening.* Everyone has a story to tell. It may take longer to get the story from a shy person, but if you try, it's usually interesting. Learn the other person's name, and repeat it in conversation. Go easy on your story, and concentrate on what the other person has to say.

2. *Force yourself to meet new people.* That might not come easy for a lot of people, but it's achievable. The Bible says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24, KJV).

3. *Ask how Jesus would act in situations where you find yourself tempted to claim positions of prominence.* That may be difficult in a society where success is often equated with prominence.

The Bible says a person ought not to think more highly of oneself than necessary. The trick is to hold your self-esteem without acting superior to any other of God's creations. Watch others for both good and bad examples.

Fasting in a World of Fast Food

In a singular reference to India's most renowned statesman, the poet Rabindranath Tagore averred that "he fasted to save the soul of India." But Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, to whom the poet was referring, depreciated the poet's grandiose views of his efforts when he declared that "men say that I am a saint losing myself in politics. The fact is, I am a politician trying my hardest to be a saint."

It is not known whether Mr. Gandhi, before his assassination on January 30, 1948, had come to believe that he succeeded in becoming a saint as a result of his nonviolence techniques and the severe punishment that he inflicted upon himself by fasting. However, both history and contemporary human experience have witnessed that "fasting has, in all ages, and among all nations, been much in use," by individuals of all social classes and by persons who had other than religious goals for their fasts. Its uses have been for religious, magical, medicinal, and social purposes.

Socrates and Plato fasted periodically. Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher, reportedly did a 40-day fast before he took his examination at the



by Morris Chalfant

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University in Alexandria. His reason: It cleared his head. He asked his students to follow his example.

The Egyptians and the Druids fasted. So did the British suffragettes—"to publicize the inferior status of women."

In Russia, Tolstoy fasted. He remarked, "To refuse food and drink . . . is more than pleasure, it is the joy of the soul."

The modern American wife who happens to live in Alaska must feel thankful that she, unlike the primitive Alaskan woman, is not compelled to remain at home fasting while her husband is out fishing, in order that he may have a good catch!

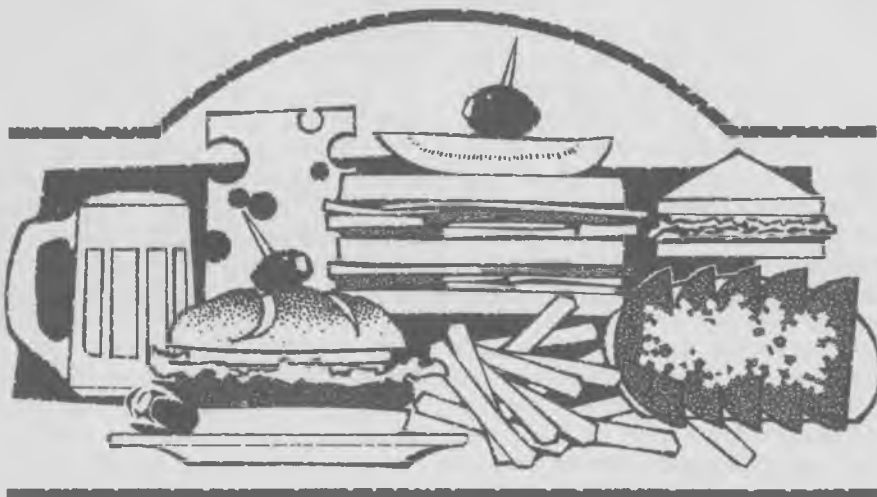
To fast, according to Webster, is "to practice abstinence from food voluntarily for a time as a religious exercise or duty."

To fast, we are told, is not simply or necessarily to abstain from food but to abstain from anything that hinders our communion with God." Or they say, "Fasting means to do without, to practice self-denial." We have only to widen the meaning enough and the cutting edge has gone.

During my rebellious teen years, Mother fasted three days during the college revival for my salvation.

It is true that there are many things besides food that may hinder our communion with God. It is also true that we need to practice self-denial in general. The fact still remains that "to fast" means primarily not to eat.

According to the Bible and church history, fasting and prayer went hand in hand. It seemed that abstinence from food, coupled with prayer, provided the catalyst that produced spiritual awakenings of such power and magnitude that nothing could stand against them. Demons fled in terror. Sickness vanished before the advance of mighty tidal waves of deliverance. The spiritually dead and unconcerned



were revived and joined in the victorious march against the strongholds of Satan.

Fasting is a spiritual exercise. It strengthens and conditions the will. It is one of the quickest and most available means at hand to reveal how much or how little authority I have over my body. I must have that authority or I cannot be victor.

Jesus employed the fast. His mighty victory over Satan followed a 40-day fast. It brought Him into complete unity with the Word. That was the combination that blitzed the devil. "Then the devil leaveth him" (Matt. 4:11, KJV).

In the New Testament Paul addressed the subject in this manner, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27, KJV). When a believer practices the art of fasting, he is serving notice on his body. It is the spirit saying to the flesh, "I am the boss, and never forget it."

An interesting sidelight concerns the expression "to keep under my body," as used by Paul in the above verse. Scholars say the thought is of going into a boxing ring and fighting a fight. To fast is to put up a fight, not only with Satan but also with self.

Fasting is a weapon. It is used to exert pressure, to bring a decision.

Great decisions are not easily obtained. There is an adversary. "Because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8, KJV). The believer is involved in conflict.

Prayer is for battle. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18, KJV). The Word adds fasting to prayer. It is further leverage. It is pleasing to God and hateful to Satan. It is a combination of power.

In my opinion, we have reached the time when the world is inhabited by so many people who have yielded to the power of demons that "this kind" will not be cast out except "by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21, KJV). But if all believers around the world would unite in prayer and fasting, a mighty blow would be struck against the forces of darkness, and millions of captives would be set free.

As a participant in prayer and fasting under the divine directive, my heart burns day and night with ever-increasing intensity. And I can see by faith great tidal waves of deliverance sweep-

Nothing . . .
I repeat . . .
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fasting.


ing across the world. Nothing . . . I repeat . . . nothing can stand before the united prayers of the people of God, invigorated and empowered by a season of sincere fasting.

This truth was made plain to all who lived in the state of Minnesota over 100 years ago. In the summer of 1876, the grasshoppers did much damage to the crops in Minnesota. In the spring of 1877, the farmers were worried, for there was every indication this dreaded plague might destroy the rich wheat crop and bring ruin to thousands.

The situation was so serious that Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 as a day of prayer and fasting. He urged every man, woman, and child to ask God to help against the terrible scourge. On that April day all schools, shops, stores, and offices were closed. There was a reverent, quiet hush over all the state. What happened? The next day dawned bright and clear. Temperatures soared to midsummer heat. It was not normal April weather. Imagine the disappointment and horror of the people when billions of larvae of the dreaded pest began wiggling into life. There were three days of unusual heat, and the larvae all hatched and got ready for their work of destruction.

On the fourth day the temperature suddenly dropped, and that night frost covered the earth. That frost killed the creeping, crawling locusts as surely as if poison or fire had been used. Grateful farmers never forgot that April 26. It went down in the history of Minnesota as the day God answered the prayers of the people.

I am so grateful to have grown up under the tutelage of parents who believed in and practiced the truth of fasting. During my rebellious teen years, Mother fasted three days during the college revival for my salvation. Conviction gripped my heart so strongly I yielded my heart to Christ. Years later, as I left for college, Mother declared Friday noon as the time she would fast and pray for her children. Throughout my adult life until her death on New Year's Day, 1976, I found great comfort and an unusual source of strength knowing that every Friday at noon Mother was beseeching heaven on my behalf.

Jesus addressed His disciples, "When you fast . . ." (Matt. 6:16). Let us not blunt the edge of this great truth; instead let us practice it often. 

Nightmare on Oak Street

It began at church one morning just before Sunday School. This woman, not one of our members, stood in the back of the sanctuary, crying. When the young minister tried to console her, she said, "Your pastor tried to molest my son yesterday." Shocked, Bob led her into the office and heard her story. She left when he promised to report the incident to the proper church officials.

After services Bob reiterated the woman's account to the elders and the young pulpit minister she'd accused.

"I'm not surprised," said Joe (not his real name), the minister, who then gave us his version of the incident.

Joe had befriended Fred (not the boy's real name) who he taught the year before in eighth grade. Since then he continued tutoring the 15-year-old on Saturdays at the parsonage. Only this time after his music lesson Joe had given the youth a massage.

"We were in the bedroom when it happened," the minister explained. "I was showing Fred the new furniture. As we were about to go out the door, he complained that his shoulder was hurting and asked for a rubdown."

Actually, that part wasn't so unusual. Joe was supposed to have "the magic touch" and for years had given massages to his family and close friends. He'd even given Fred one on a previous occasion.

This time, though, he did it on the bed. "There was nothing sexual involved," Joe told us. "No touching of private parts."

However, the boy had stopped the massage saying, "I don't feel right about this." Joe was surprised, but the teenager refused to talk about it as the preacher drove him home.

About midnight the boy called, waking Joe and ask-



by Jimmy Lumpkin

*Freelance writer,
Upland, California*

ing him all kinds of questions. "They were formal and sounded like he was reading from a list. A few minutes later Fred called again and put a policeman on the line. The officer said that he'd been listening to the conversation, and there'd be an investigation."

After telling us these things Joe added, "I'm not guilty, but I don't want to be an embarrassment to this church. Just say the word, and I'll resign."

The elders met by themselves. What should we do about Joe? He'd graduated from college and seminary with honors and had high recommendations from other ministers and churches. And our own congregation had certainly grown under his leadership.

But what about the young man's accusation? According to his mother, he'd said that Joe had been "drinking and smoking" before the attempted molestation. We knew that our minister didn't do those things.

So we called Joe into the meeting and promised to continue our support. But we advised him to consult an attorney.

He did. And his lawyer told him not to worry since the police didn't have a case.

They must have thought they did because early Wednesday morning they arrested Joe. He spent all that day and night in jail. None of us could talk to him, not even his wife.

We had a special prayer session that evening, and some of the members volunteered to raise the \$50,000 bail. However, the next morning when his wife went to pay, it'd been lowered to \$20,000.

Thursday the newspaper had a field day. **Pastor allegedly massaged, propositioned 15-year-old boy.** It said that our minister had "convinced the boy to lie down and was giving him a 'sensual massage' when he told the boy he was physically attracted to him. . . . The youth fled and told his parents what happened. They called the police." The official charge was "lewd and lascivious acts with a minor and child annoying."

The church phones rang continuously with both our members and the community demanding to know what we were going to do about Joe. Many supported him



against the "false accusation." Some of the boy's teachers told us that Fred was a troubled youngster who'd caused a lot of problems at school.

But other people thought we should fire Joe. "Didn't he learn in Preaching 101 that you never allow yourself to be alone with a teenager?" one man asked.

I preached Sunday morning, and Joe preached that evening.

The following week we put him on "executive leave" while awaiting the outcome of this mess. We offered to pay his full salary, but he accepted only the use of the parsonage.

Joe pleaded not guilty.

After a court-appointed psychologist reported that Joe had no homosexual or pedophilic tendencies we thought the case would be dismissed. Instead, it was delayed and postponed a dozen times.

More than a year dragged by with various preachers filling in during Joe's absence. Some of the congregation wanted us to hire a new minister. Others insisted that Joe resume his duties. "You're treating him like he's guilty," they complained.

Finally the court set a date for a hearing. The district attorney and Joe's lawyer agreed on a compromise. If Joe would plead guilty to "child annoying," the district attorney would drop the felony "lewd conduct with a minor" charge.

It was a tough decision for Joe. He'd already spent more than \$30,000 and was told that it might be another year before the case came to trial. The church would be left in limbo. And what if the jury believed the boy? Joe would go to prison. His wife and parents were already sick with worry.

By pleading guilty to the misdemeanor he'd get a year's probation and have to register with the state as a sex offender. He accepted the plea bargaining.

After telling the church the reason for his decision, Joe resigned as our minister.

Who won in this conflict, God or the devil? I don't know. But like a foghorn, it shouts this warning to all ministers and teachers: **SHUN THE VERY APPEARANCE OF EVIL.** The slightest imprudence can lead you and your church into the worst nightmare ever.

The Interim Pastor



by Ross W. Hayslip

Pastor,
Tucson, Arizona

I have recently completed my third assignment as interim pastor to a congregation for whom I have also served some years as associate pastor in the area of pastoral care. The interim pastorate in one sense is a new ministry in the life of the church. In another sense it has been in existence for a long time. When a pastor moves to a new assignment, someone has filled in until the arrival of a new pastor. Sometimes another minister comes as a supply pastor. I have known gifted laypeople who have taken responsibility for the congregation's worship and other activities.

It has been my experience to work with young pastors in staff relationships. When they have moved to other assignments, the church board has called upon me to assume the duties of full-time pastoral duty. The length of interim ministry has varied from three to five months. My challenge has been to prepare the way for the incoming pastor. My position on my journey of life provides no threat either for the incoming or outgoing pastor. I have felt that my role is to make this a time of growth and

strengthening to the body of Christ. In one assignment, we received 13 new members into membership and in another, 10 new members. I have also been called upon for weddings and funerals. My active pastoral record was never to go to a district assembly with unpaid budgets, and my goal during interim services has been to make sure that all budgets are current during this period of my ministry.

An interim pastorate is a challenge to preach new sermons. John Wesley burned all his sermon manuscripts at regular intervals. I have found the opportunity to prepare fresh new sermons an invigorating experience. It is a joy to find new truths and depths of thought in God's Word. This also calls for a disciplined program of study and soul searching.

This period of interim pastoral service serves as a time for a further cultivation of optimism regarding the future of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is all too easy for advancing age to bring on a spirit of bitterness and pessimism. The interim pastorate helps one to realize that nobody needs to grow old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. You are as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fears, as young as your hope, as old as your despair.

Speaking from a background of 50 years of pastoral ministry, it is my opinion that an interim pastorate is a wonderful way to stay young at heart. 🙏

Editorial note: By definition, an interim pastor should be ineligible to be considered for the next full-time pastor. That would serve the best interests of the church.

My Church Family: Helpfulness with Brotherly Watch and Care

I can't tell you who cried more—me, my wife, or our just born Carly announcing her arrival into the world. While this was our third time around in the delivery room, none of our previous experiences had prepared us for this birth.

I had been working away at my sermon when Glenda left for her usual prenatal checkup along with our youngest daughter. When her doctor phoned me a couple of hours later my first thought was that Glenda must have left a toy or something at her office. I wasn't expecting to hear that she had been rushed to the hospital. "Your wife has Preeclampsia," the doctor said, which meant nothing to me at the time. "It is quite serious."

On the way to the hospital I entered into a very open conversation with God, pleading with Him to protect my Glenda and our unborn baby. At the hospital I was told that Glenda was suffering from pregnancy-induced hypertension, which had caused her blood pressure to rise to 200 over 110. My beautiful, little 32-year-old wife was running the risk of having seizures and a stroke, not to mention kidney, liver, and heart damage! On the outside she looked fine but inside the silent killer was at work. To add to this stress was the fact that we might lose the baby.

With medication



by Mark William Royall

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Glenda's blood pressure dropped to 150 over 90, which was still high but low enough, the doctor thought, to induce her into labor. The logic was

that since it was the pregnancy that was causing her hypertension, her blood pressure should return to normal after the baby was born.

It was about 4:30 in the morning. Seventeen hours had gone by since Glenda was first brought into the hospital. I tried to be there every five minutes to rub her legs and ease the discomfort of her contractions. Her blood pressure still remained dangerously high.

It is times like these when I am so thankful for the support of my church family. I didn't have to phone and check to see if they were praying for us; I knew they were. How many times had I come before God on their behalf in their times of crises, really not fully understanding what it meant for people to know that someone is praying for them? That is, until now.

Usually it was me, their pastor, who was there to minister to them in their time of need. However, today the roles had been switched. My church family stepped in so beautifully to minister to us in so many different helpful ways. One lady came to the hospital and took our youngest daughter home for the night and then made arrangements for the school bus to drop off our other daughter at her place after school. Visitors were restricted, so people sent notes,



parcels, and flowers to our room to let us know they were thinking of us.

I realized that sometimes I had taken these little caring things we do for one another as ministers for granted. This experience made me better understand just how important and meaningful they are to the person in need.

When I receive Christians into church membership, I read that portion from the church *Manual*, which says, "The privileges and blessings that we have in association together in the Church of Jesus Christ are very sacred and precious. . . . There is such *helpfulness* with *brotherly watch care* and counsel as can be found only in the Church" (Section 801, emphasis added). Glenda and I

My beautiful, little 32-year-old wife looked fine on the outside, but inside the silent killer was at work.

were certainly reminded of just how true these words are.

Another young pregnant mother arrived at our small community hospital. She and her husband went into the only other delivery room, which was just across the hall from us. I thought to myself, "How wonderful this is that we will be able to share this miracle of our children's births together." I went as far as to picture in my mind's eye both of our babies growing up together and always sharing and celebrating this very special day together. However, our nurse told us that the baby across the hall would be stillborn. Our hearts sank.

Glenda began to worry that our baby would also be born dead. To ease her fears I turned up our baby's monitor so she could hear its heart thumping away. The nurse from across the hall came and turned it back down. Hearing the live heartbeat of our baby was just too much for the other

mother to bear. We understood. It was so sad.

Later our baby's heart stopped beating during the contractions. The nurse and I counted the silent seconds, listening to the monitor until the beat would start again. We discovered later that this was caused by the umbilical cord being wrapped around the baby's shoulder.


At one point I counted eight different gadgets that were hooked up to Glenda. Most of these things required electricity to run. As we approached the last few minutes before the birth, we ran into a problem when another gadget needed to be plugged in. We had run out of power outlets in the room. As a result, part of my job during the delivery was to listen for the nurse to tell me when to unplug one thing and plug in another. At one point the nurse shouted out, "We've lost Glenda's blood pressure!" It was all right. By accident, I had unplugged the machine that measured her blood pressure!

While I was humming the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," Carly was born into our lives on September 27 at 10:02 A.M., into a room full of joy and celebration. She let out a loud cry to let us know that all 4 pounds, 6 ounces of

her was all right. Eight minutes later another baby was born across the hall, but there was no infant cry to be heard.

Glenda and I cried together with Carly. We were glad that she and the baby had made it through safely, but we felt such deep sorrow for these other young parents. While this day would mark the birth of our child, we knew for them it would always mark the death of theirs.

I wanted to do something for this couple. I overheard them making funeral arrangements for the baby. I approached their nurse and said I would like to offer them my services in assisting them in the funeral. But the nurse said the couple had already indicated they didn't want any pastoral involvement.

This fact saddened me further, for I knew then they didn't have "the privileges and blessings" or the "helpfulness with brotherly watch care" of a church family as we did. I knew that over the past 23 hours we ran the real risk of experiencing tragedy in our own hospital room. But I also knew if that had been the case, we would have the needed and meaningful support of our church family. I thank our great Lord for them. 



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Facing the Music: Choosing Your Worship Style

Glance through almost any magazine targeting pastors and you'll see that the controversy over worship styles is hot. Sometimes it even boils over. One wise guy quipped, "The first murder in history was over worship styles." Wisdom demands that pastors and worship leaders heed his observation. Messing with the style of worship used in many established congregations can be dangerous. Yet with so much attention on differing worship styles, some of us will begin asking ourselves what style of worship is best. Will we stick with a traditional approach, or will services be reoriented to more contemporary tastes? Perhaps there's merit in a more liturgical style. Will services be "seeker sensitive" or is worship for the "already committed"? Even when these questions are answered and we choose a style of worship, we still face imple-



by Randy T. Hodges

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menting the changes our decision implies.

Choosing a worship style is largely a matter of music. Other service elements may be modified slightly, but none so much as the music. Rick Warren says, "Music is the most important factor in determining your evangelistic target, even more than preaching style. . . . When you

choose your music, you are determining exactly who you are going to reach and who you are not going to reach. More than any other factor, tell me what the music is in a church, and I will tell you who that church will be able to reach and who they will never be able to reach."¹ Observing worship services across our country leads me to believe he's right. Musical style directly impacts the outreach potential of our church. Also, we have to realize that musical style drives people's emotional response to worship. This explains why people can become so quickly upset when the style of music in their worship services changes.

What key factors must worship leaders consider before changing the style used in worship? Three key issues must be faced when we consider what style of worship will be used in the services we lead. These same issues won't disappear even when the style has been chosen. Rather, they remain in tension even as we plan, strategize, and implement. If we're wise, we'll keep them in mind as we evaluate our worship services. Let's touch briefly on three issues worship leaders must consider as we assess our worship:

1. What style is the present congregation accustomed to and how committed are they to that style?

The word of advice to heed is this: *Never underestimate the commitment to tradition.* "People especially treasure the music of their formative years, whether the popular music of their youth or the worship patterns of their most formative years spiritually."² There is no constituency for change, but a large one for keeping



things as they are. Mark Twain said it well, "The only person who likes change is a wet baby." The wise leader recognizes this important factor in planning and strategizing.

We are unwise (no, just stupid) if we believe that forsaking established tradition is the quick and easy way to bring worship renewal to most already established congregations. *Don't be stupid.*

What if there is heavy commitment to tradition? Do we just give up any hope for improvement? No, but working in an environment where there is a strong commitment to tradition means that the transition through the change will take longer and must be more carefully managed to prevent disruptive and counterproductive conflict. We cannot afford to ignore the emotional commitments of our people in the style of worship they prefer.

2. What style probably best fits the makeup of your surrounding community or your target audience?

- Tim Keller, targeting a cultured population in downtown Manhattan, leads worship services rich in liturgy and classical music.³
- Doug Murren developed a style of worship intentionally aimed at baby boomers. "They will be drawn to music with a contemporary sound," he says.⁴
- Bill Hybels, in order to reach the secular-minded "unchurched Harry and Mary," devised a strategy of worship where "services feature lots of upbeat contemporary music, highly professional singing, and clever skits."⁵

None of these pastors lead your congregation in your community! Don't imitate their style if it doesn't fit the dynamics of your situation. (Also, it may be wise to check your driver's license. If it doesn't say "Hybels" on it, you'll do better to not try to imitate him.) Design a worship strategy that fits your place of service and your own God-given gifts and talents.

As we assess our current styles of worship and envision what our worship should become, we also need to consider this question:

3. What talent base in your congregation will supply the musi-

cians, singers, and support personnel to implement the proposed worship style changes?

Music is the
most
important
factor in
determining
your
evangelistic
target.

It can be easy to overlook the assets that another church has used to put together an effective service. Yet, if we try to do *their* thing with *our* resources, we may get surprisingly different results.

- A congregation of 2,500 has deeper resources than a church of 1,000.
- A congregation of 1,000 has a talent pool greater than the church of 500.

"The only
person who
likes change
is a wet
baby."

- A congregation of 250 deals with a base greater than a church of 100.
- A church of 100 has more resources than a church of 25.

As we consider what worship style we will use, we must determine if capable people are available to implement the plans.

Closely related to the talent-base question is another issue: Are those

people who can make the service work willing to commit themselves to work with you in making it happen? No matter how deep the talent pool may be, there has to be a willingness to work together to make good things happen in worship. Capability must be matched with willing availability.

Some of us will find ourselves in situations where the talent pool seems more like a talent puddle—neither wide nor deep. It's good to remember that God knows our situations. At times our dreams may exceed our capacities, and we must content ourselves to "do what we can, with what we've got, where we are."

When discussing change in worship, it is important to issue this reminder: No one's advocating that you throw out your present style of worship. Rather, the aim is to cause us to think carefully about what we do in worship and then carefully follow our Lord's leadership. In the business of His kingdom, the issue is not what *we* want or even what *the people* prefer but rather what *God wants*. Max DePree challenges us, "In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are."⁶ In some churches, change is essential for the long-range health of the body. For these situations, it will take courageous, committed, and patient leaders to wisely guide these congregations through the transition. In others, change in worship style presents not a cure-all but an unnecessary, and even divisive, disruption. But wherever we serve, as we consider how to best lead in worship, let's commit ourselves to do whatever He wants. (More on leading worship can be found in the book *A Call to Worship*, by Randy Hodges, released by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City in 1996.)

1. Rick Warren as quoted by George C. Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 151.

2. Howard Stevenson, "Creative Music and Worship," *Your Church* (Winter 1993): 3W.

3. "What It Takes to Worship Well," *Leadership* (Spring 1994), 17 ff.

4. Doug Murren, *The Baby Boomerang: Catching Baby Boomers As They Return to Church* (Provo, Utah: Regal, 1990), 188-89.

5. *Daily Herald*, May 18, 1988, "Hybels: Why do 12,000 people listen to this man each week?" 2.

6. Max DePree as quoted by John Maxwell in *Developing the Leader Within You*, 64.

Show and Tell

Are you looking for a way to add interest to your evening service? Do you desire an idea that will fit in with your sermon? Do you want a suggestion to involve laypeople in an innovative way?

Some ministers have begun using minidramas. On an occasional basis, they write, or more often ask a member of the congregation to write, a minidrama that can be performed in the chancel area.

The minidrama requires no costumes, takes approximately five minutes to present, and makes a point relevant to the upcoming sermon. Props are kept quite simple, and the drama should have only one point.

Using the minidrama immediately before the sermon makes it more effective. The congregation will begin to watch for the point in the sermon that the dramatization has touched on.

Lines of dialogue should be kept short—easier to memorize. Action should take place with actors close by each other so that a stand-up microphone can be used instead of individual ones.

Nearly every church has members who have talent for directing, talent for writing, talent for acting. Getting these laypeople involved in a creative way is one more way to get more members interested in church work.

Two to four weeks before an upcoming sermon, the minister must give the writer the subject, purpose, and biblical reference of the proposed sermon so that the writer can produce a minidrama that is meaningful and appropriate. It is probably a good idea for the minister to ask for permission to edit if needed, to make sure that what is written is what is desired.

These minidramas should vary so that different age-groups can be actors on different weeks and thus involve everyone.

Young people have been raised in a visual world with television, video cassettes, and so on. The minidrama is one way to use this medium to cap-



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ture their interest in a visual way.

To illustrate how a minidrama might be written to adapt to a sermon, the following minidrama is one that could be used on Palm Sunday. Let us say the title of the sermon will be "Success Via Failure." The drama will carry through this theme:

Palm Sunday:
Success Via Failure
Luke 19:37-38

CHARACTERS: Mother, *young*
Bob, *preteen son*

SCENE: MOTHER *is sitting on couch, reading her Bible, when BOB comes home from school and throws book bag on floor angrily.*

MOTHER: What's wrong? You look as though you've lost your best friend.

BOB (*flings himself on couch beside her, disgust written on his face*): It's not fair!

MOTHER (*closing her Bible*): What's not fair?

BOB: Ben Williams won the science award. (BOB *stands up and starts pacing*.)

MOTHER: Oh . . . (*Pats place beside her on couch.*) Sit down and tell me about it. You studied so hard for it.

BOB (*sitting back down beside MOTHER*): You don't get it. You think I'm mad because I lost. Well,

I'm not! I'm mad because Ben won by cheating.

MOTHER: That's a terrible thing to accuse someone of doing. If you lost, you just have to accept it. Don't try to blame it on someone else and say he cheated.

BOB: But he did! (BOB *turns and looks in MOTHER's face.*) His locker's right next to mine. When we were getting in our lockers before we left school, he dropped his notebook. (*Shakes head.*) I saw an answer sheet fall out.

MOTHER: Did you ask him about it?

BOB: Yeah. He just laughed and said, "You didn't see a thing, did you?" and left.

MOTHER: So—do you know who *really* won?

BOB: Sure. Ben.

MOTHER: No. You did.

BOB: Me? I don't know what you mean.

MOTHER: Ben may have won the award, but he lost a battle with his conscience. He'll always know *you* really deserved it. He'll never really enjoy winning the award.

BOB: So?

MOTHER: So—you lost the award, but in your heart you won because you learned what was needed to pass the test. You made an honest effort.

BOB: That still doesn't make it fair!

MOTHER: I guess not. It's like what happened on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. That wasn't fair either.

BOB: What do you mean?

MOTHER: Well, Jesus was a success on Palm Sunday, and yet, a Man without sin, He lost His life on the Cross on Good Friday so that He

could win over death. By doing so, He saved us to eternal life.

BOB: So—You could say Good Friday looked like a failure, but it was really a great success.

MOTHER: Right.

BOB: So Jesus really won?

MOTHER: Yes. And Ben had success in the test and won the award, but actually he failed because he didn't measure up.

BOB: And?

MOTHER: You turned failure into success because you did your best. What really matters here is not an award. It's who really won.

BOB (*puts arm around MOTHER's neck*): Thanks, Mom.

(*Both stand and walk off, MOTHER with her arm around BOB's shoulder.*)

A Different Perspective

Ripley's Believe It Or Not Museum in San Francisco contains many fascinating exhibits. Near the museum's entrance, three television monitors are positioned next to three mirrors. The first TV displays jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie playing his horn. A sign under the adjacent mirror reads, "Can you puff your cheeks like Dizzy's?" The second screen shows a man with the unusual ability to stretch his bottom lip over his nose. "Can you swallow your nose?" asks a sign under the corresponding mirror. The third video's narration claims that a majority of people are unable to form their tongues into a U shape. An actress demonstrates and asks, "Can you curl your tongue?" A mirror is provided so visitors can try.

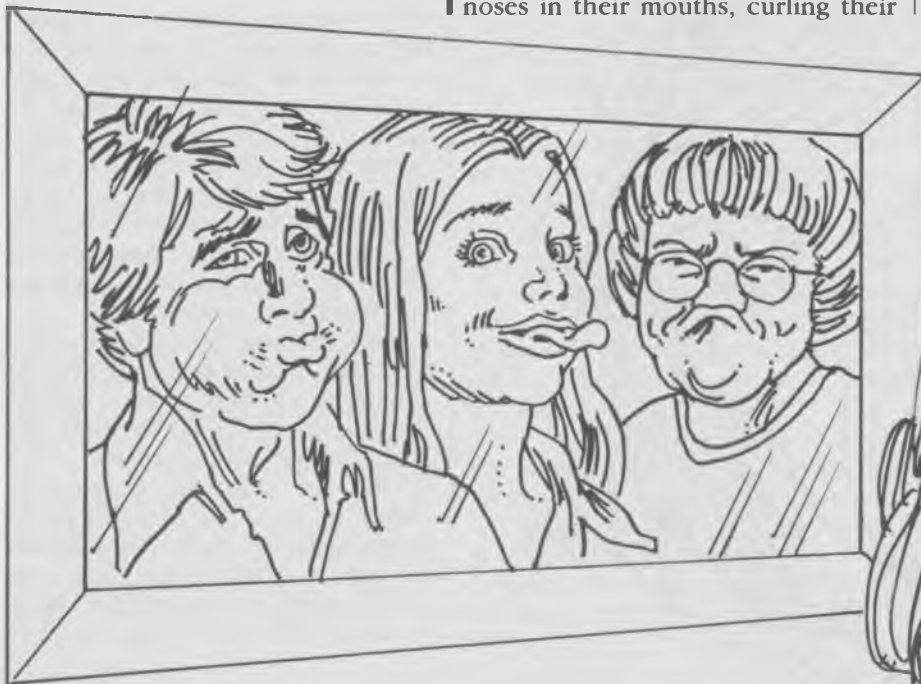
After this initial display, visitors pass through room after room of weird and wacky memorabilia. Near the exit are three "windows"—actually the backs of one-way mirrors. From this venue visitors come eyeball to eyeball with complete strangers puffing their cheeks, trying to put their noses in their mouths, curling their



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tongues. Catching someone else making crazy contortions is hilarious. Realizing that an hour earlier *you* were the featured performer makes the exhibit even funnier.

