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

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THE

# Preacher's

## MAGAZINE

NOV 29 '93

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WELCOME TO  
THE AWAKENING

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THE DESECRATION  
OF CHRISTMAS

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HOW DO YOU  
DEFEND YOUR  
MINISTRY UNDER  
CRITICISM?

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WALKING TODAY  
AS JESUS WALKED

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# No Room? Crowded Out!

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

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A psychology professor gave a word-suggestion test to his university students. He instructed them to write the word *Christmas*. Then he said, "Write under the word *Christmas* the first thought that flashes through your mind."

As he reviewed the test papers, several responses appeared such as "tree," "holly," "mistletoe," "turkey," "holiday," "carols," and "Santa Claus." Not one had written "The birthday of Jesus."

Times haven't really changed that much! On that first Christmas, the birth of Jesus stirred little interest in a busy world. Even as a child, I was saddened by the phrase, "There was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). As a busy pastor and editor during the days leading up to Christmas, I must keep asking myself, "Is there any room for Jesus?" The larger the church responsibility, the more Christmas season commitments demand my time and energy—until sometimes I sleep late Christmas morning, exhausted from the march of Christmas celebrations. I want to give more room to Jesus this year.

In Bethlehem, there was no room for Jesus. The hard fact remains: "He came to . . . his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). The prophet Micah had announced the word of the Lord: "But you, Bethlehem . . . , though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Mic. 5:2). However, caught in the excitement of renewing old friendships, the

people weren't thinking then about the coming of Christ. They had heard of it since childhood, but with the passing of years it had lost its luster and excitement. On the eve of Christ's birth, Bethlehem brushed it all lightly aside—there was no room for Jesus. And many people with houses half empty on Christmas Eve have blamed the ancient innkeeper of Bethlehem because his place was full! The innkeeper was not a bad man but a busy man. Guest rooms had to be cleaned. Camels and donkeys must be watered and fed. To accommodate the influx of people, some severe adjustments had to be made. Meals must be prepared. Good things kept them so busy that Jesus was crowded out.

Pastor, what does the birth of Jesus mean to you this Christmas? Would you join me in seeking ways to make room for Jesus—in spite of all our holiday demands and commitments to congregational life?

Jesus comes to those who seek Him. Though Bethlehem overlooked the coming of Jesus, others walked close enough to God to recognize the Christ child. On Jesus' eighth day, His parents took Him to the Temple for circumcision. Simeon, an old man, recognized Him. The widow, Anna,

possessed the spiritual discernment to recognize the presence of Christ in Jerusalem. Sages from Persia had enough spiritual sensitivity to understand that the Christ child had come. Let us not be too preoccupied this season that we fail to sense Jesus moving in our midst, taking hold of human need, and lifting those whose steps have faltered.

When I was about two years old, our pastor, Rev. Auld, preached from the text, "There was no room for them in the inn." My father served as the music director of our little Glas-sell Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles. As Pastor Auld preached, the words burned into Dad's thoughts: "There was no room for them in the inn."

Mom said that tears began flowing down Dad's cheeks as that inspired sermon warmed my father's heart. Dad began writing down the words of his own personal response. In that sacred moment of inspiration, a song was born, titled "Jesus Found Room in My Heart."

*Deep in my heart there's a blessing  
Jesus put there one day.  
He saw me humbly confessing  
And washed all my guilt away.*

*Now I can sing of His glory,  
Choice of this earth I found.  
I have to tell a new story;  
Within me these words resound:*

*Jesus found room in my heart.  
He rules it now, every part.  
I'm His alone,  
And my heart is His throne  
Since Jesus found room in my heart.*

—Earl W. Denny





# Only the Best for a King's Child

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

*Pastor, Windham, Maine, Church of the Nazarene*

**W**e were seated beneath the mammoth, lofted pulpit in Boston's historic Trinity Church. We had come, along with about 2,000 other worshippers, for Trinity's yearly candlelight carol service.

Handsome faces wreathed in expensive scarves passed through the large, heavy curtains that divide the outer quarters from the sanctuary. Women garbed in their seasonal finest gracefully seated themselves in the ancient pews.

"A person has to get here an hour early to get a seat," I overheard a fellow whisper to his friend. Even as he spoke, ushers were pointing to the sides, where the less fortunate could stand throughout the service.

On the expansive platform, poinsettias smothered the regal, churchly furnishings. A lone gold cross hung in the very center of the apse, as if to crown the blaze of color with Christ's birth.

Majestic strains pealed from the organ: the Trumpet Tune in C Major by Henry Purcell, the Sonata for Flute and Organ by George Frideric Handel, and others.

One by one, the dozens of tall, white candles were being lighted. They stood like silent soldiers amid the flowering plants.

Our family had invited guests to join us that chilly December evening. This worship had become a cherished tradition with us over the years, and we relished sharing it with friends. So it was that we anxiously awaited every move, nuance, and musical offering yet to be placed before God.

But in the crowd this year there lay a seed of distress. I first noticed it



when I happened to glance over to my left. There I noted a young man who did not seem to fit. When I first saw him, he was hunched over. His head seemed drawn toward the floorboards. Then, with a sharp twist to his right, he slung himself about, tossing his black hair into the air with a jerk.

His dark eyes shot over at me, then bounced away, then jumped back again in my direction. I noticed some saliva mixed into his beard. Obviously, the well-groomed man at the other end of the pew did not notice the youth's behavior; the man was mes-

merized by the lighting of the candles. Yet I wondered what would be his reaction when he did glance to his left. There he would see crutches resting beside a crooked body in jeans and flannel shirt.

How had I myself missed this young man's entrance? He had simply slipped in without notice, wedging his way into our tidy mosaic of seasonal bliss.

Presently I saw an usher—black-suited with red carnation in his lapel—stoop over the young man and whisper something into his ear. "Oh no!" I gasped to myself. After all, this was Christmas. And we were in a church of God. If ever love feasts were to be in fashion, surely this would be the time. That usher could not be demanding that the young man vacate, that he just up and leave to preserve the composure of the se-date.

### Fright

The usher left him. The young



man's head flipped back again while his hands jutted out. One leg shot out, then dropped back against the floor. His eyes darted back, catching me in midflight. Fright was all over his face.

All of a sudden I felt sick, not because of this young man but because of my own fear of what was going to happen to him. Surely we were not to witness a mean display of pretense at Christmas!

People kept milling about, some stretching their necks, hoping against hope that they would find a tiny space on a pew. Few noticed the intense drama going on nearby. What could I do? I had no authority in this church. There was no rescue network that I could call on to relieve the anxious, confused, black eyes beneath the young man's furrowed brow.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a young woman appeared and seated herself beside this youth. She put her hand on his shoulder, then mouthed words into his ear. She turned her head to look straight into his eyes, and her smile was comforting, understanding. Presently his flying limbs began to calm down, and his head rested steadily.

What are they going to do with him? I wondered. Will they put on a veneer of kindness and lead him away from the rest of us? What game will they play to convince him that he would enjoy the service better from a side room somewhere?

#### I Have Need of It

The young woman said no more to the dark-haired young man. She just sat there, listening to Vienne's Westminster Carillon from the organ.

The usher reappeared and passed right in front of the young man, going across the aisle to the second pew

from the front. This tall churchman had spotted a space 12 inches wide. Graciously he informed the person next to the space that someone needed it during the worship.

Back to the young woman and the dark-haired young man came the usher. Gently, he lifted the young man under his arm, taking the crutches in his other hand. The crowd in the aisle gave way as if they were the Red Sea. In no time the youth was being presented with the best seat in the house. With a smile, the person next to the space welcomed the lad into the pew.

Few noticed  
the intense  
drama going  
on nearby.

Seemingly out of nowhere, another man, in his late 20s—himself dressed in jeans and flannel shirt, his hair tied in a knot at the back of his head—knelt down alongside the dark-haired man. I watched the ponytailed one help the other man shed his winter jacket, first drawing from a sleeve one arm and then the other. Next he carefully placed the crutches on the floor right inside the seat. That done, he joined the young woman elsewhere, but close enough to see the dark-haired young man.

#### Ready to Worship

It was at that moment that I heard the opening hymn being sung from a far back balcony. The soprano lifted her voice:

*Once in royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby  
In a manger for His bed.*

I could not help but turn around. There was the robed soloist, surrounded by others dressed in holy-day splendor. This was the start of something very special. Worship had begun.

Slowly I turned back to face the front of the sanctuary. In turning, I glanced again at my "friend." That's when I saw a most marvelous sight. Spittle still gleamed among the hairs of his black beard, but now from his eyes I saw joy. He, too, had heard the opening words of Christmas praise. And he was looking over at the young woman and her ponytailed companion.

I could not help but glance at them as well. There they were—beaming with kindnesses rendered, happy that he was all right, that he had been given a good place to sit. They were ready to worship the King.

On the second verse, the congregation joined the soloist. With a shining face, the dark-haired youth twisted his mouth in jubilation. The furrow, thank God, was gone from his forehead. And with the rest of us, he sang forth,

*With the poor and mean and lowly  
Lived on earth our Savior holy.*

Although it was still days before the 25th, I knew in my heart that for me Christmas had begun. I had seen it all afresh for another year in the kindnesses of an unhurried usher, a young woman, and her helpful male friend.

 Pontius' Puddle



# The Desecration of Christmas

by Archie R. Crouch

Free-lance writer, Englewood, Colo.

**T**he desecration of Christmas began on July 15, in the city where I live. Multicolored inserts and full-page ads invited us to celebrate the birthday of Christ by the purchase of \$1,200 refrigerators, \$1,700 computers, \$2,000 televisions. We were guaranteed we could enjoy our remembrance of the baby Jesus with no down payment and no finance charges for one full year! For the less affluent there were miniature brass horns, lacquered plastic apples, super metallic twisted craft paper, and Glitzy Shirts Iron-On Applique sets. There was much, much more, of course, none of which could remind our children that Jesus was born in a stable, surrounded by farm animals and their dung.

The devil must be roaring with laughter all over hell as he watches Christian parents escorting their children to toy shops to select replicas of the most advanced weapons of war so that they can enjoy the Christmas holidays play-bombing their own homes, shooting up their parents and friends with invisible-ray guns, and "knocking out" their schools and city halls.

Don't blame the merchants and manufacturers—especially those who are not Christians—for the objects put on sale for Christmas. They make over half their yearly profits from Christmas sales. "Business is business." The manufacturers and merchants are simply taking advantage of a market created by thoughtless Christians. Last year the people of the United States spent \$25 billion on Christmas gifts and Christmas paraphernalia.

Instead of being a season of joy and renewal, Christmas for many is a time for frustration, disappointment, and



embarrassment, wrote Pastor Frank E. Wright in the *North Church Times*. It is frustration at finding that Christmas is the advent of Santa Claus rather than that of Jesus Christ. It is disappointment at being so hurried and harried that we wish it were over. It is embarrassment at being so pres-

sured into buying things for family and friends—while so little attention is given to those whose needs are great.

The devil also gets side-effects from the Christmas extravaganza. Talk to Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, or other non-Christian parents about the jealousy and covetousness aroused in their children's minds as they see all their Christian playmates cavorting with Christmas gifts. Talk to these parents of how they explain to their children why Bobby Jones got a submachine gun to celebrate the birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Before you read this, the loudspeakers in thousands of shopping malls across our nation will be blaring out the melody of "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant," and the message is not to worship at the manger in Bethlehem. The message is to lay down our cash for extravagances totally unrelated to Christmas. "It came upon the midnight clear, / That glorious song of old," from vendors hov'ring 'round the mobs to snatch their cash and go. "Peace on the earth, goodwill to men, / From heav'n's all-gracious King."

The same newspapers and television programs that are luring the public to spend lavishly for Christmas carry the front page and prime time stories of the 25 million Americans on food stamps, of the 35 million with poverty incomes, of the rapidly increasing numbers of families who have no homes or shelters, of the thousands left homeless and without work or food by Hurricane Andrew, of the 1.5 million children of Africa orphaned by AIDS, and of the starvation of at least 2 million Somalis. The assistance from government and philanthropic organizations is appallingly less than the need.



Fortunately, congregations of Christians are already beginning to reclaim Christmas for Christ. Last year, over 10,000 congregations developed programs of giving to the needy instead of giving to each other. They taught their members that the magi did not give gifts to each other when they arrived in Bethlehem, that they gave gifts to the baby Jesus. Early in His career Jesus taught that giving to God is only valid when giving to those in trouble.

The church has facilities for giving far beyond the traditional Christmas baskets or the Christmas dinners that are much appreciated as onetime joys for both the givers and the receivers. Most communities now have Centers for Food Action to collect food from those who have it and distribute it to those who have none. Those of you who have seen the pain in the face of a young mother carrying a baby and with three other hungry children tugging at her skirts as she seeks food for today and tomorrow know something of the anguish. The number of these suddenly impoverished people in affluent and poor communities is steadily increasing.

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## Last year the people of the United States spent \$25 billion on Christmas gifts and Christmas paraphernalia.

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Congregations are increasingly ingenious at reclaiming Christmas for Christ. One congregation in New Jersey transformed the usual display of Christmas lights into a witness to the real Christmas story. Since the church was located on a large area of tree-studded land, the members turned it into a drive-through replica of the sta-

ble scene in which Christ was born. Electricians set up lights for five scenes; the foretelling, the shepherds, the wedding, the camp of the three magi, and the Nativity. Carpenters built the stable/manger for sheep and cattle. Costumers designed outfits for 60 people. Hostesses prepared to feed the people they expected to drive through every night.

Over 1,200 cars visited during the three nights before Christmas. Twelve hundred packets of Christmas-centered material were given out. Almost 700 pocket Testaments were distributed. The first year was such a success that two scenes were added for the second year, and special coloring books depicting the seven scenes were given away. Over 1,700 cars drove through the second year. Plans were made to expand the program in following years. One member commented, "Christ has been glorified and His church uplifted."

For more modest methods of giving to Christ at Christmas, individuals should contact their pastor or the regional office of their denominations. All the denominations that use the *Preacher's Magazine* have national and international relief services that give active witness to the mandate of Jesus Christ to respond to human needs in the following ways:

1. By responding to the needs of victims of natural and man-made disaster, such as Hurricane Andrew and children orphaned by wars in Eastern Europe.
2. By supporting self-help programs that involve people and communities in their own development, such as seeds and tools for farmers in drought-stricken regions like Somalia.
3. By helping those it serves to restore and preserve their dignity and to realize their potential through basic education.
4. By collaborating with religious and nonsectarian persons and groups of goodwill in programs and projects that contribute to a more equitable society.
5. By helping the members of congregations fulfill their moral responsibility to alleviate human suffering by removing its causes and to promote justice.

The relief services of your denomination are eager to work with individuals who wish to find some way for alternative giving during the Christmas season. There are opportunities for small, personalized gifts as well as larger long-term gifts such as gifts of real estate, stocks and bonds, life insurance, wills and bequests. These larger gifts provide the satisfaction of knowing that one's Christmas gift will glorify Christ by assisting people in need for generation after generation.

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## Congregations of Christians are already beginning to reclaim Christmas for Christ.

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Encourage the people of congregations to estimate how much they spent on Christmas last year and to dedicate 25% of that this year to the really needy of the world.

A few weeks ago, at this writing, 22,000 Christian men gathered at Folsom Field in Boulder, Colo. Reported as the largest gathering of Christian men in the United States, the goal was to "rev up enthusiasm for Jesus." What a power they could be in the business and professional world to prod the Christian community to make Christmas what it is meant to be. Let your imagination run loose as you think of all the men's associations, all the women's associations, all the youth groups, all the church schools, and all the ecclesiastical structures of all denominations! Think of all the creative energies and resources of those people. No one can predict what the Spirit of God might do for the dispossessed of the world with a little encouragement from the kind of people who read this plea. But, regardless of that, our own hearts and minds might be revved up for the real celebration of the birth of Christ. ✠



# "We'll Just Write Him Out of the Script"

by Morris Chalfant

*Evangelist, Bourbonnais, Ill.*

A worried mother phoned the church office only hours before the Christmas program and Nativity pageant were to begin. In the annual Sunday School pageant, her son was to play one of the characters.

"We've just returned from the doctor's office," explained the mother. "Billy has a cold, and the doctor has ordered him to bed."

"It's too late now to have someone else learn the part," the Sunday School teacher responded. "We'll just have to get along without him. It shouldn't be much trouble. We'll just write him out of the script."

And that's just what they did, though only a few who watched even realized a character was missing. Joseph was home in bed, but no one noticed.

Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, is the most neglected character of the Christmas story. Who could think of Christmas without a caroling chorus of angels, without awed shepherds scampering to the manger, without the camel-borne magi? Who could successfully celebrate this season without thoughts of a harried and hurried innkeeper, an inanely pompous and insanely jealous King Herod, or the pure and pondering Mary?

But Joseph? He might as well be written right out of the script. Standing in the shadows of history, he seems uninvolved, unimportant, uninteresting.

Joseph, the husband of Mary, has often been referred to as the "forgotten man of the New Testament." Great reverence is accorded to the Virgin Mother. And this is as it should be, for she was especially chosen of God as a woman of sufficient consecration to have the great privilege of holding in her arms the Lord of Glory

in the form of a human baby.

It is quite true that Scripture makes few references to Joseph. We look in vain for any recorded word that he spoke. The Nativity story leaves him in the background—a just and good man, a carpenter by trade. Beyond that, there is only his genealogy linking to the line running back to David.

Practically all the details in the divine record that have to do with the life of Joseph are given in an incidental way. They are told, not for Joseph's sake, but for the sake of Someone whom the writer deems of greater importance.

Joseph had a difficult place. When during the betrothal Mary was found to be with child, he had to believe against ordinary reason that there was no immorality involved. He probably heard Mary's story of the Annunciation, and he had the assurance of the heavenly messenger that Mary had conceived under divine influence. But he had a more than ordinary faith to accept this situation without suspicion and to protect and care for Mary with love and understanding.

Joseph's place in the Christmas story is an assured and honorable one. He was good and kind and faithful. He was devout in his faith toward God, sympathetic, and understanding toward the extraordinary woman who was his wife.

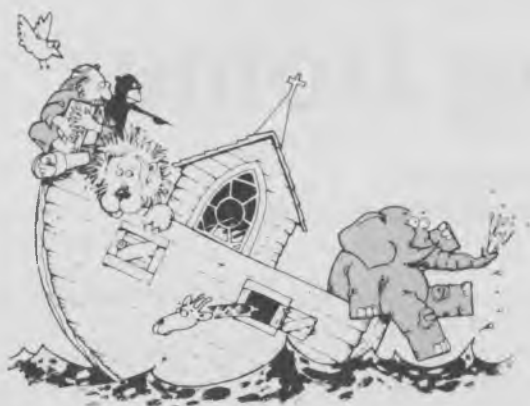


But he was her husband, not her worshiper. The modern cult by which Mary has been virtually made a fourth person of the Godhead would have been utterly ridiculous to this sensible, simple, pious man. He respected his wife in her great calling without exalting her to a place to which God never called her.

One of the greatest things that stood out in the life of Joseph was his godly example at home. One day in the life of Jesus, His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray to God. Jesus reached into His home and heart and chose the word *Father* to best describe God. Today we must be careful about praying "Our Father" in the presence of children whose fathers have deserted or abused them; for them the word has unhappy connotations. The warming, happy memories Jesus possessed of Joseph have been memorialized ever since—every time God's people have prayed. What a challenge to every father!

From all indications no one ever praised Joseph in any special way for his part in the Christmas story. The ages since have certainly treated him with marked neglect. Could he have known, would his conduct have been different? We ponder the old record and we feel that, praise or no praise, his conduct would have been the same. It would have been the same because Joseph's heart rested in God, and he listened for God's approval above any voice that might be heard in the world. Is not this calm devotion to duty a sore need among us? If we could only forget earthly voices and hear God's voice in our hearts, would not our Christmas be what Christmas ought to be? Would not life be simpler, the way clearer, and heaven nearer?

Let's not write Joseph out of the script.



## Job's Christmas Letter

**I** like to receive those annual Christmas letters. I really do. They keep me informed of the happenings of far-off friends and family. Most of the writers try diligently to be realistic as well as informative. One can actually get a flavor of the life in their homes.

Occasionally, though, an unusual card or letter will arrive that surprises us, like the latest one our family received. It was from a family I knew quite well. After expounding on the year's accomplishments of his wife, child, and cat, the writer's paragraph began with saying it had been his "best year yet." True, he had lost 30 pounds and had purchased a new sports car. But that was because he and his wife had endured bitter marital strife and a six-week separation. He had moved in with his parents who were struggling with the situation and the lawyers involved were \$2,500 wealthier.

Come on, I thought. Best year yet? Isn't this carrying a positive mental attitude too far?

Then the thought came to my mind on how Job would have written his annual Christmas letter with a positive attitude. It might have sounded something like this:

Dear Friends and Family,

It has been a wonderful year around the Job household. The Lord

has been good to us and has showered us with many blessings.

I have always been known as probably the richest man in the East with thousands of camels, sheep, oxen, donkeys, and many servants. This year, though, I had a small setback when the Sabeans and Chaldeans swept down and stole my property and killed most of the servants. My philosophy about that is that I entered the world with nothing and shall leave with nothing. It is only money, right?

As far as my family goes, the wife and I have had 10 sons and daughters who are all good children. None of them take drugs or are disrespectful to us, but they do like to party together once in a while. In fact, at their last celebration, a tornado knocked down the house where they were and killed them. I don't think they suffered much, as it happened quickly. It was a devil of a wind.

My wife is her usual self. She has enjoyed the good life we have had together, but she gets rather feisty from time to time. Actually, her last words to me, as she walked out, were, "Job? Why don't you just curse God and die?" Oh, well, you know how women can be.

Several of you have inquired about my health. I have been quite well, as we have always eaten well with the abundance of crops and livestock

from which to choose and with some great servants working in the kitchen. I also get a great deal of exercise walking around my extensive land holdings. I am a little "under the weather" now. As I write this letter, I am having a problem holding the quill because my body is covered with boils, sores, and scabs. It is uncomfortable, but once I took off the sackcloth and put the ashes on, I have not felt as bad.

I am quite fortunate to have some of the greatest friends in the world. Three of them are with me now. They sat around with me for a week before they said anything to me, but I enjoyed their company. They are beginning to get on my nerves at present, as they are convinced that I have committed some heinous sin that has caused my current misfortune. I believe I will have to end their discussion of my value system soon and send them on their way. Our discussions have certainly been lively and entertaining. I will miss their company.

Well, as good as this year has been, I am certain that next year will be better. You know my motto, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

May the Lord bless you and your family as richly as my family and I have been blessed this year.