1 Cor. 13:12, referring to our future hope, says, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully." We will always have doubts and questions on this side of eternity. Our perspectives are simply limited. Only when we leave this world, viewing it from God's perspective, will we understand truth and reality in their fullness.



A Loaf of Bread

Elmira needs a ride to the convalescent hospital," I yelled as I grabbed my keys that hung on a hook by the screen door. "I shouldn't be gone too long."

I stuck out my hand and waved to my husband, Ernie, as I maneuvered the old yellow Volkswagen bus down the rutted, dusty excuse they called a road.

"Will I ever get used to this?" I thought. "This pastoring stuff sure isn't the picture they painted for us in school," I moaned as I passed the small Native American church where a few months earlier we had been commissioned to minister.

We loved the little flock of people, but the hurt and heartache we had seen in their lives almost every day over the past three months had been



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very difficult. We were young and fresh out of Bible college and not ready for what we were encountering on the La Jolla Indian reservation.

I approached Elmira's modest home, and my heart began to ache for the tiny tribe. Her little stucco house

had four small rooms. The door and single window in the front seemed to swallow up the diminutive frame, giving it a matchbox appearance.

"Hi Elmira," I hollered as I watched her push aside the overgrown weeds to make her way to my van. She smiled shyly and opened the door to our lemon-colored mode of transportation.

"How are you today?" I greeted her.

"Oomph," she grunted as she settled her 70-year-old rounded frame onto the hard bench-like seat.

"I'm fine, Joyce. How are you?" Her native intonation came through. When Elmira smiled, her eyes twinkled and glistened like pieces of black coal. Her dark, weathered face was somewhat angelic in appearance. In the short time I had known this woman, I had come to love her.

It took us an hour to drive down the mountain into town. The dialogue between us was difficult. Native Americans are shy, so it was hard for me to make conversation with Elmira.

"Perhaps we'll find something to talk about," I thought. "Just to pass the time."

We made our way to visit Elmira's 68-year-old cousin, Lily, who resided in a convalescent home. She was ill with diabetes. Unfortunately, diabetes is a disease that affects many of the Native American people. Due to her illness, Lily had been convalescing for several months. We intended to encourage her but came away encouraged ourselves. She loved the Lord, and it was obvious to those around her.

After chatting with Lily for about an hour, I decided time had come for Elmira and I to head home. I dreaded the long drive back up the mountain. We bid farewell to Lily and left.

The conversation between us picked up a little on the way home. Elmira spoke about the mission and the folk who made up the community in and around the reservation. We also talked about the various problems



facing individuals who attended our little church.

As Elmira spoke, I thought, "I'm glad we have Jesus to offer these people."

My heart was heavy for Elmira. I knew life for her had been difficult. As a widow, the meager means she lived on made her existence hard. The little plot of land that was home to her didn't offer much in the way of worldly possessions.

As the van turned and twisted up the small, mountainous two-lane road, I reflected on my attitude before I had left the mission to visit Elmira. I felt ashamed. My grumbling about the dust and ruts in the road to and from our little trailer situated on the church grounds paled in light of her circumstances.

"Forgive me, Lord," I breathed as we approached her humble little home.

Just as we bounced over the last hump in the road leading to Elmira's house, we spotted what looked like a thin, dirty young

man. He wandered from the bushes toward our vehicle, waving his arms. He appeared weak and feeble.

I glanced at Elmira. She seemed as puzzled about the unexpected scene as I.

"Who is that?" I stammered.

"I don't know?" Elmira responded, also posing a question.

Elmira promptly opened the door and walked the 100 yards to greet the visiting stranger. I anxiously waited while my curiosity peaked and I prayed.

I could hear them talking in Spanish. Elmira's head nodded up and down as she gave affirmation to whatever they were discussing. Oddly, she turned, walked toward her house, opened the door, and disappeared inside. After a few moments, the door opened. Elmira appeared, cradling something in her arms.

"What is she doing?" I wondered.

The stranger reached out with thankful hands and received whatever it was she offered him. The young

man bowed his head as if responding "thank-you" in deep gratitude.

He turned, then vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

I was not about to leave the scene until my curiosity was satisfied. "What was that all about, Elmira?" I shouted as I rolled down the squeaky window to my left.

She shuffled over to the van and responded in almost a hush: "He was hungry. I gave him a loaf of bread."

The young man had been wandering in the mountains without any food to eat for days. He spoke only Spanish. Elmira gave food and a blessing to the stranger.

I sat there more than humbled. I felt as though I had witnessed the

widow giving her mite. Elmira was Jesus to a stranger. My emotions were mixed. Through Elmira I felt the love of Jesus but I also felt condemnation in my spirit for my attitude earlier that morning.

I began the day grumbling about mundane

difficulties yet hoped, even planned, to be a blessing to someone. I, though I was the minister, was ministered to by Lily and Elmira.

God wouldn't bless others through my complaining dissatisfied spirit, so He gave me an instruction in charity and humility. In His sight I was the one dwelling in poverty. Elmira and Lily were fulfilled with their rich spiritual blessings. They had what it takes to minister to others—loving, contented hearts.

I learned a valuable lesson on the reservation. What we endure while we are here is eclipsed by what is to come. Elmira gave away what she possessed, producing blessings in this life for others and in the life to come for herself.

As we give to a stranger in need, we become Jesus to that person. We were strangers when Jesus first found us. He unselfishly became our Bread so that we, in turn, can share His blessings with others, humbly and without complaint.

In His sight, I
was the one
dwelling in
poverty.

Artful Agony

It was not until Beethoven had become so deaf he could not hear the fortissimo of a full orchestra that he composed his chief oratorio.

It was not until John Milton had become stone-blind that he could duplicate the sublimest poem of the ages.

It was not until Walter Scott was kicked by a horse and confined to the house for many days that he could write the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

The painter who mixes his colors with blood from his own broken heart makes the best pictures.

The mightiest men of all ages have been mightiest in their agonies.

—Talmage

Keeping Your Staff

It's considered all right to burn up for God, but it's not all right to burn out for God. That's excellent advice I received from a pastor recently. That advice goes a long way toward meeting the challenge of maintaining staff longevity.

One key reason good workers leave youth service, administrative, choral, and adult ministries is they feel overworked. The average size church runs around 90 to 100 members. Whether a congregation is large, average, or small in size, one element unfortunately remains consistent: 10 to 20 percent of a church's total membership usually carries the workload.

Good workers are service-oriented individuals. These people are either built-up in the faith or mistakenly think they can work their way into heaven. Even with weekday preaching services and Sunday worship services, many Christians would be alarmed to discover how many church members believe they must earn or work their way to heaven. For these misguided individuals, work is key to their relationship with God. Inevitably they burn out, for it is impossible to reach the point where they continuously feel they have earned a right relationship with God.

Such hardworking church members are constantly busy, a flurry of motion. They volunteer for assignments before other members do. They apply proper protocol to all church events. They may be either humble or proud. They know what work they have done in the church, for it is important for them to keep a mental or physical record of their labors. After all, they are trying to earn their salvation. Publicly quiet or talkative and eloquent, one thing is certain: they will be involved in church work. With their names familiar to most of your church's membership, they work feverishly, their hands stirring many pots. Unfortunately, their zeal may not have come from God.

To avoid losing this type of hardworking church attenders, you must first minister to them to ascertain if



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they are born again. If they are not born again, out of love make clear to them that no one can earn salvation. To avoid losing such good workers, lead them into God's kingdom. If that goes undone, these good, hardworking church attenders will either grow bitter or burn out.

The born-again workers work under the Holy Spirit's unction. Individuals born-again and filled with God's Spirit desire to put their faith to work for God. Faith in God produces good works.

Avoid letting good workers burn out. To avoid burnout, be sensitive to the members of your church. Be curious about their homelife, their school progress, and the demands of their jobs, especially if they have a part- or full-time job outside church. Armed with this knowledge, you'll know when to solicit assistance for someone who is obviously working too much or when to encourage a good worker to take a few days off.

A key to adapting to change is to provide excellent training. Whether you choose to send staff to seminars, provide in-house training, or purchase books and video tapes and maintain an incisive library, when you take time to train, you tell the staff, "I care enough about you to provide specific training that will enable you to be the very best staff member possible." Know yourself. Do you micromanage? Do you stand over staff members' shoulders when you are nervous that a deadline may not be met? Do you nitpick? Are you striving

to do your best for God or are you striving to have others work to make you look your best? Do you gravitate toward certain personalities or do you enjoy, appreciate, and respect your staff equally? Do you guide and manage by word or by deed?

What do you want? Truth does set us free. Be honest with yourself. What do you want from a good staff worker? Do you want a staff member who will freely work long hours without complaint? Do you want a staff member who is also a friend, someone you and your family socialize with after work? Do you want a staff member who is introverted or extroverted?

This honest assessment is necessary. Studies have proven that office managers often hinder growth and productivity by unknowingly hiring employees who have personality traits similar to their own. As the Body of Christ continues to grow, it becomes increasingly clear that God gives us good things through our interaction with one another. A lack of the loving touch, the lack of kind words can kill or psychologically and emotionally cripple a newborn child. God blesses us through our interaction with one another. You will also find that the best working environment is one where different personalities work together toward the unified goal of winning people for God and strengthening Christians.


What do you expect? Whatever you expect is generally what you receive. Truth does set us free. Be honest with yourself. What do you expect from your staff? Do you expect perfection or are you willing to allow room for mistakes? Do you expect a quiet office or do you expect activity in your office? Do you expect an open- or closed-door policy for members of the church? Do you expect your staff to perform volunteer work on tasks outside their normal job description? Or do you expect your staff to remain inside the boundaries of their job descriptions?

Share your expectations with staff. Encourage them to do likewise with

you. Make yourself available to your staff for suggestions, complaints, and praise.

It is important to know what is going on in your staff members' personal and professional lives. It is important to provide ongoing professional training for your staff. It is important to encourage your staff to: "Take a day off." "Take a long lunch." "Go home early today." This makes it clear to your staff that you value them as individuals and not simply as people who get the church work done. This goes a long way toward preventing burnout of good workers.

Put yourself in your staff members' shoes. Be on the lookout, especially during peak work times, for signs of burnout: complaints, heavy sighs, physical weariness, lack of patience, a staff member hurrying to leave the office day after day. Provide sufficient and stimulating training. Spend time conversing with your staff without discussing work. Get to know your staff's families.

Keeping good workers is a skill that can be turned into an art form. Keeping good workers will cause you to learn and to grow personally and professionally. Keeping good workers will keep you in step with God's leadership and management style. 

Today's Books for Today's Preachers


*Stuck in a Sticky World:
Learning to See God's Best in
Life's Worst,*

by Jon Johnston,
(Joplin, Missouri: College Press,
1996), 295 pages
(PA089-900-752X, \$19.99).

Jon Johnston, Ph.D., the Nazarene scholar and church leader who has taught the past 20 years at Pepperdine University and who has written five other books, has a new one just off the press.

This book is exceedingly well-researched and well-written. It is in an area of Johnston's professional expertise as a professor of sociology and social psychology. The author also possesses an honors B.D. from Nazarene Theological Seminary, which means that he is acquainted with Scripture and theology—both of which equip

him for handling helpfully the subjects of why the righteous suffer and how we are enabled to react creatively when our world becomes garmented with a pale cast. Jon Johnston gives us many suggestions, including advice against mere "group-think" (p. 38).

His list of questions at the close of each chapter makes this book an excellent resource for group study. 

—J. Kenneth Grider
Distinguished visiting professor of
religion,

Olivet Nazarene University
Professor of theology emeritus
Nazarene Theological Seminary
Sun Lakes, Arizona



GLASBERGEN

"I see we're running a little long this morning. For our final hymn, let's just sing every other word."

Thank God for the Joy of Ministry

There is joy in ministry! This must be a premise on which we build ministry, or the New Testament is suspect. The gospel, which is the central priority of ministry, means "good news." If we are dispensers of good news, then joy is a by-product of the proclamation.

Amid all the negatives that define ministry, we must not lose sight of the joy, the victory, and the fulfillment that also come with ministry. In a negative world, it is too easy to color ministry with the wrong hues.

Paul said to the Philippian church: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). We must have a place in ministry for rejoicing, for joy, for victory—a place to savor the success of faithful ministry.

One way to thank God for the joy of ministry is to acknowledge His blessings. If one is not careful, he or she will see storm clouds in every blessing or success. We must boldly express our thanks for the victories and live those moments with gratitude and joy.

Another way to thank God for the joy of ministry is to live with a spirit of expectancy. As I visit with those pastors who are experiencing the joys of ministry, I am encouraged by them. They not only see, feel, and appreciate the blessings of ministry but are anticipating more of them as well. They see potential, they dream of better things, they are not waiting for the next crisis. There is a spirit of expectancy in their ministry. It is contagious. It not only fills their soul with joy but also spreads to their congregations.

A third way to thank God for the joy of ministry is to keep the focus on Christ. Pastors must be reminded who they are and whose they are. Those who celebrate the joy of ministry keep close to the One who called them to ministry. They cele-



by C. Neil Strait

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brate relationship. They know the source of joy and saturate life with His presence and with His will.

Yet another way to thank God for the joy of ministry is to keep life pursuing the potentials. Successful pastors keep their energies engaged in the big picture. They give themselves to the eternal causes. They accept problems as part of the journey, but not the whole journey. They are given to what Stephen Covey calls, "First things first." Where life is focused on potential more than on problems, there the Spirit unleashes energies and gifts "for the work of ministry." Such focus is the raw material for joy.

One other observation of those who thank God for the joy of ministry is that they seek to serve and not to be served. Someone has written that "fragrance always clings to the hand that gives roses."


Several years ago I visited a church that had come through a long crisis with a former pastor and now was enjoying growing days with their current pastor. I was puzzled at what had happened. The former pastor was well-trained, had a good appearance, seemed to do things well, and, for all outward appearances, had potential

for successful ministry. The current pastor, though a tremendous fellow, did not have all the gifts it appeared his predecessor had.

I inquired of a layperson what he thought the secret was to the success of the church. In a kind way he said, "Well, this pastor is not always asking for something for himself. He is, instead, asking how he can serve. He has turned the focus of the church outward. We are beginning to give, to serve, and our church has never been more unified."

So there are some ways to thank God for the joy of ministry, for where there is no thanks, there is no joy. All the victories of ministry are the by-product of faithfulness. One of the tasks of faithfulness is thanks-giving. It is too easy to see only the failures and the problems. Thanks-giving helps to keep the books balanced and in right focus.

I heard E. Stanley Jones speak years ago. He stated that he spent his mornings thanking God, praising Him, honoring Him, deepening his relationship with Him. It was the secret to his life of joy.

I heard a Sunday School teacher say one Sunday, "Let God be large in your life this week." Thanks-giving is letting God be large in our hearts. In ministry, a lot of things beg for one's attention. They clamor for attention, for space; they want to be large in our ministry. As a pastor, I encourage people to stay up-to-date with their "thank-yous," for I am convinced that thankfulness is a deterrent to selfishness. It is a reminder that life and ministry are dependent on others and especially on God. Thanks-giving turns our thoughts to God, to His blessings, to His plans, and to His counsel; all of which prepares us for success, for joy, and for exciting ministry. 

Giving to the Highest Degree: Light Shed on Love from the Dark Ages

Angry and defiant, a young couple sat across the desk from me in my office. Bitterly they spewed out resentful poison: "You don't love us. You don't even care. It doesn't matter to you that we are suffering."

Gently I defended myself: "But I *do* care. Don't you remember all the groceries my wife and I gave you? And what about the money we sent over to you each Christmas?"

"You didn't help us!" The wife was speaking vehemently this time. "You insulted our dignity. What we needed were people to understand and respectable jobs so we could support our family."

The exchange with this couple deteriorated further until I realized I was unable to reach them. Healing and restoration would have to wait for another day. With sadness I realized my acts of charity had not just been spurned, they had been misinterpreted altogether. Never mind the fact that groceries and money had been hungrily consumed at the moment. What I had intended as Christian charity had been received as a counterproductive insult.

Shocked and repulsed by what I wanted to categorize as two "ungrateful wretches," grieved that my efforts to show love in a tangible way had driven a wedge between us, I closed the conversation. Meekly I offered a simple prayer that God would somehow heal the wounds.

What went wrong in my acts of compassion? And how should I express my understanding of the biblical mandate to give to those in need?

I never expected to find some answers in the writings of a 12th-century Jew, but indeed I did. His name



by Carlton F. Harvey

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was Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon (1135-1204), known in Hebrew literature as the Rambam and in Western culture since the Renaissance as Maimonides. He is unquestionably one of the outstanding figures in Jewish history.

While browsing along in a text of selected writings, I was suddenly riveted upon a passage that spoke of degrees of charity. Maimonides, also a philosopher, was elucidating with amazing insight for 20th-century compassionate ministries.

Eight Degrees of Charity

*1. The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of the person who assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment—in a word, by putting him where he can dispense with other people's aid. With reference to such aid it is said, "You shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you" (Lev. 25:35), which means strengthen him in such a manner that his falling into want is prevented.**

My initial assumption was that the

highest act of charity was to give to the person in need without expectation of return. Clothes closets, food depots, soup kitchens, and the like headed my list, along with free medical treatment. While these charitable activities certainly have value, Maimonides places them lower on his scale of charity.

What, then, rises to the highest degree of charity? Job creation and job placement services rank as the highest form of giving. The principle is that recipients be given the enablement to provide for their own needs. Implied in this notion is an accountability for how the recipients disburse the resources placed at their disposal.

Although the parable of the talents (cf. Matt. 25:14-30) has often been cited as a model of fruitfulness and accountability, perhaps a new understanding in terms of compassionate ministries is in order.

The idea is that all three individuals in the story were disenfranchised and powerless as slaves. The master, with resources to spare, offered the slaves an opportunity to gain independence through a monetary gift and empowerment. As we learn from the story, two responded to their opportunity by multiplying the initial investment. Accountability was a delight as they presented the fruit of their labors. Independence, dignity, rising self-esteem, and fresh opportunities for advancement accompanied their master's delightful assessment, "Well done!" The servant who squandered his opportunity was understandably bound in an ongoing state of lost dignity and motivation. It was not the gift that was defeating, but his unwillingness to risk personal change.

Charity that leads to independence

via self-support includes empowerment and resources, but it also must include accountability. Thus both giver and receiver share in the responsibility of maximizing resources toward the desired end. The giving of the powerful is matched by the giving of the powerless to create a splendid synergized result.

Maimonides challenges those of us desirous of making our acts of charity most effective to consider investment in job creation and placement. But what of the remaining seven degrees of charity?

2. *A step below this stands the one who gives alms to the needy in such a manner that the giver knows not to whom he gives and the recipient knows not from whom it is given that he takes. Such exemplifies performing the meritorious act for its own sake.*

Several issues are raised here. First,

Eight Degrees of Charity

The highest degree is that of assisting a person by providing a way to dispense with other people's aid.

The giver knows not the receiver, and the recipient knows not the source.

The giver knows the recipient, but the person in need knows not the source.

The giver knows not the recipient, but the person in need knows the giver.

The giver gives directly to the person in need before being asked.

The giver who gives only after being asked.

The giver gives graciously but less than is needed.

The giver gives morosely.

the notion of giving blindly into a fund administered by others runs counter to current trends. People today want to know exactly where their gifts are going.

On the one hand, some organizations have failed to maintain credibility through spurious expenditures dripping with selfish greed. Others have lost their right to appeal for donations because of an unwillingness to pull out of unproductive programs and redirect resources into better projects. Still others have been dubbed unworthy due to a lazy, lackadaisical system of handling funds.

Maimonides would agree with these modern day concerns. He states: *One should not drop money in the charity box unless one is sure that the person in charge is trustworthy, wise, and competent to handle the funds properly, as was Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon.*

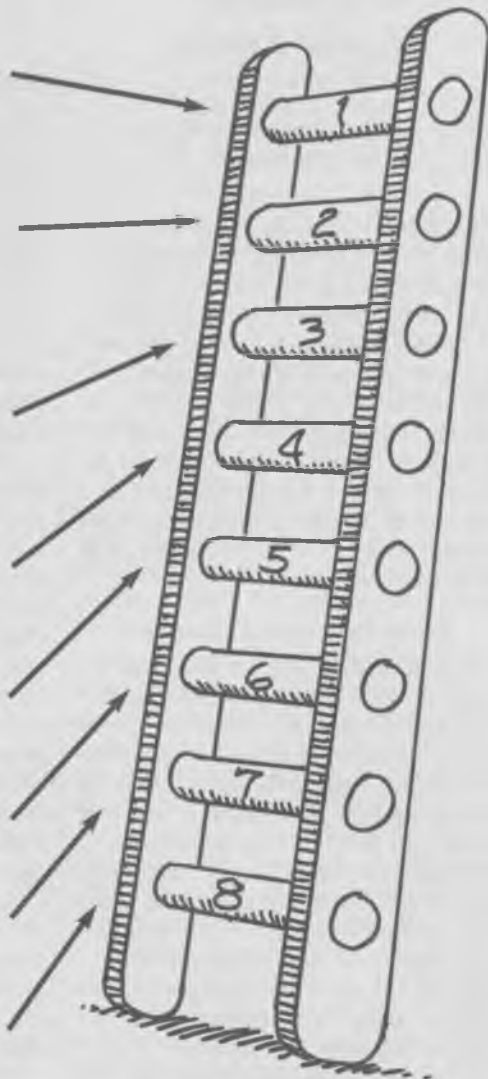
Interestingly, however, the citation of one such person worthy of the responsibility to handle funds properly emphasizes a modern-day truth. Granted, certain organizations have failed the test of responsible stewardship and giving to them should be avoided. But there are a sufficient number of worthy organizations who consistently pass tests of accountability with impeccable honesty.

The giving of
the powerful is
matched by the
giving of the
powerless to
create a
splendid
synergized
result.

What, then, is at the heart of a reluctance to invest charitable donations in organizations well equipped to meet the needs of impoverished peoples? Is it possible that the answer is to be found in the psyche of a generation infatuated with immediate gratification, rewards, and results? The grace of performing the meritorious act for its own sake has been lost on a society desperate for ego gratification.

A further tragedy is the misdirection of faith on the part of the recipient who knows the donor. Rather than learning the lesson that all good gifts come from God, the recipient is inclined to express faith and gratitude toward people. Ego gratification and misdirected faith are avoided when one learns to give joyously as an unknown to another unknown. And in the process, the dignity of the recipient is preserved.

3. *One step lower is that in which the giver knows to whom he gives but the poor person knows not from whom he receives. . . . This method becomes fitting and exalted, should it happen that those in charge of the*



charity fund do not conduct its affairs properly.

Here Maimonides offers the alternative to giving to organizations that have violated trust as discussed above. However, a further point may be made. The alert donor may wisely direct funds to a specific need when otherwise the need would be overlooked. An example is the case of the missionary soliciting funds for a worthy project but lacking the communication skills to convey the need in a compelling manner. Another example is the individual whose outward appearance does not match with a legitimate need hidden from public view. Directed giving in these instances is justified. And again, the anonymity of the contributor offers the prospect that faith and gratitude will be directed toward God.

4. *A step lower is that in which the poor person knows from whom he is taking but the giver knows not to whom he is giving. Examples of this were the great sages who would tie their coins in their scarves which they would fling over their shoulders so that the poor might help themselves without suffering shame.*

Giving that discreetly preserves dignity is not to be neglected. At the heart of the matter is one's fundamental opinion and attitude toward persons of impoverishment. Sensitivity to erase social classes in the matter of self-worth is a delicate but essential activity. Going beyond political correctness, it is an issue which strikes at the heart of the basic belief that all men are created equal and are therefore deserving of respectful treatment.

5. *The next degree lower is that of*

him who, with his own hand, bestows a gift before the poor person asks.

Christian charity is enhanced when, in view of our own good fortune, our first response is thankfulness to God immediately followed by the question, "Now with whom can I share?" Adopting this response mechanism automatically releases compassionate sensitivity to persons in need. No longer waiting for an appeal, the generous one searches out opportunities to give.

6. *The next degree lower is that of him who gives only after the poor person asks.*

Let us not pretend to ignore or refuse the one who asks. God has consistently responded to our requests for grace and help in times of need. The Christian can do no less than reply to an expressed need as opportunity is given.

The pace of modern society coupled with the screaming demands of a plethora of charitable causes has the tendency to callous even the generous to authentic cries for help. When our attention is drawn to a previously overlooked but nevertheless genuine need, it is appropriate to respond swiftly and liberally.

And let not the one who asks be despised for their asking. Rather, acknowledge the courage and inner strength required to step forward in a time of need. How much worse is the one who suffers in the silence of a pride that will not admit a need.

7. *The next degree lower is that of him who gives less than is fitting but gives with a gracious mien.*

While Maimonides places this sev-

enth down from the highest degree of charity, there is yet a simple point to be made. Our giving must be characterized by graciousness. For at its lowest degree, this is what Maimonides says:

8. *The next degree lower is that of him who gives morosely.*

The Scriptures teach that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). While we ought to accept the gift that is less than fitting as well as the gift given morosely, the greater need is that the giver would resolve personal struggles in the light of God's lavish generosity. Matt. 10:8 is instructive: "Freely you received, freely give."

I still have not completely unpacked all that was contained in the angry tirade focused on my acts of charity that day in my office. My initial temptation to withhold all my giving was overcome in the awareness that I possess more than I can possibly make good use of. Rather than horde or waste the generous gifts God has entrusted to my care, I have elected to go on giving to those in need, performing the meritorious act for its own sake. I am challenged to move up to higher and higher degrees of charity. And, thanks to Maimonides, I want to take a fresh look at the creation of a job center in my city where unemployment is rampant. I'd like to enter into a synergistic partnership of empowering people, strengthening them in such a manner that their falling into want is prevented.

*Quotations printed in italics throughout this article are by Maimonides, quoted in I. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, Inc., 1972), 136-37.

Pontius' Puddle



Where Is Your Daughter Tonight?

The teens gather after the service and form a caravan for the nearest coffee shop, ice cream parlor, or pizza place. You are thrilled when your daughter bounds up to you, asking for \$10 to join them. You are thrilled that she is part of the crowd, accepted by the kids in the church. After all, it is much safer to have her hanging around "church kids" than the unsaved "school kids." Right? Not necessarily.

Even as you peer over the heads of the short white-haired ladies who are pumping your hand in the narthex, you watch the boys gather around her and think you're safe because these boys are the sons of your deacons, your board members, your pastoral staff.

However, remember that the "preacher's daughter" title carries its own connotations and dangers. Add to that the normal teenage need to prove her individuality, distinguishing herself from her parents or family, and you have a recipe for trouble, possibly outright rebellion.

My own father was a wonderful preacher, not only in his sermon delivery from the pulpit but also in his ability to shepherd and counsel the church body. He attended board meetings every week, visited the sick and elderly, and managed growing churches. My mother was the perfect preacher's wife. She played the organ and directed and sang in small groups and choirs. The church body was like an extended family in our home.

They did not know that the bus trip for any outing, whether it be skiing or camp, provided many opportunities for unchaperoned "feeling up" in junior high school. They did not know that the boy from the high school group at church whose father was head of the deacon board had oc-



by Shari L. Risoff

Freelance writer,
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

topuslike hands. They did not know that at the Christian college I attended PK's were defined as "minks," with the same reproductive habits of the animal.

No one actually *taught* me to adjust my behavior to fit in with the crowd. In fact, quite the opposite. The crowd I was warned about was the "school crowd," not the "church crowd." The unsaved kids actually turned out to be less dangerous and more respectful than the "church kids."

It was my own mental trap that led me toward the people-pleasing behavior at church. After all, this was my dad's job. On the surface anyway, the family must be united together. One of my sister's boyfriends in high school actually accused our family of being a clique. We had to stick together, protect each other from the insensitive clods at the church who felt it their moral obligation to spy on us and report any untoward behavior to my father.

Defend your kids! Let the church people know that you and you alone are responsible for the whereabouts and activities of your own children. Talk to your kids. Have regular adult conversations with them. Don't jump to conclusions. Ask them about their lives. Then be understanding rather

than judgmental. Help them figure out how to solve problems and troubleshoot on their own. Don't expect every detail, but don't believe the myth that all teenagers want to keep everything private. Give them a safety net.

When I turned 16, I was finally allowed to officially date. My father gave me a gift that day that I shall never forget and that I will pass on to my teenage son.


My father and I dined alone at a fancy restaurant, complete with low lights and candles. I wore an evening gown; he wore a suit. He treated me with respect, showing me how a gentleman with impeccable manners would treat me and what I should expect.

His gift was a standing date forever. If I was ever asked out by someone and did not know how to turn him down, I could always honestly say that I already had plans. Then all I would have to do is call my father and tell him that we had "plans," and we would have another date.

I have done it and it works.

Despite the safety net, though, I fell into traps—traps placed by what I thought were just well-meaning "church boys," traps where I least expected them.

Care about where your daughter is tonight. Don't just give her the money to go along with the crowd. Give her attention, at least as much attention as you give those silver-haired ladies at the end of your sermon. Ask questions, and then listen when she answers.

Deep down she wants you to know. She wants you to protect her from the enticements of the world, especially when the world sits right in your very own church, probably in the same pew every Sunday. 

The Mustard Seed Vision

On October 1, 1994, the Trinity Church of the Nazarene (formerly The First Chinese Church of the Nazarene) commemorated their years as a church in a "Heritage Celebration." Having pastored this church in past years, I was privileged to be the speaker on this occasion. I was asked to bring a message on "My Vision for the Future of Trinity Church," with a textual background in the parable of the mustard seed:

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (Matt. 13:31-32, NASB).

It was an honor to be chosen as a speaker for this event and a double honor to be given this very important topic: "My Vision for the Future of Trinity Church." The only problem was that, after giving this topic my very best in preparation, I was utterly void of any vision for Trinity Church. I had nothing to show for my work. Finally I admitted to myself that I did not have a vision for the future of their church. That night, in my frustration, I prayed, "Lord, please show me Your vision for the future of Trinity Church in the context of Your parable of the mustard seed."

It has been my practice for several years to have my morning devotions while the rest of the family are asleep. The next morning during my devotional time, while on my knees, these words were projected into my thoughts: "I am the Mustard Seed. I am that smallest of seeds, which became the largest Tree in the garden, also the largest Tree in the world."



by Delbert T. Morse

*Retired elder, former pastor,
Oceanside, California*

While I was on my knees, the Lord gave to me His vision for Trinity Church, using His parable of the mustard seed. He pleads for permission to plant that Mustard Seed of himself in our hearts. It will grow to where He is the most important Person in our lives and the most important Person in our church. He promised: "But I, when I am lifted up . . . will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

In answer to my prayer for His help, the Lord Jesus declared himself to be the Mustard Seed, the least of all seeds. To emphasize that statement, He pointed my thoughts to Philippians 2:5-8, KJV:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The Lord emptied himself of His heavenly glory and accepted an animal shelter for the place of His birth. His first bed was a manger used in feeding livestock. His parents were common people from Nazareth, a most backward area. His ministry was



largely focused on the needs of everyday people. Jesus defended His ministry with these words: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:22, NASB). His ministry and popularity enraged the rulers and priests in Jerusalem. He was arrested, bound as a criminal, accused of blasphemy, flogged, spit upon, ridiculed, condemned to die on a cross between two criminals, shamefully abused, and placed in a borrowed tomb from which He arose on the third day. He humbled himself and, like the mustard seed, served as the least of all.

Into my mind was projected the mustard seed quality of His disciples. In comparison to the church of today with its great wealth and resources, its fine buildings, equipment, seminaries, and trained leaders, the disciples had so little but gave so much, even their lives. Shortly after the first Christian Church had its beginning in Jerusalem, Peter and John were arrested and faced the same ruling body that had condemned Jesus to the Cross. "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit," (Acts 4:8, NASB), replied to their charges with such boldness and confidence that the rulers were amazed. Acts 4:13, NASB, describes their response: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."

Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, writes about some of the problems with which the apostles had to live:

For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, . . . we are weak, . . . we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs

of all things, even until now (1 Cor. 4:9-13, NASB).

Thirty years ago the Lord gave to me the privilege of serving as the pastor at Trinity Church. During the last part of my fourth year, I became very



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discouraged and depressed. I decided that, for the good of the church, I should resign. One morning, in our home at Highland Park, on my knees, I asked the Lord to let me resign and take some other ministry. I reminded Him of other talented and successful pastors who could do a much better job as pastor of this church than I was doing. I also told Him, "Lord, I don't have the answer for this church." That morning, the Lord changed my life and ministry. He stood in my room; I did not see Him with my eyes or hear Him with my ears, but He spoke to me. I heard the words He said: "I am alive and in this room right now. I love you and died on the Cross for your sins. I am the answer to your church: And I, when I be lifted up . . . will draw all men to myself."



"Lord, I don't
have the answer
for this church."

Jesus' living presence and the words He spoke changed my life and ministry. I now had the answer for our church and every church, the Lord Jesus Christ. My Bible became a new book. It was about Him from the beginning to the last sentence. I had a new message for my people, "Jesus

Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2, NASB). I had a new joy in my heart, a constant reminder of His abiding presence and love for me. He gave to me a vision of hell and a taste of heaven. From that day on, I have carried a burden for the lost. I know the only possible answer, The Lord Jesus Christ.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). Also on that same night, He prayed for them and for us a most beautiful prayer: "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:26).

Millions of Christians have suffered and died for Jesus. In their lives was that glorious mystery of His abiding presence: "that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27, NASB). Paul, in the conclusion of his second letter to the church at Corinth, urges them: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5, NASB).

Dr. H. Orton Wiley, in his *Epistle to the Hebrews*, shares with us this great truth: "Nor would we forget that it is not by the holy heart that the work of God goes forward, but by Him who dwells within the holy heart. In Him, and not what He has wrought within us, lies the secret of progress in the divine life."*

The Church, according to the Scriptures, is the Body of Christ in the world (see Eph. 1:15-23). Ephesians compares the relationship of the husband and wife with that of Christ and His Church. In the following quote, portions of scripture describe this relationship of Christ and the Church:

He Himself being the Savior of the body . . . the church is subject to Christ, . . . Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that

He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless . . . because we are members of His body. . . . This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-28, 30, 32, NASB).

God speaks to us through Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church, as to His provision for all Christian churches:

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:14, 16-21, NASB).

The Lord Jesus, in Revelation 2 and 3, has a message for each of the seven churches. He commends the church at Ephesus for their labors and care of the church. Then He said, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4, 5, NASB). Any church or person that

does not give Him that place of honor and authority, as quoted above, is open to the greatest of all tragedies, that of being put out of His garden.

My prayer and God-given vision for Trinity Church: In the mustard seed parable, the Lord Jesus is the Mustard Seed. The Lord planted that Seed in His garden. That Seed grew into a Tree, the largest Plant in His garden.

**It is not by the
holy heart that
the work of God
goes forward,
but by Him who
dwells within
the holy heart.**

The birds of the air came and nested in its branches, built their nests, and raised their young. That Tree is the Church. The Church is people: men and women in whom Christ has planted the Seed of himself. They have been born-again and are new creatures in Him and are to let Him so fill their lives with himself that He becomes the largest Tree in their world and the Church. When He used Peter on the day of Pentecost, there were added three thousand to the Church (Acts 2:41). In the same way He wants to use Trinity Church to reach out to neighbors, friends, and families to draw them to himself.

Dr. J. Edwin Orr, former teacher at

Fuller Seminary, also an outstanding authority on revivals and of dynamic Christianity has written a song that expresses his burden for revival in the Church. The words of this hymn are a formula for revival and victorious Christian living.

Cleanse Me
by J. Edwin Orr

*Search me, O God, and know my heart today.
Try me, O Savior; know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.*

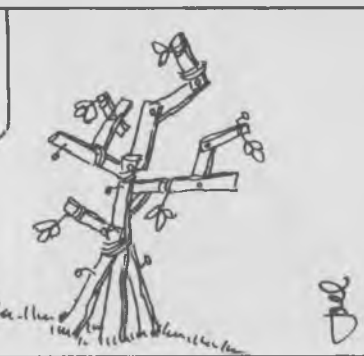
*I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin.
Fulfill Thy Word, and make me pure within;
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame.
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.*

*Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride.
I now surrender; Lord in me abide.*

*O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee.
Send a revival—start the work in me.
Thy word declares Thou wilt supply our need.
For blessing now, O Lord, I humbly plead.*

*H. Orton Wiley, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1959), 239-40.

Pontius' Puddle



The Preretirement Years: Emotional Preparation

by Dennis Apple

Pastor for senior adults and recovery ministries,
College Church of the Nazarene, Olathe, Kansas

Submitted by Pensions and Benefits USA Church of the Nazarene

As you approach retirement age, you will probably check out your pension plans, tax-sheltered annuities, and other anticipated retirement income. However, you may give very little attention to the emotional preparations you need to make in order to insure a successful retirement. If you have not made these necessary emotional preparations, you could be in for big trouble.

For over 20 years, I have served as a senior adult minister and have been positioned to observe both laypeople and clergy as they make the transition from active to retired. Those who look ahead and prepare themselves enter retirement with little or no problem. Others are tremendously

shocked and surprised at the changes which retirement brings to them, and they are the ones who suffer greatly.

Someone aptly has said that mountain climbing is a very dangerous sport but that climbing down the mountain is even more dangerous. Retirement, for the unprepared, can be very dangerous. However, it can also be the most rewarding time in your life.

Let's look at some statistics. In 1900, life expectancy in the United States was about 47 for a man and 51 for a woman. Only 10 percent of the population reached "middle age." Today, the average is 74 for men and 78 for women. People reaching their 65th birthday this year can expect to

live, on average, 11 more years. Fortunately, this increased longevity does not mean those last years must be endured in bad health or senility. Today's 70-year-olds often resemble yesterday's 40-year-olds—quite a different picture from "Whistler's mother" who epitomized old age a century ago and was only 44 when she sat for that famous painting!

One of the big shocks for which you must prepare

is the change in your role from pastor to pastor emeritus or retired pastor. When you retire, you move suddenly from pastor to retired pastor; from pulpit to pew; from a ringing telephone to silence; from sermon preparation to sermon listening; from chair of the board to church member. These are not easy transitions. In fact, such drastic changes can be dangerous.

Pitfalls of Retirement

What are some of the pitfalls of retirement? What dangers lurk ahead? Two pitfalls seem to stand out.

1. *Moving away from a community in which you have given a portion of your life in ministry is often a heart-wrenching experience.* However, if you move into another pastorate, the pain of leaving friends is eased somewhat by the new relationships. When you retire, you leave a familiar church and community where you have filled a well-established role to become part of a new church and community where you are virtually unknown and where there is no waiting, well-defined role for you to fill. Soon you can come to feel as if you are in exile.

Oh sure, it is great to travel, see your children and grandchildren, play a few rounds of golf, and read that book without the interruption of the phone. But after a while, you miss not being needed anymore. Fishing, golf, and free time all begin to lose their appeal. In short, you begin to miss some of the pressure points, and you wish again for the times when people needed you.

2. *Another danger is the severing of ties from district and general*



church offices. While some of you grudgingly fulfill district and general church office responsibilities, others of you enjoy them and are saddened when you must hand in your letter of resignation.

Strategies for Retirement

What can you do when you suddenly find yourself headed for retirement and must face these dangers?

1. *Church.* If you move to a new area, you must realize that you now have the option to be involved as much as you wish. You control the degree of your involvement. Many ministers take a part-time staff position at a local church or do supply preaching. Others give their services as chaplain or counselor at a local hospital. Many district superintendents wisely use their retired elders to teach special courses or help tutor ministers who are taking the home study courses.

2. *Family.* Retirement can be the time when the family ties can be strengthened. Perhaps the pressures of full-time ministry have taken their toll. Now, you have the opportunity to spend much more time with your companion and enjoy the fruit of your years in ministry memories. Also you have more time to spend with grandchildren.

3. *Travel.* Still another positive thing about retirement is the opportunity for travel. Older adults are traveling as never before. Someone anonymously penned the following poem that describes grandmothers who are no longer sitting in their rocking chairs.

*In the dim and distant past,
When life's tempo wasn't fast,
Grandma used to rock and knit,
Crochet, tat, and baby-sit.*

*When the kids were in a jam,
They could always count on
"Gram,"
In the age of gracious living,
Grandma was the gal for giving.*

*Grandma now is in the gym
Exercising to keep slim;
She's off touring with the bunch,
Taking clients out to lunch.*

*Driving north to ski or curl,
All her days are in a whirl,
Nothing seems to stop or block her
Now that Grandma's off her rocker!**

The same could be said about Grandpas!

4. *Study.* Keep your mind alive and growing. Every minister, out of necessity, reads a lot. He is compelled to read if he would feed his flock adequately. However, in retirement you now have the opportunity to read for your own interest and pleasure rather than reading through the "sermon lens." I know of one retired minister who has a great interest in any material written about Paul. In fact, he has made an agreement with a church college library that they will send him one book a month on the subject of Paul. At last check he had read over 20 books on the subject.

Other options are open to help keep your mind stimulated and growing. Consider taking a course at a nearby college or university. You may be surprised to discover the low-cost tuitions available to older adults. Still another educational opportunity is the elder-hostel program. Started in 1978, it combines travel with a weeklong educational experience at a college or university. For more information on the subject, write:

Elderhostel, Inc.
75 Federal Street
Boston, MA 02110-1941

5. *Hobby.* Another way to enjoy retirement is to invest more time in your hobby. Perhaps it's time to dust off the stamp books or get out that can of Indian Head pennies you have been saving. Or maybe you have always had an interest in ham radio but didn't have time to learn the theory or Morse Code. Now is the time to rejuvenate those old interests in hobbies or to start a new one.

To be sure, retirement will be very different, and your ability to retire successfully will be tied directly to your ability to handle change. One can bemoan retirement, live in the past, and mournfully long for the "good old days." Or one can look for new opportunities of serving in this new chapter of life. 🙏

*J. Winston Pearce, *Ten Good Things I Know About Retirement* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Here's the Guy with All the Gold!

by Sami King-Wente

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Livingston, California

It seems there was a very wealthy man near death. Wanting to insure his place in heaven, he stipulated that all his assets be transferred to gold and be buried with him. So upon death he trudged to the Pearly Gates with his box of gold and presented it to Saint Peter.

Saint Peter looked inside and exclaimed: "Oh, good! We've been waiting for you."

As the man beamed proudly, Saint Peter picked up the phone.

"Michael," he said. "The man to make the street repairs is here." 🙏

What Are We Teaching Our Children About the Bible?

Apparently not much, according to a recent survey conducted at Northwest Nazarene College. In the 1994-95 school year a survey was conducted of 262 students in six sections of BL101 Biblical Literature and History. This is a required course for all new students' knowledge of the content of the Bible. The Religion Department at NNC has felt for a long time that new students have a very poor knowledge of the Bible. However, we did not have any hard data to support our belief. We had been operating on hunches.

The survey consisted of 30 questions, most of which were fairly simple. There were a few tougher questions designed to see if any students had done any academic study of the Bible prior to attending college. The survey was constructed with 13 questions on the Old Testament, 12 on the New Testament, and 5 questions on interpretation and versions of the Bible. The questions were mostly of the fill-in-the-blank type so that students could not guess from multiple choices. Several demographic questions were asked at the conclusion of the survey to determine what type of Christian background and exposure to the Bible these students had experienced.

The survey was handed out on the first day of class. Students were given adequate time in class to complete all the answers. Most were finished in about 10 minutes. BL101 is predominantly freshmen, probably more than 90 percent. There are a few transfer students who may be sophomores, juniors, or seniors, as well as a few repeating the course because of an earlier failure. However, we did not attempt to identify these from the freshmen students.

The composition of the group was as follows:



by Wendell Bowes

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- Number of students who participated in the survey—262.
- Number of students who attended a Christian high school (at least one year)—32 (12 percent).
- Number of students who attended church and Sunday School fairly regularly during the last 3 years—208 (79 percent).
- Number of students who grew up in a home where at least one parent was Christian—230 (88 percent).

The results of the survey are given below. The actual survey questions are listed at the end of this article.

Range of scores: 3 to 29 correct answers.
25 percent of the students answered 9 or fewer questions correctly.
50 percent of the students an-

swered 12 or fewer questions correctly.

75 percent of the students answered 16 or fewer questions correctly.

Evaluation

The results of our survey may surprise some of you, but they confirm what those of us who teach in Christian colleges have observed for many years. Bluntly stated, most of our young people are illiterate about the Bible. They may have attended church and Sunday School all their life, they may have participated in Bible quizzing, and they may have attended a Christian high school, but they have never studied the Bible in an academic manner. As a result, they are ignorant of many of the core facts about the Bible. Our survey did not ask any questions about theology, but our hunch is that students would do even worse on a theology survey.

These statistics are alarming. Fifty-



eight percent of college freshmen could not name one Old Testament prophet, 85 percent could not name one patriarch, 69 percent did not know who led the Israelites in conquering the land of Canaan, 90 percent could not identify the author of the Book of Acts.

Biblical and theological illiteracy leaves our people vulnerable to all kinds of cults, theologies, and religious gurus. We can be thankful that some of our young people are getting a good foundation of biblical knowledge through their attendance at a Christian college. Most Christian colleges require at least one course in an academic study of the Bible, usually at the freshman level. However, what about the other young people? Demographic surveys suggest that only one-fourth of Nazarene young people go to Nazarene colleges. The other three-fourths go to community colleges or public universities or do not go to college at all. Where are they getting their information about the Bible?

What can we do about the situation? Let me suggest several areas that need to be studied. These ideas are not intended to be exhaustive or critical. Their purpose is to stimulate thinking. Maybe we can all work at improving the situation once we know that the problem exists.

Curriculum and Teaching

Does the curriculum used at the present time by our Sunday School classes and youth groups provide a basic core of essential knowledge about the Bible and theology? Do Sunday School teachers and youth workers recognize the importance of helping young people to learn this core of knowledge? I don't know the answer to this. My impression, which I get from my teenage daughter, is that many lessons deal with issues of relationships such as how to get along with parents. These are important issues for young people, and I know there is an argument for making our curriculum attractive to today's teenage mind, but are we neglecting to inform our teens of the basic facts of the Bible? This issue applies to more than just young people. Does all of our curriculum contribute to a basic understanding of the Bible and theology? And do our teachers take their task of teaching this curriculum

seriously? Do our teachers need more training in the Bible and theology?

Pulpit Ministry

Pastor, how do you view the teaching component of your pastoral ministry? Would a person who sat in your

Most of our young people are illiterate about the Bible.

worship services for one year have a pretty good idea of what the Bible is about and what your theological position is on the great doctrines of the Church? Some pastors preach only from a few favorite books of the Bible. Other pastors jump around so much from topic to topic and book to book that people are left confused. They have no idea about the importance of David or Moses or Jeremiah or the times in which they lived or even who lived before the other one. It is true that some of this information is better learned during Sunday School hour, but statistics tell us that many church people are not attending Sunday School. Maybe we need to reexamine the teaching aspect of our pulpit ministry. A series of five or six sermons several times a year on a bib-

58 percent of college freshmen could not name one Old Testament prophet.

lical time period or a character like David or Moses or Jeremiah would help many laity to understand the progression of biblical history and the important individuals who participated in that history.

Family Devotions

Can Christian families help their own children gain more knowledge about the Bible and theology? I think they can. Maybe family devotions could include a learning experience as well as a Scripture passage and prayer. Why not a short Christian video for young children on a Bible character? How about games such as Bible Trivia for older children? Maybe grade school children would like to start looking at a biblical time line or some maps of the Bible.

Christian College Education

Should more emphasis be given to getting our young people to attend a Christian college? I think so. The cost of Christian higher education seems prohibitive to many parents today, but consider the alternative. If a Christian college is the principal place where young people become literate about the Bible and their Christian faith, can we afford not to send them there? A recent sign in a college business office read, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." Perhaps we need to reconsider the real value of Christian higher education in the light of these findings.

The survey we conducted at NNC is already affecting the content of what we teach in the freshman Bible courses as well as the way we teach it. We are trying to learn from this survey about how better to educate the young people who arrive at our college doorstep each year. Let's all—church and college and family—work together in this matter of instructing our people about the Bible. It's too important to neglect.

Survey Questions

The questions on the survey are listed below, followed by the number and percentage of students who answered that question correctly.

1. To what books in the Bible does the word "Pentateuch" refer? 67 (26 percent).
2. What significant Old Testament event occurred at Mount Sinai? 171 (65 percent).
3. What river did the Israelites cross in order to enter the land of Canaan? 120 (46 percent)
4. What was the name of Israel's greatest king? 145 (55 percent).
5. Which Old Testament book is

most like the lyrics (words) of a hymnbook? 206 (79 percent).

6. Name one prophet for whom a book in the Old Testament is named. 111 (42 percent).

7. Name one patriarch. 38 (15 percent).

8. Name the person who led the Israelites out of Egypt. 212 (81 percent).

9. Name the Babylonian king who destroyed Jerusalem and took many Jews into exile. 53 (20 percent).

10. Was the nation of Israel in the Old Testament period larger or smaller than Idaho? 104 (40 percent).

11. Who was the first king of Israel? 63 (24 percent).

12. Name the person who led the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. 81 (31 Percent).

13. Place these biblical characters in the order in which they lived: David, Noah, Jacob, Matthew. 149 (57 percent).

14. Name the four Gospels in their biblical order. 215 (82 percent).

15. Who wrote the Book of Acts? 27 (10 percent).

16. In approximately what year was Jesus born? 17 (6 percent).

17. In what town was Jesus born? 224 (85 percent).

18. In what city were Jesus' followers first called Christians? 11 (4 percent).

19. Who wrote the Book of Revelation? 77 (29 percent).

20. Name one person who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. 114 (44 percent).

21. Which epistle of Paul gives the fullest and most systematic account of Paul's theology? 49 (19 percent).

22. Name two of Jesus' disciples. 154 (59 percent).

23. Who was the first Christian martyr? 62 (24 percent).

24. The New Testament was originally written in what language? 76 (29 percent).

25. What city was the capital city of the Jewish nation in Jesus' day? 125 (48 percent).

If a Christian college is the principal place where young people become literate about the Bible and their Christian faith, can we afford not to send them there?

26. Name one version of the Bible other than the NIV (*New International Version*). 240 (92 percent).

27. The books of the Bible are generally arranged in the approximate order in which they were written (true or false)? 156 (60 percent).

28. Every part of the Bible is equally true, relevant, and inspired as any other part (true or false)?

29. The findings of modern science contradict the biblical account

of creation (true or false)?

30. Paul's admonitions about ladies in the church are meant to discourage women from participating in ministry and church leadership roles (true or false)?

Analysis

1. Questions No. 1 and No. 7 both had key words that were unknown to many students: "Pentateuch" and "patriarch."

2. Students generally do not have a good knowledge of Israel's history, as evidenced by questions Nos. 2, 4, 9, 11, and 12.

3. Students who live at a distance from Idaho may have had problems with question No. 10, but as a rule, most people do not realize how compact the land of Israel is.

4. Time sequence is another problem for many students (question No. 13), even when the characters are well known.

5. Questions No. 16 and No. 18 were easily the hardest. Only students who had studied the Bible previously in an academic manner would have gotten these right.

6. The lack of knowledge about the two authorship questions—No. 15 and No. 19—was a big surprise.

7. On question No. 22 most students were able to name at least one of Jesus' disciples, but many were confused with people like Paul and Mark.

8. Question No. 24 was a surprise. Many left it blank or suggested Hebrew.

9. Most students did better than we would have guessed on the interpretation questions—Nos. 26-30. The key word in question No. 28 is the word "relevant."

BEYOND BELIEF



Picture Windows for Preaching

Compiled by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor, Three Rivers, Michigan

Prayer

A missionary once received a letter from a little girl whose Sunday School class had been writing to foreign missionaries. The teacher understood that missionaries get a lot of mail and possibly would not be able to return a response to all the children. She explained that to the boys and girls. The little girl simply wrote:

"Dear Missionary Smith:

"We are praying for you. We are not expecting an answer."

Without realizing it, that little child summed up the prayer life of far too many Christians. Most of us aren't surprised when our prayers are not answered—we're surprised when they are.

The power of prayer creates a community of faith where people pull together for the good of the kingdom. Prayer achieves in our lives dynamic responses from heaven that we thought unanswerable. With prayer we understand that God and the church stand behind us in our hardships as well as victories. Strength, comfort, and hope are for the asking through prayer!

Dynamic Preaching Magazine 9 No. 8 (August 1994), 18.

God's Care

Fred Musser was about to leave to study for the ministry when his pastor, Rev. Temple, stopped by and talked about God.

Pastor Temple said, "When my son was little, we often walked together out through the fields and neighboring pasture behind the parsonage. At first the little fellow would hold onto my little finger, but he found that when he stepped into a hoofprint or stumbled over something, his grip would fail and he'd fall down. Not giving it much thought, my mind on other matters, I'd stop and he'd get up, brush himself off, and then grab

hold of my little finger again. Each time it would be harder.

"It happened again. The boy looked up at me and said, 'Daddy, I think if you would hold my hand, I wouldn't fall.'"

Musser said that as Pastor Temple told him the story, he did so with a tear in his eye. Temple said, "You know, he still stumbled many times after that, but he never hit the ground. Now, as you walk with God, don't try to hold on to Him, let Him hold on to you. You may stumble but He'll never let you fall."

James Hewett, comp., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1988), 244.

Morality

Arthur Berry was a very successful jewel thief back in the Roaring Twenties. He hobnobbed with the famous and rich of Boston's elite, but he did his hobnobbing at night when the folks weren't home. It is said that Berry's visits were a status symbol among the ladies of Boston's upper class. His status-orientation wasn't as intriguing to the police. He was making one of his nightly calls when police caught up with him and shot him three times. He fell through a glass window. Shattered glass stuck in his body, and he lay on the ground in horrible pain. While lying there, he came to a conclusion, "I ain't going to do this anymore."

Arthur Berry went to prison for 20 years. After serving his time, he moved to a quiet New England town. There he became a respectable citizen.

Eventually word leaked out to the press that this notorious jewel thief settled in the tiny New England town—and the nation's media services arrived in great numbers. One young reporter asked him, "Mr. Berry, you stole from a lot of rich people in your life as a jewel thief. Let me ask

you a question. From whom did you steal the most?"

Without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "That's the easiest question I've ever been asked. The individual from whom I stole the most was a man named Arthur Berry. I could have done anything, been an executive on Wall Street, a successful business man, or anything I wanted to be, but I utilized my God-given talents and developed them illegitimately. I could have made it big in business but I spent two-thirds of my adult life behind bars."

King Duncan, *Lively Illustrations for Effective Preaching* (Knoxville: Seven Worlds Publishing, 1987), 308-9.

Acceptance

Nothing devastates like rejection. It causes numbing despair and negative emotions. Richard Lee tells that G. Campbell Morgan, the famous preacher, wanted to enter the ministry.

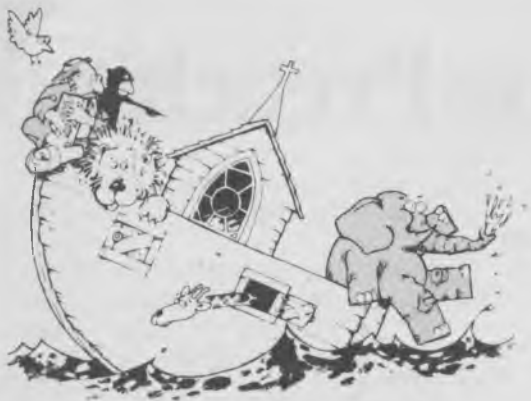
"He gave a trial sermon in front of a panel of men who were to ordain him. To his amazement and despair, they turned him down for his ordination. Knowing his father was waiting for him at home in anticipation, Morgan sadly wired his father with one word: 'REJECTED.'"

"He also wrote in his diary that day, 'Everything seems very dark. So still. But He knows the best.'"

"Soon after, he received the reply from his father. It read: 'REJECTED ON EARTH, BUT ACCEPTED IN HEAVEN, DAD.'"

The memory of that deep painful experience never left Morgan. Each person knows that type of pain. Be a positive influence on others by being accepting of them as Christ has accepted us.

Richard Lee, *Windows of Hope* (Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah, 1992), 11-12. ♪



Sinners Anonymous

There has been a lot of talk about Sunday night church. Is it worth the pastor preparing two sermons a week? How about small groups? Why not Sunday School at night? Maybe films (but certainly not movies) could be shown or special groups could perform. Here's one more idea for you to think about: Why don't churches call their Sunday evening services "Sinners Anonymous?" Christians could tell their friends that they were going to an SA meeting. After a while they could even invite their friends to sit in on the meeting.

The meeting would start by welcoming everyone. Then one of the old-timers could get up and say: "My name is Roy, and I was a sinner, but now I'm a new creation. This week I was tempted by many things: my car repair took some money I had saved for vacation, but I tithed anyway. My wife griped at me, but I maintained my loving attitude. At work I was offered a bribe to look the other way, but I refused it. It has been a difficult week. I called on Tim and Frank a few times to offer support. I thank God for my daily prayer times, His Son, the Holy Spirit, and this group. I love you. I guess that's all."

At this point, the assembled crowd would murmur approval and clap.

Another member would then stand and recall her week: "Hi, my name is Anne, and I was a sinner, but now I'm a new creation. I'd say my week was a two-out-of-ten. I never had devotions. The only time I opened my Bible was to get Mark's recipe for barbecue sauce that I stashed in there last Sunday when he gave it to me. Gary is sick with the flu. Little Pete had his zillionth ear infection. I was

down emotionally, and I yelled at my children too much. My mother called and said they would like to plan a two-week stay with us real soon. I'm so, so tired. I really don't know for sure if I can keep on being a Christian."

As she slowly slumps down into her chair with tears beginning to run down her cheeks, another group member stands.

This member is an older, grandmotherly type. "My name is Glenda Mae, Anne. You can make it. I'll be over tomorrow so you can get out of the house. I know it is rough when the family is sick. Jesus does too. The Bible is full of people coming to Jesus on behalf of their sick loved ones. As for your mother, she and I go back a long way. Send her over to my house often when she's here. I'd like to see her. Do you remember the story of Mary and Martha? It's in Luke 10, I think. Try not to get caught up in day-to-day worries and as a result miss Jesus. Dear, I love you very much."

As Glenda Mae sits, she squeezes Anne's shoulder and winks. Anne responds with a grateful smile and a nod.

One by one other members would stand and also say a few words of their struggles and triumphs. The group would clap and murmur approval, nod their heads in understanding, or give some encouraging word. One talk would follow another, building the gathering of individuals into a group.

As the meeting continues some of the newer people might get very jittery. They would shake their heads in disbelief. One might stand to angrily say that he was not really a sinner like everybody else because he could quit

anytime he wanted to—all by himself. The group would have to disagree. Another old-timer would say that they had all felt that way at one time, but it simply wasn't true. He would be willing to talk to this new person anytime about becoming a new creation.

Newcomers would only be expected to sit and listen for the first several meetings. When individuals felt comfortable in doing it, they could stand and say, "Hi, my name is Sue, and I was a sinner, but since Tuesday, I'm a new creation." As they finished, the group would welcome them into their midst with handshakes and pats on the back.

I really don't expect "Sinner Anonymous" groups to pop up around the country. God never does anything for Christians anymore. That's very strange because He was very active when I was a child. People would jump up and interrupt the pastor just before the sermon because they just *had* to testify to God's glory and faithfulness. One after another, people would get up and report on the way God had changed their lives. It was a time of encouragement to everyone. They used to call them "popcorn testimonies" because so many people would "pop up." But God has changed. He no longer cares.

Or maybe the church has changed. When I reflect back on recent times when the service has been opened up to testimonies, no one has said anything, not even me! How sad! The pastor covers up the embarrassing moment by singing one more chorus of "God Is So Good." We have beautiful songs of testimony and poems of great power, but how sad would we be if our children only spoke of us in other people's words?