Sincerely,  
Job

## I'm Going Home

by Joyce Hughes

Evangelist, Church of the Nazarene, Clarksville, Tenn.

**A**fter six weeks in Canada, including two provinces—British Columbia and Alberta—I'm going home.

After a different bed each week, a different table, and a different church, new pastors to meet and learn of their triumphs and trials, I'm going home.

As this jet plane heads upward and leaves Calgary, I realize I have been on airplanes for six weeks. But today is different: I am going home.

Home—where my husband, Harold, is with my dog and two cats. Home—where I am queen of the kitchen.

I leave at 7 A.M. It is a long flight back to Tennessee, but there is home. I try to sleep, but my anxious heart and mind will not allow sleep to come, for I am going home.

The airplane makes a stop in Spokane, Wash., and the seats are nearly full now. I listen, hearing a variety of sounds: babies cry; business-people talk; meals are being served. I smell and hear the clinking sounds of alcoholic beverages. But all of this noise fades into the background as I realize that this flight is taking me home.

As we approach Tennessee, I find a seat near the front of the airplane. My plan is simple: I will be the first down the aisle and out of the plane when we finally stop at our gate. It's such a strange reaction—this anxious feeling I have today. As we taxi in, my seat-belt is already undone, I have my briefcase in hand, and I'm the first one up, "hoping the flight attendant will not reprimand me."

Finally I'm walking up the ramp and through the arrival gates. A sea of faces await loved ones. But there, in the back of the crowd—oh he is easy

to see, for he towers above the rest at 6 feet 4 inches. Yes, he's there. He is always there!

We hug. I choke back a tear as we begin to walk to the baggage claim hand-in-hand. We've been married 30 years, and we still feel like sweethearts. This is a special day, for we both realize that as the sun comes up the next morning we will, again, return to this same airport to say, "Good-bye," again. We will walk slower, squeeze hands a little tighter, for it will be another week, another revival. Just one night at home, but I would fly around the world to have these precious hours with the one I love, next to my loving Savior.

Now, after the pleasant few hours, I begin again. My heart and mind are already reaching out to the sea of faces, those great Christian friends who worship on a mountain in West Virginia. So many are babes in Christ, for the church is only six years old and running well over 160 in Sunday School. But as I sit on this airplane today, I am thinking of another Homecoming. One of these days we are all going home. There will be One waiting. The poet said it beautifully:

*He will be waiting for me—  
Jesus so kind and true.  
On His beautiful throne,  
He will welcome me home,  
After the day is through.*



*After the toil and the heat of the day;*

*After my toils are past;  
After our sorrows are taken away,  
I shall see Jesus at last.*

*After the heartaches and sighing  
shall cease;*

*After the cold winter's blast;  
After the conflict,  
Comes glorious peace,  
I will see Jesus at last.*

*He will be waiting for me—  
Jesus so kind and true.*

*On His beautiful throne,  
He will welcome me home,  
After the day is through.*

I guess we would all want to be the first to step off that heaven-bound airplane, anxious to run up the ramp that will, at last, lead to our Savior, the One who promised, "I go to prepare a place for you. . . . that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3, KJV). I pray today that as I live on this side of heaven, I will be found faithful;

*O may all who come behind us find  
us faithful.*


*May the fire of our devotion light  
their way.*

*May the footprints that we leave  
Lead them to believe.*

*And the lives we live inspire them  
to obey.*

*O may all who come behind us find  
us faithful.*

(Jon Mohr, "Find Us Faithful," 1987 Birdwing Music)

May we hear Jesus say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21, KJV). 

# Dear Daddy

by Robert Norton

*Professor, MidAmerica Nazarene College, Olathe, Kans.*

**D**ear Daddy,  
I'll have to admit, I really missed you when you went off to preach in those little one-horse towns, back in the 1940s and 1950s. As you left on that blue and white Greyhound bus, I wondered when you'd be back home, because the bus schedules determined most of your homecomings and sometimes you'd be gone for weeks.

When you left for some little town "you couldn't get to from here," you rode all day, then sat in some greasy spoon or filling station depot until the next day's departure. Then you'd take some broken-down milk-stop Flexible Coach that would pull into town just in time for you to preach without any supper. Sometimes you didn't even know where you'd sleep that night.

You sincerely grieved for the lost, fasting for long periods of time without food or sleep. Somehow you were able to keep healthy and the people loved you, despite the fact that the body count at the altar wasn't always high.

Sometimes the pastor didn't have enough money to feed his family; and you'd give part of your offering to him as sort of an encouragement—your way of telling him that God would provide. Then you'd take that long trip back home to report to Mama that the offering you got wouldn't quite pay the grocery bill.

In about three days, you'd be off again. But, if you didn't have a meeting scheduled, you got so antsy you could hardly stand it. It seemed like you just lived out of your suitcase. Sometimes I wished it would get smashed or lost and you could never travel again.

One summer I sang for one of your meetings. Daddy, I never knew you slept so little. In the middle of every night, you paced and prayed for revival. You got up early for morning prayer meeting. Then you went to morning services, then with the preacher on his calling rounds. Preservice prayer meeting was next; then at night you preached—homey, down-to-earth, country-style messages. I wanted to get sanctified all over again in almost every service. Remember that big, red-faced cotton farmer in Big Spring who got saved on his tractor, and the drunk who prayed through in the top of a tree?

You never laid guilt on folks. You just preached simple gospel messages that made people hungry for more of the Lord. You lived so that they wanted the kind of religion you had. Your work and Christian ethics were so well-matched. You helped pastors roof churches, paint parsonages, repair water pipes and cars, and kept a good spirit through it all. Your credo seemed to be "A good workman is worth his hire," and no one would have accused you of being a freeloader!

It must have broken your heart to leave our family alone like you had to, especially when there was danger in our little town. You went to your meetings anyway, knowing that you would be criticized for leaving us alone. You simply entrusted us to God who could "supply all [our] need according to his riches in glory" (Phil. 4:19, KJV).

We got a taste of those riches when the shaggy dog that God sent came out of nowhere to guard us from the night intruder who tried to break into the house. The angel of the Lord just seemed to have guided that dog to our house, and sent him after that prowler who narrowly escaped the teeth of God's wrath that you'd prayed down on our behalf.

Our faith increased as the Indian family, newly rich from the oil strike on their land in Oklahoma, drove over 200 miles just to see "their preacher." And to leave gifts of love. What a coincidence that it was Christmas and you'd given the \$50.00 you got from your meeting to the song evangelist so that he could make his mortgage payment and avoid foreclosure! I don't even remember what we got for Christmas that year, but it was the best ever, and you were home.

Daddy, you made us poor by your taking off on the soul-winning trail, but we ultimately became rich. We learned early on to be independent and self-reliant. We learned that a godly life is not failure; that success is not necessarily gauged by fame, money, or accolades. We learned that real success is laying up treasures not of this world but in heaven.

Merry Christmas, Daddy. We hope you will enjoy seeing your legacy unfold. But if that doesn't happen, just lean back and take a well-earned Grandpa nap, realizing that the problems your kids and grandkids have will, in time, be taken care of, for the godliness of a father is visited upon his children and his children's children.

Thanks, Daddy, for our heritage. We love you.

Your son,  
Robert

## The Call of a Watchman

by Neil E. Hightower

Administrator, Church of the Nazarene, Canada, Calgary, Alta.

**M**editating over Ezekiel 33 and 34 for several days, I prayed about its spiritual implications. "Am I qualified to blow the trumpet?" I am an ordained Nazarene minister, in full-time ministry in the church, one of the long-standing record. But, do I possess the divine credentials for being a "watchman"?

The call of a watchman sounds in transition times, times when major changes in culture, in fundamental beliefs of society are occurring. The cause of changes may result from external invasion or internal precipitation. The watchman's call is not crafted for normal times but for the extraordinary. Therefore God initiates the call, and it must bear His imprimatur.

The call of a watchman warns against losing moral and spiritual moorings in the midst of dramatic changes. As Ezekiel describes in chapter 33, a watchman should blow his trumpet to sound the warning of God's Word. He warns against sin and unrighteousness. He warns against trusting in supposed covenantal security that ignores moral and spiritual responsibility in individual believers. Righteousness cannot be stored as a hedge against judgment on future backsliding.

The message of the watchman calls for repentance. The message of repentance encompasses God's judgment against sin. But it is also a message of hope. Humankind can turn from wickedness by the help of God's grace. There is no determinism in the gospel. Ezek. 33:11 sets forth the picture of a loving God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He pleads with them to turn from sin and receive life. The Wes-



leyan practice is foreshadowed here: first preaching the law of God and then setting forth the love of God.

The message of the watchman also encompasses a pastoral concern to strengthen the weak and to heal the

ill. Ezekiel 34 makes clear the Lord's judgment upon the priestly shepherds of Israel for their indifference to the welfare of the congregation. It also shows God's intent to be himself the model of concern that a true watchman must show. Ezekiel's inspired use of the phrase, "the one shepherd, my servant David," is Messianic. God will place Him over the congregation and will bring in the dispensation of the gospel. Clearly, Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise. He gave the picture of divine concern. Adam Clarke reminds us, "From this one Shepherd all Christian ministers must derive their authority to teach."

Surely, many striking parallels of Ezekiel's day match with ours. The concept of the divinely appointed watchman remains valid. As Dr. Jerald Johnson reminded us in the September issue of the *Herald of Holiness*, this call is for "prophetic hearing" by God's people. The Lord descriptively paints the picture of the worship environment in Ezekiel's day: "My people come to you, as they usually do, and

sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice" (33:31). God says that the people view the preacher as a nice entertainer, with great gifts, but they are not practitioners of the standards of God's Word.

That's difficult for watchmen! But the divine call transcends that indifference. God's earlier dialogue with Ezekiel (chaps. 1—2) convinced him that the Sovereign Lord expected watchmen to speak His words, whether the people listen or refuse to listen. That expectation remains true for modern watchmen. We are accountable to God.





In the Scripture, the legitimate test of exercising this calling is not the approval of the Church but whether the watchman himself has "digested" the Word of God and faithfully proclaimed it. Only then is he qualified to blow the trumpet of warning. The sure sign that digestion has taken place is that God's Word for the congregation will taste "as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Ezek. 3:3). Further, the watchman's warning will result in some people turning from rebellion to righteousness.

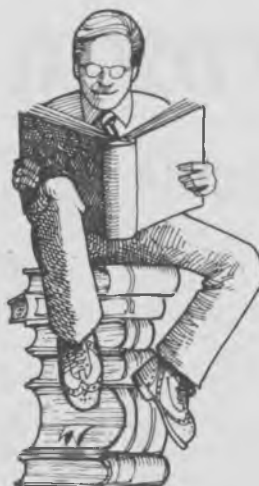
The shared secrets of divine counsel will never come forth as vindictive and harsh but will bear the aroma of the balm of Gilead. There will be gladness in their delivery. They may be quite pointed but never judgmental. The message will be full of healing for God's people because it flows from an inner fountain of loving concern. These are the signs that a prophetic man of God is in residence. The notes from his "trumpet" will be clear, and the "tune" will prepare believers for battle against the world.

The years in which we are now living seem to be transition times. The danger of the Body of Christ losing its spiritual moorings is very real. The call to sound the trumpet of warning clearly rests upon every Christian preacher. Christian social scientists and Christian social workers may also be a part of the watchman force. The message of repentance and encouragement and reconciliation are major themes of this protective ministry. The methods by which we accomplish this assignment include the mental and spiritual assimilation of the Word of God, understanding and appreciation for the "book" of human nature, and leading God's people into the disciplines of practical righteousness.

People are saying, "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" (Ezek. 33:10). Now is the time to respond to God's healing message, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (v. 11).

We watchmen are the catalysts by which righteousness prevails. ✠

## Today's Books for Today's Preachers



### *Preaching Sermons That Connect*

by Craig A. Loscalzo

(InterVarsity Press, 1992)

PA083-081-3438

paperback, \$9.99

What must I do to get the people in my congregation to listen? That is an often repeated lament of pastors and church workers. Pastors seek to effectively communicate through proper identification with congregational needs.

Professor Craig A. Loscalzo, of Southern Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., gives the caring pastor just what he or she needs to find out what people must hear. He gives the reader some hints on how to identify with the needs, dreams, concerns, and joys of the audience. His major premise is that the better the pastor understands the congregation's needs the better he or she can preach Christ.

*Preaching Sermons That Connect* reveals that sermons preached about the ongoing events in the lives of the people better serve the cause of Christ. Isolated sermons that do not show any identification with the basic present needs of the congregation are not helpful. He encourages the reader to realize anew that God identifies with us through the Incarnate Son, and we are to identify with the

needs of people as we sit among them. We are to sense what they sense and grasp their frustrations as well as their victories.

Chapter 4 has an excellent treatment of "Taking Stock" of our role in the spiritual community. He challenges his readers to live with the highest integrity, to be honest, and to demonstrate this authenticity daily both in and out of the pulpit.

The author invites the reader to explore some strategies for identification of the church's needs. Some of those ways, he suggested, are as follows: (1) faithful exegesis of the Word of God; (2) look for scriptural teachings that will gain interest; (3) have a form that fits good preaching and communication skills; (4) speak in a language that is clear and simple; (5) remember that preachers create effective sermons through hard work, prayerful meditation, and scriptural usage.

Chapter 7 includes three helpful sample sermons that serve as good examples of the author's intent. This book will present materials that, rightly examined, may lead the participants to shorten the distance from pew to pulpit by actively relating to the needs of persons sitting in the pew. For those seeking pew rights, this book will be a godsend!

—Monty Neal

# How to Develop a Sermon from a Hymn

## Which Hymns to Choose and How to Use Them

by Charles M. Mountain

*Free-lance writer, Denver, Colo.*

**F**or years it's been in front of you. And you've rarely taken advantage of it. It's a sure source of outlines, striking word pictures, and hard-hitting, memorable final statements. It even gives you the ideal vehicle for keeping your message in front of your hearers indefinitely.

And what is this modern miracle? The hymn. At one time the hymnal was as widely read as the Scriptures. People, no matter how poor they were, usually bought a hymnal along with their family Bible and kept these two treasured, thumb-worn volumes within easy reach.

Hymns are memorable. They employ images and picture language to get their point across rather than the left-brained, analytical approach of formal theology. Words and logic may be forgotten, especially in times of loss or sorrow. But the metaphor of the hymn burns a blazing image into the mind's eye of its singers. Add the music, and you have a powerful medium for the construction of your best sermons. This medium involves the total person—body, soul, and spirit—and enables your messages to cut right to the heart of your dullest listener. Every time a person sings the hymn in church or at home, your message will be before them one more time as the Spirit's instrument of salvation and sanctification.

### Part I

There is a strong New Testament precedence for the use of hymns for

preaching, teaching, and guiding the Christian life. The psalms of Luke 1 and 2 and the songs in Revelation have been known and used for centuries. Recent scholarship has uncovered a very special type of liturgical song, which scholars have labeled the Christ-hymn. The consensus of scholars is that a Christ-hymn is a lyrical poem about Christ and His work. Yet it differs from a confessional statement because of its vocabulary, style, and construction. It usually avoids the first or second person, expressing praise to Christ in the so-called he-style, that is, the third person.

The passages that most scholars would accept as Christ-hymns are the following:

1. Col. 1:15-20; 2:14-15
2. Eph. 1:10; 1:20-23; 2:14-18
3. Phil. 2:6-11
4. 1 Tim. 3:16
5. Heb. 1:1-4 [Perhaps also 2:14-15; 5:7-9; 12:2]
6. 1 Pet. 2:22-24; 3:18, 21
7. John 1:1, 3-5, 9-11, 14, 16

Besides the criteria mentioned

above, the Christ-hymn also has three distinct ways of proclaiming the Good News. First, the language it uses is marked by drama and conflict. God and Christ are set against the "powers" and human rebellion. The Atonement is, in general, expressed in terms of the *Christus Victor* (or "Christ the Conqueror") idea.

Second, the Christ-hymn uses irony and paradox to great effect. No greater extremes are joined together as they are in the Christ-hymn: heaven and earth; light and darkness; flesh and spirit; hostility and reconciliation; shame and exaltation; past, present, and future; the visible and the invisible. In each hymn, life comes from death, strength from weakness, triumph from defeat, freedom from captivity, and lordship from service.

Third, throughout all of the high drama and conflict, there is a single constant, a "strange continuity" in each of these lyric poems: Christ. And behind Him in His incarnation, life, suffering, death, and exaltation, there is God.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.  
*(Col. 1:19-20)*

In his study of the hymns in the New Testament, Reinhard Deichgraber put together this chart of the elements of the Christ-hymn [*Gottes hymnus und Christushymnus der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen:



## Christ-Hymn Elements

	Philippians 2	Colossians 1	Colossians 2	Ephesians 1	Ephesians 1	Ephesians 2	1 Timothy 3	Hebrews 1	1 Peter 2	1 Peter 3	1 John 1
1. Preexistence	2:6a	1:15		(1:10a)				1:3a	(1:20)		1:1-2
2. Mediator of Creation		1:16						(1:2c)			1:3,10
3. Sustainer of Creation		1:17b						1:3b			
4. Superiority		1:18b									1:3, 17-18
5. Incarnation	2:6-7	1:19					3:16a				1:9-10, 14
6. Humiliation, Suffering, Death	2:8	1:20b	2:14			2:14, 16		1:3c	2:21-24	3:18	1:10-11
7. Resurrection		1:18a			1:20a					3:18	
8. Exaltation (Ascension)	2:9a				1:20b		3:16b, f	1:3d		3:22a	
9. New Name	2:9b				1:21			1:4			
10. Subjection of the "Powers"	2:10-11	1:20b	2:15		1:22a		3:16b, c	(1:6)		3:22b	1:5, 17
11. Mission						2:17-18	3:16d, e		(2:25)	(3:19)	1:12
12. Installation as Head		1:18a			1:22b	2:14-16					
13. Consummation of the Age	2:10-11			1:10b	1:21					(4:6b)	
14. "Fullness"	2:7 ("emptied himself!")	1:19	(2:9) cf. 1:19	1:10a	1:23						1:14, 18
15. Atonement "Type"	Christus Victor	Christus Victor	Christus Victor	Christus Victor	Christus Victor			Expia- tion	Substitu- tionary	Christus Victor	

Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), 163]. I have added the last three categories to explore some areas that particularly interested me.

Here we have the gospel as it was proclaimed in the first-century churches. It is a three-part story of our Lord's preexistence. His incarnation/humiliations/suffering/death, and His resurrection/exaltation over every power.

So powerful and important were these Christ-hymns that Paul constructed whole letters from their revelations. He did so in letters to congregations he knew personally (see Phil. 2:6-11) and in letters to congregations he knew only by hearsay (see Col. 1:15-20; 2:14-15). Each of the Christ-hymns Paul uses "has the dignity of a holy text and is employed as a conclusive thesis." The Christ-hymns are used with all the authority of the Old Testament's prophetic, "Thus saith the Lord."

This last statement is the clincher. The Christ-hymn gives us a scriptural,

Christological, and technical model for the selection and use of the hymn in 20th-century worship and preaching. It is certainly not the only criteria for hymn use, but it seems to have the soundest foundation for us to build upon.

### Part II

The Christ-hymn has had its followers, whether consciously or unconsciously, over the centuries since the New Testament Christ-hymns were written down. Its imitators were few and far between until relatively recent times. But the Reformation sparked an explosion of hymn-making that has continued unabated into our times. Many of these hymn writers followed the path pioneered by the first-century trail blazers.

### A

First, we'll let the "creator of the congregational hymn," Martin Luther, have his say. After learning about the Christ-hymn in the New Testament,

we'd have to call him the re-creator of the congregational hymn. Luther saw his hymn writing as a teaching and worship tool for the newly formed Lutheran congregations in northern Germany. Following his own principle of using the vernacular, he produced 28 German language hymns over a period of three decades. While small in output, his hymns are great in influence.

Here is one of his better-known hymns in my translation. There are many fine renderings of this hymn, but I wanted to bring out the striking imagery and immediate impact of the literal German. Sing it to the tune "Christ lag in Todesbanden."

Christ Jesus Lay Dead, Bound by Death

1. Christ Jesus lay dead, bound by Death,

For our sin given over.

(Gal. 1:3; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6)

But now he has been raised again,  
And to Life brought us over.

(Rom. 6:9-10)

Therefore, let us joyful be!  
Praise God and let us thankful be!  
And let us sing Alleluia!—Alleluia!

2. No one has ever conquered Death,  
(Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-23, 45-49)  
Not any human being.  
Our sin has been the cause of this,  
Since no one e'er lived sinless.  
Therefore, Death came rushing  
in.  
And soon had seized pow'r over  
us,  
And held us captive in his reign  
—Alleluia!

At one time the  
hymnal was as  
widely read as  
the Scriptures.

3. Christ Jesus, God's beloved Son,  
Came to our state of being.  
(Heb. 2:14-15)  
And he has done away with Sin,  
And took Death's rights and powers.  
Of Death, therefore, naught re-  
mains—  
An empty shell, a vacant frame.  
Death's sting is lost forever!—  
Alleluia!  
(1 Cor. 15:56)
4. It was a fearful, dreadful clash,  
When Life and Death combatted.  
But in the end Life held the field—  
For Death by Life was swallowed!  
Scripture had proclaimed before  
That Death was swallowed by a  
death!  
(1 Cor. 15:54-56)  
Now Death is nothing but a joke  
—Alleluia!
5. Here is the true Passover Lamb,  
(1 Cor. 5:7-8)  
About which God has spoken;  
Who has, high up upon the Tree,  
In burning love been roasted.  
His blood clearly marks the door,  
(Exod. 21:21-23)  
And with it faith Death pushes  
back:  
The Butcher cannot reach us!—  
Alleluia!
6. The high feast then let's celebrate  
With heartfelt joy and gladness.  
The Lord himself will radiant shine,  
(2 Cor. 4:6)  
For as the sun, bright he is.

Who by his most dazzling grace  
Enlightens all our heart and  
mind—

- The night of Sin has passed  
o'er—Alleluia!
7. So let us eat and fully live  
(1 Cor. 5:6-8)  
On true Passover bread.  
The old yeast no more has a place.  
With God's good Word of grace.  
Only Christ can be the food  
Which really feeds our souls  
with good:  
Faith lives by no one, nothing  
else—Alleluia!

This hymn divides naturally into two parts: Part 1, verses 1-4; Part 2, verses 5-7. These two parts, in their turn, could be used as the basis for three sermons for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. It uses all of the themes for these "high holy days" of the Christian Church: Holy Communion, the fulfillment of Passover, the death of Christ for our sake, which overcame Sin and Death, and finally His resurrection and victory over these "great tyrants," as Luther called them.