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Carl C. Green

September/October/November 1997

Prepared by Carl C. Green

INTRODUCTION

When I was a student at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Dr. Harold Ockenga spoke in chapel for a week. He observed that, upon arrival at Boston's Park Avenue Congregational Church 33 years earlier, he began systematically preaching through the Bible, beginning with Genesis, and was not yet all the way through. I decided then to devote one service a week to systematic preaching.

The practice, continued during 20 years of pastoral ministry, provided several benefits. First, the practice required me to dig deep. As I alternated regularly between Old and New Testament books, my people gathered a sense of biblical continuity; my biblical range broadened; and my faith deepened as I tackled tough passages that were not made easy by their familiarity. Second, it protected me from hobbyhorses and the ever-present temptation to let problems shape my preaching.

I was often amazed at how God hovered over my prayerful preparation of a preaching schedule. Typically completed 6 to 18 months in advance, it was not uncommon for scheduled sermons to dovetail with special days (Worldwide Communion and Reformation Sundays in this segment) or to address current issues in society and in church about which no one could have been aware when the sermon calendar was prepared. On other occasions, as with the final sermon in this series, sufficient liberty can be taken to "fit" a series to a seasonal theme. For example, I save Ecclesiastes 11 until last to augment our denomination's historic practice of receiving an offering for world evangelism on the Sunday of the U.S. Thanksgiving. Third, early preparation and a systematic approach gave me increased freedom to speak forthrightly while protecting my credibility because the focus is clearly the Word, not a particular issue or problem. Fourth, I discovered great enjoyment in letting scripture dictate the structure, flow, and pace of services.

This series, when preached a decade ago, was one of those forages into unfamiliar, even frightening, scriptural territory. How does one handle a dark, brooding book like Ecclesiastes? A couple of highlights, perhaps, but the whole book, for 13 long weeks? As happened almost always, by the end of the series I experienced grief over needing to leave an old, valued friend.

I approached Ecclesiastes like an expansive character novel, not an action novel. For example, Napoleon's advance on Moscow is merely the stage for Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; his primary interest is what drives the characters as they experience the historic events. Thus, he explores the thoughts and motivations of the characters, not merely their actions. Since I wanted to lead the congregation into Solomon's inner being in order to spark connection with their own hearts, I found it helpful to memorize each week's passage from a modern translation. This helped me to explore Solomon's character, using his words in the common language instead of language that sounds antiquated or clumsy to the modern ear.

Written toward the end of Solomon's life, Ecclesiastes is his reflection on the things learned during the length of his lifetime. Technically, it was not a scientific study, launched from a hypothesis. However, in 1:12-13, Solomon frames his reflection in a manner that sounds strangely like John Dewey's scientific method. Therefore, I chose to present the series as Solomon's report on a scientific experiment, believing this would be a useful vehicle to capture the attention of the contemporary worshiper.

It is essential that you do your own exegetical work, filling in the blanks that these brief thoughts only suggest, and more important, letting the scripture change you before using it to change your hearers. Then it will be important to wrap each week's sermon with appropriate openers and closers, something I do not attempt here because of the limitations of space and, more important, because I do not know the personality of your congregation.

I submit there is some merit in sustaining appropriate levels of suspense, in not answering every question too quickly, too easily, too automatically. However, wisely balance any literary desire for suspense with the need not to violate your congregation's tolerance. Bring occasional worshipers up to speed and send all away with adequate closure.

A GRAND EXPERIMENT

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 1:12-18

INTRO:

Ecclesiastes is the report of a long-ago scientist who conducted a grand experiment to discover the meaning of life. This scientist, a professor named Solomon, lived around 1000 B.C. He was world renowned. His research was well financed. His methodology was modern, as we will see later, and his conclusions make it unnecessary for us to learn every lesson for ourselves.

Most of us learn from others. For example, few of us insist on inventing or reengineering the wheel before we would ride to church. Most of us will enjoy a Sunday dinner prepared with the help of a recipe; few meals are originals, the exclusive product of the cook's ingenuity. Indeed, we use the phrase, "I'm not going to reinvent the wheel," to describe the wisdom of learning from the experience of others. Yet regarding things moral and spiritual, we commonly insist, "I'll learn for myself." However, the suggestion that we learn from the professor's research is no argument for passively accepted Christianity.

ILLUS. When we dropped our daughter off for her freshman year at Northwest Nazarene College, we explained to her that we expected her professors to help her learn to think, to introduce her to the study and conclusions of others. This, we explained, opened us to significant risk—she might choose a lifestyle or belief system that violated every value we hold dear. Nevertheless, we desired an education that presented rather than hid options. We wanted her faith to rise out of lively awareness and not to be like that of the "dead fish" Frederick Buechner describes, "lying on cracked ice in a fish store window with their round black eyes."¹ This required her to choose Christ, her eyes open wide to the myriad of belief options that exist.

I. Meet the Professor

A. His title was king but he thought of himself as professor. His passions were research and teaching. His nation, positioned at a major intersection along the ancient trade route, stood at the zenith of its prosperity. Consequently, he had free time and abundant resources to passionately pursue his research project.

ILLUS. Independent wealth is a great advantage. With it the academic can fund exotic research projects; without it research must be postponed until funding is received. Thomas Jefferson is an excellent example of the independently wealthy scholar-statesman. He read Latin and Greek, became an inventor, experimented with agricultural innovations at his farm at Monticello, founded the University of Virginia, and looked to the new science of political economics for ideas he included in the Declaration of Independence.² It is easy to imagine the ways in which the United States would have been poorer if Thomas Jefferson had lacked the independent wealth to fund these various pursuits.

B. Solomon's credentials qualify him for this wide-range research project. His wisdom, given to him by God, was so abundant that it was said, "There will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (1 Kings 3:12). He is still referred to as history's wisest man. But by the time of this experiment, Solomon, entirely preoccupied with what can be seen and touched, had become disinterested in God who had given him his exceptional discerning intellect. This is not unusual. Are we not nagged by the sense that there is a national movement, led by many of our brightest, away from faith toward materialism and individualism?

ILLUS. Frederick Buechner tells the story of a Harvard homiletics student who came to see him one day. "Although many of the things I had to teach about preaching she found interesting," he said, "few of them were of any practical use to people like her who did not believe in God." Buechner later remarked that "to attend a divinity school when you did not believe in divinity involved a peculiarly depressing form of bankruptcy."³

Having experienced "much of wisdom and knowledge," Solomon informs us that he had "grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone" before him (Eccles. 1:16). At the top of the class and fully secularized, he was a persistent investigator, pressing his nose into realism with the persistence of Diogenes' years-long search for an honest man.

ILLUS. Solomon's dogged pursuit of the question, "Where is the meaning?" reminds us of Aesop's fable about the crow and the pitcher. The thirsty crow finds a tall pitcher one-third full of water—too low to be reached with his beak. He tries to get water from the pitcher by tipping it, then by trying to break it, and finally, after some thinking, by filling it with stones to raise the level of water high enough to get his drink.⁴

II. Observe the Professor's Project

A. Solomon's project is the study "of wisdom, and also of madness and folly"—a grand experiment, indeed. His laboratory is "all that is done under heaven" (v. 13), "all the things that are done under the sun" (v. 14). He "throws himself with intense energy into his hazardous inquiry!"⁵ He is not antagonistic toward God; he is just disinterested in the world unseen. He focuses on the world we can see and touch. He digs deeply and explores widely, probably planning to write a self-help book explaining the source of life's meaning when his research is complete.

B. Solomon's approach is to study with a microscope and explore with a wide-angle lens "all that is done under heaven" (v. 13). He does this theology "from below."⁶ More than 25 times he uses the phrase, "under the sun" and other equivalents. He does not begin with God and view man's situation from above through a theological or religious lens, the typical biblical approach. Rather, he

says, "Let us . . . rule out higher things."⁷ Let's begin with human experience.

This is decidedly 20th century! It is exactly how most of us view life, for we have been carefully schooled in the scientific method. Most of us do our theology from below. Like the ancient professor, moderns are most interested in observable reality. The focus has shifted "from the hereafter to the here and now. . . . Man today [does not look] longingly upwards."⁸ Indeed, few of us seriously explore the unseen until life disappoints us. Though he lived 3,000 years ago, this similarity with the professor makes us moderns a kindred spirit with him.

III. Study the Professor's Thesis

A. The professor's working thesis undoubtedly surprised him. He surely expected a happier conclusion. His bitter summary, dark and moody, voices his disappointment: life without God is a heavy burden, meaningless, like chasing the wind. Yet the research has been careful and exhaustive. Using good scientific method, he approached his inquiry with an open mind and suspended formulation of his final thesis until the research was complete.

This is how good science is done. It considers all the evidence and lets the evidence shape the thesis. The rigors of the scientific workplace are intended to reveal and to discredit research that, skewed to support a prejudiced thesis, neglects or purposely shades the evidence. If the result cannot be reproduced in independent tests, an experiment's conclusions are rendered invalid by the scientific community.

B. Solomon does not end where he begins. The evidence forces him to abandon his original thesis that meaning and fulfillment can be found under the sun. However, he is cautious in stating his findings; he is an academic, not an evangelist. You have to stick with his report to find his real conclusion. It is buried in the text; it is not in the headlines. Perhaps uttered under protest, certainly uttered in disappointment, his conclusion declares what he did not expect: relationship with God is necessary if life is to have meaning.

Ecclesiastes tells us the evidence is unrelenting. Without God there are twists and gaps. Human wisdom cannot solve the fundamental problem of life. Life's twists cannot be straightened by human logic. In fact, Solomon complains, "the more you understand, the more you ache" (1:18, MOFFATT). "Satisfaction in life under-the-sun will never occur until there is a meaningful connection with the living Lord above the sun."⁹

CONCLUSION:

Benefiting from the discoveries of others, we routinely enjoy wheeled travel, fire, flight, tasty food, and more. We do not refuse the experience of others because if we do our participation in technological advance will grind to a halt and the quality of life will plummet. Instead, the discoveries and experience of others become our learning express lanes, hurrying us past the slow-moving congestion of people who insist on making every discovery by themselves.

Isn't it just as absurd to refuse the moral and spiritual

express lanes as to refuse the advantages of travel, fire, flight, or a tasty recipe? The wise will benefit from the research of the wise professor's grand experiment. He tried it all. His research project was comprehensive and well-funded. Ecclesiastes is his report of findings.

1. Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 64.
2. Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, Kans: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 107-8.
3. Buechner, *Telling Secrets* 60, 62.
4. William Bennett, *Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 532-33.
5. Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes in Geneva Commentaries Series* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 19.
6. Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), 83.
7. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 42-43.
8. Kung, *On Being*, 82.
9. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 16.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

INVOCATION	
CALL TO WORSHIP	Sing to the Lord
HYMNS	"Sing unto the Lord"
	"We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer"
	"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
	"I Will Bless Thee, O Lord"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"You Have Called Us"
	"I Worship You"
	"Blessed Be the Name"
PASTORAL PRAYER	
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 1:12-18 (in unison)
CHOIR	"Almighty God"
OFFERING	
SERMON	"A GRAND EXPERIMENT"
BENEDICTORY PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Find a way to declare that God stands at history's beginning and end. Lead your people to announce the confidence—even if that confidence trembles—that He knows the future and, though unknown to us and full of danger, it is full of possibilities.

Invocation

On this day, we gather, Almighty God, to understand the meaning of our existence. Meaning in life is very often associated closely with work. Too deep for us to fathom, we do not believe that the mystery of life's meaning has no explanation. We believe You are the Creator and we are Your creations, created to do good works that You prepared before our salvation for us to do (see Eph. 2:10). We will worship, thankful that You are the Power behind all and the Meaning running through all. Amen.

Offering

Convinced that God was in his dream of the stairway to heaven, Jacob said, "Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth" (Gen. 28:22). With our tithes and offerings we similarly respond to God's grace.

WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT GOD LIKE?

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 1:1-11

INTRO:

The professor's grand experiment is underway. The hunt for meaning is on. He has studied and explored "all that is done under heaven" (v. 13) in the search for meaning. Now he begins to report his findings about wisdom, madness, and folly (vv. 13, 17).

"Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" (v. 2). This first finding is discouraging, but it is a reliable finding. This conclusion is not the report of an emotional or social hypochondriac; it has, as we shall see in the weeks ahead, been drawn from hard evidence, collected, sorted, and analyzed. The professor has not applied his personal prejudices or preferences to the evidence; the evidence has shaped his conclusions. He has done his homework; he reports no unsubstantiated conclusions. We can hardly miss his surprise in the discouraged report. "Everything is meaningless!" is quite different than the thesis he set out to prove.

I. What Is Under-the-Sun Disappointment? (1:4-11)

A. If under the sun is all there is, life is grim. Man is small and transitory, dwarfed by the universe's size and permanence. If we deal only with what is concretely observable, man is a wisp of air quickly dissipated while the universe, far more durable than the Energizer Bunny, keeps going and going. Indeed, our own behavior illustrates and underlines the impermanence of human life. We will not be remembered by those who follow us for the same reason we do not remember those who went before us.

ILLUS. [Inquire how many of your parishioners know their grandmother's maiden name. Great-grandmother's maiden name? Great-great-grandmother's maiden name? You shouldn't have to retreat very many generations before few hands are raised and the point is made.]

It's a frightening thought, isn't it? With few exceptions, future generations will forget the things we have learned and want to pass along to them. Accumulated wisdom is routinely rendered obsolete and forgotten, discarded, or devalued. If future generations think about us at all, they will think us primitive, perhaps uptight and old-fashioned.

Before we react, we should consider our own behavior. Few of us are careful or enthusiastic students of history. Most of us tolerated history in school; we didn't enjoy it. We were impatient to depart the duty past and get on with the present.

ILLUS. A member of one church where I served said to me, "You act like this church had no history before your arrival!" I think she was right.

Future generations will not disappoint us any more greatly than we disappoint the generations before us. They will probably behave just about as we do. This detachment from history, this disconnection to roots will

likely increase rather than diminish with technological and informational acceleration.

B. If "under the sun" is all there is, life is wearisome, redundant, endless, monotonous. The universe is a merry-go-round. Life is an unending treadmill. Nothing changes. Little is achieved. The verses are full of images: "The sun rises . . . sets, and hurries back to where it rises. . . . Round and round [the wind] goes, ever returning on its course. All the streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again" (vv. 5-7).

ILLUS. Picture the mime, walking vigorously but going nowhere. Or what about the winners of last year's World Series and Super Bowl? They have to do it again this year. If they don't make it, it won't be too many years before the fans scream, "What have you done for me lately?"

ILLUS. One parishioner greeted the pastor after his Palm Sunday sermon, asking, "How are you going to top that next week?" The pastor felt the terror—this week's Palm Sunday masterpiece increased the parishioner's expectation for Easter and the likelihood that Easter's sermon would be anticlimactic.

We never get caught up regardless of how hard we try.

ILLUS. Chuck Swindoll tells the story of seeing a guy in his car with a stereo and four speakers. "They were so big you couldn't see around them in his little Volkswagen. We're talking wall-to-wall speakers. . . . The guy is a rolling sound system, and I'll guarantee you one thing: he's not satisfied with it. Why? Because there's always a better sound. . . . Put this in a Mercedes and double the size of the speakers and it'll blow you away!"¹

C. If "under the sun" is all there is, there is nothing new.

D. Even our ability to understand is a frustration if "under the sun" is all there is. Microscopes, telescopes, and countless other technological gadgets are unable to gather enough data from the five senses to make sense of life. What we find behind every new discovery is not satisfaction but another question mark. Our curiosity is never satiated.

II. What Is the Disappointing Thesis? (1:2)

A. "Meaningless!" Life lived solely on the horizontal plane produces boredom and frustration. It is redundant, endless, useless, monotonous, senseless.

ILLUS. F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* points to the emptiness of a life of materialism. Gatsby is dashing, deep-pocketed, mysterious. On a "slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York,"² fashionable folk attend his continuous and opulent summer parties. But the real story is about Daisy, Gatsby's long-ago love. When their relationship does not renew, the mansion goes dark and the parties end. Just before the final tragedy is told, Fitzgerald's narrator concludes with penetrating melancholy, Gatsby "must have looked

up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, *material without being real* . . . ”³

B. “Utterly meaningless!” Desire is enlarged and multiplied. The endeavor to gratify our desires is accelerated. But the frenetic activity leaves behind an aching void, a blank space that is not filled up.

ILLUS. “A son of a minister wrote to his father: ‘Dear Dad, I’m trying hard to be an atheist, but I’m having [an awful] time at it.’ He and his wife were in the hands of a psychiatrist at forty dollars a week each.”⁴

ILLUS. George Bernard Shaw reported, “I grow tired of myself whenever I am left alone for 10 minutes.”⁵

C. “Everything is meaningless!” Ecclesiastes . . . is an essay in apologetics. It defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative.”⁶

ILLUS. Jean Paul Sartre, the 20th-century atheistic existentialist, argued that “man is simply what he makes of himself.” But he conceded that atheism can produce despair instead of hilarity when he said, “we are limited to what is within the scope of our own wills. . . . Nothingness . . . lies coiled in the heart of being, like a worm.”⁷

D. This conjugation of words—“everything is meaningless”—is a verbal exclamation point. It is emphatic, not impulsive. Meaning does not happen under the sun; you have to get above the sun!

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. A newspaperman once challenged E. Stanley Jones’ declaration that the Christian and scientific approaches to life were “rendering a verdict on life and that verdict is a Christian verdict.” So Jones challenged him: “If you don’t believe in the Christian way, then why don’t you go out and try it—put it under life and see what life will say. I suggest this: Go out for a week and say the un-Christian thing, think the un-Christian thing, and be the un-Christian thing in every situation for a week and then come back and tell me what you have found, how it has worked. ‘Shucks,’ he snorted, ‘You’d be bumped off before the end of a week.’”⁸

The professor has described for us what life is like when God is subtracted. Ecclesiastes is the report of test results. It tells what life is like if “under the sun” is all there is.

I want to give you an unusual assignment for this week: contemplate what life would be like if under the sun were all there is.

I do not give this assignment to discourage you but to vitalize your faith and to acquaint you with why many in your worlds, their horizons locked beneath the sun, experience despair they cannot seem to resolve.

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 30.
2. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925), 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 162.
4. E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 49.
5. *Instant Quotation Dictionary*, comp. Donald O. Bolander (Mundelein, Ill. Career Institute, 1972), 37.
6. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 44.

7. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1966), 469.
8. Jones, *Unshakable Kingdom*, 62.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	Lord, We Welcome You
SONGS OF WORSHIP	“O Worship the King” “He Is the King” “You Are Crowned with Many Crowns” “Trust His Heart” More of You
CHOIR	
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
PASTORAL PRAYER	
HYMNS	“I’d Rather Have Jesus” “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”
OFFERING	
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 1:1-11
SERMON	“WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT GOD LIKE?”
BENEDICTORY PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Stir in your people the desire to be as large hearted as Christ. Confess the sins of littleness, meanness, and narrow-mindedness that too often characterize us. Admit the need for forgiveness and amended lifestyles. Repent that we are worn out by people’s multitude of demands. Ask for grace to sympathize deeply with their needs, to mercifully excuse things that are unlovely, to helpfully mend things that are amiss. Pray that love for each other and for everyone else will increase and overflow (1 Thess. 3:12).

Prelude to Offering

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” The hymn recalls a grand event. The Philistines had occupied Israel’s territory for more than 20 years. Samuel interceded for them with the Lord and the Lord’s thunder threw the Philistines into panic, giving Israel victory in a rout. Then Samuel took a stone, set it up, and “named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far has the LORD helped us’” (1 Sam. 7:12). Let’s make today’s tithes and offerings our Ebenezer.

Scripture Reading

Try organizing the scripture into a choral reading. Engage everyone—men, women, children, young, old—in describing life’s circles, in speaking the great questions of this passage, and in pronouncing the professor’s conclusions. Use your imagination. How can you use the rich variety of congregational voices so the scripture sings rather than being a dull, routine reading?

Benedictory Prayer

Lord, guide our contemplations during this week and through the next weeks. We reach above the sun, asking You to help us consider what life would be like if “under the sun” were all there is, if You—Father, Son, and Spirit—were subtracted from our existence and from our experience. Use this week of contemplation to renew our appreciation of You, to enlarge our sense of privilege that You invite us to be Your children, and to stimulate us to never take for granted the love You extend to us. Amen.

DEAD ENDS

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 2:1-16

INTRO:

ILLUS. Think of all the familiar cliches and commercial jingles you can: "Go for the gusto!" "You only go around once!" "Live life to the full!" "Catch it while you can." "Eat, drink, and be merry."

The professor's initial thesis included all these and more. The initial assumption of his grand experiment was that the secret to life's meaning will be unearthed somewhere under the sun.

I. Can You Apply the Scientific Method to Life?

A. Applying careful thinking to his experiment, the professor begins testing life to see what is good. A master question drives his research: "How shall we reap happiness and rest rather than grief and sorrow?" What is good about life on the purely horizontal plane?

His quest was more than a cerebral exercise. It engaged his whole person, not just his intellect. He busied himself with everything, leaving no avenue of inquiry untouched. He investigated the roots of the question; he explored the subject on all sides, twice assuring us that he has not lost his clinical perspective (vv. 3, 9). He realizes that any loss of objectivity will void his search for reality by jeopardizing his credibility.

B. The scientist—whether the experiment is social science, biology, or physics—tests one factor at a time. Multiple variables blur the outcome—which variable was responsible for the observed reaction? So experiments are constructed to consist of many constants and a single variable. By testing the chosen factor in this way, the experimenter can document the response to the stimuli imposed.

This is precisely the professor's plan of action. One by one he tests several possible avenues to life's meaning.

1. Pleasure. He explored harmless and enjoyable forms of nonsense, full of rip-roaring laughter and good times. He stimulated all his senses in the pursuit of delight.

2. Wine. It is unclear whether the use of wine was a separate investigation of a subcategory of pleasure. Nevertheless, the professor "uses wine, not as a debauchee, but as a connoisseur."¹

3. Folly. The professor rejects the demand that everything must make sense. He establishes a high tolerance for absurdity, embracing antirationality—a kind of ancient existentialism.

4. Work and self-centered acquisition. His words thunder self-sufficiency: "I built," "I planted," "I made gardens and parks," "I made reservoirs," "I bought slaves," "I owned more," "I amassed," "I acquired," "I became greater by far than anyone before me." "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired." Like Midas, everything he touches turns to profit. He's got it all—wine, women, and song—all "the delights of the heart of man" (v. 8).

5. Intellectualism. Abandoning antirational existentialism, he explores rationalism. He gives himself to the seri-

ous work of organized and logical thinking. The fool, he reasons, operates in a dark room, not knowing what's up next. Clear-thinking people with their eyes wide open should win every contest hands down.

II. Life Can Lead to Dead Ends

A. Now the professor states the empirical verdicts.

1. Pleasure is meaningless. It accomplishes nothing. It produces no gain. Laughter is ultimately foolish—empty, nonsensical.

ILLUS. "A . . . man . . . awoke melancholy every morning, and he went to bed in the evening deeply depressed. . . . He decided to seek the counsel of a medical doctor. The psychiatrist listened to him for almost an hour. Finally, he leaned toward his patient and said to him, ' . . . I understand a new Italian clown has come into our city, and he's leaving them in the aisles. . . . Why don't you go see this professional clown and laugh your troubles away?' With a hangdog expression, the patient muttered, 'Doctor, I am that clown.'"²

ILLUS. Natasha is a major character in Leo Tolstoy's expansive novel, *War and Peace*. Natasha's fiancé, Andrew, is a soldier fighting Napoleon's advance on Moscow. While Andrew fights, Natasha violates his love, chasing pleasure and the affections of another man. Tolstoy describes her at pleasure's dead end: Natasha "never laughed without a sound of tears in her laughter. . . . As soon as she began to laugh . . . tears choked her: tears of remorse, tears at the recollection of those pure times which could never return, tears of vexation that she should uselessly have ruined her young life which might have been so happy."³

2. Wine. No gain; it, too, is meaningless.

ILLUS. A wealthy California land developer returned home, informing his wife that he had just closed a \$15 million deal. The garage was full of exotic cars, a yacht was moored to the back porch of their exclusive waterfront home. There was no limit to the pleasure they could purchase, but his wife, rich and bored, was an alcoholic. Emptiness had moved her from connoisseur of wines to debauchee.

3. Folly. No gain; a chasing after the wind.

4. Work. "When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve . . . nothing was gained under the sun."

5. Intellectualism. No gain; meaningless. In fact, the intellectual's plight may be the worst of all, for what good is intellect if "under the sun" is all there is? The wise ought to have some advantage, but experience shows they do not.⁴ Wisdom buys no exemption. Both the wise and the fool die. Neither is long remembered. Both are forgotten. In the meantime, it is the Ph.D. who can't get a job. "Overqualified," they say.

B. The professor speeds down these promising, brightly lit roads in a hurried search to find what is "worth-

while for [people] to do . . . during the few days of their lives" (v. 3). But each avenue proves to be a cul-de-sac, a dead end. Indeed, the word "overtakes" (v. 14) suggests the frightening, inevitable acceleration of an enlarging snowball that chases one in a nightmare.

So which is it? Eat, drink, and be merry; or eat, drink, and be miserable?

ILLUS. "Guillermo Vilas—a superb Argentinean tennis pro whose name is a synonym for confidence, strength, and inner security—once dropped his guard in a *Sports Illustrated* interview: 'Fervently, I think that many times one feels oneself to be secure and, suddenly, one's world falls down like a pack of cards in a matter of seconds.'"⁵

ILLUS. Before committing suicide, cartoonist Ralph Barton wrote: "I have had a few difficulties, many friends, great successes. I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, and have visited great countries of the world. But I am fed up with devices to fill up 24 hours of the day."⁶

CONCLUSION:

The professor began his great experiment, confident that he could identify "what is worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives" (v. 3). With persistence and flair, he has explored life's grand boulevards of possibility. He's been down all the streets—pleasure, laughter, wine, folly, selfish work, intellectual pursuit. He has explored the same avenues modern indulgents explore.

Now he adds up his meaning-seeking itinerary and his multitude of acquisitions. He recalls his transition from self-indulgence to great projects in the service of the public good and his cerebral pursuits. Finally, with bitter sadness, he rages, "My gross worth is millions but when you deduct the overhead my net worth is zero!" (Eccles. 2:11, author's paraphrase). With diligence and unlimited resources, I have explored the under-the-sun possibilities. I have found no lasting, satisfying meaning in any of the usual places people look. Each has failed the test; they do not contain meaning. Every boulevard has ended at a dead end.

Where, then, do we look to find meaning, gain, and true profit? The popular solutions are being eliminated one by one.

ILLUS. E. Stanley Jones once said that God "hid secrets amid the leaves of creation and as he hid them, he must have said to himself: 'I wonder how long it will take [them] to discover that.'"⁷

If viewed with clinical sobriety, "under the sun" seems to possess insufficient meaning to satisfy the hearts of humankind. Perhaps we need to begin looking somewhere else; perhaps we need to look up.

1. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 59.

2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 44.

3. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, vol. 51 of *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., William Benton, Publisher, 1952), 373.

4. George Aaron Barton, *The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1980), 82.

5. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 53.

6. Ralph Barton, quoted by Dennis Alexander in *Beyond Science* (Lion Publishing, 1972), 123.

7. E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 49.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

INVOCATION

SONGS OF WORSHIP

"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

"I Will Sing of the Mercies"

"O Most High"

"Be Ye Glad"

CHOIR

FRIENDSHIP MINUTE

OFFERING

SCRIPTURE READING

Eccles. 2:1-16

SONGS OF WORSHIP

"Jesus, Jesus"

"I Love You, Lord"

PASTORAL PRAYER

SERMON

"DEAD ENDS"

BENEDICTORY PRAYER

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Ask God to rearrange the perspective of our lives, to throw His large horizons around our little days, to capture our imaginations with those things unseen but more real than what we can see. Announce the congregation's grace-empowered decision to possess the opportunities tucked away in these serious times by choosing great faith instead of preoccupation with the petty. Ask God to elevate our minds and to stabilize us so we will return to life reinforced and freshly assured that we are useful in God's service.

Invocation

Through the length of the week past, Father, we have considered what life would be like if You did not exist. We are more certain than ever that we need to be in relationship with You if our lives are to be full of meaning. We intend that our worship shall reflect that conviction.

Friendship Minute

We have considered what life without God would be like. Somehow John 3:16 seems more profound than ever: "God so loved the world that he gave." Let us give, rejoicing that He is alive, well, and interested in us.

Scripture Reading

Prepare a dramatic reading, each lay reader dressed to reflect the various outlook their scripture portion describes—hedonist, comedian, academic, landscaper, land developer, etc. Memorized lines will be best. The lines are brief.

A GLIMPSE UP

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 2:17-26

INTRO:

The professor has conducted his grand experiment, journeying down the broad boulevards people typically travel in their search for meaning. The boulevards—pleasure, laughter, wine, folly, work, and intellectual pursuit—seem at first to be grand avenues of possibility. But every boulevard ends up a dead end. Solomon discovered what Jesus declared centuries later: the grand boulevard that many follow is a road leading to destruction (see Matt. 7:13).

I. Life Under the Sun Is Meaningless (2:17-23)

A. Having determined to restrict his search for meaning to things under the sun, the professor, like many in our day, excused God from his considerations. Now he assesses his choice, heaping sad words upon each other—labor, sorrow, grief, toil, and pain. These emphatically describe the progress of the professor's grand experiment.

The verbal images are powerful. Life is hated; despair consumes his heart; all the things accomplished and accumulated are viewed as "a great misfortune" (v. 21)—grievous, calamitous. Intended to be fun and enlightening, the grand experiment has become a painful nightmare.

B. The phrase "under the sun" and the word "meaningless" are both used five times in today's few verses of scripture. The number five is not important, but this pairing is very significant. Each under-the-sun inquiry is underscored and punctuated with its own painful synopsis, "Meaningless!" The professor has put all his marbles in the under-the-sun basket. Now his lament weeps and wails: "I hated all my toil because I shall leave it."

II. The Case for Despair Sounds Self-Evident (2:18-23)

A. We focus and strain to get ahead. We work carefully, prudently, and with well-figured calculation. What happens? The paradox astonishes us: the employee works from nine to five, goes home, enjoys the evenings, and sleeps like a baby. Meanwhile, the highly motivated entrepreneur may achieve wealth but worries interrupt sleep and work interrupts leisure.

Look into life's rearview mirror. We expect hard work to produce security and exhilaration. Instead, we get worry, sleepless nights, and little that lasts. Now take a candid look through life's windshield. See yourself pouring your heart into your work across a lifetime. You learn your craft, excel at it, and take pride in it. You perform your work with wide-ranging knowledge, inventive wisdom, skill, and craftsmanship. But someone else will inherit the produce of your lifetime at work.

The inheritor may be wise and sincere; he may also be inadequately gifted to oversee what he inherits; or he may be a fool, unfocused and shiftless. Nevertheless, he will have full control over what has been carefully gathered with wisdom and prudence. Our work may not survive, and this clearly isn't what we expect.

ILLUS. On June 22, 1897, the British Empire celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Queen ruled over one-quarter of the earth's land and 372 million of its people. Many other subjects considered her divine. Newspaper editorials predicted that the empire would last forever. Almost exactly a hundred years later, the British Empire and its monarchy have fallen into sad decline: Canada and Australia have home rule and are considering withdrawing from the Commonwealth. Ireland and Scotland continue to discuss home rule. The popularity of the queen is in a historic decline, and her husband has established a commission to consider downsizing the monarchy.¹

B. No wonder the professor is disgusted. Wisdom and hard work are clearly not enough. Everything gained may be left to someone who cannot maximize its value or who may not appreciate its value. Painstakingly gathered, the work of a lifetime may be squandered quickly or badly. This is clearly unjust—a great and meaningless misfortune!

Where, then, is meaning to be found? Dedicated, skillful work, standing alone, is unable to supply meaning to life.

III. It Is Time to Take a Glimpse Up (2:24-26)

A. To this point, the Professor has been fixated under the sun. Now, for the first time, for a moment, he lifts his gaze: "This . . .," he says, "is from the hand of God, . . . without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"

This is no admonition to eat, drink, and be merry. It is the remark of a man brooding over his disappointments and finding such philosophy inadequate, even distasteful. So, lifting his eyes above the sun and rethinking his initial thesis, the professor begins to explore a new proposition. Perhaps life's meaning cannot be found under the sun. Perhaps God must be included if we are to find enjoyment and satisfaction in our eating, drinking, and working.

ILLUS. Francis Fukuyama traces the history of political philosophy in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*. He recalls how Hegel, Marx, and others considered God a hindrance to the advance of civilized society. For nearly 300 pages, Fukuyama persuades the reader that he is comfortable with this progressive dismissal of God. Then, taking a sharp turn, Fukuyama surprises us: "Lockean liberals who made the American Revolution like Jefferson or Franklin, or a passionate believer in liberty and equality like Abraham Lincoln, did not hesitate to assert that liberty required belief in God. The social contract between rational self-interested individuals was not . . . self-sustaining; it required a supplementary belief in divine rewards and punishments."²

Fukuyama concludes that we need to reach above the sun if civilization is to be stabilized. Absent any "belief in divine rewards and punishments," humankind does not have sufficient stimulus for civilized behavior.

Fukuyama's conclusion supports Solomon's revised thesis: it is God's good work to render our under-the-sun pursuits meaningless. This is a device used by God to remind us that we need Him.

ILLUS. John Wimber's wife of eight years sued for divorce. Devastated, he drove into the Las Vegas desert, gun in hand, seriously considering suicide. Five generations removed from any church involvement, God was not part of his frame of reference. Desperate, he got out of the car, looked up into the heavens, and heard himself saying aloud, "O God, if You're there, please help me." Surprised and embarrassed by the outburst, he drove back into Las Vegas.

When he walked through his hotel's lobby, the night clerk said, "John, there's a message from your wife."

He called her and she said, "John, I've decided to give it one more chance."

Wimber replied, "When did you decide to do that?" She said, "A half hour ago."

Wimber recalls: "When she said that, something that had never been connected before in my life came together. I pictured myself out on the desert talking to the dark saying, 'God, if You're there, help me.' And He did. I leaned back against the wall and said, 'I'm in touch with the supernatural.'"³

Strictly horizontal in worldview prior to this point, the professor tentatively, perhaps hesitantly, reaches above the sun. Each one of us can probably recall some occasion when, like Wimber, we first made the connection that the missing piece of our search for the meaning in life may lie above the sun.

This is probably not the time of conversion for most of us; it is when our investigation seriously reaches, for the first time, beyond the sun. It is the time when we initially consider that God, residing above the sun, may be the one who can give shape to our under-the-sun experience.

B. If we refuse to look up and extend our horizon beyond the sun, we may be moral and prosperous, but we will not fully enjoy what we gather and store up. God, Solomon observes, gives the sinner "the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God" (v. 26), while enjoyment is the domain of those who are connected to God. So the little the righteous have is better than the wealth of many wicked (Ps. 37:16) because God adds wisdom, knowledge, and happiness to the prosperity of the righteous.

The professor is reminding us quietly that wealth without God makes no sense because the task God gives the sinner includes no possibility of permanent gain. "Real enjoyment in all things depends on a higher source than men."⁴ Life can only be enjoyed with God.

CONCLUSION:

The professor's discovery has been authenticated across the centuries. Enjoyment, purpose, direction, and

eternity are added to our lives by Him who stands above the sun. Meaninglessness is replaced with meaning when the first glimpse up becomes a steady gaze, fixed on Jesus (see Heb. 12:2).

ILLUS. A young boy led his little sister on a hike. Soon she began to complain, "There's no path; it's all rocks and bumps."

"That's right," explained her brother, "the bumps are what you climb on."⁵

The bumps in your road are put there by God, not to trip you up but to be your stepping-stones to Him.

Have you looked up? Or are you chasing the wind? "If you don't have the living Lord in the . . . nucleus of your plans, you are facing endless miles of bad road."⁶

1. Historical information from *Pax Britannica* by James Morris (San Diego: Harves/HBJ, 1968), 21-23.
2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 326.
3. John Wimber, "Personal Testimony & Evangelism," Tape 1. Produced by Nazarene Communications. Copyright 1978 by the Fuller Evangelistic Association. Given at the Evangelism and Church Growth Conference of the Church of the Nazarene.
4. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 74.
5. Heard on the *Master Plan* radio program, July 21, 1996 (Box 70, Springfield, MO 65801, 1-800-410-7070).
6. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 63.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

SONGS OF WORSHIP "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
"I Will Rejoice"
"Glorious God"

FRIENDSHIP MOMENT
CHOIR "All Creation Sings His Praise"

OFFERING
SONGS OF WORSHIP "How Great Thou Art"
"Be Exalted, O God (I Will Give Thanks)"
"Lord I Lift Your Name on High"
"I Look to You"

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER
HYMN "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
SCRIPTURE READING Eccles. 2:17-26
SERMON "A GLIMPSE UP"
PRAYER
COLLECTIVE BENEDICTION IN SONG "The Lord's Prayer"

Creative Worship Ideas

Offertory Idea

Jesus Christ paid for our salvation, and because others gave of their time and resources, we know Him. In thanksgiving we now give our tithes and offerings so that, through the ministry of this church and our influence, others will come to Christ.

ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 3:1-22

INTRO:

ILLUS. The Mullen agency, according to the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, "has created advertising for light-bulbs, luxury cars and apple juice. Now the Wenham, Mass., shop is pitching religion." One of Mullen's older ads "is a picture of Earth as viewed from outer space. The tagline is, 'Without God, it's a vicious circle.'"¹

The advertisement's tagline sums up the professor's viewpoint. Time and eternity meet in today's verses; the professor's upward glance lengthens and focuses.

I. Consider Time (3:1-11)

A. This passage is not a prescription for life; it is a description of life. A familiar passage of poetic beauty, its intent is protest. It complains that man's activities are limited as well as his knowledge of God's works. The lament wails that life is a series of contrasts; one period undoes what another period has done with little recognition that we have been here before.

ILLUS. In the United States, the crew cuts of the 1950s and early 1960s are back. Meanwhile, the country's dominant politics have shifted from optimistic to pessimistic in this century, from conservative to liberal and back again. Educational trends demonstrate the same ambivalence—old math or new math, phonics or whole language? [Increase the congregation's level of participation by asking them for examples of things that have come back into style.]

B. The nagging question keeps repeating itself: "What does a man get for all the toil?" (2:22; see also 1:3; 3:9). How do we make sense of life when it shifts like the sand and swings from extreme to extreme like a pendulum? How do we make sense of life's inevitabilities—birth and death? Is there any exit from the meaninglessness of it all?

The professor calls the conventional wisdom a heavy "burden God has laid on men" (v. 10). He knows the feeling of time pressure. He knows how the events of time clutch us in their grip. Today's success will be followed by tomorrow's failure, today's birth by tomorrow's death. He knows there is a time for everything, but when is the right time? Timing is a delicate issue. The right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing. So when is the right time? Life's cyclical, pendulumlike behavior will keep us perpetually off-balance unless we can find some fixed point to steady our equilibrium.

II. Consider Eternity (3:11-14)

A. Pondering this reality, "the writer pushes a door open. You can almost hear it squeak."² The perspective changes. Hatred of life is drowned in a refreshing swell of optimism. God is sovereign, and He will make all things beautiful in His time. All the fluctuations are under absolute control. In Christ, we are conquerors, never victims (see Rom. 8:35-39).

ILLUS. One of the phrases of an inscription, dated 1692

and found in Baltimore's old Saint Paul's Church went like this: "Whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."³ The phrase captures the flavor of the professor's emerging confidence.

B. Not only does God make everything beautiful in its time, but also, though we cannot fathom what He has done from beginning to end, "He has . . . set eternity in [our] hearts" (Eccles. 3:11).

Pondering this insight from above the sun, the professor muses. "What separates us from the animals?" he asks. It is not our physiological functions; we "have the same breath" (v. 19). Neither does our fate distinguish us; we die just as the animals do and "who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" (v. 21). So what distinguishes us: our ability to ponder such questions.

ILLUS. Descartes, the 17th-century philosopher, doubted everything. "All things I experience," he said, "are nothing but illusions and dreams." Finally, he found the "single truth which is certain." "One thing," he said, "remains about which I can have no doubt at all, that *I think*." Upon this famous platform of five words—"I think, therefore, I am"—Descartes reserved "his doubts about the self, things, true ideas, and God."⁴

Most of us, thankfully, worry less severely than Descartes did about such things. But Solomon argues that we ponder questions and unravel dilemmas that never occur to animals because eternity, put there by God, resides in our hearts. By ourselves we are animals.⁵ But we are not by ourselves; God has placed the awareness of eternity in our hearts. Therefore, we are unique among the animals; we are more than mere animals. There is something about us that, unlike the animals, is not content under the sun.

ILLUS. "Abraham Maslow formulated his famous hierarchy of needs back in the 1940s. . . . [Maslow] sought to establish a list of 'universal needs' that affect everyone. . . . Maslow boiled down his list of needs to five. These were survival, security, belonging, prestige, and self-fulfillment."⁶ When survival and safety needs are met, we do not coast in neutral; we begin the quest to find higher meaning. This capacity, Solomon points out, is what separates people from the animals.

We are unable to comprehend everything God has done from beginning to end, but we know enough to perceive His hand in our affairs. We may not know everything there is to know, but we are able to understand that "under the sun" is not all there is. If only as a glimpse, we discern the gift of God applied to our lives from above the sun. "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live," Solomon says, to "eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all [their] toil" (vv. 12, 13).

III. Consider Looking Above the Sun (3:14-15)

A. Someone has said that life is like a yo-yo, always pulling us back to God. That is precisely the image the

professor conjures up in verse 15: "Whatever is has already been and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account." The figure is not that of a "river, but a circle. . . . He conceives of event chased by event, until it is itself brought back to God."⁷

ILLUS. Frederick Buechner tells of being 27, living alone in New York falling in love with a girl who was not in love with him, and unsuccessfully trying to start a novel. He was not a churchgoer, but one morning, on impulse, he went to church. He remembers the preacher in the pulpit "twitching around a good deal" as he "played variations on the theme of coronation," and he also remembers that moment when the preacher said, "Jesus is crowned among confession and tears and great laughter." "The great wall of China crumbled and Atlantis rose up out of the sea," Buechner recalls, "and on Madison Avenue, at 73rd Street, tears leapt from my eyes as though I had been struck across the face."⁸ Pulled by the great tug of God's hand, Buechner climbed along the string of these words into God's redeeming hand.

God doesn't let us go easily. Reaching out again and again, He persistently pulls us toward himself.

ILLUS. Robinson Crusoe grew up in a Christian home. Unmoved by his father's faith, young Crusoe yearned for adventure. He pursued his dream of a life at sea, but his ship ran aground on a Caribbean island. Only Crusoe made it ashore. There he recalled his father's admonition "that if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me—and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel."⁹ Rummaging through a trunk he salvaged from the ship, Crusoe discovered a Bible during his first year on the island. Opening it, he read, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 50:15, kjv). Alone and afraid, Crusoe's soul opened to God, and he learned to see God's grace in the circumstances that unfold in the 27 years of nearly complete isolation before he is rescued.

God inhabits our goings and our comings, using them to remind us of himself. He uses our conclusion that everything under the sun is meaningless, like chasing after the wind, to cause us to consider Him.

B. Though we "cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (v. 11), life's unpredictabilities make sense when we "know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it" (v. 14).

Someone has said: "It is not the suffering that is difficult; it is the senselessness of the suffering." Perhaps this is what the songwriter had in mind when reminding us that we don't need to know everything about tomorrow if we know who holds our hand. The tortured shaplessness of life under the sun takes shape when it answers the pull of Him who stands above the sun.

CONCLUSION:

We are captured in time, but God uses time to our ad-

vantage. Inserting himself into life's hypnotic circular rhythms, He tugs us back to himself, informing us that we are far more than mere animals because He has set eternity in our hearts. When our earthbound, under-the-sun perspective has us convinced that life is meaningless, God speaks: "Look up! Connect with Me! Standing above the sun, I will make everything beautiful at the right time."

Without God, life is purposeless, profitless, miserable, and meaningless. With Him, it will ultimately make sense. This is the good news of the gospel!

1. *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, September 28, 1996, A16.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 86.
3. *Desiderata*, found in old Saint Paul's Church, Baltimore, dated 1692.
4. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1966), 249, 254-255.
5. Michael A. Eaton, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Ecclesiastes*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 85.
6. Paul R. Timm and Brent D. Peterson, *People at Work* (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Publishing, 1993), 55.
7. George Aaron Barton, *The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1980), 103.
8. Frederick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace* (San Francisco: Harper, 1970), 43-44.
9. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 1964), 4.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE READING

Eccles. 3:1-11

SONGS OF WORSHIP

"All Creatures of Our God and King"

"Psalm of Thanks"

"All the Earth Shall Worship"

FRIENDSHIP MINUTE

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

SONGS OF WORSHIP

"All Heaven Declares"

"Blessed Be the Name"

"Lord, I Love You"

OFFERING

CHOIR

"Shine On Us"

SCRIPTURE READING

Eccles. 3:11-22

SERMON

"ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS"

BENEDICTORY PRAYER

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

Several weeks ago, we heard Solomon lament life's unending circle—"The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises" (Eccles 1:5). He complained about life's unending cycle, calling it meaningless. This morning, Solomon sees the same phenomenon but his melody is hopeful instead of melancholy. We are going to see what happens when God is injected into the circle of life—meaning happens. So let's rejoice!

1 + 1 = SURVIVAL

by Carl C. Green

Eccles. 4:1-16

INTRO:

ILLUS. Matt Truell, reporting on the Menninger Clinic's help to stressed-out executives, wrote: "Corporations downsize. That means friends are fired. Long hours mean you don't see your family. You were unhappy when you didn't get promoted. When the promotion came, you were still unhappy."¹

These verses address the emptiness of life at the top. Life at the top, the professor insists, is a miserable way to live! The question is a good one: Should I sacrifice everything in the scramble to the top?

I. Rivalry Causes Isolation (4:4-8)

A. The professor editorializes on what he has observed. His point of view may be, in part, autobiographical. He has a cynical view, but he believes it is supported by the empirical evidence—just watch how people behave.

The primary motivation for labor and achievement is rivalry. Skills and techniques are developed to improve the worker's performance. Tireless workers, practitioners of the work ethic, are applauded. The willingness to work hard, the professor says, is very often about one-upmanship rather than work.

ILLUS. The goal of power breakfasts is less about work than to demonstrate that I can be at work earlier than you can. The motivation is rivalry—a scramble for wealth, leadership, power, or status.

B. The professor observes two kinds of compulsives in the world: the hardworking overachiever and the lazy underachiever who "folds his hands and ruins himself" (v. 5). The word picture is vivid. The overachiever seeks to get ahead by means of self-sufficient independence. The underachiever, folding his hands in a kind of living death, tries to get ahead at everyone else's expense. Of the two, the more common is the tendency to withdraw into isolated self-containment.

ILLUS. A recent sociological study reveals the increasing desocialization (isolation) of people in America. It has been given an interesting name: "Bowling Alone."² Its title comes from the statistic that bowling leagues are on the decline while individual bowlers are on the increase. The study also mentions that people in crisis tend to stop coaching Little League, going to Kiwanis, and so on. Withdrawing rather than reaching out for help seems almost instinctive.

Isolated independents, absorbed in work, disconnect from others. They avoid relational commitments. They are alone, with no friends or family. Workaholics, they find no end to toil. Their eyes are not content with the wealth they possess.

The picture saddens by the lateness of the lesson learned. Only when life is nearly used up, do workaholics ask themselves the big questions about life's choices: "For whom am I toiling?" "Why am I depriving myself of

enjoyment?" Standing there with everything and nothing, they each conclude, "This is meaningless, miserable business!" The conclusion is despair.

The professor offers a middle-of-the-road solution: "Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind" (v. 6).

C. The professor offers to us as good counsel that social fragmentation, whether from rivalry or compulsive absorption in our work, never produces companionship. Therefore, it is better to be "a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning" (v. 13). Relationships are more valuable than money and insulated power.

The professor is not giving naive counsel. Possessing power and recognition, he has seen the fickleness of popular favor. He understands that the masses frequently and persistently discard old leaders for new leaders, even doing detriment to their situation. And he understands the paranoia that the fickleness of the masses can arouse in established leaders.

ILLUS. By 1973, President Richard Nixon's 1972 election mandate had devolved into paranoia. Nixon and his staff, fortified in the White House, tried to troubleshoot Watergate, which itself was the product of their overactive paranoia.

Nevertheless, the counsel sounds: choose simplicity rather than personless achievements (see verse 6). Choose relationships rather than independent loneliness (see verses 9-12; cf. 2:24-26; 3:11-15).

III. 1 + 1 = Survival (4:9-12)

A. Life illustrates God's Word: "Two are better than one" (v. 9). The buddy system is wise because it works. "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. . . . If two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (vv. 10-12).

ILLUS. It was May 1986. A class of high school students were stranded on Oregon's Mount Hood. The entire Northwest followed daily reports of the search to find them. The hours stretched into many days. Finally, news came. Huddled together, two or three had survived; all who had become detached perished in the mountain's winter grip. 1 + 1 = Survival.

B. Outside community, we simply cannot keep warm; standing alone, we are at risk. For this reason, true spirituality connects us; it does not disconnect us. Relational networks are important: 1 + 1 = Survival.

Paul assures us that we have been blessed "in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and prays for enlightened understanding. He wants us to know the hope to which God has called us and God's incomparably great power. Wedged between those

two phrases is the one that interests me most: he also wants us to know "the riches of [God's] glorious inheritance in the saints" (v. 18).

Christ, Paul says, is "head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (vv. 22-23). This is an unusual idea. We think about Christ as the believer's fullness; we are not used to thinking about Christ needing fullness. Yet the church, Christ's body, completes Christ.

Paul's word picture sounds gruesome: When we detach from one another, we decapitate Christ. We reject His Body while embracing His severed head when we disconnect from others. If this is not sacrilege, it is a significant departure from God's way.

"The riches of [God's] glorious inheritance" is extended to us "in the saints" (v. 18). Each of us is one of God's branch banks, a depository of God's heavenly resources. Each of us is surrounded by other branch banks. *We must interact transparently with other believers if we are to have access to God's resources.* When we detach, choosing isolated independence, we end up alone, with neither friend nor family."

II.II.I.S. I was serving my first church. The concluding service of our district's annual meeting was underway. I was seated front and center, flanked by a row or two of our people, many of them brand-new Christians. Though our church had experienced good growth, represented by the large number of new Christians who surrounded me, I was in a spiritual dry spot. When the speaker opened the altar for prayer, the Lord prompted me to go forward. I argued, "But Lord, what will these who've come with me think?"

Finally I went forward. When I finished praying, the people from my congregation were gathered around praying for me. My openness deepened and solidified our relationship; it did not diminish my ministry.

Sadly, we operate under the false notion that vulnerability is taboo. These notions disconnect us and put us at very high risk. Two are simply better than one when it comes to survival.

CONCLUSION:

Choose relationships; reject isolated independence. 1 + 1 = Survival. It is God's way! A cord of three strands cannot be easily broken!

II.II.I.S. God's Word and my relationship with Him have been keys to survival, but small groups of people have also been instrumental. One small group met for breakfast. For two years we met every other Tuesday. We developed close and valued friendship. One morning at a difficult time in my life I shared some of the things I was experiencing. When I finished, one by one, these people whom God had given to me *before I knew I needed them* extended His help to me. They shared with me their similar experiences. They affirmed me. Suddenly, surprisingly, I was not alone; they dispensed heaven's inheritance to my frightened heart. Healing began that day.

II.II.U.S. The Roman symbol of the rods bound by cords on one version of our dime comes from Aesop's fable about

the bundle of sticks. A man could not get his quarreling sons to live in harmony. So he asked them to try to break a bundle of sticks tied together. None could. Then he untied the bundle, gave an individual stick to each son, and asked them to try again. Each son broke his stick easily. Aesop's moral: "Union is strength."³

"Two [really] are better than one. . . . If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? . . . Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:9-12).

1. Matt Truell, the Spokane, Washington, *Spokesman-Review*, Sunday, November 17, 1996, A18.

2. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* (January 1995), 65.

3. William Bennett, *Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 388.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

SCRIPTURE READING Eccles. 4:8-12

INVOCATION

SONGS OF WORSHIP "He Will Come and Save You"
"May Christ Be Exalted in Me"
"We Praise Thee, O God"
"You Have Called Us"

FRIENDSHIP MINUTE

OFFERING

CHOIR

"Undivided"

SERMON

"1 + 1 = SURVIVAL"

SELECTED INTERVIEWS

COMMUNION

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, pray for the Church around the world. Acknowledge that we are never drawn close to God if we are not also drawn close to one another. Pray that all discord, not only in the local church but worldwide and across denominational lines, will resolve into gospel-advancing unity.

PRAYER BEFORE THE BREAD: Help us see ourselves strong because our individual lives are a part of the common loaf, united with believers spanning both the centuries and the globe.

PRAYER BEFORE THE CUP: May the love we express toward each other be that which we have received from You—the wellspring of forgiveness received, covered by Your shed blood.

CLOSING SONGS

"The Bond of Love"
"Make Us One"

Creative Worship Orders

Selected Interviews

Interview small group participants (select and prepare them before the service). Ask them, "Has there ever been a time when a small group made the difference between your survival and demise?" Have them describe how their lives have been enriched by small groups of Christian peers who met regularly to share and pray.

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT MONEY

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 5:8-20

INTRO:

"When Solomon writes on money, it's time to take notes. [He] knows whereof he speaks. . . . His base income in gold alone was in the neighborhood of \$20 million . . . not to mention his export-import trade lines and the limitless 'perks' that came with being king. . . . We're talking 'filthy rich.' . . . You and I . . . cannot comprehend the immensity of his wealth."¹

These verses are straight, no-holds-barred talk about money and its impact on society. The professor is clearly frustrated with the inequities produced by people whose viewpoint falls exclusively under the sun. He punctuates his talk about money with talk about power or its misuse. Solomon knew what we know—there is a clear symbiosis between money and power. Each needs the other and each reinforces the other.

I. The Madness Money Causes (5:8-12)

A. The poor are oppressed in political districts; justice and rights are routinely denied. Are you surprised? Don't be! Social and political systems are devised to protect valued turf.

ILLUS. An old Russian proverb says, "When money speaks the truth is silent."²

ILLUS. In a 1987 *Parade Magazine* article, "The Reward Is One's Own Dignity," Marie Ragghianti said, "In a world where loyalty is often valued over competence, the whistle-blower can become a pariah." Ragghianti knows how tenaciously political systems protect their turf. In 1977 she lost her position as the head of the Tennessee Board of Pardons and Paroles because she challenged the sale of early releases to inmates and their families by members of the Tennessee administration. Ragghianti recalls a conversation with Tom Murton, another whistle-blower whose experience in Arkansas was the basis for the movie *Brubaker*. Murton, "forced to teach instead of practicing the profession he had given everything to" she says, "railed at his colleagues in the field of corrections, who, he said, had shut him out. 'I'm being wasted, Marie.'"

Ragghianti, angered by Murton's anger, replied, "Yes, there was corruption, but isn't that part of the human condition? Yes, we were the ones thrown out, but haven't we known fulfillment? And didn't we know that we weren't playing the game? Didn't we *know* that we were jeopardizing our jobs by what we did, and didn't we make a decision to do it anyway?"³

The professor observes another slippery slope. People quickly learn what they have to do to get ahead, so a two-way arrangement is worked out: underlings seek upward mobility by compliance while superiors study the conformity quotient of underlings.

ILLUS. Gen. Colin Powell describes how he coped with the Army system in his autobiography: "You pay the king his shilling, get him off your back, and then go about do-

ing what you consider important. . . . I vigorously set out to better every indicator by which my brigade was statistically judged. And then went on to do the things that I thought counted. . . . I had detected a common thread running through the careers of officers who ran aground . . . a stubbornness about coughing up that shilling. They fought what they found foolish or irrelevant, and consequently did not survive to do what they considered vital."⁴

This slope is slippery because the line between raw expediency and being a team player is so thin. The professor is not opposed to building bridges so we can accomplish what is vital for society; he is opposed to abandoning all principle just to get ahead.

B. The professor gives several snapshots of money-mad insanity. Snapshot 1: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (v. 10).

ILLUS. Rockefeller, the story goes, was asked, "How much money do you need before you will feel comfortable and secure?"

He answered, "Just a little more."

ILLUS. In 1987 Mike Mailway reported, "People most dissatisfied with their paychecks are those who earn about 25 percent more than average. This, from a University of Illinois sociologist who says his studies also indicate that a raise in salary rarely makes anybody happy. He claims those who get raises quickly adjust—to higher levels of dissatisfaction."⁵

Snapshot 2: Goods increase and so do those who consume them. Many provide no benefit except for the owner to feast his eyes on them. This, the professor reasons, makes no sense. There comes a point when something else, something newer or better is of little benefit except to underline one's wealth. At some point the accumulation of vehicles becomes a statement rather than a means of transportation.

ILLUS. "Some modern fabulist once put [it] very neatly; he wrote of a wonderful atomic converter which took common earth and stone and turned out whatever goods you wanted. Men rejoiced at the end of all poverty and laughed at the few reactionaries who feared that the world might get used up. Five thousand years later, astronomers were disproving with mathematics the popular legend that the earth had once been much bigger than the moon."⁶

ILLUS. The current lunacy of athletic salaries threatens the financial integrity of the professional sports leagues. Shaquille O'Neal, according to a radio report, will receive \$105 million for eight years. Meanwhile, the median annual salary level for doctors is \$59,000; for lawyers, \$53,000; for university professors, \$46,000; for public school teachers, \$33,000; for clergy, \$23,000; for secretaries, \$20,000; for construction workers, \$18,500; for

waitresses, \$14,000.⁷ This is clearly not about need; it is about ego. The question is a good one: will ego's greed eventually destroy the athlete's golden goose?

Snapshot 3: Moral and ethical compromise occur as people conspire to get ahead at the expense of others. Who can forget the savings and loan scandal of the early 1980s or the post office scandal that felled Congress's Dan Rostenkowski?

Snapshot 4: The number of dependent consumers increases in proportion to the increase of wealth and goods. The more you possess, the more "friends" you accumulate, all hoping for a piece of the action.

ILLUS. One businessman described his life this way: "My employees get paid while I get no pay, and they sleep like babies while I spend sleepless nights sweating my next payroll." This is precisely the paradox the professor has in mind: "The sleep of the laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep" (v. 12).

Swindoll has it right. "Money can buy us tons of comfort, but not an ounce of contentment."⁸

II. Why Money Madness Is Madness (5:13-17)

A. The professor explains why love of money is madness. Wealth is often hoarded to the harm of its owner and is often lost through misfortune. For this reason, the professor calls preoccupation with wealth a grievous evil. Have you seen this grievous evil happen?

ILLUS. A radio talk show host once referred to the monetary instability of life as a "dark cloud."⁹

It really doesn't matter whether wealth is hoarded or lost. Either way, a person can be left with nothing. Money is transitory. It is highly susceptible to inflation, devaluation, or economic slump.

ILLUS. "The uncertainty of riches is proverbial; at any moment they may take wings and fly away. A panic on the Stock Exchange, depreciation in the value of securities, a new invention, the diversion of trade from one port to another, or the competition of a foreigner, may in a short time cause the carefully hoarded winnings of our lifetime to crumble like the Venice Campanile [an ill-fated bell tower]."¹⁰

The professor concludes his explanation with a bang: "All his days [a person] eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger" (v. 17). The argument is simple: it is better to not have a fortune than to lose it. For loss brings distress and disappointment that will never be experienced except by the impoverished rich.

B. This sets up the bottom-line issue: You can't take it with you. The professor does not say we take nothing out of life. He knows we take our character and our conscience. He says we take nothing we can carry in our hands. So if we make a bundle, what do we gain? We end up with a handful of nothing; our net worth is \$0.00. Making a bundle, in the final analysis, is like toiling for the wind.

The opposite of the bottom-line evil is the bottom-line good. In a burst of reassuring insight, the professor sees what he relays to us: "It is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome la-

bor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him. . . . When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart" (vv. 18-20).

CONCLUSION:

Seneca, the Roman sage, was right, "Money has never yet made anyone rich."

So how do we establish sanity in the midst of money madness? Reach above the sun. Seek Jesus, His kingdom, and His righteousness; believe that He will sufficiently add to you all things (see Matt. 6:33).