As in the Christ-hymn, the whole hymn is shot through with the dramatic language of conflict. Christ is pictured as opposing Death in particular. The hymn centers on the violent confrontation between Christ and Death, both portrayed as medieval knights locked in close combat (see also 1 Samuel 17). The turning point of the battle is described in verse 4, the "strange and fearful clash."

And what irony! Death is overcome, "swallowed up," by the death of Christ! Sin's most powerful weapon is turned back upon it, and both sin and death are overcome in the apparent defeat of Christ.

But there is continuity. The central character of every image and metaphor of this hymn is Christ. He is the Victor over the powers. He is the Passover Lamb who was slain, yet who lives forevermore. He is the Victim and the Priest, the "loser" and the "winner."

Several approaches to your sermon from this hymn may be taken.

1. The first could be topical. Take the relevant verses for Maundy Thursday (vv. 5-7), Good Friday (vv. 1-3), and Easter Sunday (vv. 1-5), and use them and the order of their thoughts as the outline of your sermon.

- a. Maundy Thursday: "Christ Our Passover"
- b. Good Friday: "Christ Our Death"
- c. Easter Sunday: "Christ Our Life"

2. A second approach could be to let the Scripture passages on which the hymn is based be your texts for these days. This would amount to a biblical-exegetical style of preaching. The poetical images and the paradox Luther uses in the hymn could illustrate your message very nicely.

3. The powerful images and unusual phrases Luther uses could be the jumping off point for your message.

- a. Maundy Thursday: "The Lamb Is Roasted" ("in burning love [has] been roasted")
- b. Good Friday: "The Champion Loses" ("Christ Jesus lay dead, bound by Death, / For our sin given over")
- c. Easter Sunday: "The Devourer Is Devoured" ("Death was swallowed by a death!")

The hymn  
burns a blazing  
image into the  
mind's eye  
of its singers.

## B

For our second hymn tracing its ancestry back to the Christ-hymn of the New Testament, let's take one of the *Olney Hymns* of John Newton. Of the several hundred hymns in this collaborative effort of John Newton and William Cowper, Newton contributed 286. They are uneven in quality since their intended singers were the largely uneducated and poor folk of the Olney parish Newton served. But the best of them rival the high quality of an Isaac Watts or a Charles Wesley. They tend to dwell on Newton's own remarkable experience of providence and salvation. But most important for us, *the hymns were designed to be sung at the end of the sermon. They are an outline and summary of the message for the*

day. Just find the scriptural roots and you're ready to go.

The themes of God's grace, love, and His amazing willingness to be friends with sinners are the cantus firmus of Newton's work. We're all perhaps too familiar with "Faith's Review and Expectation" (i.e., "Amazing Grace"), but my personal favorite is "A Friend That Sticketh Closer than a Brother": Sing it to "Amen sjunge hvarje tunge," or any appropriate tune in the meter 87.87.77:

The Christ-hymns are used with all the authority of the Old Testament's prophetic, "Thus saith the Lord."

1. One there is above all other,  
Well deserves the name of Friend;  
(Luke 12:4; John 15:12-17)  
His is love beyond a brother's,  
(Prov. 18:24; 17:17)  
Costly, free, and knows no end:  
They who once his kindness prove  
(Rom. 2:4)  
Find it everlasting love!
2. Which of all our friends to save us,  
(Rom. 5:6-11)  
Could or would have shed their blood!  
But our Jesus died to have us  
Reconcil'd in him to God:  
This was boundless love indeed!  
Jesus is a Friend in need.
3. Men, when rais'd to lofty stations,  
Often know their friends no more;  
Slight and scorn their poor relations,  
Though they valu'd them before:  
But our Saviour always owns  
Those whom he redeem'd with groans.  
(Heb. 7:23-25)

4. When he liv'd on earth abased,  
Friend of sinners was his name;  
(Matt. 11:19)  
Now, above all glory raised,  
He rejoices in the same:  
Still he calls them brethren,  
friends,  
(Luke 12:4; John 15:15)  
And to all their wants attends.
5. Could we bear from one another  
What he daily bears from us?  
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother  
er  
(Matt. 12:46-50)  
Loves us though we treat him thus:  
Thought for good we render ill,  
He accounts us brethren still.
6. Oh! for grace our hearts to soften!  
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;  
We, alas! forget too often  
What a Friend we have above:  
But when home our souls are brought,  
We will love thee as we ought!

The form of this short hymn is theme and variations with a coda. The theme is stated in verse 1, where Jesus is called the sinner's Friend. The dramatic element is played down, but it is there. The phrase, "Costly, free, and knows no end," and the entirety of verse 2 set up the dramatic conflict between God and His rebellious creation, the human being. Verse 2 is derived from the thoughts of Paul in Rom. 5:6-11, which expands the metaphor of justification to include the ideas of estrangement and reconciliation. The death of Christ not only declares us "not guilty" and ushered into the Kingdom but also provides the means by which we may be friends with God. Newton occasionally interprets salvation by the use of legal metaphors in the Olney hymns, due no doubt to his theological training. But he is always ready to go immediately to the amazing grace of God in Christ, who wanted even His most corrupted and stubborn creatures to become His dear children and beloved friends.

However, irony and paradox are most evident in this marvelous hymn. Over and over Newton contrasts Christ's sacrificial and self-emptying

love with the conditioned and grudging love demonstrated by people. The element of continuity is, obviously, the loving friendship of Christ.

A sermon outline along these lines might go like this:

1. Verse 1. Theme stated: "Christ's Friendship: Beyond a Brother's"
2. Verse 2. Variation 1: "Christ's Friendship: Boundless, Even to Death"
3. Verses 3 and 4. Variation 2: "Christ's Friendship: Faithful in High and Low Circumstances"

Luther saw his hymn writing as a teaching and worship tool for the newly formed Lutheran congregations.

4. Verse 5. Variation 3: "Christ's Friendship: Longsuffering"
5. Verse 6. Variation 4: "Christ's Friendship: Exhortation and Hope"

#### C

It is obvious that there is no way we can cover even a fraction of the descendants of the Christ-hymn in this article. But I hope these two examples have whetted your appetite to seek out and use the hundreds of Christ-hymn works in your hymnal. If your denomination uses the Church Year, you have several seasons when a whole series of sermons could be developed. You could use either 8 to 10 hymns by the same author or the same number of hymns by different writers, but all on the same subject, say, the Cross or the Christian life. Let your creativity go, and let the treasury in the hymnal be your source of preparing riches.



# Reaching Children and Their Families

by Muriel Larson

*Christian educator, Greenville, S.C.*

**I**n our outreach to children, we emphasize the goal of reaching whole families," says Ken Owen, Jr., a children's pastor at a church in Greenville, S.C. "Statistics have shown that parents are the number one influence in children's lives. Therefore it is very important to reach parents in order to ensure a healthy Christian growth in children!"

Soon after Pastor Ken joined the church staff six years ago, he instituted a bus ministry. First he printed a colorful introductory flier telling who, why, and what. By discreetly following a loaded school bus one weekday, he discovered a neighborhood with many young people in it.

The following Saturday he took a group of volunteers to that neighborhood. Bikes, toys, and children playing made it easy to spot homes where the children lived. Knocking on doors, his team of visitors introduced themselves and told what church they represented.

If the family attended church regularly, the bus ministry workers left a flier and offered to be of help in the future.

If the person hadn't attended church recently or was interested in sending his or her children to Sunday School or church, the worker gave the parent the time the bus would be in the neighborhood the next Sunday and asked that the child be ready at that time.

Unfortunately parents don't always comply with this request. At one home the bus captains had to dress a three-year-old every Sunday. The lad is now eight and still attends every Sunday. He has received Jesus as his Savior, and his mother says he wants

to be a preacher. Sometimes going an extra mile really pays off!

Later the bus workers added a colorful approach to visitation. They often take puppets with them, or one of them dresses in a costume. If children are nearby while they talk to a parent, they ask them if they would like to come to Sunday School. Enthusiasm and friendliness always add to the appeal of the outreach.

"We usually have three full buses every week," says the children's pastor. "Our Sunday School, youth work, and church have grown through this ministry. In fact, our children's church on Sunday grew so large that we started holding a children's church on Saturday for those who can't come on Sunday.

Over the six-year period since it started, this ministry has reached several thousand children, and hundreds of them have received Jesus as Savior. Former bus child April Price now attends a Christian college in Florida, preparing for the Lord's service.

"We always look for opportunities to lead parents to the Lord," says Pastor Ken. "Every person gets a visit from a bus captain on the day before the bus picks the children up. That's when we find opportunities to speak to the parents about salvation. Some of them have come to Christ and are now serving in our church."

However, some parents actually hinder their children. One 11-year-old was bringing other children from his neighborhood to the bus. One day the minister shared the gospel with his mother and two brothers. He asked the mother if she would like to receive Christ as Savior. She said she wasn't ready.

Because of her response, her son would not receive Christ either. "If Mom isn't ready, then I'm not," he said. After that he began causing trouble for the church workers, and then he dropped out completely. His parents finally asked the youth pastor what to do. About a year later they started to attend a church—and soon thereafter their son asked Jesus to come into his life.

Recently Pastor Ken received a call from the mother of a 10-year-old who seldom sees his real father and whose stepfather is gone a lot. The boy had pulled the wash off the line and set fire to it. "What can I do?" the distraught mother asked.

Pastor Ken counsels parents when he can, but sometimes he refers them to professional Christian counselors. Parents of problem children often respond more readily to Christian witnessing because of their concern for those children. If there were no church outreach to such children, such families might never be reached.

A children's musical each Christmas draws many of the bus parents. Also at Christmas the bus ministry group buys gifts for the children who would not be getting anything for Christmas. Last Christmas they bought gifts for 32 children. Parents' hearts are opened when they see the love of the Lord demonstrated.

Some maintain that bus ministries are not for today, but they are. This outreach takes the gospel to the street, meeting people where they are. When we have the opportunity to reach boys and girls from unchurched families, we know it is well worth the time and effort it takes.

# How Do You Defend Your Ministry Under Criticism?

## A Look at Paul's Defense of His Ministry

by Jerry W. McCant

*Professor, Point Loma Nazarene College, San Diego*

### Introduction

When Paul discusses himself, what he says extends to the term *apostle*. "Paul's awareness of his place in God's purpose finds its most pointed expression in his understanding of himself as an apostle."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon, all of his letters are written in the official capacity of apostle. Paul's task as an apostle is to preach the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

"Paul is the representative of the apostolate in the New Testament"<sup>3</sup> and "it is difficult to tell how the apostle was understood before and apart from Paul."<sup>4</sup> However, he often faced opposition to his apostleship. In his letters to Corinth, particularly 2 Cor. 2:14—7:16 and chapters 10—13 but already begun in 1 Cor. 9:1 ff., Paul defends his position as an apostle of Jesus Christ. In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul deals with the denial of his right to be an apostle. His message was said to be unapostolic and reprehensible. Thus, his first word in 2 Corinthians, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1), is already beginning a "defense" of his ministry.

Of the 79 fully attested occurrences of "apostle" in the New Testament, 80% of them are found in the writings of Paul and his associate, Luke.<sup>5</sup> However, in Acts, Luke never calls Paul an "apostle." In his letters, Paul never calls the Twelve "apostles." In 2 Cor. 10—13, Paul is concerned with a defense of the legitimacy of his ministry. Paul thought of the Corinthians as his "letters of recommendation" (2 Cor. 3:1) and they should have commended him (12:7), but they rejected his credentials for ministry. He refused to

be treated as inferior to the "super-apostles" (11:5; 12:11), but even when he must defend his ministry, he will "boast in the Lord" (10:17) and of his "weakness" (11:30).

### Paul's Opponents: The Corinthians

Various suggestions have been made to identify Paul's "opponents" at Corinth.<sup>6</sup> The hypotheses include: Judaizers, wandering Jewish preachers, Gnostics, and spiritual men. Most of the theories have supposed they were intruders in Paul's territory. W. G. Kummel, however, thinks the opponents were "specific people who have attacked him within the community."<sup>7</sup> Munck believes the opponents "are the Corinthians themselves, their false picture of the apostle, which now finds support in the behavior of the apostles from the outside."<sup>8</sup>

Unquestionably Paul's defense is to the Corinthian Church. He has no more dialogues with intruding opponents than Socrates with his accusers.<sup>9</sup> Paul begins with a plea to the Corinthians (10:1); he asks not to be forced to act boldly with them (v. 2). The apostle is not satisfied with their obedience (v. 6). They judge him by outward appearances (v. 7). Apostolic authority is exercised "for building you up" (v. 8). He does not wish to "fright-

en [them] with [his] letters" (v. 9). In the "foolish discourse" (11:1—12:18), Paul begins by asking the Corinthians to bear with his "foolishness" (11:1). He fears the Corinthians will be led astray and he fears the worst may have happened (12:20-21).

In bitter irony he asks if he sinned by preaching to them without charge (11:7-12). After an attack on the "false apostles" (vv. 13-15), Paul asks not to be considered "a fool" (v. 16), but he is willing to be a fool for the Corinthians. With scathing sarcasm he calls the Corinthians wise who gladly bear with the foolish (v. 19). The foolish have abused the Corinthians (v. 20) and Paul's sarcasm continues, "To my shame, I admit that we were too weak" (v. 21). The Corinthians forced him to become "a fool" (12:11).

Becoming a fool, Paul tries to persuade the Corinthians of his legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> He criticizes their criteria for an apostle through the use of irony.<sup>11</sup> As a fool he parodies self-praise and boasting. Although boasting is forced on him (12:1, 11), Paul knows that boasting of his status as an apostle is not like the Lord (11:17) and that "there is nothing to be gained" (12:1). Thus he will boast only in his weakness (11:30; 12:5, 10).<sup>12</sup> Such "boasting" is paradoxical and ironic. The idea of defending himself is abhorrent and, although Paul parodies a defense, he clearly denies any defense (12:19).

Many charges were made by the Corinthians against Paul. He is inconsistent (10:1, 10) and unimpressive in appearance; his speech is "contemptible" (v. 10, NASB). He is not a good speaker (11:6). Paul's refusal to accept their financial support insulted the Corinthians (v. 7). He was ac-



cused of stealing money from the Jerusalem offering (12:16) and was not a miracle worker (v. 12). Paul should have been commended by the Corinthians (v. 11); they have seen "the signs of a true apostle" (v. 12, RSV). Apparently, the Corinthians wanted Paul to be a sensational "divine man" (11:32—12:10).<sup>13</sup> Paul's opponents were the Corinthians who rejected him as their apostolic minister.

### Defense by Parody

Reading a letter is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. We do not hear the Corinthian side of the conversation. Any attempt to reconstruct their side of the dialogue is problematic. Apparently the most persistent and serious charge is that Paul was not a "divine man." Paul spends considerable time deriding the Corinthian criteria for an apostle. Parody is a humorous or satirical imitation of something that is serious. Paul employs parody with consummate skill, belittling the Corinthians in a defense of his ministry.

Paul vows to boast only in his weaknesses (11:30) and then illustrates his weaknesses. His first illustration comes from Damascus and the early days of his ministry. The story (vv. 32-33) comes as a surprise and Bultmann can see "no reason" for it.<sup>14</sup> Barrett correctly sees this story as "a crowning illustration of the weakness and humiliation of which Paul boasts."<sup>15</sup> To understand Paul's illustrations of his theme (i.e., Damascus escape, heavenly rapture, the thorn in the flesh), remember that he is: (1) defending his ministry; (2) boasting of "weakness"; (3) speaking as a "fool"; (4) ridiculing the Corinthian idea of apostleship.

E. A. Judge suggests that Paul's escape from Damascus is a conscious parody of the criterion for the award of the *corona muralis*, the Roman reward for the first soldier over the wall in a besieged city.<sup>16</sup> By standing on its head the Corinthian criterion that an apostle be a hero, Paul pours contempt on boasting as he does explicitly in 12:11. Instead of scaling the wall, Paul was smuggled out of the city in a fish basket by unnamed persons like a load of contraband merchandise.

First Church at Corinth wanted a minister who was a hero, a successful minister. Paul argues that he is an

apostle even though he is not "successful."<sup>17</sup> He was not the suave, smooth-talking minister. Today he would not become a television preacher or a "performing preacher." His defense would not be the annual income of the church, the new cathedral, or the large membership of this church. Paul would not measure the effectiveness of his ministry by the current criterion for success.

**With scathing  
sarcasm Paul  
calls the  
Corinthians  
"wise" who  
gladly bear with  
the "foolish."**

With the rapture story, Paul gives a miracle story but ridicules it.<sup>18</sup> In the same context as the Damascus story, Paul tells about "a man" caught up to paradise in the third heaven. It is only in verse 7 that "a man" is identified as Paul. Speaking as a fool, Paul cannot say if the experience was "in the body or apart from the body" (v. 3); only God knows. Revelations are under God's control; the apostle cannot produce them, and they do not make legitimate one's ministry. Paul heard only "inexpressible words" about which he is forbidden to speak (v. 4, NASB).

Not only must an apostle be a hero, but he must also be able to report ecstatic experiences in which he receives divine revelation. After Paul reported his heavenly experience, he still did not have the evidence to satisfy the Corinthian criterion. By inversion of their criterion, Paul defends his ministry by saying that ecstasy is no cause for boasting and does not provide adequate apostolic accreditation. Unlike Gnostic spiritualists, he returns with empty hands. They evaluate his ministry on the basis of what they see in him and hear from him (12:6). He could boast but still would not satisfy the Corinthians because he is not a "divine man." Paul defends

himself by satirizing the demand for such experiences in the minister.

Ironically, Paul says that because of the "extraordinary quality" of his revelation, he was given a "thorn" to keep him humble.<sup>19</sup> A majority of scholars, assuming a straightforward account, have concluded that Paul's thorn was a physical malady. They justify this conclusion by harmonizing 2 Cor. 12:7 with Gal. 4:13, 14.<sup>20</sup> However, a comparison of the texts shows that the only common feature of the two texts is the word "flesh." Careful exegesis makes it most unlikely that Paul had any physical illness in mind when he spoke of the "thorn in the flesh." Four words in the passage—thorn, angel, buffet, and remove—are always used in the Bible to refer to persons.<sup>21</sup> It is most probable that Paul's "thorn" was a person or persons.<sup>22</sup>

The persons about whom Paul has been concerned throughout his letter are the Corinthians. They forced him to become a fool and boast in weakness and failed to commend him (12:11). Paul's opponents were the Corinthians, as this essay has already demonstrated. The form of the story in verses 7-10 is a healing story that Paul parodies. It is a healing story with no healing. Thus, Paul's thorn is a sick Corinthian church that refused to recognize the legitimacy of his ministry. The church is not healed. Although Paul leaves the question open, he must accept the possibility that the church will always be sick (vv. 9-10). Paul receives grace sufficient to endure the pain inflicted by a sick church.

An apostle in Corinth was expected to perform miracles.<sup>23</sup> Paul's thorn illustrates his "weakness"; he prays for healing but there is none. Ironically the church demanding miracles from Paul is not healed. In 12:7, Paul indicates that the thorn is a consequence of returning from his rapture with empty hands. His failure to bring back an ecstatic report from paradise results in being afflicted with a sick church. Since irony often carries a double meaning, the "thorn" may be understood as a splinter or a cross. At one level Paul may be saying that the Corinthians meant to crucify him (13:4); he is crucified on the cross of the Corinthian church.

Christ's death and resurrection are

the paradigm for Paul's ministry. He defends his ministry Christologically. The catchwords "weakness" and "power" in 12:9-10 and 13:4 assure a Christological interpretation. He so identifies with Christ that "the sufferings of Christ are ours" (2 Cor. 1:5, NASB). In Corinth, Paul's message had been the foolishness of "the word of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18, NASB) and "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2) in a context of weakness. Paul carries "in our body the death of Jesus" and this earthen vessel is "given over to death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:10-11). He wants to be "conformed" to the death of Jesus (Phil. 3:10, NASB) and is "crucified with Christ." Suffering is inherent in the ministry of an apostle; this fact explains his long "catalog of sufferings" (2 Cor. 11:23-28). The thorn becomes Paul's symbol of apostleship.

Paradox indicates Paul's resolution: "Power is perfected in weakness" (12:9, NASB); "When I am weak, then I am strong" (v. 10).<sup>24</sup> Out of a situation of "weakness," Paul is certain that "Christ's power may rest on me" (v. 9). Although unworthy to be an apostle, Paul declares, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), an apostle of Jesus Christ! Paul is "an apostle of Christ Jesus" (1:1) even though "I am nothing" (2 Cor. 12:11).<sup>25</sup>

The Corinthians are admonished: "Examine yourselves!" (13:5); Paul did not "fail the test" (v. 6, NASB) of a true apostle.

### Some Concluding Observations

Paul, like Job, had the courage to maintain his integrity in the face of opposition and pain. Despite the rejection of the church at Corinth, Paul knows he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Christ was crucified on account of weakness but was raised from the dead. Paul knows that he too will live by the power of God (13:4). Wisdom counsels us to learn with Paul that a true minister is a suffering servant. Does not Jesus teach us to take up a cross (Mark 8:34)?

Ministers still contend with Corinthian criteria. Corinth wanted Paul to be a hero, but Paul never got over the wall. Today Paul would reject the criterion of "success." He stands "success theology" on its head with a parody that satirizes the Corinthian demand for success. Car-

nal methods can produce growth and success without the Spirit's assistance. This is not to oppose growth and "superchurches" but success does not make legitimate one's ministry. God calls ministers to preach the gospel, not to become heroes.

No ecstatic experience guarantees the legitimacy of one's ministry. Paul waited 14 years before telling of his rapture and says it is "not profitable" (12:1, NASB) in making legitimate one's ministry. Faithfulness to God's call to preach the gospel affirms one's ministry. God may grant ecstatic experiences with visions and revelations, but such experiences are not under the manipulative control of ministers seeking to establish their ministry. Ecstatic experiences are useless for the validation of one's call to the ministry.

## Paul employs parody with consummate skill, belittling the Corinthians in a defense of his ministry.

Few ministers follow Paul in reporting unanswered prayers. Paul rejects the Corinthian claim that a true minister must report healing miracles. One can be a true minister even when there are no miracles. In his parody Paul prays for a sick church that is not healed. A church in Los Angeles advertises "Healing Service Thursday 10 a.m." Paul would never do that because he knows one cannot guarantee miracles. Ministry is legitimate when a minister is crucified with Christ and raised with him by the "power of God" (13:4, NASB). The true minister is one upon whom the "power of Christ" has come to rest (12:9, NASB).