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 162.
2. Frank S. Mead, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1965), 463.
3. Marie Ragghianti, "The Reward Is One's Own Dignity," *Parade Magazine*, March 22, 1987, 4-5.
4. Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 220.
5. Mile Mailway, "Mike Mailway," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 25, 1987.
6. Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 124-25.
7. Heard on a radio broadcast, Summer 1996.
8. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 163.
9. KIRO Radio, Seattle, Washington, March 22, 1987.
10. F. B. Meyer, *Inherit the Kingdom* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1904), 121.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	"We've Come to Worship"
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"We Praise Thee, O God"
	"Sing unto the Lord"
	"How Majestic Is Your Name"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
CHOIR	"Seekers of Your Heart"
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 5:8-20
OFFERING	
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"Nothing as Precious"
	"Higher Ground"
	"Let the Redeemed"
	"We Will Glorify"
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER	
SERMON	"STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT MONEY"
BENEDICTION PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Prayer

Lead the congregation to repent of their participation in the kind of systemic, institutional sins about which Solomon is concerned in today's passage. Ask for a holy hatred of sin. Direct such anger at prejudice and wrongdoing institutionalized into state and corporate policy—powerful nations preying on weaker nations, the advantaged classes exploiting the less advantaged, our enjoyment of technology and cheap products that steal the health and dignity of workers. Pray for the day when employers and workers will each give the other the product of consecrated lives. Pray that we will find ways to purposely leave enough around the edges of our fields of plenty so those for whom there is no crop this year may find enough for their needs.

GLADNESS OF HEART

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 5:18—6:12

INTRO:

ILLUS. Born with congenital heart disease, Dewayne was not expected to live through childhood. In his 20s, he had already outlived several prognoses. He grew up in a Christian home but, unable to understand his health problems and an accumulation of related life experiences, renounced the Christian faith and discontinued his connection with the church. Now, after several years, Dewayne again began attending church.

One day Dewayne rehearsed his life history in my office, pouring out his questions, disappointments, frustrations, and anger. "I don't even know if I believe there is a God!" he complained. It was clearly a moment of struggle with the meaninglessness attached to the purely under-the-sun viewpoint for which he had opted.

I replied, "Dewayne, you know what I am supposed to do now. I am supposed to urge you to ask Christ into your heart. But I am not going to do that. You have a problem more fundamental than Christ's absence from your heart; you don't even know if God exists. So sometime in the next days or weeks, speak to the air and ask God to reveal himself to you."

Several weeks later Dewayne told me the story of his inquiry, declaring, "I believe God exists." Although he did not leap quickly to full-fledged faith, something foundational had happened, something without which full-fledged faith could never have occurred. Over the next weeks and months, Dewayne's journey to full-fledged faith was not a straight road; it was full of twists and turns and switchbacks. He vacillated between despair and hope as he tried to figure out the relationship that had to occur between the God above the sun and his own under-the-sun existence. This is precisely the situation of today's scripture.

The professor's grand research project has led him to a kind of early faith. He has studied the plight of the oppressed poor who have no advocate. He has researched bureaucratic oppression and injustice, and nearly impenetrable networks of official graft. He has wrestled with the senselessness of wealth-gathering and wealth's certain instability (see 4:1; 5:8-15). The dark despair occasioned by his conclusions has driven him to look above the sun. Life under the sun has forced an upward glance that in turn has occasioned a kind of prefaith.

I. Look for a Glimpse of Hope (5:18-20)

A. The professor intended to explore "all that is done under heaven" (1:13). He walked every brightly lit avenue of under-the-sun possibilities, but none lived up to its promise. Each avenue ended up a dark dead end posted "Meaningless!" Each dead end has darkened the professor's mood. He has begun to suspect that no relief from life's meaninglessness exists under the sun. But the professor, a diligent scientist, stubbornly proceeds to explore the question: What is worthwhile for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives?

Three times he reports God peeking into things under the sun (see 2:24-26; 3:10-15; 5:18—6:2). Then seeing a developing pattern in these above-the-sun sightings, he begins to get excited. After all, every scientist understands that evidence sometimes alters prior propositions. That is fine. Science is about discovery, not defending false propositions.

B. Realization is that magical moment of insight. Insight is quite different than knowledge. We can possess knowledge without insight. Insight occurs when what we know first makes sense. Knowledge is a possession, perhaps lightly held; insight is a valued possession, passionately held.

Knowledge is the algebra student, working an equation flawlessly as she follows the teacher's instructions step by step. It is the aspiring artist painting by the numbers or the Bible student reading a verse and knowing it is in the Bible. But these are not insight. Insight is that moment when knowledge moves to applied understanding. Insight happens when the algebra student no longer needs the teacher's step-by-step guidance; the equation is understood, both the way it works and why. Insight occurs when the artist no longer needs the lines, the numbered canvas, and the numbered paint containers. Instead, what the heart sees and feels shows up on canvas. The Bible student, reading a familiar, often read verse or passage, exclaims, "Why haven't I ever seen that before?"

The professor reports the first occasion when his clinical dispassion gets swallowed up by the passionate excitement of discovery: "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him. . . . Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart" (5:18-20).

II. Hope Can Cloud Over (6:1-6)

A. As quickly as the hopeful realization burst, hope clouds over with the limited viewpoint under the sun. "I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil" (vv. 1-2).

Few of us enter faith or proceed along faith's path on a straight-arrow trajectory. Entry is seldom a straight line; it usually zigzags. Even we in personal relationships with God sometimes find our moods shifting between hope and despair. Certainly this was the case of the psalmist. Through two psalms (Pss. 42—43) he fluctuates between "put your hope in God" and "my soul is downcast within

me." You wonder if he will ever get the victory. Yet for us as for him much of life ebbs and flows.

The professor realizes that God gives wealth and possessions; now he argues with God. He still wishes God were not necessary for life under the sun to have meaning. He resents that God may give a person everything but may also withhold the capacity to enjoy the abundant wealth and status possessed. It is not fair, the professor insists with animated fervency, that strangers and aliens enjoy them instead. This cruel irony makes wealth meaningless, a sore affliction, a heavy evil!

In fierce reaction to God's perceived unfairness, the professor launches into a fervent protest that positions the stillborn child as better off than we who dwell under the sun: "A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity . . . , I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man—even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity" (Eccles. 6:3-6).

B. It is an under-the-sun reality that God does not enable enjoyment if life is not centered in Him. If God is absent, the person who has everything is worse off than a stillborn child. Innocent death is better than unfulfilled death. Wealth simply does not assure happiness; it cannot substitute for internal well-being. And internal well-being cannot be supplied under the sun. The only source of supply is He who resides above the sun.

CONCLUSION:

Do you see it? The professor's investigative research "is slamming every door except the door of faith."*

We know what the professor knew—we exert endless effort but are never satisfied. Careful behavior produces no socioeconomic gain. Most of life is empty chasing. A new discovery, even an important discovery, does not guarantee fame because "whatever exists has already been named" (v. 6). Skill and strength are no guarantees of success because there is always someone stronger and more skilled. We cannot even count on a promotion; the promises may be empty flattery. Our under-the-sun perspective is so narrow and limited that we mostly guess our way through life.

Is this your experience? If so, you are a candidate for gladness of heart. Without God, no measure of wealth or possessions are sufficient; with God, your wealth and possessions, great or small, will produce gladness of heart. Occupied with God's gifts to you, you will seldom reflect on what is missing.

ILLUS. One day, some months later, Dewayne decided for Christ. Though he was not expected to outlive his own childhood, he married and had two children. He enjoyed his family for a decade or more, convinced they were God's gift to him. Dewayne eventually died while awaiting a heart and lung transplant, but he died declaring that God had been and would remain his stability.

Isn't this a good time to invite God to insert His above-

the-sun perspective into your under-the-sun existence? Why don't you invite God to occupy you with gladness of heart?

*Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 108.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	"I Was Glad When They Said unto Me"
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story" "Behold, What Manner of Love"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 5:18—6:12
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"You Have Called Us" "Satisfied" "You Are My Everything" "Change My Heart, O God"
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER	
CHOIR	"Awesome in This Place"
OFFERING	
SERMON	"GLADNESS OF HEART"
SONG OF INVITATION	"In His Time"
BENEDICTION PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Prayer

Enlarge your prayer to encompass the whole world and its leaders. Pray that the Lord will lay His hand upon our youth, here and around the world, to be pioneers in His name of a new era—an era undivided by race and language, by territorial disputes, by prejudice, by bitterness and hatred, and by the resentments that economic incongruity breeds among the many who starve while a few of us have more than enough. Pray that we will be peacemakers as we pray for peace among our friends, our families, our neighbors of every race, and our enemies.

Offertory Idea

Jesus' story of the good Samaritan pictures those who share what they have with those who do not have, taking no thought of what they will get in return. Our world is in need; may we be good Samaritans, our hearts and pocketbooks open to care.

Benediction Prayer

Father, we are coming to realize how much we need to be in strong salvation relationship with You. Life is teaching us what Your Word tells us: our lives may be blessed with wealth, possessions, and status, but we cannot enjoy them without You. So we turn to You, needing Your good gifts—not wealth or possessions, but the ability to be content with what we have, to accept our lot, and to be happy in our work. Give us a clarified sense that things under the sun is not all there is when we are in relationship with You. Help us discern Your purposes in our present location in life. Keep us occupied with gladness of heart. Amen.

SOMETHING BETTER THAN STRENGTH

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 9:11—10:2

INTRO:

ILLUS. E. Stanley Jones penned these words: "Someday science is going to put it down on the table and say: 'This and this and this is the way to live. And this and this and this is not the way to live.' And we are going to look on those two lists and our eyes will open . . . wide for we are going to say, 'Why, Brother, Man, the way you say to live is the Christian way. . . .' And the scientists will reply: 'We don't know anything about that, but this is the way that life works and this is the way that life does not work.'"¹

The professor set out to let life under the sun teach him about life under the sun. He was not interested in theology; he was interested in anthropology. But anthropology has insisted that he become interested in theology, especially if he wants to learn "what [is] worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives" (2:2).

ILLUS. In 1975, *Time* magazine reported Masters and Johnson's latest research. *Time* cited their conclusion: "Sex should mean commitment, 'developing a long-range relationship rather than concentrating it all on short-term pampering of the individual self.'"² Masters and Johnson were not defending or explaining the Bible. They probably didn't read it. Nevertheless, the scientific method, fully applied, affirmed what the Bible has said all along.

ILLUS. In 1987, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that "AIDS will re-revolutionize sexual behavior. Virginity and chastity will once again become prized."³

The professor's experience parallels Jones's prophecy in the same way Masters and Johnson and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* fulfill it. The reason is simple: Life "is Christian in its essence and in its object."⁴

I. Life Teaches Lessons (9:11-18)

A. Success and prosperity do not automatically fall into our laps, but contrary to popular wisdom, life is not irreversibly stacked in favor of the swift and the strong. The Hebrew text places negative references at the front of each phrase to increase the emphasis. More literally, the English might read, "not to the swift is the race; not to the strong warrior is the winning of the battle; not to the clever is the getting of bread; not to the brilliant is true wealth; not to the learned comes favor and power."⁵

We act like we are in control of success. We say things like, "You can have anything if you work hard enough." But life is complicated. It is more than a ceaseless progression of hours and days, unfolding mechanically and predictably. Quantum physics, they tell me, represents a movement away from simple cause and effect to calculations that account for unpredictable but observable random factors. Again, there is nothing new under the sun. Solomon knew this 3,000 years ago. Time and chance occur unexpectedly and are not subject to human control; they upset all human calculations.

ILLUS. A friend of mine maintains a database of baseball statistics and plans his vacation to merge with the at-home schedule of the major league teams. He said about Frank Howard: "He was never in the right place at the right time. He had ample skill but was always caught by the numbers."

Natural giftedness is simply no guarantee for success. Neither is the inclination to run faster, be stronger, or to manipulate more cleverly. Uncertainty and unpredictability are an unavoidable part of life. We never know when our hour will come. Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds caught in a snare, people are often trapped by evil times that fall upon them unexpectedly.

B. When the pressure is off and deliverance is accomplished, life returns to "normal."

ILLUS. The tendency to relax when the pressure is off is illustrated by a teenager who was nearly killed in an automobile accident. Hovering between life and death, she promised God she would serve Him if He let her live. However, her life was a story of broken promises. When the pressure was off, her promises were forgotten.

The professor illustrates this with his own story—one that is a mirror showing us ourselves. A small city is attacked by a powerful king. Under siege, the city faces certain doom. Meanwhile, a poor but wise man devises a plan that ends the siege, saving the city with his wisdom. What most impresses the storyteller is this: Nobody remembered the poor wise man (see vv. 14-15).

Why are we so forgetful? Why do we judge the value of someone's statements by the standing he has in the community rather than by his content and quality? Why do we, sophisticates of the global economy, find rural wisdom and country logic too common for our tastes? Are we simply fickle? Why do we quickly forget or abandon those who have rendered us great service?

II. Life Creates Choices (10:2-4)

A. Strength, the professor teaches us, seems more impressive at first sight than wisdom, but wisdom is better than strength. Quiet words from the wise merit more attention than the shouts of a ruler of fools and wisdom is better than weapons of war.

How can this be? Wise counsel is seldom popular. People turn quickly to the behaviors that got them into distress in the first place. Stand strength alongside wisdom, and strength will get the public's vote nearly every time, when they are pushed to choose weapons of war over God's Word. Nevertheless, the professor, warming to the evidence at hand, is unyielding. He drags his initial conclusion, "Wisdom is better than strength" (9:16), through the meat grinder, wondering: Why would anyone despise the wisdom that saved them just because this wise man was poor? Why would anyone, let alone a whole city, abandon the very strategy that turned death into deliverance? The professor concludes that the flaw is not in God's Word; it is the city's forgetful foolishness.

The professor's story sounds strikingly similar to the story of another poor but wise man who devised a strategy for deliverance. On the Cross, Jesus provided life for us to replace the death resulting from our transgressions and sins (see Eph. 2:1-9). Although God is fully aware of our tendency to forget our promises, His promise still stands. If we receive Jesus and believe in His name, He gives us the right to become God's children—children born of God (see John 1:10-13).

Secure in the integrity of his conclusion, the professor reaffirms his conclusion. He speaks in a whisper, his confidence evident in the serenity of his tone: "Wisdom is better than strength. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (Eccles. 9:17-18).

Wisdom, unapologetically connected to God who is above the sun, is absolute; the euphemisms we prefer will not forever void the truth.

ILLUS. When Union support for the war was ebbing, Abraham Lincoln began drafting the Emancipation Proclamation. His advisers urged him to simply issue an edict proclaiming all slaves were free. Lincoln responded that saying slaves were free wouldn't make them free. He asked, "If you call a sheep's tail a leg, how many legs does a sheep have?"

"Five," they answered.

"No," Lincoln replied, "a sheep only has four legs. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it so."⁶

People may dispute God's Word, revise it, or despise it in the hunt for peer approval, but contentment is found in personal relationship with God and in alignment with His ways, not in rewriting truth. The quiet words of the wise throw us at crosscurrents with the world in which we live. Yet the world's way is not working.

B. Our choices are simple—we can turn left or right. The response of the foolish heart is a bad choice. Lacking moral intelligence, moral perspective, or moral will, the fool despises God's Word. He or she lacks good sense. With the flair of an exhibitionist, the fool displays stupidity even while walking along the road.

We can also turn right, which is the response of the wise heart. The wise-hearted person demonstrates self-control in desperate and unfair circumstances. He or she chooses to benefit from God's counsel. The wise person knows that one sinner destroys much good, and a lot of honor is outweighed by a little folly. This one also believes, with tenacious confidence in God's Word, that "calmness can lay great errors to rest" (Eccles. 10:14). Thus, preachers continue to preach God's Word when we wonder if it ever makes any difference, and believers continue to live by God's Word even when they feel totally outgunned by the world's pleasure.

CONCLUSION:

Life under the sun documents the truth first given to us from above the sun: God must rule every search for

meaning and symmetry. Though it often does not seem imminent, He insists that "evil shall fall upon the heads of its own authors."⁷

Barton captures Solomon's conviction: "One must bow to the despot, but the despot is not always right."⁸ Is Solomon's conviction yours?

1. E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 61.
2. *Time*, February 3, 1975, 69.
3. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 11, 1987.
4. Jones, *Unshakable Kingdom*, 61.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 273.
6. James C. Humes, *The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 194.
7. Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes in Geneva Commentaries Series* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 243.
8. George Aaron Barton, *The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1980), 170.
9. Raymond Bayne, *Before the Offering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976), 59.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP "The Battle Belongs to the Lord"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE

SONGS OF WORSHIP "All Hail the Power"
"Mighty Is Our God"
"Blessed Be the Lord God Almighty"
"Holy Is the Lord"
"I Will Come and Bow Down"

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER
SCRIPTURE READING Eccles. 9:11—10:2
OFFERING

CHOIR "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow"
SERMON "SOMETHING BETTER THAN STRENGTH"
BENEDICTION PRAYER

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Prayer

Thank God for the Church in all centuries and around the world. Affirm the Church for guarding great traditions and passing them down to us; for speaking to us of faith and redemption; for inviting us to kneel at the foot of the Cross; for assuring us that God will receive us there, forgiving us and adopting us into His great family of believers; for surrounding us with love, nourishing us, admonishing us, and nurturing us.

Offertory Idea

"A missionary intern called in the home of an elderly man and led him to the Lord. Afterward the man said, 'I haven't much, but I am so happy I want to give something for the Lord,' and he handed over a five-dollar roll of dimes. This is the natural response of every heart who realizes what it means to be saved."⁹

THE POWER OF WORDS

by Carl C. Green

Eccles. 10:4-20

INTRO:

ILLUS. In 1517 Martin Luther posted 95 topics for discussion on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The words he posted sparked the Protestant Reformation. Later, on April 18, 1521, the face of Western civilization was reshaped when Luther refused to recant his position at the Diet of Worms. "My conscience," he declared, "is captive to the Word of God. I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.¹ Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen."²

ILLUS. Winston Churchill repeatedly captured the attention of the world and rallied the British spirit with well-crafted words. "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be," he bellowed at the House of Commons after Britain's defeat at Dunkirk, "we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."³ Two months later Churchill was back, memorializing the Royal Air Force for their victorious defense against the German Luftwaffe. His words still rivet our attention, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."⁴ Who can forget his famous address at Harrow School on October 9, 1941? A few well-chosen words, spoken with fierce bulldog tenacity, forged the Allied spirit long before victory was sure: "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never. . . ."⁵

ILLUS. In his 1961 Inaugural Address, John Kennedy masterfully turned a phrase into a challenge that aroused America's optimism to new levels when he said, "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."⁶

Words are powerful; words have shaped history. The professor knew words were powerful; he also knew what modern research has documented: "Approximately 35 percent of the social meaning in a normal conversation is conveyed by the verbal components and 65 percent by the non-verbal components."⁷ We speak the words as carriers of meaning, but our attitudes and behaviors are the energy that drives the meaning.

Chuck Swindoll remarked, "In a day of soft diplomacy, straight talk is rare. . . . T. S. Eliot was correct when he said that we humans cannot bear very much reality."⁸ But the professor is ready to engage in straight talk. Reaching above the sun, he also reaches deep into our hearts and our behaviors.

I. Life Is like a Portrait Studio

A. We arrive at the studio for a class picture. The camera is ready; the backdrop is hung. The professor has arranged the setting. He intends to reveal the defects of foolishness by viewing it against wisdom. We understand the technique. For example, an inferior stereo seems fine until compared to a superior system. Your shoes look fine until you wear them into a shoe store.

Wise words are grace, the Hebrew says; they embody all that is gracious and kindly. "If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success" (10:10). The meaning seems obscure but the professor's point is potent: skill and foresight can overcome the lack of native intelligence or natural ability. "Wisdom thinks ahead."⁹ "Success depends on foresight."¹⁰ "Wisdom prepares the way for success."¹¹ Thoughtfulness, not brute force, brings success. The wise man prepares his tools; the fool, choosing superficiality and haste, nullifies inherent skills by inadequate preparation.

B. The professor has arranged this class picture so that, as each of us sits for our portrait, our attitudes and behaviors will be compared to the standard of wisdom. Foolish behavior seems normal in the company of fools; its deep flaws become clear when compared to wise behavior.

The professor is unapologetic about this tactic. One by one, he plans to set foolish behaviors in the shadow of wise behavior. "Look closely," he says, "see the embarrassing silliness of foolish behavior, its pettiness and eventual devastation."

Today's text defines a fool as at least one of three things: (1) one who, exalted to status for some reason other than competence, seems disinterested in developing competence; (2) one who excludes God from his lifestyle and decision-making; and (3) one who uses his tongue so the everpresent dangers common to all people are magnified and multiplied.

Watch the parade of fools carefully. It is a tragedy, played as a comedic parody—a Laurel and Hardy routine or maybe the Three Stooges. Never seeing the dangers, fools gladly embrace inexcusable risks; they dig a pit for someone else to fall into but fall into it themselves, invariably getting hurt more than the victim. Watch the frequency with which the fool's foolishness is revealed by the tongue. Isn't it a bit frightening that our tongues, to great degree, identify us as wise or as fools?

II. Look at the Portrait of a Fool

A. Work wearies the fool. Speaking with conviction about everything, though making no effort to learn what is going on in the world, and being known by his or her opinionated lack of social skills, the fool routinely silences dissenting or informing viewpoints. Words multiply but incoherence never diminishes. No one can tell the fool anything. No one can make sense out of what he or she says. George Barton, quoting Genung, got it right in the early 20th century: "One cannot make out of a fool's talk the way to the nearest town."¹²

The professor is heaving a sigh. He wonders, do fools ever get tired of talking? Does their chatter ever stop? He concludes that silence is better than foolish words; much talk is harmful.¹³

ILLUS. Martin Buber said, "When a man grows aware of a new way in which to serve God, he should carry it

around with him secretly and, without uttering it, for nine months, as though he were pregnant with it, and let others know of it only at the end of that time, as though it were a birth.”¹⁴

The fool, the professor says, is like a snake biting before the charmer has secured his profit. Lacking social grace and refusing to learn, the fool uses words that are foolish at the beginning and wicked madness at the end. Speech becomes malicious and brings about the fool’s own undoing.¹⁵

B. These characteristics, while aggravating, are not the fool’s worst characteristics. The fool’s worst characteristic is a negative and critical approach to life. Though he or she doesn’t recognize or practice basic social skills, a foolish person can’t figure out why everyone steers clear and why he or she can’t get ahead and doesn’t have friends.

Because the fool is too lazy to work, the rafters sag; the house leaks because his or her hands are idle. The fool revels superiors and curses anyone who has more than he or she has. Negative criticism controls the fool’s thoughts and words. The foolish person seems oblivious to the fact that a bird in the air may carry words back to the one about whom they were said. All these can’t be fixed because the fool will not accept helpful reason.

III. Study the Class Portrait of Fools

A. A culture, nation, or community can be foolish, too, concerned only about present pleasure, unconcerned with morality or righteousness. Fools eat at improper times—not for strength but for drunkenness (see Eccles. 10:17). Hedonism swallows them. Because they do not live with self-control, they cannot experience blessing.

Stupidity is not the exclusive domain of the unlearned peasant; it is also evident among sophisticates—the ruling class, leaders, people with clout, those who possess power. A position of leadership does not guarantee that a person will speak with wisdom or act without error and with fairness. Human institutions, the professor observes, routinely advance cronies instead of those who merit advancement. Just look around. Many who behave with social clumsiness ride in society’s limousines while others, behaving with the grace and dignity of princes, walk or ride bicycles.

B. Foolishness is sin, not because God decided to be difficult or demanding, but because it is bad public and social policy. We may choose to disregard wisdom or violate wise counsel. We cannot say, “It’s my own life!” for our life is not isolated and insulted from the lives of others. Sin, inevitably social, cuts a wide swath. (AIDS, spreading uncontrollably, is commonly known as a social disease.) “One sinner destroys much good,” the professor says. “As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (9:18–10:1). “One bad apple,” the old proverb goes, “spoils the whole barrel.” One hypocrite can cast negative reflection on the integrity of a whole community.

CONCLUSION:

Take your stand with Martin Luther, saying, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. . . . To go against

conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me.”

Reject the company of fools. Embrace wisdom; receive holiness from beyond the sun. Abandon sin’s lazy float downstream with the tide of peer pressure. Build good relationships with positive behaviors; don’t destroy relationships with negative behaviors. Take your stand on the right side of right and wrong. Determine that the words from your mouth will be gracious and redemptive. Use the power of words for positive, godly ends.

1. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 185.
2. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, ed. Emily Morison Beck (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), 155.
3. *Ibid.*, 744.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 745.
6. *Ibid.*, 890.
7. Paul R. Timm and Brent D. Peterson, *People at Work*, 4th ed. (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Publishing, 1993), 225.
8. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 293.
9. *Ibid.*
10. George Aaron Barton, *The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 1980), 172.
11. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 242.
12. Barton, *International Critical Commentary*, 174.
13. Loader, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 121.
14. Martin Buber, *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings*, 74, 84.
15. Leupold, 242.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP
SONGS OF WORSHIP “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”
CHOIR “Great Is the Lord Almighty”
“Be Still and Know”

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER
SONGS OF WORSHIP “To the Lamb”
“Make Us One”

FRIENDSHIP MINUTE
OFFERING
SCRIPTURE READING Eccles. 10:10-20
SERMON “THE POWER OF WORDS”
BENEDICTION PRAYER

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

On Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Convinced the Bible taught that we are saved by faith and not by works, Luther simply intended to call the Church back to a biblical posture. Charles V, emperor of Germany, ordered Luther to renounce his ideas before the Diet of Worms. Luther refused. He was subsequently excommunicated and the Protestant Reformation was underway. Luther preached the Word and reformed public worship, introducing congregational singing and using hymns to teach biblical theology to the illiterate 16th-century masses. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” one of his first hymns, became known as the battle hymn of the Protestant Reformation.

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 12:1-7

INTRO:

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (v. 1). This is no detached argument; it is an impassioned plea. The professor originally approached his experiment unconcerned about anything not under the sun. By the end of the experiment, he is convinced that nothing under the sun can have meaning if it is not connected to the Creator who stands above the sun.

The adages abound: "Youth for pleasure; age for business; old age for religion." "Let the devil have the prime and God the dregs. Time enough to think of religion when we are old. . . . Now is the time for pleasure. . . . Religion will come in course."¹ These may be the popular view but they are not the view of the professor. Informed by his wide-ranging, in-depth research, the professor insists, "Mankind needs to look not merely to his well-being but to his Maker."²

I. Remember God at Life's Front Side (12:1)

A. Remember your Creator at the front side of life, while you have years to invest and sufficient energy for service. We discard much opportunity for meaning if we save religion until life's tail-end.

ILLUS. In Sherwood Anderson's memorable short story "Sophistication," 18-year-old George Willard encounters manhood the first time he takes a "backward view of life." George's youthful confidence is invaded as he thinks about his future and his ambitions. Looking back over a life not yet lived, he sees his limitations and experiences with a strange surge of regret. The eyes of his imagination open wide. He sees, "as though they marched in procession before him, the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into the world, lived their lives, and again disappeared into nothingness. The sadness of sophistication," Anderson observes, "has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that . . . he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. . . . The 18 years he has lived seem but a moment, a breathing space in the long march of humanity. Already he hears death calling."³

The possibility of old age and life's termination are quiting. This is precisely why many of us, if asked to write our own epitaph, would decline to do so. We'd rather not think about death. But death's inevitability makes this one of literature's sobering passages.

B. Remember means "reflect to discern ultimate reality; let remembrance shape [your] conduct,"⁴ "act decisively."⁵

ILLUS. Walter Burke cites the work of Chris Argyris in his book on learning and changing. Argyris, he says, addresses "the gaps . . . between what [people] say (he calls it espoused theory) and what they do (theory in action)."

Burke argues that, if organizations want to be healthy, they will take action to reduce the differences when they become aware of gaps between their stated beliefs and their behavior.⁶

This is precisely how the professor uses the word "remember"—it urges more than some kind of distanced intellectual recollection; it is a call to action, to move theory from "espoused" to "action."

II. Remember Your Creator (12:1-5)

A. The first word following the professor's injunction to remember is a demanding word. "Before" demands that we hurry up: *before* life turns discouraging and distasteful; *before* aging progresses; *before* the days of trouble come; *before* the years empty of pleasure arrive; *before* the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain" (v. 2).

B. Our attention aroused, the professor paints a picture of inevitability, repeatedly emblazoned with the word "when": "*when* the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men stoop; *when* the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; *when* the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; *when* men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; *when* men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; *when* the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred" (vv. 3-5).

As aging runs its course, physical ailments compound, increasing limitations. The limbs, the keepers of the house, once sturdy, tremble and shake; the steady, erect step of youth becomes an increasingly stooped shuffle.

ILLUS. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* recorded this 1987 interview with two participants in an old-timers baseball game: "I'd still be playing if I could find someone who'd let me play," the 48-year-old [Gaylord Perry] said. Joe Foy, a mere 44 years old, has no such thoughts. 'This is the first time I've touched a baseball since 1984,' said Foy, who retired in 1971. 'I was daydreaming at the banquet [Saturday night] about hitting a home run and making a diving stop. But every swing is an adventure. Your mind says go, but your body says no. . . . You never forget what to do, but you can't get your body to do what you want it to do.'⁷

The teeth (grinders) cease to function too. The uppers don't meet the lowers or become too few.

ILLUS. Chuck Swindoll recalls the trip to the grocery store when his four children were small. "I was at the baby-food section, piling those jars in my cart. Nearby was an older gentleman very carefully picking and choosing 'strained this' and 'mashed that.' . . . I smiled and said something like, 'Boy, I bet it's great having those grandkids around the house!' He frowned, 'This ain't for the grandkids, sonny; this is for me!'⁸

"Those looking through the windows grow dim" (v. 3).

Solomon sounds like a former eye doctor of mine. One day following church he asked me how old I was. I told him. With a confident twinkle in his eye, he said, "You'll come see me when you hit 40!" He was right. How did he know? Predictable inevitability!

With anecdotal snapshots, the professor vividly illustrates the deterioration of hearing. The doors to the street close, sealing us off from human interaction; the sound of grinding fades; people rise at the sound of birds but all the bird songs grow faint. The irony of age is not lost on the professor. Awakened by the slightest sound, the aged can't hear well enough to enjoy the songs the birds sing.

He continues, announcing the vulnerability that age brings. Heights and dangers in the streets breed fear for the aged they never experienced when young and agile. Indeed, the time comes when the spring blossoms on the almond tree leave them like a worn-out grasshopper, no longer inspired by life's potential for rebirth.

ILLUS. In her middle 90s, Annie became so frail she couldn't leave her house. It took a full day's energy to make the short trek from her bedroom to the living room sofa and back again at night. Each week when I stopped to visit her, she would quote the psalms in her frail voice. One late winter day, I remember her saying: "I would like to see my fruit trees blossom just one more time. Then I'd like to go home to heaven." Annie lived through several more springs. Her faith never flagged, but she never again expressed the desire to see another spring, only disappointment that heaven still waited.