1. William A. Beardslee, *Human Achievements and Divine Vocation in the Message of Paul* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1961), 79.

2. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-11; Gal. 1:6; also see 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:1; Gal. 1:11; 2:2, 7; 1 Thess. 1:5, where his apostolic message is characterized as "my/our gospel."

3. Beardslee, *Human Achievements*, 79.

4. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "apostolos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, tran. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:437.

5. Rengstorff, *Theological Dictionary*, "apostolos," 421.

6. The literature is too abundant for citation in this brief article; for a good summary see Dieter Gerogi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 7-16.

7. W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 284.

8. Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, tran. Franke Clarke (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1959; original, 1954), 325, n. 2.

9. Hans Dieter Betz, *Paul's Apology II Corinthians 10-13 and the Socratic Tradition*, ed. Wilhelm Wullner (Berkeley, Calif.: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1975), 2.

10. As a fool, Paul put on the mask of the Greek in self-depreciation. An abbreviated "foolish discourse is the Socratic": "I know that I know nothing."

11. The technical term is parody. His defense is really an "ironic apology." (See Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity, ed. Wayne A. Meeks [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 173.)

12. For a similar no-win situation see Demosthenes, *De Corona*, tran. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince, Loeb Classical Library.

13. The technical term is *thelos aner*.

14. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, tran. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 218.

15. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), 303.

16. E. A. Judge, "The Conflict of Educational Aims in New Testament Thought," *Journal of Christian Education* (1966), 45. Also see his "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice," *Australian Biblical Review* (October 1968), where he argues that "boasting" is a parody of self-advertisement in Hellenistic society.

17. Paul has been "successful" and he can boast; here he refuses to boast of heroic feats to legitimize his ministry.

18. Betz, *Paul's Apology*, shows that the form of the rapture and thorn in the flesh stories is aretology, which is a miracle story. Betz also demonstrates that both are parodic. A parody takes a serious story and ridicules it. By the use of a parodic aretology, Paul mocks the Corinthian criteria.

19. Since his experience produced no evidence, humiliation is more appropriate than pride. A revelation that produces no evidence possesses no extraordinary quality and is no occasion for pride.

20. One of the first to make this equation was J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972; reprint of 1865 edition).

21. Paul's word for "thorn" (*skolops*) appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The closest parallel is Num. 33:55; Paul may have had this verse in mind. See also Sirach 43:19, Hos. 2:8, and Josh. 23:13.

22. Chrysostom, *Homilies on II Corinthians*, Hom. XXVI, identified the "thorn" with persons mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles. Terence Y. Mullins, "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (December 1957), 299, take a similar position.

23. Hans Dieter Betz, and "Eine Christus-Aretologie bei Paulus (2 Kor. 12:7-10)," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969), 288-305 identifies both stories in 12:1-10 as aretologies. See Morton Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies. Divine Men, the Gospels of Jesus," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 90 (1971), 174-99.

24. See Philo, *Moses*, I, 69: "When the enemy is surest of ravaging you, then your fame will shine forth more gloriously." Even more striking is the remark in the same passage where Philo comments on what Moses had learned at the burning bush in Exodus 3: "Your weakness is your power."

25. "I am a nobody" is a good example of Paul's use of irony, perhaps even acidic sarcasm.

## Walking Today as Jesus Walked

by Hal Perkins

Pastor, Lake View Park Church of the Nazarene, Oklahoma City

**S**hould significant church growth be more prominent among holiness churches than other groups? Should the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit flow even more freely through a holiness church than other churches? Should Jesus' character and the fruit of the Spirit be more prominent in holiness churches than others? Should the holiness church be more likely to be holy as Jesus was, to walk as Jesus walked, to do the works as he did, even greater works? Is there any connection between holiness, character, power, and church growth? I think so. The Spirit, through the Scriptures, says about Jesus' holiness and our holiness: "Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Pet. 1:15).

**Let us first consider the nature and fruit of Jesus' holy life and then the nature and fruit of the holy life the Church is to experience.**

### *1. Jesus' holiness involved an emptying of self.*

Surprisingly, Jesus' holiness was not because He was divine. Jesus willfully chose to leave behind His divine prerogatives as God, including holiness . . . He emptied himself, not of being God, but of the attributes of God—character, wisdom, and power (Phil. 2:6-7). Jesus became like me "in every way" (Heb. 2:17) and was "tempted in every way" as I am (4:15). If Jesus possessed some special "holiness" or power that I do not have, He is not like me in every way nor tempted as I am. In addition, Jesus humbled himself (Phil. 2:8), refusing a self-centered, self-serving, self-

reliant position. He refused to rely on His own understanding or power (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49-50).

### *2. Jesus' holiness was established on an awareness of His Father's love.*

At His baptism, Jesus experienced His Father's words: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Awareness of His Father's love drew Him to abhor walking independently of His Father. His passion for His Father led Jesus to make no judgments apart from His Father (John 5:30). The Father's love drew Jesus to speak no words other than those He heard from His Father (8:28). He would do only what He saw His Father doing (5:19). The Father's love secured Jesus' resolve to reject self-determination and sustained Jesus' passion for and sensitivity to His Father. This sensitivity to, love for, and faith in His Father were essential ingredients in Jesus' holiness. His purity of heart was established through an awareness of His Father's love.

### *3. Jesus' holiness was the indwelling Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:21). The Holy Spirit led Jesus into and through

temptations (4:1-13). The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to minister in power (vv. 18-21). "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and . . . he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him" (Acts 10:38, italics added). Jesus' actions sprang, not from His independent power, but from the fruit of His relationship with His Father by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was sensitive to, filled with, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit was the source of Jesus' holiness. The Spirit of holiness in Jesus made Jesus' holiness possible.

### *4. Jesus' holiness came from perfect communion with His Father by the Holy Spirit.*

With His mission to save the world (John 3:17), we would not expect Jesus to need time for private, intimate communion with His Father. But not so. At daybreak Jesus went to a solitary place to be with the Father (Luke 4:42). In fact, He "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16). He spent nights in prayer (6:12). Jesus needed time alone with His Father to prevent the flesh, the world, or the enemy from establishing a foothold. He prayed to renew His awareness of and passion for His Father and to receive what His Father was thinking and doing, that He might come into agreement and full cooperation with His Father. Through His persistent communion, perfect union occurred, and Jesus was perfectly one with His Holy Father and thus perfectly holy.

### *5. Jesus' holiness was made visible in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.*





From His union with the Father by the Holy Spirit, the actual attributes of God—character, power, truth—were made visible through Jesus. Jesus could pray for His enemies, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34) because, through union with the Holy Spirit, He was filled with the fruit of God’s love (Rom. 5:5). Jesus revealed the peace in the face of Pilate’s threats because, through sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, He knew His Father’s love and power. Jesus was freed from being controlled by fear. Jesus could call Lazarus to come forth because, through sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, He knew the Father’s will and thus spoke with authority, releasing God’s resurrection power. Jesus revealed God’s love by going to the Cross because, through sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, He heard His Father’s voice. Jesus’ holiness was made visible in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

#### 6. *Jesus’ holiness resulted in church growth.*

People around Jesus observed His compassion for the hungry, His grace for the adulteress, His healing of the sick, His authority over evil spirits, and His inspired, authoritative words. By observing Jesus, they believed and entered the kingdom of God. Jesus led the woman at the well to repentance because, through sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, He was given a word of knowledge regarding her history. Many from her town believed because of her testimony. Jesus’ holiness, seen in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit, drew people to himself and thus to the Father. Jesus’ holiness, character, ministry, and church growth were inseparably linked.

#### How does the holiness of Jesus relate to me?

##### 1. *Like Jesus, my holiness involves an emptying of self.*

We were born independent of God, not feeling, desiring, thinking, or behaving in union with Him. Jesus emptied himself of all independence of His Father. I similarly need an emptying—a death or crucifixion—to my independence of God. I need death to independence—always wanting my own way, relying on my own understanding and ability—that Paul called being “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). When Jesus died on the Cross, He died not only to free me from the guilt of my independence or

rebellion, but also to free me from the power of my independence. As I



If Jesus  
possessed some  
special  
“holiness” or  
power that I do  
not have, He is  
not like me in  
every way.



enter into Christ by faith, I enter into His death (Rom. 6:2-8). By faith the independent “me” is crucified. Now,



Jesus needed  
time alone with  
His Father to  
prevent the  
flesh, the world,  
or the enemy  
from  
establishing a  
foothold.



through faith, I am set free to depend on God, to walk humbly with Him. As is my faith, so shall it be unto me

(Matt. 9:29). Here is the good news! As Jesus was emptied of self in His life, in His death He makes possible a self-emptying to all who truly believe in Him.

##### 2. *Like Jesus, my holiness is established on an awareness of my Father’s love.*

When I realized the extent of my value in God’s sight, my heart was strangely, passionately warmed. Perhaps one can realize the extent of God’s love and not be moved by it. But His love for me is far greater than necessary to create my impassioned love for Him. I love Him because He first loved me. Not in my own righteousness but because I am in Christ I have experienced my Father’s words: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17, KJV). My Creator God infinitely values me as His unique creation made exclusively for union with himself. The power of God’s unconditional love creates a passion for Him. His love compels me to resist thinking or saying one word or doing anything independent of Him. His love frees me from the fear of others and from the temptation to be controlled by people or things instead of God (Gal. 1:10). With all my heart I want to know Him, to be intimate with Him, to be aware of what He thinks, what He wants. I want to be one with Him, to think, speak, and act in perfect union with Him. The heart of holiness is a response made possible by the realization of God’s gracious love. It is the response of loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

##### 3. *Like Jesus, my holiness is the indwelling Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit touches me with the awareness of my Father’s love. As He, the Spirit of God, actually indwells me, the life of God who is holy makes my spirit “one with him” (1 Cor. 6:17). I am a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). God and I live together (Rom. 6:8). The power that raised Jesus from the dead indwells me (Eph. 1:19-20). What does this mean? The love of God actually indwells me loving Him, loving others, loving even myself (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit, who now indwells my spirit, makes it possible for me to know everything that God wants me to know (John 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:9-16). The same Spirit that enabled Jesus to be holy

and thus to do God's will (Acts 2:22; 10:38) dwells in me to make it possible for me to love as Jesus did, to speak with wisdom and knowledge and authority as Jesus did, to do the very works that Jesus did (John 14:12). The Holy Spirit in me is my holiness. He produces Christlikeness.

*4. Like Jesus, my holiness comes from communion with my Father by the Holy Spirit.*

My reason for existence is to walk in communion with my Father. By the presence of the Holy Spirit, I know God through Scripture, His Body, His sovereign activity. I am enabled to adjust to what He is thinking, wanting, feeling, and doing. The Holy Spirit in me makes actual union with God possible. To the degree that I *commune* with the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1), I am enabled to come into union with God. But, potentially, I can also put out the Spirit's fire and grieve Him (1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30). This occurs through neglect of communion with God. As Jesus spent time focused only on His Father, so I must purpose to commune with God resulting in union with Him. To the degree that I commune with and adjust to God, there is oneness with God. Oneness with the Holy One is my *actual* holiness. As my thoughts become His thoughts, my words His, my behavior His, I am holy as He is holy. This is a true holiness. I can allow self-centeredness, pride, people, circumstance, or any other darts of Satan to creep in and draw me from bringing *every* thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). To the degree this occurs, my true holiness is diminished, even though this unholiness may remain hidden to others and even myself. Christ reigning through me is actual holiness; anything else reigning is unholy. Disagreement with Christ is unholy. Oneness with Christ is holiness because holiness is Christlikeness.

*5. Like Jesus, my holiness is made visible in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.*

Like Jesus, when communion leads to union there will be spiritual fruit (John 15:5). This will be the life of God made visible. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). To the degree that I am in union with God by His indwelling

presence, you *will* see His character in me and His ministry through me.



The heart of  
holiness is a  
response made  
possible by the  
realization of  
God's gracious  
love.



As I am in union with God by the Holy Spirit, those who curse me/Him will experience my/His blessing in return. Those who mistreat me/Him will find me/Him praying for them. If



Christ reigning  
through me is  
actual holiness;  
anything else  
reigning is  
unholy.




the Holy Spirit rules, you will see faith, peace, and joy as I/we walk through the inevitable storms. As I am ruled by the Spirit, Jesus' compassion for the lost, the sick, the hungry, and the possessed will be discernible in my/His countenance. Jesus' desire to offer direction, or healing, or food, or deliverance will be made known in me and thus will flow through

my/His mouth, my/His hands. My holiness—Christlikeness—will be made visible in the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I am to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16), and do what Jesus did (John 14:12). The character and ministry of Jesus shall flow through me as they did through Jesus—by the power of the living God in me, His Holy Spirit. Jesus' pattern is this: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (15:5). Do I experience little fruit—Christlikeness? The abiding is probably minimal. Do I desire to walk as Jesus walked? I need to abide in Him!

*6. Like Jesus, my holiness will result in church growth.*

It is inevitable. Word will get out. The life of God made visible in Christlikeness, spiritual fruit, and gifts of the Spirit will be powerfully attractive. Some, of course, will react to and run from the light of God through me. But it is still true that if Jesus is lifted up, people are drawn to Him. As my life is in union with Jesus, with the resulting fruit and gifting, both the lost and the found will see and hear Jesus and will be drawn more and more to Him. In their eyes, Jesus will increase and I will decrease (John 3:30). They will receive and relate to Him, growing in communion and union with Him. As they do, Jesus' fruit and gifts will be increasingly visible as the living Christ flows through them. Inevitably, others will see and hear and respond. And my life—His holy life in and through me—shall not have been in vain.

Jesus has convincingly called me to follow Him, abiding in Him moment by moment. He has equally convinced me to expect the fruit of His abiding love: being holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15), being enabled to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), being enabled to do the works that He did (John 14:12), being enabled to draw others to Him (Matt. 4:19). Christ, holiness, character, power, and church growth are intimately and inevitably related. I am not to seek holiness, or power, or church growth, but Jesus Christ. If I seek the living Christ with all my heart, I will inevitably experience His holiness and character, and, simultaneously, make possible the outpouring of God's power and His adding to the church. 

## Shining for Jesus in Dark Places

by Larry E. Blum

Chaplain (Captain), U.S. Army

**I**t's amazing the things a person thinks about when stumbling over something in the dark. I had just tripped over a tent picket and hit the ground so hard my helmet flew off. Besides nursing sore hands and knees, I also wished I had seen the picket. However, it was one of those nights in the Arabian Desert when no moon nor stars shone to give light.

At times like that, a person is liable to ask himself, "What am I, a 39-year-old minister of the gospel, doing in the middle of a desert wearing combat boots, camouflage uniform, and survival gear?" To answer the call to preach and go "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) is one thing. "But, Lord, couldn't You let at least one star shine so I wouldn't trip and hurt myself?" It is a valid concern when physical danger is near, but also a valid question when spiritual danger is possible. Simply put, the world without Jesus Christ is in darkness. Those without Him stumble in the darkness of sin. Everyone needs to see.

The world looks to Hollywood in search of a star, but God looks to us who are Christians—the Church. Paul reminds us, "You shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16). Don't underestimate your importance in the kingdom of God.

Over a year after the war in the Persian Gulf, I received a letter that said in part:

I just want to let you know . . .



how much I appreciated you as our chaplain, especially during Desert Storm, Desert Shield. You really got me going in the right direction. The Bible studies and the services we had were always so interesting! I guess what I am really trying to say is, you are the only chaplain I have known in my 20-year career that has left a lasting impression on me! Praise the Lord!

Tooting my own horn? No, but merely sharing part of the story of the ministry of the church to include the chaplaincy. Also, to say thank you to the church for loaning me and other pastors to the military to preach, teach, and "hold out the word of

life." As the church, all of us who call ourselves Christians "shine like stars" in a darkened, sinful world that is without God. Together, we "hold out the word of life"—Jesus Christ.

Often, the results of our ministry are not seen quickly. Sometimes we don't hear of the results at all. At other times, a year or so after we have labored for the Lord, God allows us encouragement through the testimony of one who has seen the

light and taken hold of the Word.

It is exciting to know that in a darkened, pessimistic world, the church of Jesus Christ shines brightly. The church at Philippi was, no doubt, made up of ordinary people with concerns and cares much like ours. They were employed in a variety of occupations much like the church today. But they shined "like stars" for Jesus. How important you are as a Christian!

Our darkened world offers all kinds of "food" and "light." The Bible tells us that Satan appears as an "angel of light" who leads people to stumble in darkness. But the church, made up of husbands and wives and children from all walks of life, shines "like stars in the universe" holding "out the word of life." Don't underestimate your significance in the kingdom of God. God says we bring light to a darkened world. Believe it when He tells you that your Christian life and testimony are bringing light and life to those stumbling in the dark. We all share in this ministry together. Really, we shine for Jesus so that no one need stumble in the darkness of sin. ✠



# To Spend and Be Spent

## Wesley's Call to Service as Essential to Spiritual Formation

by John Hay, Jr.

*Pastor, Indianapolis Shepherd Community*

**A**ccording to John Wesley, our 18th-century spiritual forebear, the call to the "deeper life" of Christianity is marked by two things: self-surrender and self-giving service. Both are essential to authentic Christian living today.

Wesley's letters to people for whom he served as a spiritual guide are full of admonitions to surrender one's life to God and then live in self-forgetful service, particularly to the poor. Together, these are for Wesleyans the height and depth of Christian spirituality.

Self-surrender, or "entire resignation," is the critical threshold through which many disciples have journeyed into the fullness of life. Wesley told one correspondent, "We must die to ourselves and advance in the life of God."<sup>1</sup> To Miss March he writes: "Entire resignation implies entire love. Give Him your will and you give Him your heart."<sup>2</sup> Also called "self-donation," this is the negative side of one's full devotion to God.

The other side of the deeper life coin is the positive expression of service to others, specifically the poor. Wesley did "not acknowledge him to have one grain of faith who is not continually doing good, who is not willing to 'spend and be spent in doing all good, as he has opportunity to all men.'"<sup>3</sup> He exhorts Mrs. Johnson that her calling "is not only to do good, but to do *all* the good which you possibly can." She is then guided to help "my friend Sister Gayer."<sup>4</sup>

### The Relationship Between Faith and Service

Putting service and faith in the right perspective is critical to understanding Wesleyan spirituality. As

Wesley and his descendants conceive of it, Christian service is an expression of heartfelt faith, not a means to it. It is not the same as "works righteousness," which is supposed to earn one heavenly merit points.

As the Apostle Paul emphatically declares, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Christian service has to do with joyful, self-forgetful selfgiving that expresses the in-dwelling Christ.

The right relationship between faith and service is clarified in the next verse. Paul says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (v. 10).

Good works, or Christian service, are those actions of love for which we are created in Christ to express. Faith comes first, then service. Ours is not a religion of works, but a faith that works. Put another way: service is the expression of faith.

This is the essence of "sanctification"—that we are set apart from the world for the holy uses of God. We give ourselves to God for God's redemptive purpose in the world. The other half of holiness is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Sanctification is not the end of the

journey but the beginning of sacred service.

### Why Service Is Essential to Growing Spiritually

Some people have difficulty understanding why there is a constant call to service. Some may suspect the preacher is lazy or simply more money should be given to relieve the needs of the poor. Neither is, necessarily, the case. Rather, the call to service is a matter of spiritual discipline and growth in Christlikeness.

Wesley understood this important part of spiritual development, constantly urging those believers he counseled to serve others. A true Christian, says Wesley, "cannot but be zealous of good works. He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent" for others.<sup>5</sup> "While you help others, God will help you," he wrote Ann Bolton.<sup>6</sup> Jane Hilton Barton is urged to "snatch all the opportunities you can" for compassionate service and witness.<sup>7</sup>

The Christian is created to serve. According to Wesley, the social dimension of the gospel guards against fruitless individualistic piety. "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social religion; no holiness but social holiness," he said. Instead, "faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection."<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Wesley D. Tracy cites many of these and other of Wesley's encouragements to service in an unpublished work titled "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation." Tracy points out that "in the Wesleyan scheme of things piety is incomplete without the nourishment of service; spiritual formation is retarded with-



out spending and being spent in behalf of Christ and others."<sup>9</sup>

### Why Serving the Poor Is Important

Of all Wesley's calls to service, none ring so clear and persistent as the call to serve the poor. Christians are to "join hands with God, to make the poor man live."<sup>10</sup> The invitation to "put yourself in the place of every poor man and deal with him as you would God should deal with you" is as challenging today as it was in 18th-century England.<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of spiritual formation Wesley told gentlewoman Miss March to "converse more, abundantly more, with the poorest of the people, who, if they have not taste, have souls."<sup>12</sup> Less than three weeks later he writes her again, urging her to "frequently, nay, constantly visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless" who "have nothing to recommend them but that they are bought by the blood of Christ."<sup>13</sup>

One particularly poignant instruction from Wesley goes to theology student Brian Bury Collins: "You have seen very little of the choicest parts of London society: I mean the poor. Go with me to their cellars and garrets, and you will taste their spirits."<sup>14</sup>

The reason Wesley focused his efforts and directed his spiritual "students" to serving the poor was not simply sentimental. Instead, ministry to the poor was central to his understanding of Christian faith.

Two core doctrines place service to the poor squarely in the center of Wesleyan spirituality. First, *God's free grace has been declared for all peo-*

*ple, including the poor.* In Wesley's day, the poor had been written off as unredeemable "fodder for the factories." But Wesley could not square institutionalized poverty with God's will for humanity. Spiritual equality called for the whole gospel to be preached to all people, particularly those "marginalized" in society and the churches' perspective. Spiritual equality's seed bore fruit among the Methodists of actions challenging social inequality.

Second, *Wesley was convinced the human spirit was perfectible by faith.* This often misunderstood teaching persuaded inhumanly treated people they could live differently and become better. Christian perfection, he said, is the "medicine of life, the never failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men."<sup>15</sup> Christian perfection put in tension the optimistic possibilities of grace and passive obedience to corrupt and intolerable social conditions. It produced dramatic changes within people and in society.

### Ministries of Service for Social Change

The message of free grace and Christian perfection compelled Wesley and his Methodist Societies to serve the poor. They offered relief, but worked for release. Rather than condescending charity, they offered curative care. Unlike many religious persons of the time, who removed themselves from "the real world" of suffering and oppressive politics, Wesley asserted, "My part is to im-

prove the present moment."<sup>16</sup>

And improve it he did. Wesley and the Methodists established and maintained an orphanage, schools, a "lying in" hospital for destitute or unwed mothers, the first free medical clinic in England, a plan to employ out-of-work Methodists in textile work, made antislavery appeals, and worked for prison reform. The list goes on. Some consider the effect as the transformation of the nation.

What is the source of such activism? Christian love.

Such a spirituality of outgoing service based on indwelling love is desperately needed today. Poverty has reached critical dimensions at a time when evangelical Christians seem co-opted by consumerism and wrapped up in spiritualities of self-interest.

The time is ripe for Wesleyans to reclaim the call of Wesley to "spend and be spent" in self-forgetful service.

1. *Letters* 7:139, July 31, 1782; most references to Wesley's letters have been cited by Dr. Wes Tracy in "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation," an unpublished doctoral dissertation.

2. *Ibid.*, 6:225, July 1, 1772.

3. *Ibid.*, 2:39, July 1745.

4. *Ibid.*, 7:245, Oct. 27, 1784.

5. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* 1:22.

6. *Letters* 7:233, Aug. 31, 1784.

7. *Ibid.*, 3:151, Nov. 1, 1769.

8. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* 1:22.

9. Tracy, "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation," 161.

10. *Works* 8:267.

11. *Journal* 2:21.

12. *Letters* 6:206, Feb. 7, 1776.

13. *Ibid.*, 208-9, Feb. 26, 1776.

14. *Ibid.*, 7:23-24, Mar. 13, 1781.

15. *Works* 7:3.

16. *Letters* 2:94.

## BEYOND BELIEF





# Welcome to the Awakening

by David L. McKenna

President, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Ky.

**A** well-worn legend has Rip Van Winkle falling asleep during the reign of King George III and awakening to the presidency of George Washington. You have all heard the moral of the story: *Don't sleep through a revolution!*

As a twist on the legend and its moral, I would like to say, "Welcome to the awakening!" Americans experienced the first Great Awakening in the 1700s. Because there are similar signs of spiritual renewal in our day, we may be the privileged participants in the third Great Awakening in American history.

Prime evidence is a Gallup poll that shows a general religious awakening, but more significantly, an evangelical resurgence in our midst. For those of us who are in the evangelical tradition, we are surprised to learn that 35 percent of all Americans confess to be "born-again, Bible-believing, and witnessing Christians."

An opinion poll is only a surface indicator of spiritual awakening. But behind the current popularity of religion are six facts that show similarities between the great awakenings and events in our day, and thus point to the moral of our story: *Welcome to the Awakening!*

## **Fact One: The great awakenings began on college campuses.**

Historians of religious revival point to Williams College in the 18th century and to Oberlin 100 years ago. In one of the Carnegie series titled *Education and Evangelism*, Robert Pace and J. Edwin Orr have noted the beginnings of revival on Christian college campuses in our generation during the late 1940s and early 1950s. From those campuses came the leaders of such groups as the Graham Crusades, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade, and Young Life.

## **Fact Two: The great awakenings have advanced among the young.**

Whether referring to the Haystack Group of the 1700s or the YMCA of the 1800s, the common purpose was to take the gospel to the young on secular campuses and into the society at large. During the past 25 years similar ministries have spread among students on high school, college, and university campuses.

One result is that Christian college enrollments are rising, contrary to national trends, which baffles the experts. Another surprising result is that conservative churches have grown during a time when the mainline church was suffering from guilt by association with other crumbling social institutions.

## **Fact Three: The great awakenings have been evangelical rather than sectarian in spirit.**

Having begun on college campuses, the great awakenings are paralleled by renewal in the church. There is always the temptation to cast individuals who have declared their faith outside of denominations into a sectarian mold.

Helmut Thielicke, after his visit to America, spoke of his fear that the dynamic evangelical Christian spirit that he found among individuals would be stifled by sectarian demands. To the credit of the churches that have encouraged informal groups for Bible

study and prayer, the awakening is an evangelical *spirit*, not an evangelical *stereotype*.

## **Fact Four: The great awakenings have been proven in spiritual wastelands.**

In the first Great Awakening, the wasteland was deistic New England; in the second, it was the new secularism throughout the cities of the developing nation. Today, our spiritual wastelands have been spotted on eastern and western seaboard, particularly for Evangelicals.

Tradition reinforces evangelical Christianity in the Bible Belt of the South and discourages it in staid New England. Likewise, social pressure raises church attendance in the flatlands of the Midwest, but that pressure is left behind by the spiritual immigrants who flee to the Western states.

Yet, in each of these barren spots, evangelical Christianity is showing vital signs of new life. An editor of a national magazine who has visited both of these regions confirms the ripple effect moving from the campus to the church and to the community at large as a sign of genuine spiritual awakening.

## **Fact Five: The great awakenings cycle from spiritual revival to social reform through individuals.**

As ultimate proof of the first and second Great Awakenings, there is a succession of men and women who have led in political, social, economic, and religious reform. For the third Great Awakening, the jury is still out. Thus, our scene shifts, from the search for a final proof that we are in a great awakening to the call for the people we need as links between spiritual renewal and social reform today.



Experience teaches us that when the initial fervor of any movement wanes, only the intellectual content remains. Otherwise, the converts become either social deviates manning some forgotten outpost or pitiful members of a generation burned out from the flames of their own age. Revel, writing in *Neither Marx Nor Jesus*, contends that the scholarly Lenin writing alone in his study was far more dangerous than Jerry Rubin on the streets screaming, "Do it!"

The day is  
dawning on  
another great  
spiritual  
movement in  
our land. The  
clouds are  
brightening. Are  
we alert and  
ready to fulfill  
God's purpose?

Six million people are involved in

When Williams College was over-

God has invited  
each of us to be  
an instrument  
for working out  
His plan of  
redemption in  
our present  
society.

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# On the Front Lines or AWOL in the Abortion Battle?

Patricia Smith

Free-lance writer, Canby, Oreg.



I had never walked out of a Sunday School class. That is, not until the morning when we sat comfortably in our pews, weighing the merits of abortion rescues.

During a campaign in our state to "Ban Convenience Abortion," many of us had marched on the front lines, confronting the pro-choice forces that were bolstered by national N.A.R.A.L. leaders shipped in from New York.

We met them in a school assembly where a Planned Parenthood speaker pleased students with warm fuzzies. "You can make your own choices." In reference to sexual activity, he asserted: "When you get ready to drive a car, we teach you how." (Applause)

With as much taste as possible, we answered the student question, "How are abortions done?" In conclusion, we reminded these precious teens: "You're worth waiting for. Remember, abstinence not only prevents AIDS but it also prevents abortion." (No applause)

We met them in a business luncheon where a young father challenged our views on sex education. We responded: "We have no objection to sex education that stresses the importance of chastity, marriage, and the family. But, if any of you can find the word *marriage* in Planned Par-

enthood literature, please underline it in red and mail us a copy."

In rebuttal, our Planned Parenthood opponent offered the usual warmed-over rhetoric: "We teach teens responsible decision making."

We met them in local television studios where they thought they could get away with carefully crafted false statements. They probably assumed that these "sweet, Christian pro-lifers" would lack the nerve to expose them. We confidently confronted them with, "That's a lie," and gave supporting documentation.

We labored over educational newspapers, writing and distributing them door to door in our state's 36 counties. We tried to tell the real story of abortion that has been shielded from public view by pro-choice media and the self-protecting abortion industry.

We wept over the letters and

phone calls from abortion's living victims: women who sought escape from abortion's depression and guilt in drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and contemplated suicide—women who could not now bear children due to injury from a teen abortion.

*If ye . . . shed not innocent blood in this place, . . . Then will I cause you to dwell . . . in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever (Jer. 7:6-7, KJV).*

We agonized over the opposition to our efforts coming from within the Christian pro-life ranks. "Purists," unhappy about the initiative's three exceptions of rape, incest, and maternal health, refused to cooperate. "Professional pro-lifers" preferred a 20-year gradual approach to halt abortion-on-demand, rather than an effort that could halt 95% of all abortions now.

During a hectic morning in the campaign office, I spied a 4" thick pile of printed computer labels. "What list is that?" I asked.

"The church list," replied our secretary.

"How many churches are there in this state?" I queried.

"3,700," came her reply.

In fact, we on the front lines were learning that most of these troops in God's army were either AWOL (ab-



sent without leave) or back at camp, warming their hands by the fire.

*But this thing commanded I them, . . . walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, . . . but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward (Jer. 7:23-24, KJV).*

Weary from warfare, we dragged ourselves to the election eve gathering. Amid the hotel's beautiful, tasty buffet and the cheerful red, white, and blue decorations, we watched our defeat unfold on the large-screen television. Sure enough! The predicted block of Christian votes, which could have brought victory, failed to come up "pro-life."

He promised: . . . *this place shall no more be called Tophet . . . but The valley of slaughter (Jer. 19:6, KJV). Because they have forsaken me . . . and have filled this place with the blood of innocents (v. 4, KJV). Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them (11:11, KJV).*

Now it was the Sunday morning after. Weary from work and defeat, I

considered staying home from church. But instead, I wandered to church in a slight state of shock. Our pleasant Sunday School class and peaceful church service would be a tonic to my wounded spirit.

In Sunday School, our pastor, whom we all love, continued the study in Acts. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, KJV). Then he asked, "In light of this verse, how do we view the abortion rescues?"

As I felt the nervous emotions welling up inside of me, I whispered a prayer: "Lord, why now? Please keep me calm." Here sat my wonderful Christian friends, sipping on their coffee, well-dressed, well-fed, and well-housed, commenting academically on whether abortion rescuers should be "obeying God rather than men."

My patience snapped to a close. The pastor recognized my upraised hand. "I know some of these people. They are not radical, ignorant bigots. One is a Ph.D. who goes with his wife weekly to the hospital to rock drug babies. He used to be pro-choice but is now a walking encyclopedia for the pro-life movement. When the eight rescuers were recently jailed, they led six prisoners to the Lord. Our liberal newspaper does not tell us about that, do they? While we sit

here so smug and comfortable, a father sits in jail. He has lost his job, his savings, and his freedom because he cared enough to risk all of these—to protect the lives of preborn children. I will not sit in church and hear the abortion rescuers criticized."

Afraid that my fervent emotions might turn into anger, which would offend the woman sitting in the second row who had recently marched her teen daughter to the abortion mill, I clenched my mouth shut, picked up my Bible, and rushed from the room.

Prophet Jeremiah had sustained me throughout the campaign. If he were speaking from our pulpit today, he would find no need to change his words:

*If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them (18:8, KJV). And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart (24:7, KJV).*

*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (31:34, KJV).* ¶

## GUESS WHICH EVICTION THE COURT WILL FIND OBJECTIONABLE.



## The Power of a Note

by Fred Bauer

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**O**n my first job as sports editor for the *Montpelier* (Ohio) *Leader Enterprise*, I didn't get a lot of fan mail, so I was intrigued by a letter plopped on my desk one morning. The envelope bore the logo of the closest big-city paper, the *Toledo Blade*.

When I opened it, I read: "Sweet piece of writing on the Tigers. Keep up the good work." It was signed by Don Wolfe, the sports editor. Because I was a teenager (being paid the grand total of 15 cents a column inch), his words couldn't have been more exhilarating. I kept the letter in my desk drawer until it got dog-eared. Whenever I doubted I had the right stuff to be a writer, I would reread Don's note and walk on air again.

Later, when I got to know him, I learned that Don made a habit of jotting a quick, encouraging word to people in all walks of life. "When I make others feel good about themselves," he told me, "I feel good too."

Not surprisingly, he had a body of friends as big as nearby Lake Erie. When he died last year at 75, the paper was inundated with calls and letters from people who had been recipients of his spirit-lifting words. Mr. Toledo Blade, as he came to be known, had indeed made them feel good about themselves.

Over the years, I've tried to emulate Don and other friends who care enough to write uplifting comments, because I think they are on to something important. In a world too often cold and unresponsive, such notes are springs of warmth and reassurance. We all need a boost from time to time, and a few lines of praise have been known to turn around a day, even a life.

Why, then, are upbeat note writers in such short supply? My guess is that

many who shy away from the practice are too self-conscious. They're afraid they'll be misunderstood, sound corny or fawning. Also, writing takes time; it's far easier to pick up the phone.

The drawback with phone calls of course, is that they don't last. A note attaches more importance to our well-wishing. It is a matter of record, and our words can be read more than once, savored, and treasured.

Even though note writing may take longer, some pretty busy people do it, including George Bush. Some say he owes much of his success in politics to his ever-ready pen. How? Throughout his career he has followed up virtually every contact with a cordial response—a compliment, a line of praise, or a nod of thanks. His notes go not only to friends and associates but also to casual acquaintances and total strangers—like the surprised person who got a warm, calligraphic back pat for lending Bush an umbrella.

Even members of the news media, not normally any president's favorite pen pals, have received solicitous notes from the commander in chief. And so have members of their families. One summer day, when Bush invited some of the press corps to Kennebunkport for a barbecue, the young daughter of Jack Gallivan, a director of ABC's "Primetime Live," went swimming in the Bush's pool and lost her tooth. Noticing Katie Gallivan crying, Bush asked her what had happened. When he heard, he knew from his own children what that meant: no proof under the pillow for the Tooth Fairy! He called an aide to bring him a presidential note card bearing an etching of his Kennebunkport house. Bush made a small X on the card and wrote:

*Dear Tooth Fairy—Katie's tooth came out where the X is. It really did—I promise.—George Bush*

It fulfilled the best prerequisites for inspirational note writing: it was short on verbiage and long on empathy. And most important, it dried Katie's tears.

Another gifted presidential note writer was Abraham Lincoln. One of his most famous personal letters was a tender condolence to Mrs. Lydia Bixby of Boston, who had lost two sons in battle. "I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of loss so overwhelming," he wrote. "I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

Lincoln's wartime letter of loss brings to mind a more recent conflict and some letters of gain. When a New Jersey newspaper urged its subscribers to write to service men and women in Operation Desert Storm, schoolteacher Connie Stanzione accepted the challenge with patriotic fervor. In all, she sent 50 or so letters to anonymous troops.

"I told them how proud I was of them and how much I appreciated their sacrifices for the cause of freedom," she recalls. One who wrote back was 30-year-old Army sergeant Kerry Walters, who thanked Connie for her thoughtfulness. She answered him, and so it went. Gradually, as they exchanged letters about themselves, they became friends.

After they traded photographs, romance blossomed. Their letters were no longer signed, "your friend," but "with love" and "fondly." After a \$129 phone call, Kerry sent a letter that concluded: "I pray that I've touched your heart like you have touched mine and that you would like to build a family together. Constance, will you





marry me?" Connie immediately accepted. Fittingly, their wedding ceremony included an inspirational message about love from one of the most famous letter writers of all time—Paul. His first letter to a small, embattled band of Christians in Corinth so challenged and inspired them that it has been treasured and preserved for 2000 years. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love never ends. And *that* is exactly the power in words of praise.

Even top corporate managers, who have mostly affected styles of leadership that can be characterized only as tough, cold, and aloof, have begun to learn the lesson, and earn the benefits, of writing notes that lift people up. Former Ford chairman Donald Petersen, who is largely credited for turning the company around in the 1980s, made it a practice to jot positive messages to associates every day. "I'd just scribble them on a memo pad or the corner of a letter and pass them along," he says. "The most important 10 minutes of your day are those you spend doing something to boost the people who work for you."

"Too often," he observed, "people we genuinely like have no idea how we feel about them. Too often we think, I haven't said anything critical; why do I have to say something positive? We forget that human beings need positive reinforcement—in fact, we thrive on it!"

What does it take to write letters that lift spirits and warm hearts? Only unselfish eyes and a willingness to express our appreciation. The most successful practitioners include what I call the four "S's" of note writing:

1. *They are sincere.* No one wants his sails filled with smoke.
2. *They are usually short.* If you can't speak your piece in three sentences, you're probably straining.
3. *They are specific.* Complimenting a business colleague by telling him "good speech" is one thing; "great story about Warren Buffet's investment strategy" is another.
4. *They are spontaneous.* This gives them the freshness and enthusiasm that will linger in the reader's mind long afterward.


  
 A few lines can  
 brighten a day,  
 motivate a  
 coworker—and  
 sometimes  
 change a life.  



It's difficult to be spontaneous when you have to hunt for letter writing materials, so I keep paper, envelopes, and stamps close at hand, even when I travel. Fancy stationery isn't necessary; it's the thought that counts.

So, who around you deserves a note of thanks or approval? A neighbor, your librarian, a relative, your mayor, your mate, a teacher, your doctor? You don't need to be poetic. If you need a reason, look for a milestone, the anniversary of a special event you shared, or a birthday or holiday. For the last 25 years, I've prepared an annual Christmas letter for long-distance friends, and I often add a handwritten word of thanks or congratulations. Acknowledging some success or good fortune that has happened during the year seems particularly appropriate considering the spirit of the season.

Don't be stinting with your praise. Superlatives like "greatest," "smartest," "prettiest"—they make us all feel good. Even if your plaudits run a little ahead of reality, remember that expectations are often the parents of dreams fulfilled.

Today I got a warm, complimentary letter from my old boss and mentor, Norman Vincent Peale. He once told me that the purpose of writing inspirational notes (he is the best three-sentence letter writer I have ever known) is simply "to build others up because there are too many people in the demolition business today."

His little note to me was full of uplifting phrases, and it sent me to my typewriter to compose a few overdue letters of my own. I don't know if they will make anybody else's day, but they made mine. As my friend Don Wolfe said, making others feel good about themselves makes me feel good too.



## Pontius' Puddle





# Dealing with the Hidden Grief of an AIDS Death

by Victor M. Parachin

Grief specialist, Virginia Beach, Va.

After three years of marriage, Linda and John gave birth to a healthy baby boy. When their son was six months old, the parents became alarmed because he began to lose weight. More alarming was the fact that the infant began to need smaller diapers rather than larger ones.

Initially their pediatrician was baffled. After extensive testing in a hospital, doctors determined the little boy had AIDS. When the parents were tested, they learned that Linda, the mother, also had AIDS. Their son died at 14 months of age. Linda's health continued to deteriorate for nearly three years before her life ended at age 32.

In spite of the fact that shortly before her death, Linda was an emaciated 60 pounds and had become completely blind, her diagnosis was kept a secret from family, friends, and colleagues. Even at the burial, all but one brother and sister believed that Linda had died of cancer.

Unfortunately, there is still a major social stigma attached to AIDS patients. As a result, those who grieve an AIDS loss are afraid to publicly acknowledge their grief. In effect, survivors of an AIDS-related death are denied the opportunity to express their feelings and explore the many emotional aspects connected to the loss.

Yet, AIDS is an international health problem that will continue to grow until an effective treatment is discovered. The Centers For Disease Control



in Atlanta conservatively estimates there are 1 million Americans who are HIV positive. Of the nearly 200,000 people officially diagnosed with AIDS, 120,000 of those have died.

Increasingly, pastors and other religious leaders will be called upon to provide care for AIDS patients as well as their family and friends. This was anticipated as early as 1989 by the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In their directive, *Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis*, the bishops stated: "Persons with AIDS are not distant, unfamiliar people. We must embrace them with unconditional love." Here are ways to help surviving family and friends who have

experienced an AIDS-related death.

## Respond with Compassion

The AIDS crisis has presented not only a medical challenge but also a theological one. Religious groups are confronted by the fact that in many cases, AIDS was contracted through drug use or numerous casual sexual relations, both of which violate Christian teaching.

In spite of that, all AIDS patients and their survivors must be treated with unconditional love and acceptance. The 1987 U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued just such a call in *The Many Faces of AIDS: A Gospel Response*:

For Christians . . . stories of persons with AIDS must not become occasions for stereotyping or prejudice, for anger or recrimination, for rejection or isolation, for injustice or condemnation. They provide us with an opportunity to walk with those who are suffering, to be compassionate toward those whom we might otherwise fear, to bring strength and courage both to those who face the prospect of dying as well as to their loved ones.

Dr. R. Sider, a professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, articulates the same concern: "No matter how weak or frail, no matter how marginalized or despised, no matter how ravaged by wrong choices, [to] people with AIDS . . . we offer them our love and

support, no matter how inconvenient or costly. This is the first, middle and last thing to say."

### ***Be Sensitive to Hidden Grief***

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, a grief specialist and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colo., reminds care givers that AIDS survivors are disenfranchised because they feel the need to hide their grief. He states:

Disenfranchised grief is experienced when the death of someone loved is not acknowledged or socially supported. Unfortunately, many survivors of AIDS deaths are disenfranchised. Because of the social stigma surrounding the disease, survivors of AIDS deaths feel the pain of loss, yet may not know how, or where, or if, they should express it.

This pattern of sheltering feelings and hiding the true nature of the illness often begins when AIDS is first diagnosed. One example is that of Elizabeth Glaser and her husband, Paul, now Hollywood director and former star of the TV series "Starsky and Hutch." In 1981 Elizabeth was infected with the AIDS virus through a tainted blood transfusion. Unknowingly, she passed the virus on to her two children.

Ariel, their eldest daughter, was diagnosed as HIV positive at age four. Although the couple decided to confide in only a few of their closest friends, the impact was extremely negative. "At first, no one would allow their children to come and play at our house," Elizabeth Glaser writes in her book, *In the Absence of Angels*.

Some friends refused to let my kids come to their homes at all. Some said their children could continue to play with mine, but only at the park. Some dropped out of our lives. We asked a therapist to see if a child psychiatrist would work with Ari when and if we felt it was appropriate. I was later told the psychiatrists would not see my child because they were afraid if word leaked they would lose too many other patients.\*

Unfortunate experiences such as those of the Glasers force AIDS patients, their families, and close friends to engage in a conspiracy of silence. A key task for religious leaders and other care givers is to offer support within the context of unconditional

love and acceptance so that survivors will open up and share their feelings.

A healthy grief recovery hinges on the freedom to express feelings honestly and openly. Dr. Wolfelt states: "Just like other bereaved persons grieving the loss of someone loved, AIDS survivors need to talk, to cry, sometimes to scream, in order to heal."

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### ***Work to Be Well Informed***

Because of inaccurate information and fear associated with AIDS, there is a continuing need for education and information. Clergy need to be very well informed so that they can inform, educate, and reassure others about AIDS issues. Some people hesitate to visit surviving family at a funeral home, fearing they will contract the virus themselves simply by shaking hands or embracing family members.

AIDS survivors  
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order to heal.

An effective way for clergy to deal with such questions is to have educational brochures in their churches that lay people can take home and read about AIDS. One excellent booklet is published by the National Funeral Directors Association (11121 W. Oklahoma, Milwaukee, WI 53227), titled *A Caring Response to an AIDS-Related*

*Death*. That brochure is effective in dispelling myths about contracting AIDS during a funeral visitation.