III. Remember with Urgency (12:6-7)

A. The professor is no longer a dispassionate clinician; he has become an evangelist, a persuader admonishing urgency. Death, an unavoidable reality, approaches. As before, the professor urges us to hurry up. The time to remember our Creator is now, *before* we go "to [our] eternal home and mourners go about the streets" (v. 5); *"before* days of trouble come" (v. 1); *before* the shatterings of life come, "before the silver cord is severed or the golden bowl is broken; . . . and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (vv. 6-7).

B. Life also demands urgency if we want to live well.

ILLUS. Mrs. Wesley wrote to one of her sons that the time to "mend our lives" and to lay "the foundations of solid piety . . . in sound principles . . . [is] while strength and vigor last . . . [before] the infirmities of old age overtake us."⁹

Ecclesiastes speaks the materialist's despair profoundly. It also announces God, not as one to whom we cling in pitiful last resort desperation, but as the phoenix rising triumphantly from the ashes of our materialism.

CONCLUSION:

Solomon's research faces us with three facts: First, I'm not getting any younger. Second, God has designed me to

be empty without Him. Finally, now is the time to prepare for eternity. So act decisively; respond to God while you are young. Do more than acknowledge His existence; establish a personal, saving relationship with Him. Remember your Creator.

1. Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes in Geneva Commentaries Series* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 285-86.
2. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 147.
3. Sherwood Anderson, "Sophistication," *Theme and Form* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), 124-25.
4. J. A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans's, 1986), 273.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 349.
6. W. Warner Burke, *Organization Development*, 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1992), 44.
7. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 15, 1987.
8. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 353.
9. Bridges, *Geneva Commentaries*, 287.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	Eccles. 12:1-7
INVOCATION	
SONGS OF WORSHIP "Crown Him with Many Crowns"	
	"I Will Bless Thee, O Lord"
	"A Child of the King"
	"All Hail King Jesus"
	"O How He Loves You and Me"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
OFFERING	
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"Ah, Lord God"
	"A Shield About Me"
	"Meet Us"
	"God Is So Good"
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER	
CHOIR	"How Great the Love"
SERMON	"REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR"
SONG OF INVITATION	"Jesus, I Come"
BENEDICTION PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

Before the beginning, Lord Jesus, You were. You were with God, and You were God. Through You all things were made; without You nothing was made that has been made. Life resides in You (see John 1:1-4). And we have gathered to remember You, our Creator. Not content to believe with our minds alone, we conform our behaviors, our attitudes, our resources, and our lives to the beliefs we speak. We worship, declaring that You are both our Creator and our Lord. May You find our worship acceptable. Amen.

Offertory Idea

Giving is less an act of obedience than it is an act of recognition. When we recognize royalty or come within arm's reach of a hero, adulation happens naturally, effortlessly, and with joy. God, our Creator, is near. Our tithes and offerings are evidence that we recognize Him and affirm His Lordship.

GOD'S GOOD GOAD

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 12:9-14

INTRO:

The professor's project is complete. His homework is done. His conclusions are not half-baked theory; they are the result of exhaustive reading, research, and study. He has "pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. [He] searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true" (vv. 9-10). Hoping we, his readers, are wise enough to benefit from his exhausting study, he has set before us what he has learned.

I. What Is the Bottom Line (12:13)?

A. The professor's from underneath conclusion is this: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (v. 13). Meaning can be found at no other source. The research has convinced the professor that every other source is inadequate to turn the few days people spend under the sun into meaning.

"Meaning" is an important word because our cognitive culture frequently confuses intellectual and relational knowledge. They are not the same. It is not sufficient to believe God exists. Meaning requires entry into "fellowship knowledge, that comes in the context of knowing a person."¹

ILLUS. Imagine arriving home some evening. Relaxing music plays in the background. The smells say dinner will be special. The table is set with formal dinnerware. The dining room flickers in the soft light of candles. Your spouse greets you and says, "I worked all day to make this evening special. I love you."

You reply, "I believe you exist."

Is your spouse going to be impressed? Probably not. "I believe you exist" is not the desired response. Your spouse wants to hear you say, "Thank you. I love you too."

In this same way, God is not impressed when we say, "I believe God exists." He desires us to enter into fellowship with Him. God gives meaning to life under the sun; not "fate, not mischance, not calamities, not men, not rulers"²—God.

B. "This [fearing God and keeping His commandments]," the professor says, "is the whole duty of man." He has traveled the whole circuit of possibilities for meaning, diagnosed each possibility, and assigned to each a carefully reasoned valuation. His conclusion? Vanity makes meaning inaccessible and destines the soul for misery. There is one single opportunity for meaning in human life: reverence God in the intimacy of a knowing relationship and express that knowing reverence by keeping His commands. Any reverence that does not express itself in obedient attention to what God says is not true reverence.

II. What Is Careful Communication (12:9-10)?

A. Again, this bottom-line conclusion is not the conclusion of a flawed research methodology. The research has

been meticulously pondered, the equations checked and rechecked, the conclusions rigorously verified. The professor seems to infer that we will arrive at the same answer if we try the experiment ourselves, though he hopes to save us the trouble.

He set out to "study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven" (1:13). He has done that. He has looked at "all the things that are done under the sun" (v. 14). In fact, he studied until his body was wearied and he thought he was never going to find an end to the books he needed to read before drawing his conclusions. He set out to put both wisdom and madness under the telescope of his high-powered wisdom and knowledge, letting nothing escape his investigation. That, too, has been accomplished—"all has been heard" (12:13); there are no blind spots.

B. Now comes the most important part of the professor's project: effective communication. A first-rate academician, he desires a broader audience than one of academic peers. Understanding the language of academic elites, he chooses the vernacular in order to impart to the masses the things he has learned.

"When many hear someone who is confusing, they think he is deep,"³ especially if their names are followed by degree initials from prestigious institutions. But the professor does not want to impress the masses with incomprehensible eloquence; he wants them to understand. So he ponders the research and searches for the right words to teach the research's lessons—words that are upright, true, right on, and reliable. Then he organizes the lessons and their applications into easy-to-remember-and-apply proverbs.

ILLUS. An aspiring but frustrated preacher once complained about the response of listeners to his sermons. "I know what I was trying to say," he complained. "If they don't, that's their problem!" If this preacher's perspective is true, every communicator's task is made much easier. After all, the most challenging part of every preacher's weekly task occurs after he has achieved personal understanding of the material, much of it rigorously technical. Then he has to translate it into language the hearer can understand and apply. Preaching is about far more than speaking; it is about communication. Communication does not occur until the hearer understands what the preacher is trying to say.

The professor, believing that the art of effective communication is as important as the research itself, wrestles with the manner of presentation as a dog worries a bone. With thorough diligence, he searches for words that will grab the reader's attention and win a hearing. He weighs his words, carefully evaluating whether they are honest and balanced. He wants his words to clarify rather than confuse, riveting "themselves into minds that are cluttered with other things."⁴ Like the professor, effective

communicators always work hard to state their cases with unmistakable clearness so no one will fail to understand.

ILLUS. Robert Short wrote, "The author of the Book of Job was a consummate dramatist. The psalmist was a lyrical poet. The author of Jonah knew how to tell a fascinating short story. The author of Genesis and Exodus was a historical novelist who could recount powerful sagas of epic proportions. But Ecclesiastes? . . . The preacher was . . . an artist of another sort. He was a photographer."⁵

Chuck Swindoll may be right. He pictures Solomon with a camera hung around his neck, taking snapshots of life. "He reveals it all as he takes one snapshot after another. None of them is in color. All of them are in stark black and white."⁶

Should not we, carriers of the gospel, find ways to speak the gospel in the vernacular rather than in the language of the Church, a language increasingly foreign to the person on the street?

ILLUS. The great advances of the gospel have always been accomplished in the vernacular. The New Testament was penned in the Greek of the marketplace, not of the Greek classics. In A.D. 405, Jerome's *Vulgate* gave the scripture a new voice—this time in Latin. In A.D. 1611, the gospel again found its way to the street as the King James Version when Shakespeare's language was the language of the street. Then of course, there are the stories of Luther and the Wesleys, teaching theology by putting Christian words to the top 40 tunes of their days. It was not until the Great Awakening, 1734-44, that harmony replaced unison in congregational singing.

As we give witness to our faith in a grand variety of social interactions throughout every week, we, like the professor, must organize our thoughts to create interest and spiritual insight rather than disinterest or confusion. Perhaps this is what it means to be a "new wineskin" (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38) as we participate in God's "new thing" (Isa. 43:19).

III. God's Word Is a Goad (12:11)

A. "The words of the wise are like goads" (v. 11). Like the large sharp-pointed sticks used to drive cattle, the professor's inspired words of wisdom intend to prompt, prod, and stimulate us to obedient action.

ILLUS. "Skeptic David Hume was seen making his way to a little chapel where George Whitefield was preaching. Someone said to him, 'Mr. Hume, I didn't know you believed this message!' He responded, 'I don't, but that man in the chapel does, and I can't stay away.' He [couldn't] silence the words because they [were] prodding at him, pushing at him, exploding silently in his mind."⁷

B. "The collected sayings [of the wise are] like firmly embedded nails" (v. 11). "They furnish a kind of mental anchorage."⁸

We recognize the collected sayings of the wise as the Bible. "We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all

things necessary to our salvation."⁹ Anchored people affirm the embedded nails and rejoice in the authority of the Bible.

CONCLUSION:

The words of wisdom imparted to us by the professor were "given by one Shepherd" (v. 1). They have power because they open the road of meaningful communion with God and satisfaction in life. This conclusion drives the professor's call to action: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (v. 1). Fear Him. Obey Him because someday you will stand before Him, and He "will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (v. 14).

1. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 153.
2. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 300.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 367-68.
4. Ibid.
5. Robert L. Short, *A Time to Be Born, a Time to Die* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), 3.
6. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 364.
7. Ibid., 370.
8. Leupold, *Exposition*, 295.
9. "The Holy Scriptures," *Manual, Church of the Nazarene*, 1993-97, 27.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	"All Creation Sings His Praise"
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 12:9-14
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"Ah, Lord God"
	"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
	"My Heart Rejoices"
	"Jesus, Jesus"
	"Amazing Grace"
	"He Is Lord"
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER	
OFFERING	
SERMON	"GOD'S GOOD GOAD"
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"Jesus Loves Me"
	"I Will Serve Thee"
BENEDICTION PRAYER	

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Prayer

Thank God for each confession of personal faith; pray that each confession of faith will become an intercession turned to action under God's leadership. Ask God to bring to our minds someone to whom we will minister this week in His name. Pray that we will go, not passing by quickly on a distant side of life's road but making goodness attractive and carving God's will into this world.

Offering

Jesus tithed. He affirmed tithing (Matt. 23:23). When people asked His disciples if He paid the Temple tax, they said yes (Matt. 17:24). Let us follow Jesus' example now.

THE RETURN OF BREAD

by Carl C. Green
Eccles. 11

INTRO:

The professor's grand experiment has demonstrated that the wisest decision we can make is to remember and to reverence God, not merely with statements of belief but by keeping His commands. This decision, once made, impacts every other decision we make and all our behaviors.

This morning we want to return to chapter 11 and let it become a kind of postscript to this series. "The life of indifference and unbelief has been placed against [the life of faith] on the scales and been found wanting. Now the Preacher [professor] calls for a verdict."¹ He wants us to explore ways to give visible evidence that we have decided for wisdom. These verses declare several truths that are important on Thanksgiving Sunday.

I. Invest Life Wisely (11:1-3)

A. "Cast your bread upon the waters" (v. 1), the professor urges. Be a giver. Contribute; don't just consume. An educator, he is also a trade baron—the king of a prosperous, prospering nation. His experience with his merchant fleet becomes a spiritual lesson: life is not all instant gratification. Significant lag time occurs between the assignment of goods to long commercial voyages and realized profit. Casting bread upon the waters is an act of faith. The distribution of goods and resources includes no guarantee of profit; disaster may come on a ship or the entire fleet. That is why returning bread occasions thanksgiving—astonishment mixed with delight.

The professor is not content to encourage timid faith or token giving. "Large-heartedness," Charles Bridges wrote in 1860, is "true Christian prudence."² Swindoll, with the vigor of an enthusiastic cheerleader, says, "Be bullish!"³ Invest your resources liberally. Invest your friendship expansively. Offer your help graciously, not as a get-rich scheme, but as acts of godly service.

ILLUS. "A war correspondent watched a . . . nun swab the blood and pus out of a young soldier's leg. Gangrene had set in. The correspondent was repulsed by the sight. He almost gagged as he turned and mumbled under his breath, 'I wouldn't do that for a million bucks.' Overhearing his remarks she looked up and responded, 'Neither would I.'"⁴

You do not know what disaster may lie just around the corner. Nevertheless, give seven portions, even eight. Reject pessimism, paranoia, and fear. Give liberally. Remember, life at its best is a faith venture. Gain does not always come instantaneously. Some loss is part of operational overhead, but if we give liberally the net gains will outweigh the net losses.

B. Resist the urge to hoard, to save, to keep. Instead, invest, push away, give—"cast your bread upon the waters" (v. 1). The invested life shares. The shared life is the best hedge against disaster. Do you want friends? Invest! Make friends.

ILLUS. Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story *Kidnapped* is the story of David Balfour. David's father, Alexander, died a poor man, leaving only a sealed letter and some instructions on what to do with it. The instructions send David to a run-down highland Scottish estate occupied by Ebenezer, "a mean, stooping, narrow shouldered, clay-faced creature."⁵ Upon receipt of the letter, Ebenezer arranges David's kidnap. After many adventures of escape, David returns to Shaw Castle and learns the story that provoked his kidnap. Ebenezer and his father were brothers who loved the same woman. When she rejected them both because of their hostile rivalry, Alexander left his portion of the inheritance to Ebenezer and departed to the lowlands. Affected by Alexander's attempt to end the hostility, the young lady followed. She married him and bore David. They lived a full, though poor, life. Meanwhile, Ebenezer, left with the estate, lived like a miser. He saved every penny, eating only cold porridge. In the end, the pitiable Ebenezer, with no friend in the world, was required by the law to surrender to David two-thirds of everything he saved during a life of self-imposed, suspicious poverty.⁶

Keep it in mind, the miserly life is a bad choice. If you shut your ear to the poor, someday you'll cry all alone (see Prov. 21:13). On the other hand, if you forge friendships and make helpful alliances, friends and allies will rally to you in situations of disaster.

ILLUS. The ancient story of Androcles and the lion dramatically tells how Androcles' own kindness in the end sets him free. A Roman slave, Androcles fled from his cruel master. He encountered a moaning lion. Instinctively, he turned to escape, but the lion did not pursue him. Androcles returned and saw the lion's paw, swollen and bleeding. A huge thorn was causing the lion great pain. Androcles pulled out the thorn and friendship was struck. Eventually Androcles was captured, returned to Rome, and sentenced to die in the arena. The emperor and thousands of people were present for blood sport. Androcles was led to the middle of the arena, where a lion, loosed and hungry, roared and bounded toward his victim. Then the lion recognized his friend and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The surprised emperor summoned Androcles who told him the whole story, whereupon both were freed.⁷

II. Embrace Life's Risks (11:3-5)

A. The professor's advice does not fail to account for the risks built into life. He knows we get rained on and knocked down. J. A. Loader calls these verses an "ode to uncertainty."⁸ The professor is not naively blind to the uncertainty. His two examples, falling trees and raining clouds, illustrate human helplessness. We are unable to control the difficulties of life, some of which are unanticipated and others that, although anticipated, simply freeze us in our tracks.

B. Some of us tend to wait to give until life seems safe or to make decisions until the success of our decisions is sure. But the professor rebukes this kind of procrastination. We cannot wait to scatter seed until there is no wind or we will never sow. If we wait to cut our grain until there is no possibility of rain, we never reap. Educated risk is part of life lived well.

ILLUS. Colin Powell describes his decision making methodology in his autobiography. "We do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely," he says. "Before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide. . . . I have a timing formula, $P = 40$ to 70 , in which P stands for probability of success and the numbers indicate the percentage of information acquired. I don't act if I have only enough information to give me less than a 40 percent chance of being right. And I don't wait until I have enough facts to be 100 percent sure of being right, because by then it is always too late. I go with my gut feeling when I have acquired information somewhere in the range of 40 to 70 percent."

So don't watch to see which way the wind is blowing. Don't look at the clouds to see if they're going to rain on your parade. God's work cannot be fully understood for the same reasons that we do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb. So stay busy. Sow seed in the morning; work with your hands in the evening. What will succeed? This or that? We do not know, but something will succeed, and there is an outside possibility that both this and that will do well. Simply put, chances are that no time will be better, less hazardous, than now. So go for it.

While you are living life aggressively, be a person of conviction. Set the pace; don't follow the crowd. Study God's Word, learn God's ways, do right even if it means walking into the wind or being rained on by the world.

III. Invest All of Life (11:6)

A. Get started making a contribution early in life; don't wait until life falls into your lap ready-made. Banish anxiety from your heart. . . . Youth and vigor are meaningless (v. 10) if you never cast your bread upon the waters.

B. Resist the urge to say, "leave me alone; I'm retired; I've paid my dues."¹⁰ Do not use advancing age as an excuse to become idle.

CONCLUSION:

Don't reject everything you cannot understand. Above all, don't reject God because you don't understand how your life unfolds or because you think it unfolds unfairly with too many falling trees and raining clouds. The life of joy never comes to the waverer.

We simply don't understand all of life. So accept life's risks; invest wisely; invest vigorously. Be thankful that God guides the ultimate outcomes. Expend your resources in doing good. Respond to life's wind and clouds by sowing when God calls, when grace moves, when the

heart feels, when Christ's Spirit whispers to your heart. Remember: If you cast your bread upon the water in obedience to the inner promptings of Christ, you will find it again. The return of bread is a wonderful, glad sanctification of the despair over life's circles (1:3-11).

1. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes* in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 139.
2. Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes* in *Geneva Commentaries Series* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 268.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 313.
4. *Ibid.*, 322.
5. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1987, first published in 1886), 15.
6. *Ibid.*, 128-29, 136.
7. William Bennett, *Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 118.
8. Loader, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 127.
9. Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 393.
10. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 323.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	"We Gather Together"
INVOCATION	
FRIENDSHIP MINUTE	
SCRIPTURE READING	Eccles. 11:1-6
SONGS OF WORSHIP	"Let All Things Now Living"
	"Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"
	"Give Thanks"
	"We Praise Thee, O God Our Redeemer"
	"The Worship Song"
	"I Will Come and Bow Down"
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER	
CHOIR	"He's Been Faithful"
SERMON	"THE RETURN OF BREAD"
COLLECTIVE AFFIRMATION	
OFFERING (Congregation sings)	"My Tribute"
CONGREGATIONAL BENEDICTION	"All Hail King Jesus"
	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Creative Worship Ideas

Collective Affirmation

[Congregation speaks this recitation, adapted from Eccles. 11, a phrase at a time.] We do not fully understand God's work—the path of the wind, why a mother's womb expertly cradles and nurtures life, why falling trees and clouds full of water fill life with danger. Nevertheless, banishing anxiety, we cast upon the waters of faith our tithes and offerings, visible signs of our confidence in God's provision. In seven and eight portions we give our resources and our selves to God's service. Trusting the Maker and Sustainer of all things, we believe that what we set adrift for God's service this day will return to us again, enriching our lives with news that our obedience to God has enriched the lives of others. Amen.



Highpoint

WELCOME TO *HIGHPOINT*

What kind of world do we live in? Obviously, it all depends on those with whom one is talking. Numerous descriptors can be used to describe our times.

Recently, while opening the mound of bulk-rate mail that accumulated on my desk during a two-day absence, I noticed a flyer advertising a seminar. I am a seminar junkie. I would love to attend many more than I do; fortunately, budget constraints limit my participation to about one a year. This participation advertisement was plugging a training event for those interested in the virtual corporate university.

Lifelong learning intrigues me. I am also intrigued by the recent marriage of high-tech, sophisticated learning delivery systems. This flyer advertised a wide range of of-

ferings for those interested in "Making training work in the 'learn-more/do-more-in-less-time' world." When I read that description, I thought of Larry Dennis's Sunday evening sermons for *Highpoint*. That's really where many of us are living . . . caught in the jaws of a learn-more do-more-in-less-time world.

The significance of Larry's contribution cannot be overlooked. Every pastor needs to read, then preach this series. If we don't find ways to help our people manage the demands of this age, the casualty list will be staggering. May God bless you as you "stand between the living and the dying."

David Felter, editor
Highpoint Series

Biography

Larry Dennis is the senior pastor of the Highland Park Church of the Nazarene in Lakeland, Florida. Dennis began his ministry there in 1994. Since arriving, the Sunday School has grown from a yearly average of 445 to 645 and worship attendance has increased from 791 to this year's average of 1,070. During the past 24 months the church

has received over 200 new Nazarenes into membership.

Prior to serving in Florida, Dennis served growing congregations in Texas and Ohio. He is a regular speaker at pastor and spouse retreats, Sunday School conferences, and seminars across the country. Larry is married to Debbie, a registered nurse. They have three sons.

INTRODUCTION

When I received the assignment to write 13 sermons for the *Preacher's Magazine*, the first inclination was to send my "candy sticks." My mind began racing over the past 25 years, and immediately I wanted to pull my 13 favorite sermons from the barrel.

Once reality set in and I realized my assignment was to provide Sunday night preaching material, I became painfully honest with myself. In the early '70s, evangelistic messages on Sunday night were common (and occasionally effective). As you well know, that is rarely the case now. Our Sunday night crowd for the most part is made up of regular, faithful saints of the church.

A shift in Sunday night preaching has occurred in most evangelical churches. Actually, it is more teaching than preaching. As with your evening sermons, often my P.M. sermons are prefaced with, "Tonight I will be exchanging my preaching hat for my teaching hat." The following 13 lessons represent something I have used in my last two pastorates. Few series have received more positive comments. Better than the comments, these 13 sermons have been instrumental in bringing tangible changes in the lives of the people who have internalized and put the teachings into practice. I would love to take the credit, but to be very honest these are not even my sermons. The primary source for the information I will be sharing with you is the one book, next to the Bible, that has most

influenced my life. It is Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, published by Harper and Row.

Once or twice each year I teach a class using this text. Some very positive fruits are continuing to be reaped. As a part of my life for the past 15 years, I have had a chance to read it, digest it, and practice it. I hope, if you choose to use these teachings, you will make the investment in the book and allow it to become a part of your own personal disciplined life.

These disciplines include:

Meditation
Prayer
Fasting
Study
Simplicity
Solitude
Submission
Service
Confession
Worship
Guidance
Celebration

Celebrating Discipline!

Larry D. Dennis

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES— THE DOOR TO LIBERATION

By Larry Dennis

Outline:

1. The Celebration of Meditation
2. The Discipline of Prayer
3. Celebration of Fasting: "When You Fast"
4. The Discipline of Study: The Path to Spiritual Growth, Loving, and Studying God's Word
5. Celebration of Simplicity
6. The Discipline of Silence
7. Discipline of Submission
8. Discipline of Service
9. Discipline of Confession
10. The Discipline of Worship
11. The Discipline of Guidance
12. The Discipline of Celebration

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES—THE DOOR TO LIBERATION

INTRODUCTION. As a congregation we need to move beyond surface living. More than that, as individuals, we are hungry to live deep below the surface. All the children of God are hungry for the deep things of God. John Woolman has said, "It is good for thee to dwell deep, that thou mayest feel and understand the spirits of God's people."

We are tempted to believe that only the spiritual giants are able to reach into the spiritual depths. But it is not so. Through spiritual disciplines all of us can experience the transforming effect that will take us beyond the mundane and the ordinary in our relationship with God.

I. JOY IS THE KEYNOTE OF ALL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

- A. We find a new liberation from the stifling interest of selfishness and fear.
- B. Our inner spirit is set free. Once we begin to understand and live the spiritually disciplined life, there is new joy, singing, shouting, and jubilation because all become a part of our spiritual lives.

II. THE PRIMARY REQUIREMENT FOR GROWING DEEPER IS A LONGING AFTER GOD.

The psalmist wrote, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul longs for Thee" (Ps. 42:1, NASB).

III. DEEP CALLS TO DEEP.

All of us in the subterranean chambers of our heart feel this continuous calling. We long and hunger for it. Along with this, we desire a real commitment to spiritual discipline to bring it to pass. Foster says it so well, "The spiritual disciplines are an inward and

spiritual reality and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics of coming into the reality of the spiritual life."*

This first teaching really is designed to help us understand our need for the inward disciplines. First, we look at these facts:

I. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE HELPS US TO FOCUS ON INGRAINED HABITS.

- A. All of us know what it is like to be defeated in our spiritual life.
 1. Trying harder.
 2. Making promises to oneself and to God often results in defeat and discouragement.
- B. There is no way we can free ourselves from sin that can easily creep into our lives.
- C. Spiritual disciplines move beyond willpower.

II. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES OPEN THE DOOR.

- A. The needed change within us is God's work not ours. (Hurrah!)
 1. It must be an inside job.
 2. Only God can work from the inside.
- B. Paul went to great lengths to remind us that righteousness is a gift of God. It has nothing to do with our own personal works. (Eph. 2:8-9)

III. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES BRING NEW HOPE.

- A. As our lives become totally and wholly His, some wonderful things begin to happen.
- B. The message of Gal. 5:22-23 becomes a living reality.

Our lives become living examples of love, joy, hope, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- C. The fruits of the Spirit are lived out as a natural expression and an outflow of what God is doing inside of us.

1. Spiritual disciplines are inward changes.
2. These inward changes come to pass because we open ourselves to God's healing, directing, and forming hand.
3. We joyfully see ourselves with Jeremiah in the potter's house voluntarily climbing on the potter's wheel and allowing the Lord to gently and masterfully shape us into what He wants us to be.

IV. WE ARE DEALING WITH LOVE, NOT LAW

- A. Jesus taught us we must go beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20).
- B. The best way to nullify the impact of the spiritual disciplines is to make them into laws. They are beyond the scripture. "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col. 2:23, KJV).
- C. The spiritual disciplines are a loving way of life in which we continually look to the Lord to help us in disciplining our lives so that we can live out the deeper experience and existence He has called us to.
- D. Spiritual disciplines bring a new effectiveness and joy that we cannot know apart from them.

"I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches" (Ps. 63:6, KJV).

*All quotations are taken from Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1988).

THE CELEBRATION OF MEDITATION

INTRODUCTION. Most Wesleyan-Arminian Christians are scared to death of meditation. When the word is even mentioned, our mind conjures up pictures of Zen Buddhists or New Agers on a California beach with bodies contorted in painful yoga positions—at ease! Take a moment and read Foster's chapter on meditation. You will see it in a new and refreshing ray of light.

I. UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION

- A. Slam on the brakes! Put your fears aside and listen to the Word of God. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening" (Gen. 24:63, NKJV). "My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on your word" (Ps. 119:148, NKJV). Surely John was meditating on the Lord when he wrote, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10, KJV). In the very first psalm, David writes, "Delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2).
- B. Fear not . . . the wonderful freeing difference between transcendental meditation and the meditation of us Christians is very simple.
 1. Transcendental meditation calls for a detachment. Meditation associated with Buddhism, New Age, and Yoga all call for the detachment of the mind from present circumstances.
 2. Meditation for the child of God is a call for attachment. This meditation upon God and His Word draws us closer and attaches us more firmly to Him, His presence, and His obvious will for our lives.
- C. Meditation forces us to slow down. Life really is moving too fast.

II. MEDITATION IS DESIRING THE LIVING VOICE OF GOD.

*Only to sit and think of God,
oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought to breathe the name
earth has no higher bliss.*

—Frederick W. Faber

- A. We humans tend to want someone else to talk to God for us.

"You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. 20:19, NKJV).
- B. This is a sad mistake. The voice of God is so real, crisp, and clear if we will but take the time to listen.
- C. It is difficult for most people to even believe we can hear God's voice.

III. PREPARING FOR MEDITATION

- A. It is impossible to learn how to meditate from a book.
- B. Meditation comes from an inward desire.
 1. Most of it is tied to Paul's admonition "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17, KJV).
 2. We must continually hunger for our hearts to live in a constant state of communication and communion with the Lord.

IV. COME ON, YOU CAN DO IT!

- A. God has given us a wonderful gift.
 1. It is the gift of imagination.
 2. Our imaginations can transport us anywhere around the world and His universe if we will just allow it.
 3. God gave us this gift so we could bless and honor His holy name with it.

- B. True meditation revives our love for God's Word.
- C. Meditation is a very practical aid to help us through life's difficult journeys.
- D. Here's how to meditate:

Take a passage, any recorded specific event from God's Word. For example, look closely at Matt. 8 where Jesus calmed the storm. Look into the terror stricken eyes of the disciples. Feel the boat being tossed about like a cork on the sea, and allow yourself to feel the spray of the sea in your face and the terror of what appears to be your soon coming death. In the midst of the panic and the stress, now envision Jesus standing up and saying those welcomed words, "Peace, be still." As we meditate on that simple little four-verse passage, the storms of our own life can be quieted and diminished because we are reminded again that we serve a Savior who cares about our problems and is able to help us solve them. As we prayerfully meditate on any of a thousand passages, we will find strength, comfort, and encouragement.

CONCLUSION. So let's get busy! The scriptural call to meditation is clear. Once we learn this discipline, we will be able to face many more of the storms of life with an assurance of God's help and care.

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

INTRODUCTION. This is an opportunity for you as a pastor and teacher to use your very best teaching on prayer and also pull from some of Foster's wisdom and experience on the subject.

One of the great questions that all pastors are asked from time to time is "Why can't the church today be like the New Testament church?" One of the simplest reasons is that for the most part the New Testament church was made up of Messianic Jews. These people, as students of the Old Testament, already had the disciplines in place that we are studying. Prayer was already a part of their life. Meditation was a regular practice. Fasting, study, simplicity, tithing, worship—all these things were a part of their spiritual repertoire.

I. TO PRAY IS TO CHANGE.

Someone has said that, "Prayer catapults us into the frontier of spiritual life."

A. We struggle with change; all of us do.

1. Those unwilling to change often abandon prayer.
2. The closer we come to God, the more we see our need to be transformed.

B. Prayer changes our motives.

1. So often we pray for our circumstances to be changed. God uses prayer to change us (James 4:3).

C. Real prayer causes us to

1. Think God's thoughts.
2. Desire God's desires.

3. Love what God loves.

II. PRAYER AS LIFE'S MAIN BUSINESS

A. Biblical examples abound.

"In the morning a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35, author's paraphrase). The psalmist David said, "Early will I seek thee" (Ps. 63:1, KJV).