For example, to the question, "Can HIV infected persons attending the visitation or service spread the virus?" the answer is: "No. Touching such as handshaking, hugging, and casual kissing are all safe and encouraged. Remember, people who are HIV infected or in active stages of AIDS are grieving many losses. They need and deserve our compassion, understanding, and support."

Another issue people raise at the time of a funeral is whether or not it is safe to touch the body of someone who has died from AIDS. The funeral director's brochure offers this answer: "All evidence shows that casual contact, such as touching the deceased's face or hands, is perfectly safe. Ask your funeral director for information and assistance if you feel uncomfortable."

### ***Accept the Intensity of AIDS Grief***

The harshly negative response from society toward AIDS patients and families creates a more intense grieving process. Elizabeth Glaser reports: "Sometimes when I am alone in my car, I scream, 'If You are there, God, I hate You! I hate You for making this my life. I hate You for letting Ari get sick. And I hate You because I don't really think You are there.' My throat hurts when I'm done but I usually feel calmer."

While such intense and angry expressions can be unsettling to a care giver, the bereaved need to get those feelings out. Dr. Wolfelt advises: "Accept that survivors may be struggling with explosive emotions, guilt, fear, and shame well beyond the limits experienced in other types of deaths. Be patient, compassionate, and understanding."

### ***Be Aware of Support Groups***

One of the most effective sources of help to an AIDS survivor is a support group. There, they can meet with people who have had a similar loss, see others coping successfully, and share their feelings without fear of rejection or ridicule. A practical act of mercy on the part of a religious leader would be to take the time to locate a group, noting location, dates, meeting times, and giving that information to the bereaved. †

\*(New York: Putnam Publishers, 1991).

# Pastor, Don't Forget the Little Ones

## A View from Under the Pew

by Roy Austin

Pastor, Claresholm, Alta.

**I** am a child.

You may think it strange that I would talk with you about pastoral care since I am *just* a child. I have never been to seminary. I have no way of knowing what it's like to be a pastor. Let me assure you, however, that I am not critical. I have no intention of adding more stress to your ministry than it already has. In fact, if you will hear me, I think I may be able to help you have less stress and certainly more fun in ministry than you have now.

No doubt, you have a philosophy of pastoral care. Whatever that philosophy is, it will probably work with children. You see, if the pastoral care of children is absent from your ministry, the problem is not likely a weakness in philosophy but perhaps a memory loss in your understanding of children.

You were probably a child once yourself. That gives you an advantage that you don't have, for example, when you are working with senior citizens. There's nothing like personal experience to help you empathize with others.

But then sometimes I wonder, "Were you really a child once?" I hear you talking about mid-life crisis as if it were the first time in your life you faced the question of "Who am I?" Have you forgotten what it was like when you started school? Can you remember adolescence?

Well, perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself. I know you are a true pastor, through and through. I sense your concern for everyone in the church. I hope you won't mind, then, if I try to help you in your desire to be a pastor to children like me. I want you to



know I do need a pastor. I need you to be my pastor.

I need to know from you that I am one of your congregation. That's right. I'm a real person. I am a whole person. I'll never be more a "person" than I am right now.



I have a name. When you call me by my name I feel honored. I feel like a "real" person, which, of course, I am. I am not just somebody's child or a "head" to be counted for your district report. I am a person.

Of course, many people, including those in the church, think that "real" people are "adult" people. Children are seen through the hopes of who or what they will be when they grow up. These same people see the "real" church as the "adult" church. They refer to children as the "future" church. In the meantime, we are perceived as part of the baggage brought along by our parents.

We are welcome to attend the worship services but are expected to be "miniature adults," which, of course, is quite impossible. I am a child physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I'm not a little adult. I can only be whole, as the child I am. I need your help to feel accepted as a person. I need an advocate. I need you to help protect the privilege I have to be a child.

Yes, I know the apostle Paul says that when he became a man, he "put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). In fact, that was a good sermon you preached from that text. Maybe sometime you will preach on the other half of that statement, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child."

In different ways, I am simply asking that you give me "permission" to be a child and to experience life and love and grace as a child.

Do you remember when the apostles wanted to send the children away so Jesus could help the "real" people with their "real" problems? The chil-

dren were fortunate to have an Advocate to intervene for them. Your influence and your example in treating me like a "real" person will go a long way in helping others in the church do the same.

Have I told you how much I enjoy Sunday School? Its great! I love the Bible stories. In fact, to me, they are more than what you adults think of as stories—they are reality. I wish they could be as "real" to you. Thank you for the care you take in selecting and training Sunday School teachers.

I guess some pastors are probably relieved to think their responsibility to children ends when the programs are running smoothly. Don't take me wrong—I'm glad for the programs. I like my teachers. But no program or teacher can take the place in my life that belongs to you as my pastor. My teachers tell me about God but because you are the pastor, you represent God to me in a special way. When you accept me, I feel like God accepts me. When you love me, I feel like God loves me.

That's one of the reasons I like the worship services. I'm afraid my mind wanders. Sometimes I'm thinking about parties when you're preaching about prayer, but don't underestimate what I am experiencing. Even the smell of varnish in the sanctuary is making an impression upon my mind, so 50 years from now, when I experience the same smell, a warm feeling will come over me reminiscent of Sunday worship as a child.

Since you are the pastor, I trust you like I trust Jesus. I believe everything you say. My confidence in you is a sacred trust.

When you prepare your sermons and when you lead the church in worship, don't forget that I am one of your parishioners. By the time I am six years old, I have struggled with fear, guilt, rejection, sorrow, failure, and pride. I have felt joy, wonder, awe, and love. I don't need to know that what you say applies to my needs too. Sometimes I just need to know the words to help me describe my inner experiences.

Do you remember what I said about Bible stories being reality to me? The same is true of the symbols of worship. There is still much I don't understand. But the sanctuary itself, the pulpit, and, of course, the altar

are all expressions of reality to me. Symbols are probably more important to us children than they are to you adults.

Symbols help me—especially when I can participate, like we do during Communion. I really want to pray at the altar, but I need to know from you that it is all right. So when you invite people to come to the altar to pray, remember to remind us children that we are welcome to bring our needs there as well.

When we have Communion, it would help if the whole church understood that children are welcome at the Lord's table too.

Some people insist I would get more out of a "children's church" service. In some ways, that is true. Of course, what many of them are really saying is that they would enjoy worship more if we children weren't there. I know that harmony in the church often requires some compromise. I do enjoy children's church but just between you and me, I get more out of "adult" church than most of the adults think I do. Anyway, who says that the value of worship is what we "get out" of it. Just being there, observing, experiencing, and participating with the whole "family" in worship is something that can't be measured. So, even with a good children's church program, I hope you will give me frequent opportunities to worship with the whole church family.

You see, at this point in my life, I don't fully understand myself apart from my family. Likewise, I can only understand who I am in the church in relationship to those with whom I worship.

Seeing you at church each Sunday gives me a wonderful sense of security. Before the worship service begins, I feel a sense of anticipation. When I see you take your place at the front, I feel a sense of knowing "everything's going to be all right."

If the time comes for you to move to another assignment, please don't just disappear. I will need your special help to work through the crisis of separation. You may not know it, but I think you're going to miss me too. So let's agree that we'll at least take some time to talk about our feelings and to pray that God will help us both during our time of transition.

There is another way you can help me or, perhaps I should say, a way we could help each other. We could be friends—you and me. I hear people saying that a visitor coming to church is not looking for a friendly church but for a friend. That is true for children too. When I get a little older, my age-group peers will be my most important friends but, at this age, the acceptance of adults is far more important than the acceptance by my peers. That is one of the reasons it is important for me to know that you are my friend. When you ask me about my birthday party or my first day at school, you are helping me understand what it means to have Jesus as a friend. Sometimes, you must need a friend too. Could I be your friend?

I think we could help each other. Every part of the body needs every other part. That is what 1 Corinthians 12 is about, isn't it? We need each other. I need you, as I've been saying all along. You need me. You really do!

To me, it seems quite clear that even Jesus needed the friendship of children. I have a feeling that when He rebuked the apostles for sending the children away, His concern was not only for the children's needs. They were meeting needs in Jesus' own life that no one else could meet, not even His disciples. Just like you, Jesus must have become weary of "adult" skepticism and doubt. The children were a breath of fresh air. Their acceptance of Him, their love, their joy, their honesty gave Him a new perspective through which to view the world.

Most of us children are good at playing. It's what we do best. Play is the very thing most pastors are poor at. I think you would be a better pastor if you played more. Your example would give the other adults in the church a model so they could "loosen up" a bit too.

I have an idea. Do you want to try it? Next Sunday, announce in church a special day for the pastor and the children. We'll take off somewhere, just us, and spend the day in play. It will do you a world of good, and it will give me a chance to be with you. We'll both be better for it.

That is, if I can get out from under this pew!

# Brainstorming

by Bob Dipert

Coastal District Superintendent, Papua New Guinea

**M**aking decisions in a church board meeting can be difficult and often nonproductive. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is basically a refinement of brainstorming and can be very helpful.

You may say, "What's so good about that?" It is no big deal if time wasted in committees and boards is not important. It's no big deal if you don't mind when the discussion is dominated by one aggressive, vocal person and the shy person can't get a word in edgewise. Or, it's no big deal if it's all right when a meeting fails to effectively address the issue under consideration or is sidetracked by unimportant or irrelevant topics. For example: You try to set priorities for the next year's building program. Should we build the Sunday School annex, expand the sanctuary, or pave the parking lot? Then someone gets you sidetracked on the color of the hall carpet! NGT is no big deal if you prefer not to have people with good ideas contribute to the discussion due to the threat of negative reactions.

If you have problems in dealing with some of the above situations, welcome to the "real world" of church management. But take heart; maybe NGT can help.

NGT was first introduced to me by a layman in a church planting situation in Canada. After a year and a half, the church had just gotten organized and a new church board had been elected. The time of the "benevolent dictator" was over. We were planning a church board retreat at which we would attempt, with the Lord's help, to develop a written purpose for our new church, hammer out some goals

and objectives for the year, and develop a long-range plan for the future.

Don Goings, in management with the Alberta Provincial Government in finance, shared with me an article from *Administrative Management* written by Blair Steveson and Stephen Franklin. I read the article, discussed it with Don, and decided to give it a try at the church board retreat.

We were sitting around the spacious room at the retreat center, a circle consisting of church board members and their spouses. At first no one spoke. Instead, each individual was writing ideas on a pad of paper. For 15 or 20 minutes they were writing ideas on what each person thought would be a good mission statement for our church. A very structured sharing of ideas took place. Each member in a round-robin fashion shared one idea from his or her list. A recorder listed this on a flip chart so all could see. There was still no discussion—only the recording of privately generated ideas. The round-robin listing continued until each member indicated he or she had no further ideas to add. The result of this process provided a list of ideas created by this structured process. After the listing process there was a spontaneous discussion. Then we all voted privately on what we thought were the top five priorities on the list. The group decision became the pooled outcome of individual votes.

Then we went through the same process in setting our goals for the year. Following that, we again used the NGT process for setting our objectives for the year.

Here are some of the positive factors involved in using NGT:

**1. It allows, even forces, equal participation.** Even the shyest member of the group can participate without fear of being "out-shouted."

**2. The quantity and quality of ideas increases.**

**3. The "group process" becomes more efficient and more effective.**

**4. Since individual voting at the end of the NGT process is private, the individual is protected from group pressure.** No more being squeezed into another's mold!

**5. The round-robin polling of ideas disassociates ideas from individuals.** Even in the church, one member may disagree with another as a result of personal feelings toward a participant, not because the idea lacks quality. With NGT most people will forget who shared an idea after the second or third time around the circle.

### HOW TO SET UP AN NGT SESSION

**1. All pre-session arrangements should be made:** room reserved, paper, pencils, refreshments, agenda, etc. It's a good idea that the room be private, free from distractions. A large chalkboard, white board, or flip chart should be available with chalk, markers, erasers, and 3" x 5" cards for voting.

**2. While the number of people varies, I have found 10 persons is a good number to work NGT successfully.**

**3. In the NGT conference, each session should be at least 90 minutes long.** Two hours causes fatigue. Less than an hour rushes the group.

4. As the NGT session starts, the group leader should explain how NGT works. He or she should then hand each member a paper with the question under consideration printed at the top (i.e., "List the goals you think our church should try to achieve this year with the Lord's help." Each group member then writes his or her responses. Allow 10 to 15 minutes.

5. The leader begins the round-robin polling of the group for each individual's response to the question. Beginning at a specific point, the leader will ask each group member for one idea/response. As the idea is read, the group leader or secretary records the idea on the chalkboard, white board, or flip chart. No discussion is allowed at this time. The leader continues going around the group as many times as necessary until no one has any more ideas to share. Allow at least 20 minutes for this activity.

6. The group then discusses the ideas, beginning with the first down to the last. Some responses will be combined with another because of similarity, or may be reworded or enlarged to make clear, but never deleted. Allow at least 15 to 20 minutes for this period of discussion.

7. After discussion, the group leader distributes 3" x 5" cards to all members. Each person is then asked to identify the five most important ideas/responses and to list them on his or her card. Each one is asked to select the most important idea and assign it a weight of "5." Ask each to select the least important idea from the list and give it a weight of "1." Select the second most important idea and give it a weight of "4," etc., until all five of the ideas have been assigned a number, 1 to 5.

8. The cards are collected and weights are tabulated on the master idea/response list. With this list of ideas, you have a basis for setting a priority of those ideas.

In summary, NGT provides opportunity for equal participation, depersonalizes the discussion of ideas, provides a sense of accomplishment, and is an efficient and effective use of human resources to accomplish Kingdom business.

# Preacher's Exchange

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*Preaching the New Common Lectionary, Year A, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*

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All books edited by Fred B. Craddock and published by Abingdon. These have recently gone out of print.

## CONTACT:

Larry Snyder, 19150 Helena Ave., Port Charlotte, FL 33948

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# Harnessing Your Thorn in the Flesh

by Esther M. Bailey

Free-lance writer, Phoenix

If God had removed the apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh," ministers would have missed out on a good sermon illustration. What preacher hasn't comforted the flock with the scripture, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9, KJV).

A minister or leader can also allow a personal thorn in the flesh to increase his effectiveness of ministry. Paul's experience comes under our Christian heritage, but a contemporary person can provide living proof that "[God's] strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, KJV).

Sometimes a physical impairment helps followers identify with their leader. That happened in dramatic fashion for a preacher I'll call Norman.\*

For several years Norman believed that God was calling him to work with the trainable, mentally handicapped. He envisioned a large ranch on which he and his wife would live and supervise the care and education of adults destined to non-productive lives without help. Just when his dream neared fulfillment, an accident resulted in the loss of both of his hands.

While asking himself and God "Why?" a revelation came to Norman. I'll be better able to understand those I serve, he thought, and they will relate to me because now I am one of them. Working with his learners as an equal, Norman inspired them to mental, social, and spiritual achievements far surpassing his highest expectations. He turned a liability into an answer.

In a very different way, Carl used a speech impediment to good advantage. As minister of evangelism and



outreach, Carl was expected to equip laypeople to witness for Christ. Standing before a large crowd, he said, "When someone starts talking about evangelism, I get scared. My heart beats fast, my palms sweat, and I begin to stutter." He then followed up with an unintentional display of speech peppered with repetitious sound.

"I do stutter," he said, "so if you know what I'm trying to say, just say it." That put the congregation at ease. If Carl wasn't embarrassed, no one else need be either. As rapport built between Carl and his audience, he gained confidence that minimized his problem.

Instead of giving a lecture on evan-

gelism, Carl related several personal experiences. One time a lady called the church office seeking spiritual help when no one but Carl was in. He suggested that she come into the office, but she indicated that her need was too urgent to wait.

"I-I-I don't t-t-t-talk too well on the ph-ph-phone," he explained.

"I'll be right over," she said.

By the time Carl concluded his message, church members had gained a down-to-earth concept of witnessing. A polished performance no longer seemed necessary. Many individuals went home with a zeal to put their God-given skills to work for the Lord.

Even a less than ideal background can be used in a positive manner. As a church leader, Scott felt inferior to others. "I wish I had grown up under Bible teachings," he sometimes said. "I can't even speak the language pertaining to spiritual matters."

Certainly early Christian training is most desirable, but Scott's past gave him an edge on ministry not shared by all. He better understood the skeptic. Because his own faith had been won after many a battle with doubt, Scott knew what went on in the mind of one who needed proof in order to believe. He recognized the kinds of illustrations that might influence an agnostic.

Information that strengthened his own belief was worth passing on. He liked scientific confirmation of Bible truths. Mysteries of nature often spoke to him about the reality of God. Why should it be harder to believe in God than to believe in the uncanny ability of animals to perform incredible feats? He was always on the lookout for logical arguments.



\*Names and certain details have been changed.


Although everyone suffers from some sort of hindering factor, not all maladies are apparent to others. Ministers who seem to have it all together can still find ways to expose their own vulnerability in order to downplay self and elevate God. A pastor named Marvin has mastered the art of portraying himself as human.

For instance, he preached a sermon about discouragement based on the story of Elijah. "I don't know about you," he said, "but when I get discouraged, if someone says something the least bit critical, it just blows me away. I want to go sit under a juniper tree and say, 'Take me, Lord. I can't handle it.'"

Anyone listening to that kind of preaching will likely respond: "The pastor knows where I'm coming from because he's been there. If God can take him through discouragement, He can help me too." The pastor who leads by example is more likely to meet with success than the one who drives by force.

An experience of personal tragedy can serve as a prep school for ministers. Credentials for dealing with another's pain earned through suffering may outweigh a college degree in psychology.

Many parents of children who went astray have received comfort from the counsel of a pastor named Darryl. Darryl and his wife raised two fine children, but Tom rebelled all the way. On drugs and in trouble with the law, Tom brought shame on his parents. If it had not been for the similar plight of another couple in the congregation, Darryl might have labeled himself a failure and given up the ministry. Together the two couples prayed together, cried together, and kept hope alive. Eventually, Darryl became a specialist in helping parents cope with emotions that come from watching a child take the path of the prodigal son.

Do any of these illustrations strike a personal chord? When you consider all the good that God can bring out of affliction, you may want to revise your prayer life. Instead of asking God to remove your thorn in the flesh, you may be led to pray: "Lord, please allow the Holy Spirit to demonstrate divine power through my weakness." God will surely answer that prayer. 

# Do You Know This Picture?



Do you know this picture? A group of scholars is studying the role this image and others by the artist Warner Sallman (including *Christ at Heart's Door*, *The 23rd Psalm*, and *Christ in Gethsemane*) have played in the lives of Christians. Do Sallman's pictures hang in your home, school, or church? What has the imagery meant for your devotion, worship, prayer, family, or friends?

Please send any response to David Morgan, Campus Box 55, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383. Thank you.

# Thank God for the Shadows

by Geraldine Nicholas

*Pastor's wife, Sandpoint, Idaho*

**F**or several years my husband pastored a church on Canada's west coast. Our home had a large backyard with a variety of fruit trees and berry bushes. As the years passed, we learned how to look after those trees and bushes to increase their productivity. Of course, along with our best efforts, God had to provide the right weather conditions, which included plenty of sunshine.

I've discovered along my Christian journey that spiritual growth is not conditioned on "sunshine" as were our fruit trees. The life of a pastor's wife has many high points. But, because of the energy and emotional output that is required to be "on top" of the many challenges and demands, low points are inevitable. There are bound to be times of disappointment, sickness, and loss over which we have little or no control that leave us as numb and shaken as anyone else. In tracing the points of greatest growth, it is the shadowy valleys of life where my most significant growth has occurred. At those functions I have gained spiritual insights and learned many valuable lessons.

Becoming aware of this pattern has given me some understanding about why spiritual growth requires "shadows."

First, in the shadows of life we have to relinquish our right to see and understand. The fact is that shadows do not allow us the privilege of seeing clearly. Our vision becomes blurred. We ask God, "Why did this happen? Why the pain? Why do those who have treated us unfairly continue to prosper?" But the "whys" often remain unanswered as we are forced to contemplate God's permissive will and purpose in it all. Job found no ex-

planation when God seemed to abandon him. Yet he chose to walk by faith rather than sight and understanding, declaring, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15, KJV). At that point, the battle was no longer his. He had a powerful deliverer—God himself. So do we!

Second, in the shadows we find quietness for a while. Sometimes we need to retreat from the hustle and noise of life to gain perspective—time to "be still" and contemplate God's presence in a fresh and new way. I recall one spring noticing particularly the beauty of the tulips and daffodils as they started blooming. It occurred to me that those flowers did not parade their beauty only for rich or powerful people, but their loveliness was displayed for princes and paupers to enjoy equally. They expected nothing in return, content to be their best in their season according to God's plan. This must certainly be the essence of "true beauty" in God's view.

Third, in the shadow places we yield control of our lives. Often we are helpless to do otherwise because the self-sufficient quality of our existence has vanished. This is particularly difficult for efficient, achievement-oriented, independent persons. Losing control usually involves losses



of some kind—perhaps a loved one, a job, a reputation, or maybe one's health. Lying in a hospital bed attached to tubes is a pretty vulnerable state. Acknowledging that the situation is beyond control and heaping the whole mess at the feet of Jesus allows Him the opportunity to help us grow strong spiritually in spite of our apparent weakness. What an opportunity to discover for ourselves that His grace is indeed sufficient, for our "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, KJV).

Fourth, in the shadow places we shed our pride. Surely pride is one of humankind's most destructive emotions. The Scripture is threaded with abundant examples of how pride and jealousy destroyed good people. Lucifer was cast out of heaven because of it. An enlarged ego can cause us to miss heaven as our will and wishes replace God's design for our life. Pride evaporates in life's shadow places. We are forced to experience humility whether or not we want to. In becoming humble, our usefulness to God appreciates because we take on His likeness. We learn how mis-

placed our pride is since, in reality, all we are or ever hope to be depends on God. Our pride rests in Him and the power He produces in us.

Fifth, in the shadow places we learn what Jesus meant when He said, "Judge not . . ." (Matt. 7:1, KJV). How vividly we see that the world's definition of success or failure is not a true measure of one's worth in God's sight. Experiencing God's grace and love toward us in the shadows encourages us to see the value of unconditionally accepting others. We develop a deeper capacity for compassion and love.

Sixth, the shadow places teach us that, if we are to really know how to love as God loves, we must experience pain. The two are intertwined. Jesus gave us a dramatic example at Calvary. A mother who has experienced the excruciating pain of childbirth soon forgets it once her infant cuddles in her arms. Love supersedes pain. It is soon forgotten.

A pastor's wife had recently become a widow. After her husband was gone, she started asking God questions as if He were a physical presence in the same room with her. She vented intermittent grief, anger, and confusion openly. One morning, in the midst of her monologue, she suddenly became aware of His presence permeating the room. To her, it seemed He was confirming His fidelity. He did care! She was not alone in her time of weakness. Somehow the "whys" didn't seem as important anymore. Her bitterness evaporated in the warmth of His love. That precious experience continued to give her strength during the dark days of adjustment and decision relating to the future. She said, "It gave me a tremendous sense of security to know that my relationship with God was permanent and could not be snatched away as death had snatched my husband."

That seems to be how it is in the shadows of life. God shows us more of himself. He reveals truths that had not occurred to us before. He teaches us the things that are *really* important—principles of eternal value. There emerges discernment and blessings that we could never have imagined. In the absence of "sunshine," God, in His unique and miraculous way, produces spiritual growth.

Thank God for the shadows! ✠

# Are Your People Fed Up?

by Larry T. Allen

Pastor, Catlettsburg, Ky.

I chuckle to myself when I think back to an embarrassing incident during a revival week in my first pastorate. Pam and I were taking our evangelist and his wife to dinner before one of the evening services. As we approached the restaurant, I made a statement that caused quite a stir. Inadvertently I said, "This is a good place to eat, but the food isn't so good."

Not only did I frighten our evangelistic team, but my wife wondered what I meant by that puzzling statement.

I meant to suggest that the food served did not match the atmosphere of that restaurant. It had a brand new building, waitresses were cordial, the service was

prompt, the location was excellent, and the lovely decor added to the restaurant's atmosphere.

While the food wasn't poor, it wasn't outstanding either. Perhaps you can understand when I said, "It's a good place to eat, but the food isn't so good."

I wonder if some church-

es might be like that restaurant: good places to visit, but the meals are not so good. Years ago I visited the Sunday services in a church that was having some great days. Attendance was up. Morale was high. Positive things were taking place. During both morning and evening services people came to the altar without any preaching. I was glad for the victories but walked away feeling a certain emptiness. I believe the empty feeling came because the Word of God had not been preached nor read.

Great emphasis should be placed upon the Word of God in our public services of worship.

May it never be said of our holiness churches that "they are good places to eat, but the food isn't so good." ✠



# How Does a Pastor Handle Failure?

by C. Neil Strait

District superintendent, Michigan District, Grand Rapids, Mich.

**T**he greatest efforts, the most dedicated attempts sometimes wind up as failure. Alex MacKenzie wrote a book, *Time for Success*, in which he stated that "success is doing your best." Too few will settle for this. The Christian, on occasion, must face failure with the assurance that one has done his best. Granted, it is small comfort when one faces all the questions and fears related to failure. But in Christian service, the only failure is failure to do the will of God. That is a truth all of us need to hear, ever and again, and to rehearse before our next suspicions of another's failure.

One phrase I use often in talking with pastors and their mates who are facing rejection, going through a crisis, or experiencing failure: no church, or no person, is the last—or first—word of their ministry. A layperson's cutting words are not the first or last word on any ministry. If a pastor or anyone can pillow his head at night knowing he has given God and the church his best, then God's word is "Well done!" That is an authentic and encouraging word for what appears to be failure. At the deep moment of failure we need to hear God's word of encouragement before we bring closure to the experience.

Sometimes the success syndrome becomes so demanding and bigger than life. It towers over failure like a giant, speaking all the ugly thoughts that shatter and destroy one's self-image. Servanthood calls us to hear a different drumbeat and to present our failure to God. Our failure, given to God, can be raw material for God to chart another path and open another door. All He needs is our relinquishment of the failure and our willingness to go forward

in obedience to His next chapter for life. Denis Haack has reminded us that "the Lord has promised to return soon. Until then, we are to be faithful. That means faithfulness with wealth, fame, power, self-fulfillment, and appearance—or without them."<sup>1</sup>

The key thought that Haack expresses is "or without them." Success is easy to handle. When things are going well, faithfulness seems easy to identify and implement. But failure brings a different environment. Failure brings guilt, self-doubts, and resentment. Failure brings all those things that make us—we think—unworthy of God's care and help. We need to know that we are no less the person in failure than we were in success. Unless, of course, sin and disobedience cause the failure. While we are no less the person, we are a fractured being because of sin.

The pastor, then, must do the hard task of stewardship when failure comes. One must pick up the pieces, give them to God, and see what God's next marching orders are for life. We need to know that failure is not sinful nor does it keep us from God's grace and compassion.

Shelley Chapin's life was arrested early by cancer. Dreams and successes faded. Failure seemed the only appropriate word to summarize her journey. But Shelley fought back, us-

ing what life had dealt to her for the glory of God. She wrote toward the end of her ordeal:

I was to learn that all of life depends on grace. Each breath I take, every song I sing, every prayer I offer, and every plan I make—all grow out of grace. . . . Learning to see our lives as a gift, one day at a time, is an important part of living in this world.<sup>2</sup>

One way a pastor handles failure is to shift the focus from success to service. If what we had offered to God comes to failure, He is partner with us in the failure. He will not leave us there to drown in self-pity and remorse. He will not abandon us along the road of faithfulness.

What all of this does is bring fresh caution. It forces a fresh examination of our efforts, our disciplines, and our accountability. Not all failure is ours, nor is all our failure the fault of another. Somewhere there needs to be a place where we process all of it with God and ready ourselves for the journey onward.

Toward the end of his life, Albert Einstein removed from his wall the portraits of two scientists—Newton and Maxwell. He replaced them with portraits of Gandhi and Schweitzer. He explained that it was time to replace the image of success with the image of service.

The pastor keeps before him the image of service—service to Christ and His kingdom. The image of service places a proper view on success. But, more importantly, it gives interpretation and comfort to failure.



1. Denis Haack, *The Rest of Success* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 102-3.

2. Shelley Chapin, *Within the Shadow* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), 16.

## Hidden Treasures

by Carol L. Bruning

*Christian educator*

**T**he deacon's wife must have suspected my housekeeping endeavors lacked proper priority. As footsteps echoed through the empty parsonage, she turned away from the rest of the Search Committee. "You'd never believe this place when Preacher Thomas and his family moved out. His wife, bless her, was so busy caring for others. I don't think she ever managed to get her housework done. Why, we had to paint every room and it took us three full days to clean the oven!"

She didn't intend it as gossip. It wasn't mean-spirited or unkind. The message she offered was clear. Keep the parsonage clean.

Throughout our tenure in the parsonage and in the years since, I've followed her admonition in my own quirky style. It's not that we're total slobs. Housecleaning has never become a daily routine, much less a spiritual experience. Oh, we keep the laundry done. My husband, Frank, vacuums once a week with fervor and I can load a dishwasher with the best of them.

Once a month or so, I get the nesting instinct. I haul out the Pine-Sol and wash every surface with the zeal of a newly ordained missionary. The rest of the time, I'd rather call on a sick friend or write a card to a new widow than dig the popcorn kernels and pennies from the crevices of the sofa.

Unfortunately, they'll never hold me up as a shining example of great moments in housekeeping history. Instead, my basic philosophy is: "No place for anything and nothing in it's place."

It's downright demoralizing. A good friend, also a preacher's wife, has arranged, labeled, and card-catalogued their bookshelves and video library. Hunting for something at our house, on the other hand, is truly an adventure. You can never imagine what might fall from a shelf or spring

from under a bed. Every day reveals some long-forgotten and misplaced treasures.

The surface appearance of our house seems neat and orderly. Should a curious church member drop by to discuss the nursery volunteers schedule, she'd see a sparkling kitchen, replete with an immaculate stove. That is, as long as she doesn't see the charred crisps of a long forgotten, but enjoyed cherry pie, etched indelibly in the oven's bottom.

No, I don't suffer from a borderline personality disorder associated with maladapted preachers' wives. Hiding may explain but not excuse human inadequacies or failures. Adam and Eve did it in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). Moses hid after murdering the Egyptian (Exod. 2:12, 15). Sin and its guilt are not the only reasons for hiding. Even King Saul, when God chose him to rule the nation of Israel, responded to the honor by hiding (1 Sam. 10:22). Hiding is a normal, human response.

I may be able to explain why we do it, but I know we cannot camouflage the reality of our life-style from the Lord. I cannot conceal my petty resentments and snide remarks and imagine I'm a perfect Christian any more than I can shut the hall closet and pretend that pile of un-hung-up jackets doesn't exist. As our omniscient Father, God knows all about my sins and the clumsy attempts to cloak the shame (Ps. 69:5). I have to own up to those dust bunnies under

the furniture in my life and do some spiritual mopping up.

Some days, that commercial slogan, "Calgon, take me away!" can be so inviting. When the going gets too tough, God allows us to hide. He even provides an escape route for faithful Christians (1 Cor. 10:13). Because we are so special (Ps. 17:8), He offers us a chance to regroup in his secret pavilion (27:5). We can retreat, as even Jesus did (John 8:59) from the strife of everyday life. When we hide in the sheltered sanctuary of His personal chambers, He even allows us to close the doors (Ps. 31:20).

"Honey, where'd you put it?" is the bane of my existence. Most of my family members have stopped asking such foolish questions. Instead, they wander aimlessly through the house. With a bewildered expression, they look under cushions and through Mount Everest-sized piles of paper. Eventually, they uncover whatever it was they were looking for in the first place. Maybe they find something even better.

My mother, my efficient, immaculate alter ego, always told me, "Nothing is ever lost, only misplaced." As Christians, this old saying is especially relevant. We have the opportunity to hide in the Word. When we search for the lost keys, combs, and glasses of our spiritual life, we can turn up those spiritual treasures just when we need them the most. When we read and meditate upon His words, we find answers that illuminate our paths (Ps. 119:105).

I doubt I will ever totally reform my hide-and-forget style of living. I'm pretty comfortable after 20 years of marriage in this helter-skelter, spontaneous sort of existence. I can usually rationalize my behavior. I tell myself, "I'm like Mary. I'd rather be at Jesus' feet." That works most of the time. At least it did until the president of the Dorcas Circle came last week and asked to hang her coat in the hall closet.





# I Will Serve Thee

by Mary Egidio

*Pastor's wife, Greenville, Pa.*



I forgot to tell you. This is the weekend the pastor's family is in charge of cleaning the church," announced my pastor-husband one Saturday afternoon.

"Oh great, like I have nothing else to do," I thought to myself as I fed our five-month-old daughter.

"I need you to run the sweeper in the sanctuary while I mow the lawn," he called back over his shoulder as he left the parsonage.

"So this is the glamorous life of a pastor's wife," I said into Elizabeth's brown eyes as she held her bottle.

We had come to this church just two months ago, leaving seminary for the excitement of our first assignment. There were many changes in our life-style—moving to a new town, with a new baby, and a new role as

threw a load of diapers in the washer and got the stroller from the hall closet.

"Come on, sweetie," I said, as I picked her up, "let's go for a ride."

I pushed the stroller through the back door of the church just in time to shoot a dark look at my husband as he roared past with the mower.

When I entered the sanctuary, I stopped short. The blast of oppressive air that hit me almost knocked me back. Since the church could only afford to run the air conditioner on Sunday, the hot summer sun had made this room into a bake-oven. I was tempted to turn around and tell my husband that he could run the sweeper himself. But I decided against it.

My foul mood continued as I

pastor's wife. At times, it was overwhelming.

While my husband studied at seminary, I had been the main breadwinner with a challenging job. Now I felt like my biggest challenge was keeping diapers washed and formula made.

After Elizabeth finished her bottle, I put her in her playpen while I

plugged the sweeper in the back of the sanctuary and began making my way down one side toward the front. I grumbled to myself about how this task was taking away from the precious time I could spend with my daughter. Besides, wasn't the pastor's wife supposed to devote her time to more lofty things like organizing ladies fellowships and mission conferences?

My sweeping job led me to the front of the sanctuary, around the altar rail. As I ran the vacuum over the carpet, I suddenly became conscious that this was the place where the people of our church gathered to pray. Sometimes they came to pray for personal needs, sometimes for healing, sometimes to confess their sins and seek salvation. It was a place of miracles, of changed lives. As I swept, I could almost see the people kneeling there. I felt as if I had to be careful to avoid hitting their legs with the sweeper.

As I turned to clean the other side of the sanctuary, I could picture the people who normally sat in those pews. I thought of John and Carol who sat in the front row. I began to pray for them as they struggled raising their teenagers. I saw Pat and Paul and was thankful for the stability their years of faithfulness gave to the church. I prayed that Paul's lay-off from work would end soon. Then there was Harold and Elenor in the third row. How devoted Harold had been through all of Elenor's health problems. I lifted both of them in prayer.

Just then I realized that my mood had changed while sweeping this part of the sanctuary. I hadn't even noticed it at first, but I actually found myself humming as I worked. What had caused the change in my attitude? Was there some sort of spiritual power in that area around the altar that had affected me? I can't say. But the song I found myself humming provided a clue. It was, "I will serve Thee, because I love Thee."

# A Child's Gift to God

by Kenneth Tanner

Free-lance writer, Afton, Mo.

**N**ext week we start tearing down the old church building. None of us really knows what we will feel as we demolish the building that has been like an old friend for the past 76 years.

For three generations the building has served our town. It saw not only the baptisms and weddings of my generation but also those of our parents and grandparents. It is the place where we were taught the values that would enable us to lead Christian lives. Most important, it was the place where we came to know and love Jesus Christ.

Yes, tears of sadness will be shed on that day as we remember the Bible school when we were children, the thousands of Sunday services, and the funerals of our departed loved ones. The basement where we held our Wednesday night Boy Scout meetings will be filled in. The brass bell will be lowered from the roof. Then the building will be torn down and asphalt will be spread over the entire area so it can be used as a parking lot.

But today there were no tears of sadness, only tears of joy, because this afternoon we dedicated our newly completed, all-brick church building. We removed a one-square-foot section of concrete from the foundation of the old building, where 76 years ago a young girl of 13 named Sarah inserted her finger into the freshly laid concrete and drew a cross.

In a way, that one-foot section of concrete is like a book containing the genealogy of three generations—a silent record of baptisms, weddings, and funerals. It is a reminder of the past.

Using a jackhammer and crow bars, we removed the section containing the cross and installed it in the foundation of our new church building. We did it, not as a tribute to the young girl, Sarah, but rather as a way of taking along to the new building all that had taken place during the past 76 years.

A hush fell over the congregation as the section of the old concrete was carried across the lawn. While it was



being inserted into the foundation of the new building, a two-inch triangular piece of one corner broke off. The missing area was hastily filled in using a bag of ready-mixed concrete.

**Sarah inserted  
her finger into  
the freshly laid  
concrete and  
drew a cross.**

Then attention was diverted to the middle of the lawn where the pastor

was about to give the dedication speech. The pastor stretched his neck and looked around, saying, "Where is Sister Sarah? She should be here, since she helped to dedicate the old church."

"She's over there by the new cornerstone," a voice in the crowd shouted.

Stooped over the newly installed section of concrete was old Sarah, with a young girl next to her. Since Sarah is rather hard of hearing, some of us went over to get her so she wouldn't miss the dedication ceremony. We arrived just in time to see the young girl draw a cross in the two-inch triangular section that had been filled in.

Our new church building had just been dedicated to God by a child, the same way the old church building had been dedicated 76 years ago. ✠



## E. Stanley Jones— In the Lineup of Those Whose Hearts Were “Strangely Warmed”

by J. Ray Shadowens

Free-lance writer, Spring, Tex.

Who, in all of Christian tradition, would title his spiritual autobiography, not *A Struggle of Ascents*, but rather *A Song of Ascents* (Pss. 120—134)? Who, after authoring religious books selling millions of copies, would gather two profound truths of his faith in a volume titled *The Unshakeable Kingdom and The Unchanging Person*? Who else, having lived in nine decades, would summon enough energy and inspiration to produce his final literary work: *The Divine Yes*? The answer is, of course, one of Christianity's most influential 20th-century representatives, E. Stanley Jones!

The year 1994 marks the 110th anniversary of evangelist-missionary-Christian ambassador, “Brother Stanley’s” birth. The whole of Methodism, virtually all of Wesleyanism, and a vast segment of Christendom will want to pause in gratitude for the life and works of this spiritual giant. He was born on January 3, 1884, and died on January 25, 1973. It seems doubtful that anyone could overestimate his singularly unique contribution to a global understanding of the Christian faith.

The pivotal point in the life of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, came on May 24, 1738, at Aldersgate Street in London. For “Brother Stanley,” it came in a revival in the Baltimore Memorial (Methodist) Church as an adolescent. He acknowledges that he was soon confronted with the awareness that, as glorious as his conversion was, God had something more for him. In his quest for God’s fullness, he was directed to the devotional classic *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, by Hannah Whitall Smith. Before he had concluded read-

ing that volume, the Holy Spirit impressed upon him to lay aside the book and open his heart to the Divine Presence. He referred to this second spiritual encounter as the “conversion of the subconscious.”

In his own characteristic style, and with Acts 2:1-4 as a backdrop, Dr. Jones writes of his own personal Pentecost:

Now we are one—one in the Holy Spirit. But where is the “evidence”? Tongues are the “evidence,” it is objected. We would have laughed, as I laugh now. “Evidence”? The Holy Spirit Himself was the evidence by His very presence and power in each and all. He was self-verifying. To ask for evidence beyond Himself would be to ask for the marginal to verify the central.<sup>1</sup>

Following his graduation from Asbury College, and with a definite call to missionary service, he left New York on October 13, 1907. He arrived in Bombay on November 13. Bishop James Mathews, his son-in-law, reports: “When first he went to India in 1907, he said that one word stood for India: paralysis! When he came toward the end of his years, he said the word was possibility.”<sup>2</sup> That expression alone would have assured him of the camaraderie of Norman Vincent Peal and Robert Schuler.

Two episodes out of the spiritual

venture of “Brother Stanley” will serve to show the all-consuming passion of his religious life: (1) Christocentric: “A Hindu said to me in India; ‘Jesus has got into your blood; hasn’t He?’ ‘Yes, and He has raised my temperature.’” (2) Kingdom-centered: “One of the best compliments I’ve ever had came from a little girl who asked her mother: ‘Mother, how old is Stanley Jones?’ And when told that I was eighty, she said, ‘How can that be, he acts as though he is just beginning.’ I am just beginning, because I belong to the ageless kingdom.”<sup>3</sup>

As far as is known, Dr. Jones never laid claim to being a formal theologian. Yet, he possessed a rare quality of being able to make Christian doctrine practical and relevant.

It seems that he disdained theological labels: conservative, moderate, or liberal. He wrote: “A conservative journal discussing the question, ‘Is Stanley Jones a Modernist?’ came to the conclusion that he was a fundamental soul and a modern mind. Perhaps that describes it!”<sup>4</sup> One need not agree with every presupposition to profit immensely from the great body of enduring, scripturally sound truths that filled pages of almost 30 volumes from his pen. Even in his final book, completed only months before his death, his commitment to “the principle of a federal union” of participating denominations is underscored. Not too many evangelical churches would like to become incorporated into such a merger. His complete allegiance to the “unshakeable kingdom” seems to provide the basis for his view of a “federal union.” What Dr. Jones envisions as the Christian Church’s social mandate may not find



sympathetic ears among conservative ecclesiastical leaders.

"Brother Stanley's" devotional book, *Victorious Living*, was the first book by this well-known author that this writer ever read. Then he was hooked. Bishop James Mathews and his wife, Eunice, daughter of Dr. Jones, have done the admirers of this spiritual stalwart an incalculable service. In a volume titled *Selections from E. Stanley Jones* they have put together under 28 topics, excerpts that are characteristically Jonesian. It is not at all surprising that the introductory theme is "Jesus Christ," followed by "The Kingdom of God" and "The Holy Spirit." The final four pages are devoted to "Aphorisms." These two close intimates of Dr. Jones elected not to include considerations from volumes they regarded as wholly devotional in nature. One can profit immensely by *studying* each significant treatment of these fundamental doctrines. This work is treasured by this writer as few others are in his limited library.

*The Divine Yes*, edited in its final form by this duo, was written following "Brother Stanley's" stroke and a relatively short time before his death. For a man of his age, he had apparently enjoyed above average health for four score years. He felt compelled to attempt to answer some of life's most perplexing questions. He titled his approach "Questions Which Demand an Affirmative Answer—Is There a God? Does God Reveal Himself? Is There a Corporate Dimension of Revelation? Is There an Answer to Suffering?" and, finally, "A Diary of the Victory in Affliction." Through these most-probing questions, he reflects an unequivocal commitment to *The Divine Yes*.

Interestingly enough, Gateway films—Vision Video has released a videotape titled *Selected Messages by E. Stanley Jones*. This is not an attempt by some present actor to dramatize the work of this great man. "Fortunately, films have been found of some of his best messages delivered in the 1960s. He speaks on *Ministry, The Self, Christianity and the World Situation*, and *Jesus is Lord*" (from the video cover). On this 45-minute production, he speaks of two of the evangelistic innovations introduced by Dr. Jones: The Roundtable

and the Ashram. The first of these brought together professionals and academics of differing ideologies and religious philosophies. Without debate or petty arguments, they were asked simply: "Does your religion or ideology bring personal satisfaction?" (writer's paraphrase). This world-renowned evangelist declares that, in virtually every instance, the Christians were alone in answering affirmatively.

The Ashrams were designed as retreats that brought together peoples from various world areas, in different countries, where brokenness and openness prevailed. Many participants left these gatherings spiritually renewed persons.

Bishop Mathews offers this provocative "assessment of his achievements":

He found the Christian movement largely among the outcasts and left it at the center of India's life, a challenge and an issue to the intellectuals and leaders.

He found the Christian movement scattering its energies about marginal issues of doctrine and denominations and left it centered on Jesus Christ as the one and central issue.

He found the Christian movement largely alien and Western and left it more naturalized through the Ashram movement.

He found the Ashram movement Indian and localized and left it internationalized and universalized.

He found evangelism in America on the edge of the life of the churches, largely in marginal groups, and not too respectable and in good odor; and he left it a central issue in the life of all churches and made it respectable and necessary.

He found evangelism largely emotional and left it appealing to the total person—mind, spirit, and body.

He found Christianity presented as alien to human nature and left it as supernaturally natural and sin as unnatural and alien.

He found the Kingdom of God largely inward and mystical, or futuristic in heaven, and put it into life as the one issue now, supplanting all the alternatives of communism, fascism, and what-not. The

Kingdom of God on earth now is the issue.

He found the nonviolent noncooperation movement Indian and Gandhian and left it as a method of finding freedom for negroes in America.