B. Historical examples are everywhere.

1. Wesley, "He that has prayed well has studied well."
2. David Brainerd, "I love to be alone in my cottage where I can spend much time in prayer."

III. PRAYER IS WORK, BUT IT WORKS!

1. It is a learning process.
2. It calls us to persistence.
3. It is a listening process.
4. We tune in to God.
5. Our imagination of possibilities and potential is enhanced and enlarged. Foster says in his book, "We are working with God to determine the future! Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly. We are to change the world by prayer" (Richard Foster).

IV. THE PREREQUISITES OF REAL PRAYER

A. Desire

"Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1, KJV).

B. Willingness to abide in Christ
John 15 reminds us of Jesus' desire that we have our being in Him. He is the vine; we are the branches.

C. Don't complicate it!

1. The Lord's Prayer is an easy and precise model of how all of us should pray.
2. We need to be specific in our prayers. James said, "You have not because you ask not" (4:2, NKJV).

CONCLUSION. Don't forget it, "Prayer—secret, fervent, believing prayer—lies at the root of all Godliness" (William Carey).

CELEBRATION OF FASTING "WHEN YOU FAST"

Matt. 6:16

INTRODUCTION. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us no options. He didn't say if you fast or should you choose to fast, but He said "when." Very clearly, He was saying to us He expects us to fast.

My brother Mike, who pastors in Xenia, Ohio, recently concluded a 40-day fast. I can't even comprehend going 40 days without solid food. He felt that God had laid it on his heart; unable to get away from God's direction, he said yes.

I shared the story of Mike's fast in a sermon illustration, so my whole congregation knew about it. After hearing that the fast had been concluded, one lady came to me and wanted to know the results. She was anticipating a great stirring, moving, or miracle within his congregation. I shared with her that Mike had told me that there was no "boom" on the 40th day. No one was raised from the dead. There was no check for \$2 million to pay off the mortgage and build the new school they desperately need.

Something more significant did happen. Mike said the fasting changed him. It gave him a new reliance and dependency upon God. It brought him closer to the Lord than he had ever been and in the weeks and months following his fast, he saw a hope, a joy, and a personal communion with the Lord that he had not experienced before.

That's what fasting is. Fasting is not done to show God how serious we are and force Him to do something. We enter into fasting to express our renewed dependency and reliance upon God for all things.

I. FASTING IS ANTICULTURAL.

- A. Many of us worship at the shrine of the golden arches!

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- B. We have been taught that it is harmful to the body to go without a meal in a given day.
- C. Our own brain tells us, "This is not a good idea."

- c. jealousy
- d. strife and
- e. even fear.

Times of fasting can be times of great personal revelation.

II. FASTING IS LIKE A CONTINUOUS THREAD WOVEN THROUGHOUT THE SCRIPTURES.

- A. The list of biblical "fasters" is a "who's who" of the Scriptures. Moses, David, Elijah, Queen Esther, Daniel, Hannah, Paul, and, of course, Jesus himself.
- B. It is important to understand the types of fasting.
 - 1. There is fasting from solid food with the taking of liquids.
 - 2. There is partial fasting, which would involve the type of fasting Daniel did in the Old Testament, eating only selected foods.
 - 3. There is the absolute fast, the giving up of food and water for a period of time.

CONCLUSION. We have to be wise when we talk to our congregations about fasting. Our pews are dotted with those struggling with sugar diabetes, chemical imbalance, and various protein, mineral, and/or vitamin deficiencies. Our approach can never be on the side of guilt. It cannot be legalistic.

We must give people options. For example, some people who are diabetic could never fast an entire meal in a day, but they could give up coffee or something else they really enjoy. For a person who is chemically imbalanced, there are foods they must take in on a regular basis, but there are others they could certainly leave out of their diet. So we remind our people there are a number of options and different ways to fast. Sometimes food is not even an option, so we can fast television or even purchases of things. The idea is to give up things that are important to us and that in the absence of them we would definitely feel a dependence and closer walk with our Lord.

III. FASTING HAS REAL PURPOSE.

- A. Fasting must be centered on God as a part of our personal worship.
- B. Fasting reveals the things that control us.
 - 1. Food
 - 2. Our dependency upon external things
 - 3. The psalmist David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Ps. 69:10, author's paraphrase). Often times the things that control us are revealed during times of self-denial such as:
 - a. anger
 - b. bitterness

THE DISCIPLINE OF STUDY: THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH, LOVING, AND STUDYING GOD'S WORD

INTRODUCTION. The purpose of embracing spiritual disciplines is the total transformation of the person. Nowhere is the purpose more clearly seen than the discipline of study.

Paul said the way to be transformed is through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2). Studying God's Word will enable us to "think about these things": "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8, author's paraphrase).

Jesus said that the knowledge of truth will bring freedom. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The lack of study in our lives is a loss for us personally and for those we are attempting to influence. Foster says, "They may sing with gusto, pray in the Spirit, live as obediently as they know, even receive divine visions and revelations; and yet the tenor of their lives remains unchanged.

"Why? Because they have never taken up one of the central ways God uses to change us: study." The lack of study brings:

- A. Bondage
- B. Shallowness
- C. Frustration

TEN STEPS TO SPIRITUAL LIBERATION THROUGH BIBLE STUDY

I. READ THE BIBLE ITSELF!

In a day when we are bombarded with study aids, computer Bible packages, video series, and TV preachers by the score, there is a call to purity and focus for our study times. Before searching through what someone else says about God's Word, we need to learn to read it, study it, and digest it ourselves. The psalmist said, "I gain my

understanding from your precepts" (Ps. 119:104, author's paraphrase).

II. READ IT WITH PRAYER.

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps. 119:18). In tune with David as he seeks God's help and understanding His Word through prayer.

III. READ SYSTEMATICALLY.

"I will not neglect your word" (Ps. 119:16). It is a daily commitment. It is also a commitment to understanding the context of the Word, who is writing it, to whom was it written, and what was the intended purpose of the message.

IV. CONCENTRATE AND GIVE YOUR FULL ATTENTION.

"Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders" (Ps. 119:27). No radio, no CDs, no TV, no dozing—God's holy Word is truly worthy of our undivided attention as we read it.

V. BELIEVE AND ACCEPT GOD'S WORD AS TRUTH.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (Ps. 119:9). It is His Word, and His Word is truth!

VI. READ WITHOUT PREJUDICE.

"Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees" (Ps. 119:33). Our study of God's Word, if it is to change us, must eliminate cultural and doctrinal prejudices. What does the pure Word of God say to me about who I am and who God wants me to be and what God wants me to do?

VII. APPLY WHAT YOU ARE READING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE.

"You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words" (Ps. 119:57). Our prayer before entering into study must always be one of seeking God's direction for our daily lives through the reading of His Word.

VIII. MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD.

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). Most of us are out of the habit of memorizing. It really is not as difficult as we have convinced ourselves. It is a

matter of discipline, but oh what a wonderful reward comes from memorizing God's holy Word.

IX. LET THE WORD OF GOD CONTROL YOU.

"I will always obey your law, forever and ever" (Ps. 119:44). As we seek to be spiritually disciplined, we ask ourselves, who is in control: I, my spouse, a close friend, or God himself?

X. BE PREPARED TO SACRIFICE.

"It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (Ps. 119:71). No pain, no gain! What a wonderful opportunity to join the great heroes of our faith, Peter, Thomas, Paul, and Jesus himself, on the road to willingly sacrificing whatever necessary to draw closer to our wonderful Lord.

CONCLUSION. Major Van Sicle was associated with the Salvation Army for many years. He was known as a tremendous soul winner. He later relocated in Washington, D.C., and his ministry centered around helping hopeless alcoholics. In dealing with one of the most severe cases he said, "If you take the Gospel of John and read it 50 times, I guarantee you deliverance from alcoholism." It seemed like a bold thing to do, but the alcoholic was so desperate he did it. The man read John 7 or 8 times and accepted Christ as his Savior. He kept reading the Gospel of John, and before long he was completely delivered from alcohol. He came to know the truth, and the truth set him free! Major Van Sicle said that over a period of some five years he had seen 100 conversions and deliverances from alcohol by this simple prescription. "Read the Gospel of John 50 times and I guarantee deliverance from this habit." It is the Word of God that brings life and godliness and hope.

CELEBRATION OF SIMPLICITY

INTRODUCTION. This chapter represents one of the most inspirational yet challenging disciplines. Simplicity is freedom. Simplicity brings joy and balance to our lives. Yet simplicity also speaks of personal sacrifice and self-denial. Solomon said, "God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated" (Eccles. 7:29, TEV).

The old Shaker hymn says:

*'Tis a gift to be simple,
'Tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourself in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight,
When the true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that manifests itself in an outward lifestyle.

One of the great problems of our contemporary culture is that most people feel trapped in a maze of competing attachments. Most people have no real unity or focus in their lives. As believers, we must understand that the lust for affluence is psychotic. It is psychotic because it forces us to completely lose touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy.

I. THE BIBLE AS A TEXTBOOK ON SIMPLICITY

- A. We are prohibited from exploiting the poor.
- B. We are cautioned against possessing too much (Lev. 25:23).
- C. We are warned about trusting in our riches (Prov. 11:28).
- D. Jesus clearly speaks against the love of money (Luke 16:13).

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E. Christ taught us that our focus should not be upon our possessions (Matt. 6:19-21).

F. We see a potential young disciple rejecting Christ because of his unwillingness to turn loose of his possessions (Matt. 19:16-22).

Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us.

II. A SEARCH FOR A PLACE TO STAND

"Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth" (Archimedes).

A. The majority of Christians have never seriously wrestled with the problem of simplicity.

- 1. We conveniently ignore the words of Jesus on the subject.
- 2. Simplicity challenges our vested interests in an affluent lifestyle.

B. Our place to stand is on the Word of God. "But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33, author's paraphrase).

- 1. The call is very simple.
- 2. Our focus, desire, and intentions are all to be wrapped up in seeking God's kingdom first.

C. The person who does not seek the Kingdom first does not seek it at all!

D. One of the great benefits of simplicity is the freedom from the anxiety of owning, holding, and possessing things.

III. SIMPLICITY AND THE FREEDOM OF ANXIETY ARE SYNONYMOUS.

The three keys to possessing the freedom from anxiety are:

A. We understand that everything we receive, we receive as a gift from God.

B. Everything we have is cared for by God.

C. All that we are stewards over is available to others.

IV. THE OUTWARD EXPRESSIONS OF SIMPLICITY

A. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.

B. Reject anything that produces an addiction in you.

C. Develop the habit of giving things away.

D. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.

E. Develop a healthy skepticism toward the conventional wisdom regarding debt that says, "Buy now—pay later."

F. Reject anything that breeds oppression in others.

G. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION. May God give us the courage, wisdom, and strength to always hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority in our lives. To do this is to live the life of simplicity.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SILENCE

INTRODUCTION. Jesus calls us from loneliness. Loneliness is inner emptiness; solitude is inner fulfillment.

Prayer, fasting, simplicity—each spiritual discipline results in distinct freedoms.

I. THE FREEDOM TO BE ALONE

- A. Not in order to be away from people but in order to hear better
- B. Ministry in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11)
Before choosing the Twelve, Jesus spent a night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12-13).
- C. After news of John the Baptist's death, Jesus withdrew in a boat to a lonely place (Matt. 14:13).
- D. After feeding 5,000, Jesus "went up into the hills by himself" (Matt. 14:23, author's paraphrase).
- E. When the Twelve had returned from a preaching mission, Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place" (Mark 6:31, NASB).
- F. After healing a leper, He "withdrew to the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:16, author's paraphrase).
- G. Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:19)
- H. Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46)
We must seek out the "recreating stillness of solitude" if we want to be with others meaningfully.

II. THE FREEDOM FROM EXCESSIVE STRESS

"Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, KJV).

- A. Stress ties us in knots.
- B. It alters our personalities.
- C. It keeps us from God.
- D. It blurs our vision.
We often miss the most beautiful places on God's earth.

III. FREEDOM FROM TUNNEL VISION

Sometimes God creates solitude.

Elijah "came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die" (1 Kings 19:4).

In the solitude he discovered that God was not in the wind

earthquake
fire.

After the fire, however, came a gentle whisper containing the voice of God (v. 11-12).

IV. THE FREEDOM FROM CONTROLLING OTHERS

"On the Lord's Day I was in the spirit" (Rev. 1:10).

- A. Our insecurities often cause us to seek to control others.
- B. We sometimes use words to control others.
- C. Let us seek God's control of ourselves, not our control of others!
- D. Best friends are those with whom we can be silent—they are not afraid of the pause.
"Silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive" (H. Nouwen).

DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION. Freedom of submission—what a relief.

1. Laying down the burden of “my way”
2. Laying down our obsession for things to go our way
3. Being free to value others
4. Giving up our rights for the good of others—the paradoxical way to real freedom
5. Breaking with the Old Testament directive, an “eye for an eye” and accepting Christ’s law—turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39)

Freedom of Identity—not losing it.

1. Did Jesus lose His identity at Golgotha?
2. Did Peter lose his identity when he followed Jesus?
3. Did Paul lose his identity when he was crucified with Christ?

They found their identity in the act of self-denial.

Jesus said, “He who finds his life will lose it and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).

I. SUBMISSION AS TAUGHT BY JESUS

Christ’s most radical teaching was His reversal of the notion of greatness.

- A. Living example

“He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

 1. Cross death and cross life
 2. Submission to follow Jesus
 3. Servant to all
- B. Abolished conventional wisdom
 1. Privileged position
 2. Status
 3. Order of leadership
- C. Expected followers to become examples
 1. “If anyone would come after me, he must

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deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

2. First must be last (Mark 9:35).

II. SUBMISSION AS TAUGHT IN THE EPISTLES

Christ’s example set the tempo.

- A. Paul
 1. Count others better than yourself.
 2. “He . . . emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant” (Phil. 2:7, NASB).
- B. Peter

1 Pet. 2:21-25
- C. General call to submission
 1. Cultural subordinates (Col. 3:18-22)
 - a. wives
 - b. children
 - c. slaves
 2. Cultural dominates (Col. 3:19)
 - a. husbands
 - b. fathers
 - c. masters
 3. Perfect illustration—letter to Philemon

III. LIMITS OF SUBMISSION

“The limits of the discipline of submission are at the points at which it becomes destructive. It then becomes a denial of the law of love as taught by Jesus and is an affront to genuine biblical submission” (see Matt. 5:6-7 and 22:37-39).

- A. Apparent contradiction—“submit yourselves to every ordinance”
 1. Peter calls for submission to the state (1 Pet. 2:13).
 2. To the high priest he states, “We must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29).
 3. Go back to the biblical formula.
- B. Easy to comprehend some limits
 1. Child is asked to aid an adult in breaking the law.
 2. Citizen is asked to denounce his faith for the

dictates of the state.

3. Teen is asked to smoke pot in order to join a fraternity.

C. Others are not so easy.

1. Unsaved husband, unsaved wife
2. Student in school who knows teacher is biased
3. Employee dealing with unsaved employer

IV. ACTS OF SUBMISSION

- A. Submission to the triune God
 1. In the morning, we wait before Him.
 2. “Thy will be done” throughout the day.
 3. In the evening, last words of the day
- B. Submission to Scripture
 1. To hear the Word
 2. To receive the Word
 3. To obey the Word
- C. Submission to family (Phil. 2:4)
 1. Make allowances.
 2. Listen to each other.
- D. Submission to neighbors
 1. Sharing food, baby-sitting, mowing lawn
 2. A moment to visit—no task too large or small
- E. Submission to church community
 1. Job to be filled
 2. Task to be done
- F. Submission to needy and the world

CONCLUSION. Submission—the glorious act of resting in Christ.

DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

INTRODUCTION. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant . . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:26-28).

The spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in position or title but in a towel. Bernard of Clairvaux said, "Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe." Most of us would agree that whenever there is trouble over who is the greatest, the real trouble is over who is the least. Most of us know we will never really be the greatest. Just don't let us be the least. Jesus redefined greatness with His towel and basin. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15, NKJV).

Most of us are more prone to be drawn to radical self-denial than the call of servanthood. In service we must experience the many little deaths that go beyond ourselves. Service often banishes us to the mundane, the ordinary, and the trivial.

As with all other disciplines, service offers a great liberty. Enabling us to say no to the worldly emphasis on promotion and authority, service frees us from the great pecking order of society.

There are great differences in choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant.

Paul reminds us that we are called to be love slaves. He also reminds us that there is a justifiable fear of being stepped on. But who can really hurt someone who has freely chosen to be stepped on? "So subject . . . that all men may go over thee and tread upon thee as upon mire of the street" (Thomas à Kempis).

Francis of Assisi believed that of all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christ gives to His friends, perhaps none exceeds the power to conquer one's self, willingly enduring sufferings, insults, humiliation, and hardships for the love of Christ.

Richard Foster offers some specific ways that service must take form and shape in our daily lives.

- I. THE SERVICE OF HIDDENNESS
"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the . . . Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20, KJV).
- II. THE SERVICE OF SMALL THINGS
References to Dorcas who made coats and garments for the widows (Acts 9:39).
- III. THE SERVICE OF GUARDING THE REPUTATION OF OTHERS
"Speak evil of no one" (Titus 3:2, NKJV).
- IV. THE SERVICE OF BEING SERVED
"Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13:8, KJV).
- V. THE SERVICE OF COMMON COURTESY
"To be gentle and show perfect courtesy to all men" (Titus 3:2, author's paraphrase).
- VI. THE SERVICE OF HOSPITALITY
"Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Pet. 4:9, author's paraphrase).
- VII. THE SERVICE OF LISTENING
"Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).
- VIII. THE SERVICE OF BEARING THE BURDENS OF EACH OTHER
"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2, NKJV).

IX. THE SERVICE OF SHARING THE WORD OF LIFE
"Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2).

DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION

INTRODUCTION. “Confession”—As Wesleyan-Arminian Christians, some may struggle with this word. Especially the thought of developing a lifestyle or discipline in the area of confession.

It is important that we realize that at the very heart of God is the desire to give and forgive. Jesus’ horrible death upon the Cross is a constant reminder to us that God was willing to go to any cost to absorb all of the evil of humanity, to heal it, forgive it, and redeem it.

The Bible views salvation as both an event and a process. To converted people, Paul says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Clearly we are forgiven of our sins at the point of our initial coming to Christ. The infilling of the Holy Spirit has the power to cleanse us and free us from sin. Yet we are still reminded there are points in our lives when we continually and willfully stray from the love and grace of our Lord. It is important for us to understand and embrace the discipline of confession. Christ himself in His teaching prayer told us we should pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12, KJV).

Foster’s approach to confession is well rounded in that it deals with our lives personally and the desire within believers to walk close to the Lord and do nothing to mar that relationship. He also deals with our responsibility to forgive others. In a very beautiful and simplistic way, Foster brings us to a point of daily opening up to the Lord. He says, “The evidence of mercy and grace sparks a contrite heart and allows confession to flow. As we open our hearts to the Lord, we are reminded that His greatest delight is to forgive. God calls his beloved children, now residents of heaven, to a great celebration whenever one person on earth makes a confession.”

I. THREE KEY INGREDIENTS CONSTITUTE REAL CONFESSION BEFORE GOD.

A. An examination of conscience

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“This is a time where a soul comes under the gaze of God and where in his silent and loving presence this soul is pierced to the quick” (Douglas Steer).

B. Genuine sorrow

1. Sorrow is necessary because it is the abhorrence of having committed the wrongful act.
2. It is a deep regret of having offended the heart of God.

C. A determination to avoid sin

In the Old Testament we are called to repent and turn. This is the key. We must become like Joseph with Potiphar’s wife. He ran from sin. “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God . . . such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth” (John Wesley).

II. WE DO NOT HAVE TO CONVINCE GOD TO FORGIVE

A. The heart of the Father is like a shepherd who is willing to risk anything for one lost sheep.

B. Confession begins in sorrow but ends in joy.

C. God faithfully calls us and speaks to us.

1. He hungers to examine our hearts. “In all areas we are called to be aware of weaknesses. God affords us the opportunity to confess our fears, confusion, abilities, and blindness.”
2. We have the wonderful opportunity to cry out with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139:23). However painful, once God has revealed it, then we are responsible to confess it, allow

Him to deal with it, and then turn from it and walk in the new light.

CONCLUSION. “The Discipline of Confession brings an end to pretence. God is calling into being a church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiveness and empowering graces of Christ. Honesty leads to confession, confession leads to change. May God give grace to the church once again to recover the discipline of confession” (Richard Foster).

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION. "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God" (William Temple).

Pastors everywhere are focusing on worship. Every church I know of is in transition. We are all trying to find worship style or worship patterns that both please God and meet the expectations of the worshipers. So many things cloud and complicate our attempts to worship. Our culture, our background, our presuppositions, our likes, our dislikes, our comfort level, our interpretations of the Scripture, our fears and anxieties—the list is endless. As most of us in the church world are aware, congregations around the world are engaged in what is known as "worship wars." So what is the answer? Where do we go? How do we worship?

God is actively seeking true worshipers. Jesus declared, "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).

I. WORSHIP IS THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE DIVINE INITIATIVE.

- A. Adam and Eve were drawn to God in the garden.
- B. In the crucifixion, Jesus drew men and women to himself (John 12:32).
- C. Scripture is filled with examples of God's efforts to initiate, restore, and maintain fellowship with His children.
- D. Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of God.

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II. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

- A. There can be no question about it; "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10, KJV). Our hearts hunger to see God.
 1. The need is desperate.
 2. Like Isaiah, our hearts desire to see Him high and lifted up. We come into His presence to worship Him for who He is.

III. THE ACTS OF WORSHIP

- A. We understand that worship is a priority. "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).
 1. The primary function of the Levitical priests was to "come near Me to minister to Me" (Ezek. 44:15, NKJV).
 2. Today God is calling His church back to worship.
- B. Preparation for worship
 1. We open our hearts before Him.
 2. We allow Him to search us.
 3. We allow Him to look deep within and reveal any barriers that would prohibit us from worshiping Him.
 4. "We must worship Him with a holy expectancy." "Those in the upper room were not surprised when the building they were meeting in trembled and quaked. They had been expecting God." We must daily cultivate our expectation of worship. The psalmist told us to, "Come into His presence with thanksgiving in our hearts and

give Him praise" (paraphrase of 95:2).

C. Worship avenues

1. It's personal! Personal worship must be developed by each of us if we are to enjoy corporate worship with our brothers and sisters.
2. Corporate worship
 - a. Those leading prayerfully must seek the face of God.
 - b. The responsibility is awesome to bring people to the place where they "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).
3. We are called to be free before the Lord in our worship experience. "For freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

CONCLUSION. Fruits of worship are unbelievable. True worship is lived out in a life of holy obedience. Worship enables us to hear the call of God, the call of service so very clearly that we respond, "Here am I! Send me!" (Isa. 6:8). Authentic worship will empower us to join in the Lord's war against the demonic powers that war against us in the Christian church.

"Worship is a deliberate and disciplined adventure in reality" (Willard Sperry).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16).

THE DISCIPLINE OF GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION. “In our day, heaven and earth are on tiptoe waiting for the emergence of a Spirit-led, Spirit-intoxicated, Spirit-empowered people. All of creation watches expectantly for the springing up of a disciplined, freely gathered, martyr people who know in this life, the life and power of the kingdom of God. It has happened before. It can happen again” (Richard Foster).

The discipline of guidance takes us to a wonderfully important point. The goal of guidance is not specific instructions about this or that matter but rather conformity to the image of Christ. Paul said, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29, *KJV*).

Specific guidances are the happy by-products of the goal of conforming to the image of Christ. The discipline of guidance speaks of our conscious obedience to God’s will, an ever-present hunger to live day in and day out doing the will of God.

I. THE WILL OF GOD IS DISCOVERED AS WE BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH GOD.

A. Learn His ways.

B. Become His friend.

1. As we become Christ’s friends, He takes great pleasure in producing fruit in us—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT’S GUIDANCE BECOMES INSTINCTIVE.

A. Our relationship with the Lord continues to grow.

B. Our decisions are made in accordance with His will.

By way of illustration, just like the intimate knowledge of love between spouses guides them

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to decisions of shared approval, so our inward fellowship gives us an inward knowledge of the ways and directions God would have us go.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVING AND DWELLING INSIDE OF US IS USED OF GOD IN A NUMBER OF WAYS TO BRING GUIDANCE.

A. Scripture

B. Reason

C. Circumstances

D. Promptings of the Spirit

In addition to:

1. Angels

2. Visions and dreams

3. Continued influence of other godly people in our lives

IV. THE BLESSING AND PRACTICALITY OF CORPORATE GUIDANCE.

A. God led the children of Israel out of bondage as a people.

B. Christ taught a corporate guidance as we find in the often quoted “if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:19-20, *KJV*).

1. The New Testament Church as chronicled in the Book of Acts gives numerous references.

a. Pentecost was a corporate event.

b. The Church gathered, worked together, and in many respects were led as a group. “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32-33, author’s paraphrase).

c. Acts 13 gives us a wonderful example of corporate guidance in the calling of Paul and Barnabas to enter the field of

missionary evangelism.

d. In Acts 15 Peter before the assembly defends his ministry. As the Spirit met with the entire group, they stated, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .” (Acts 15:28).

They had faced the toughest issues of their day and had discerned the voice from on high. This is the high watermark in the Book of Acts.

V. IN A VERY REALISTIC SENSE, THE CHURCH FUNCTIONS BEST WHEN IT ALLOWS THE LORD TO USE ALL ITS TALENTS AND POWERS OF DISCERNMENT.

A. Accountability and trust is a vital part of the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

B. The Spirit himself stands ready to give leadership, but there is a wonderful place for check and balance. So often today culture invades our churches rather than our churches impacting culture.

1. Even in church business meetings there is a place for corporate guidance.

2. This calls for a newness of trust in one another and complete dependency upon the moving of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION. Dallas Willard says it well. “The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons, with himself included in that community as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant.” It sounds somewhat idealistic but biblical—the Body of Christ working in a synchronized fashion to lift up and glorify our Lord and King Jesus Christ.

THE DISCIPLINE OF CELEBRATION

INTRODUCTION. It is interesting, isn't it, that the last discipline is the reverse of the title of the text. I sometimes think that this particular chapter should have been first. It is such a practical application of God's joy at work in our lives. Augustine said, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." Celebration is a happy characteristic of those who walk cheerfully over the earth in the power of their Lord.

I. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS NOT MERELY A GOOD FEELING.

- A. It is acquainted with suffering, sorrow, heartache, and pain.
- B. It is not found through seeking.
- C. It is not trying to pump up the right emotions or forcing a cheery disposition.

II. JOY IS THE RESULT OF THREE THINGS.

- A. Provision
- B. Place
- C. Personality, functioning properly in the course of our daily lives. It all stems from the abundant life Jesus promised us. It often slips in unaware as our attention becomes focused upon the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of this earth.

III. JOY MAKES US STRONG.

- A. There is a correlation between joy and power.
- B. On the days when the joy of the Lord seems to engulf us, there is an overwhelming flow of God's life and power from us to others.

IV. CELEBRATION IS BOTH A GRACE AND A DISCIPLINE.

- A. A grace because it truly is unmerited from the hand of God
- B. A discipline because, though it is a gift from God, it is also something we must be conscious of. "Continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name" (Heb. 13:15, author's paraphrase). For illustration's sake, we need to begin the day by letting the Lord know that we love Him, adore Him, worship Him, desire His will and way all day long. And we conclude the day thanking the Lord for His love, presence, strength, and grace. Praise and thanksgiving inevitably bring joy and power.

CONCLUSION. Real joy, happiness, and celebration in life are found in the assurance of being rooted and grounded in God. The ancient priest Brother Lawrence said, "Lord, I am yours; dryness does not matter nor affect me!"

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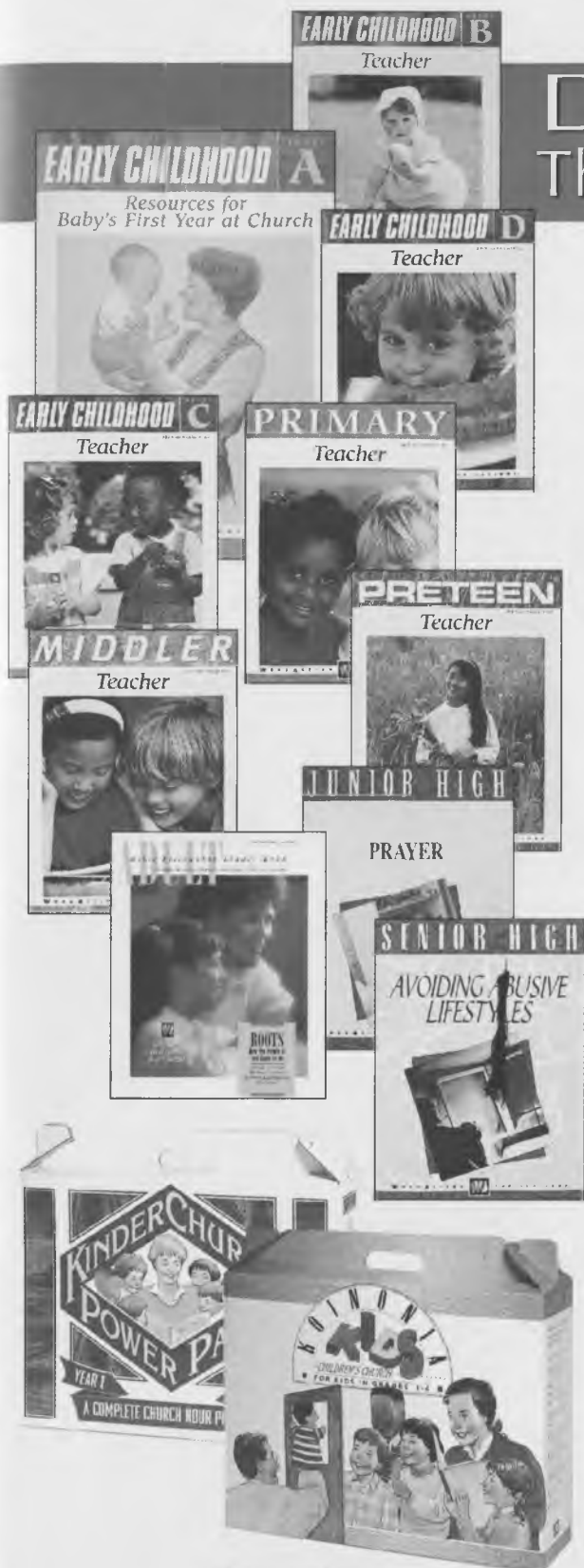
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