He found church union alternating between church councils and merger and put in between them federal union as a practical plan for union now.<sup>5</sup>

No appraisal of the life and ministry of Asbury College's most famous alumnus would be complete that did not relate two especially poignant facts out of his final days on earth: What he envisioned for himself beyond the earthly pilgrimage,

I have often said half jokingly that when I get to heaven, I will ask for twenty-four hours to see my friends, and then I shall go up to Him and say, "Haven't you a world somewhere which has fallen people who need an evangelist like me? Please send me there." For I know no heaven beyond preaching the gospel to people. That is heaven to me. It has been, is, and ever shall be.<sup>6</sup>

He instructed concerning the disposition of his earthly tabernacle following his soul's departure:

It was his desire, often repeated and given to us in his own handwriting, that if he should die in India his remains be cremated. This done and a portion of his ashes has been interred in the Bishops' Lot of Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Baltimore ["... about 100 yards from where I got into the Kingdom of God"] [writer's insert]. The remainder of his ashes are buried in his beloved Sat Tal in the Himalayas at the very spot he had pointed out to us on Various occasions, a lovely knoll called Phyllis Mount.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, it was not this writer's privilege to know "Brother Stanley" personally, but my Christian life is richer because, in the providence of God, he, too, lived in the 20th century. †

1. E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 70.

2. E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 156.

3. E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and The Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 11.

4. *Ibid.*, 210.

5. Jones, *The Divine Yes*, 159, 160.

6. *Ibid.*, from the book jacket.

7. *Ibid.*, 151.

## Can Ministers Opt Out of Social Security?

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

### A Question Often Asked

"My adviser has recommended that, as a minister, I can elect out of Social Security and put my money into an annuity program, thereby securing a better retirement. Is this true? Is it legal? What forms might be involved?"

### A Law Often Misunderstood

The Tax Code does provide a means for *some* ministers in *some* denominations to exercise an option to terminate Social Security/Medicare coverage for their ministerial earnings. The proper form (IRS Form 4361) must be used, and it must be filed on the correct basis of religious belief. If approved by the IRS, only earnings from ministerial services are exempt from self-employment tax. Form 4361 specifically states, "Once the exemption is approved, you cannot revoke it."

Some are of the opinion that the form may be filed anytime. However, the current version of Form 4361 (revised June 1991 and not scheduled to expire until June 30, 1994) states that the form must be filed "by the date your tax return is due, including extensions, for the second tax year in which you had at least \$400 of net earnings from self-employment, any of which came from services performed as a minister." Some have misunderstood this provision to mean "two years after ordination." However, in some denominations a district-licensed minister may file taxes as a minister prior to ordination. It is at this same point that the two years must begin.

The individual filing the Form 4361 must certify, by signature, that specific statements are correct. The first statement is as follows:



I certify that I am conscientiously opposed to, or because of my religious principles I am opposed to, the acceptance (for services I perform as a minister . . . ) of any public insurance that makes payments in the event of death, disability, old age, or retirement; or that makes payments toward the cost of, or provides services for, medical care. (Public insurance includes insurance systems established by the Social Security Act).

Under the Tax Reform Act of 1986 and effective after December 31, 1986, any minister who applies for exemption from Social Security based on conscientious opposition is required to inform the ordaining, commissioning, or licensing body of his

denomination that he is conscientiously opposed to the receipt of "any public insurance that makes payments in the event of death, disability, old age, or retirement; or that makes payments toward the cost of, or provides services for, medical care, including the benefits of any insurance system established by the Social Security Act." The second statement deals with certifying that the applicant has informed the denomination.

The third statement certifies that the applicant has not filed Form 2031. (Before 1968, one had to sign Form 2031 to elect *into* Social Security. Now, *all* ministers are included automatically *unless* there is a basis for electing out.)

The fourth statement deals with the specific request for exemption and certifies an understanding as to which earnings the exemption would apply if granted.

According to the Form 4361 "General Instructions," before your application can be approved, the IRS must *again* certify that you are aware of the grounds for exemption and that you want the exemption on that basis.

When your completed Form 4361 is received, IRS will mail you a statement that describes the grounds for receiving an exemption under section 1402(e). You must certify that you have read the statement and seek exemption on the grounds listed on the statement. The certification must be made by signing a copy of the statement under penalties of perjury and mailing it to the IRS service center that issued it, not later than 90 days after the date the

statement was mailed to you. If it is not mailed by that time, your exemption will not be effective until the date the signed copy is received by the service center.

If your application is approved, a copy of Form 4361 will be returned to you marked "approved." Once the exemption is approved, you cannot revoke it.

These measures are to prevent persons from seeking exemption simply on economic grounds.

#### A "Catch" Often Overlooked

Key words in qualifying for exemption from Social Security coverage on ministerial earnings are "religious principles" and "conscientiously opposed to the acceptance of any public insurance." The tax regulations and court decisions are quite clear. Religious principles cannot be simply the personal conviction that perhaps Social Security will not be there when you retire, or that a better retirement can be purchased through an annuity. The belief must be an integral part of your religious system of beliefs—your theology.

Further, this religious principle must be one that would prevent you from ever asking for the benefits from such a plan based on your church salary. No basis exists for an objec-

tion to paying the taxes, or to the level of the taxes to be paid. It is as though you would be saying, "Even if I have to pay the taxes, I can never file for the benefits, since my theology will never allow me to accept them."

The Church of the Nazarene has one of the highest levels of participation in Social Security of any denomination of its size or larger. This has been true since the very earliest days of Social Security coverage for ministers. Most local Nazarene churches have a practice of reimbursing part, if not all, of the minister's Social Security/Medicare tax, as well as that of lay staff. By practice and polity, there appears to be no basis for an exemption for Nazarene clergy from Social Security/Medicare self-employment taxes.

#### If You Made a Mistake in a Past Election for Exemption

Some ministers who previously made an election for exemption have become aware that they made their decision based on erroneous information. As a result of their expressed desire to reenter the Social Security System, Congress made provision in the Tax Reform Act of 1986 for a brief "window of opportunity" to be opened to those persons to opt back

into Social Security without having to pay the back taxes (SECA). Of course, no Social Security/Medicare coverage was to be retroactive for the years one was exempt from SECA tax. (Only earnings on which SECA tax was paid is included when one's benefit is calculated.) The "window of opportunity" closed as of April 15, 1988.

The Pensions office of the Church of the Nazarene is not aware of any formal provision that now exists to allow ministers to revoke previous exemptions and "opt back into" Social Security. If there were such a formal provision, no doubt it would include paying the back taxes, interest, and penalties. Usually, amended tax returns can only be filed retroactively for three years. If you are a minister who has opted out of Social Security based on erroneous information and wish to now participate, it will no doubt require the services of professional legal and tax advisers to determine for your unique situation if there is any course of action that may accomplish that end.

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



PASTOR, I FIGURE WE SAVED A GOOD  
THREE BUCKS BY BUILDING IT OURSELVES.



## Picture Windows for Preaching



by Derl G. Keefer

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

### *Awe of God*

A young lady who was touring Europe entered a museum in Vienna. In the solitary splendor of a silent, sun-splashed room stood the piano of Beethoven. Without thinking, the girl sat down and began to peck out a tune. Suddenly one of the museum's guides hurried into the room. He informed the American girl that this was, in fact, the great master's piano. He told her that the famous concert pianist Paderewski had recently come to view that very piano.

"And what did Paderewski play?" the girl asked.

"Nothing," said the guide. "He felt unworthy to touch Beethoven's piano."

We know how to enjoy the Master, but we have forgotten how to tremble, how to be in awe of Him.<sup>1</sup>

### *Bible*

John MacArthur, Jr., quotes J. I. Packer concerning the Bible:

The Bible appears like a symphony orchestra with the Holy Ghost as its Toscanini; each instrumental has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as a great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole. . . . The point of each part becomes fully clear when seen in relation to all the rest.<sup>2</sup>

### *Experiential Faith*

James Lahman wrote that on a cold February morning in a Benedictine monastery in Vermont he heard a weather-beaten monk speak one of the most powerful statements on experiential faith he had ever heard. As

Lahman shivered in the cold, the ancient monk said, "The essence of what we know is only part of the essence of what is."

Lahman commented, "We live not so much by what we know, as by what we believe and by what we give ourselves to. If we are to be truly alive, we need more than what our minds explain or comprehend."<sup>3</sup>

### *Frustration*

Frustration for the Christian can be defined as "the extent to which my will does not equal God's will." Whenever we are not completely satisfied that the will of God is a sufficient plan for our lives, a sense of panic about the future lunges into our conscious thoughts. "I need a more predictable future, a more concrete plan. I cannot live with this much ambiguity about my life." Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt. 6:34). By His power, He holds all things together, including tomorrow.<sup>4</sup>

### *God's Love*

C. S. Lewis, in *The Screwtape Letters*, pictures Satan explaining to a group of demons what they are up against in trying to fight God's will for all of humanity. Satan states, "Remember, disgusting

as it may seem to you, God really loves those weak, filthy human vermin that crawl the earth. Hateful as it may seem to you, He really wants them happy. His master plan is to win from them the free, unforced recognition of His love, and the free unforced response to it." God desires to win our love, obedience, and allegiance.<sup>5</sup>

### *Home*

Douglas Freeman, a biographer of George Washington, described Washington's intense desire to be home for Christmas once he resigned from the Continental Army.

Home was the magnet that drew him, home the haven he sought, home the years-long dream that now was near fulfillment. Every delay was a vexation and every stop a denial. At last the cold, clear waters of the Potomac came in sight, then the ferry and after that the blustering passage, the last swift stage of the ride, the beloved trees, the yard, the doorway, Martha's embrace, and the shrill excited voices of Jack Custics' younger children—all this is a richer reward than the addresses of cities, the salutes of cannons, and the approving words of the President of Congress.<sup>6</sup>



1. Lee Richard, *Windows of Hope* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1992), 54.

2. John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 292.

3. James Richard Lahman, "What Can the Wise Men Teach Us?" *Pulpit Digest*, January/February (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 43.

4. Patrick Morley, *Walking With Christ in Details of Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 230.

5. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour Books, 1990), 45-46, 68-74.

6. Gary Bauer, *Our Journey Home* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 16.

# Stories Preachers Tell Each Other

## What's in a Name?

by Nancy Predaina

*Pastor's wife, Peoria, Ariz.*



Everyone likes the sound of his or her own name. I have one mammoth problem: I'm terrible at remembering names. For some people, an inability to remember names is not a high-priority problem. However, as a pastor's wife, I really think that it is helpful to know the names of my congregation. Needless to say, I agonize over this problem.

On the opening night of a revival, the evangelist's wife told me that she used word association to remember names of the congregation. She greeted people prior to the service so that she could call them all by name at the end of the service.

Impressed and curious, I decided to stand beside her to watch as she greeted each person. Actually, I was secretly hoping the ability to remember names might rub off on me.

The people began to arrive. She greeted each one. Among them was a young college student named William Dotson.

At the end of the service, I again stood beside her and was amazed as she called each individual by name. As William Dotson walked up to her, she smiled triumphantly and announced, "I remember *you*. You're William Honda!" So much for word association.

Another memorable event occurred about five weeks after my husband and I had arrived at a new pastorate. The church had its annual Christmas banquet at a local restaurant. A week prior to the banquet, we had received a letter from the district superintendent asking our church to do something special for an elderly pastor and wife on our district.

Among other things, we decided to send this couple an invitation to our Christmas banquet.

I studied the pastor's name and discovered that I had no idea how to pronounce it. Unfortunately, I couldn't find anyone in my church who knew how to pronounce the name. Being a relatively reasonable person, I decided to wait until the banquet and then ask the pastor how to pronounce his name correctly.

On the evening of the banquet, my husband and I arrived a few minutes late due to an emergency hospital call. As we rushed into the banquet room, the hostess hurried us to our seats at the center of the head table. As I sat down and tried to catch my breath, I smiled at the pleasant-looking elderly man seated next to me. I had never seen him before, so I assumed he must be the pastor we had invited. I introduced myself and added, "When we received the letter from the district, I couldn't decide how to pronounce your name. Could you tell me how?"

The gentleman looked at me with sympathetic blue eyes and enunciated carefully, "Of course. My name is Mil—ler."

For one heart-stopping moment I

stared at him. "Miller?" I weakly repeated.

He obviously decided that I was a bit feeble-minded and needed more help. So he spelled his name for me as if we were in a spelling bee.

"M-I-L-L-E-R. Miller."

I looked down the table to our Christian Life chairman who had overheard the conversation. He didn't offer any help. In fact, he was choking with laughter and almost sliding under the table—which, by the way, was exactly where I wished to be.

When I looked back at Rev. Miller, he was waiting expectantly to hear what I would say next. I decided a "time-out" was in order, so I said, "Just a minute." I turned my head to look down the table. At the far end, I saw another elderly couple who were unknown to me. In my rush to get to my seat, I had sped past without noticing them.

I turned back to Rev. Miller and made an effort to explain. "I think I've made a mistake. You see—" My voice trailed off as I tried to think of some sensible explanation.

Rev. Miller smiled at me kindly and said, "Oh, I understand how hard it is to learn names in a new pastorate."

That incident is undoubtedly one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. Of course, it was not quickly forgotten. For weeks afterward, our Christian Life chairman made a point of saying to me, "M-I-L-L-E-R. Miller." Then he'd walk away laughing.

Shakespeare wrote, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." I wonder what the rose thinks about that?



# An Open Letter to Pastors



Dear Pastor:

I was looking forward to visiting your church and worshipping with you when I was in your town last week. I looked in the yellow pages under "Churches," but I saw no advertisement for your church that would help me know, as a visitor, who you were or the times of your services. There was only that one line that told me the name of your church and the address, along with the phone number. So, I called the church number to get the necessary information, but there was no answer.

Since I had some time on my hands, though, I did take down the church address and went to a local service station and bought a map of the area so I could locate your church. I thought, if I could find your church, I could find out your name and the times of the services from the church sign out front. I hate to be late for services, especially when I am a visitor.

Well, I did find your church and I stopped to read the sign out front. It really didn't help me because your name was not on it. There were no times of the services. Also, I hap-

pened to notice that two letters had fallen off from the name of your church.

I really was looking forward to visiting your church last week because I like to attend churches in my own denomination when I am out of town. Since I do a lot of traveling in my work, I am in many places in the course of a year. But, I wasn't able to find out when I could attend your services. I hope I can do that at another time.

In the meantime, let me give you a few suggestions—from a layman's perspective and from a businessman's perspective—you can do so much more in marketing your church in your local community and increase the effectiveness of your ministry many times.

(1) Have a small advertisement in the yellow pages that tells your name, location of your church, and the times of all the services.

(2) Put an advertisement in your local paper each week with the same information above and a warm welcome.

(3) Get to know the editor or religion editor of your local paper so you can have an item of local interest that can run free of charge from time to time.

(4) Have an attractive sign in front of your church with your name on it and the times of your services. If you change times of your services, make sure you change your sign immediately. I was an hour late to one service because the sign had not been changed six months previously when the service time had

been changed. The pastor told me, "We haven't got around to that yet!"

(5) If possible, have an answering machine on the church telephone with a warm welcome and information about your church, including the times for your services. If you are hard to locate, you might even give some simple directions.

(6) Keep your church well-groomed so that when people find it, they will be impressed by what they see on that first occasion.

(7) Have greeters with name tags inside the doors of the church so no one enters without a friendly welcome.

(8) Have a small, attractive brochure of your church to give to visitors with information about you and your church. Tell about all the services offered by your church, along with a warm welcome.

(9) Recognize visitors by name in your services rather than a general, "We welcome all our visitors this morning." Using their name will help them feel an important part of your church from the first visit. Give them a small gift from your church if you can.

(10) Visit each newcomer to your church the week following his or her visit. It will produce results.

I hope I have been helpful to you, Pastor. We have much for which to be thankful and a great message to share. I look forward to seeing you the next time I am in your area.

Sincerely,

A Brother in Christ



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---

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Tim Stearman

## December/January/February 1993-94

Prepared by Tim Stearman  
Pastor, Tulsa, Okla., Central Church of the Nazarene

Pastor Stearman previously served as director of Adult Ministries at the International Headquarters, Church of the Nazarene. He also served as pastor of Independence, Kans., and Del City, Okla., Churches of the Nazarene. Stearman began his ministry as minister of youth at the Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene, Topeka, Kans.

Before attending Nazarene Theological Seminary, he graduated with an A.B. from Friends University in Wichita, Kans.

## INTRODUCTION

Like most of the preachers who have been asked to submit material for this section of the *Preacher's Magazine*, I found the assignment much more difficult than expected. Even though I am in the habit of writing out manuscripts, the thought of those being published suddenly brought a sense of sobriety not known before.

Like most of us who use this section, originality is something that I strive for, but I often find myself looking to others for help. In fact, as I looked over these sermons and prepared to submit them, I occasionally asked myself, "Did I write that?" Maybe we should clean out our files more often.

The following sermons are a potpourri of messages that I've enjoyed preaching. I work especially hard at the art of storytelling, having discovered that the story will bring the audience back when their minds have drifted. It is also the thing they will remember most about a sermon.

# A THOUSAND POINTS OF LIGHT

by Tim Stearman

Isa. 9:6-7

Dec. 5, 1993

## INTRO:

When word reached the young soldier that he could have a three-day pass for the Christmas holidays, it was much too late to book passage home on a train or a bus. On this Christmas Eve, 1944, all means of public transportation were already well filled.

With his duffel bag slung over his shoulder, he thumbed a ride with a family driving north. As they rode along, snow began to gently fall. The 150-mile trip between the soldier's base and his parents' home consumed eight hours. As the roads grew treacherous, the car skidded off the primitive highway once more.

In the wee hours of the morning on Christmas Day, the car stopped. The soldier walked the last few blocks to his parents' home, crunching through the snow. Gazing toward the end of the road, he was surprised and delighted to see a small electric candle flickering in his parents' window.

He climbed the steps to the porch and stomped the snow from his combat boots. As the door opened, a startled father peered out into the dark that surrounded his son. Warm hugs were followed by laughter as the boy's mother joined the reunion.

Later that morning as the three sat around the kitchen table enjoying steaming cups of coffee, the boy asked his father, "Why, Dad? Why in the world did you have that light burning in the window when I arrived this morning? You weren't expecting me. For all you knew, I had already been shipped overseas. Why did you leave the light in the window?"

The father responded by saying, "Oh, I don't know, Son, I guess I let it burn just in case."

Two thousand years ago, God hung a light in eternity's window "just in case."

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV).

And God named that "light in the window" Jesus.

According to Isaiah, that light's name expresses His marvelous nature.

1. "**Wonderful-Counselor**" should be hyphenated. It means a wonder of a counselor.

2. "**Mighty God**" suggests a divine warrior or a hero.

3. "**Everlasting Father**" is better understood as "Father of Eternity."

4. "**Prince of Peace**" means a successful ruler or leader.

Isaiah gave us a marvelous glimpse of one aspect of the coming Messiah—the Light in the window of eternity.

Yet, we sometimes struggle when we put his description alongside our impression of the New Testament narrative of the birth of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we see that light differently.

When we throw in our own family customs and the

notions we pick up from the secular celebration of this season and put that into our emotional blender, we end up with a strange conglomeration of ideas and opinions of what Christmas is or really should be.

Isn't it amazing how simple a light is?

The decorations that we've incorporated into our worship service today are not the **Light**. They are in celebration of the **Light**. They are announcing the coming of the **Light**.

As I considered our annual Hanging of the Greens service, I tried to consider the nature of the adornments that would grace our sanctuary. What should be the decor?

It should be simple. Inexpensive, yet very costly.

This Wonderful-Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace—this **Light** that was born in a barn—how can I best be prepared to welcome Him?

As we anticipate His coming, may we be adorned in attributes that serve as a welcome mat to the **Light**.

## I. May We Exhibit the Light of Humility

We learn humility from Jesus' arrival.

A. Jesus came in humility.

B. Jesus lived in humility.

"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death" (Phil. 2:8).

We also read, "in humility consider others better than yourselves" (v. 3).

We are to live in humility as Jesus the Light is our example.

## II. May We Exhibit the Light of Compassion

A. Compassion displays itself through giving.

**ILLUS.** In the city of Topeka, Kans., over 8,000 people are fed every Thanksgiving Day by a gentleman who owns a garbage collection business. Motivated by compassion, Mr. Cushionberry seeks ways to give something back to the community.

Like many churches, we have participated in the Angel Tree project. Through that organization, we have sought to provide Christmas gifts to children who have parents in prison. This year we gave to 60 children. The greatest joy came from the fact that we were to deliver the gifts to the homes rather than to an agency.

B. Compassion displays itself through gratitude.

**ILLUS.** Several years ago on a bitter cold Christmas Eve, my doorbell rang. A young black boy without gloves or hat asked if he could shovel snow from my driveway. After turning him away, I immediately felt checked. I opened the door again, but he was gone. No trace of him could be seen. I got in my car and drove through the neighborhood but never found him.

May God help us to see and help people in need and to be grateful for His blessings. We need to exhibit the light of compassion.



### III. May We Exhibit the Light of Good Stewardship

A. We have received much.

Our living rooms on Christmas Day resemble an explosion in a paper factory from all the gift wrapping.

B. We need to exhibit the light of good stewardship and common sense.

Don't neglect opportunity to give through your church. Christmas naturally brings added expenses, but you won't neglect making your car payment. So don't neglect your church.

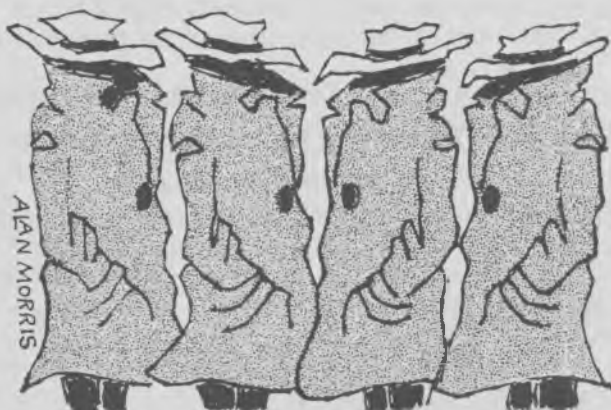
### IV. May We Exhibit the Light of a Good Memory

**ILLUS.** Some years ago, a western city reported a sad situation. The manger in their Nativity scene would be empty. Someone had stolen the infant.

But the central figure of Christmas is so neglected that His disappearance often goes unnoticed for days. What's new about that?

People may forget Jesus the remainder of the year as well. What's worse, a crook who steals a plaster image or millions of nominal Christians who ignore His presence?

EVER SINCE FIRST CHURCH  
GOT THOSE NEW USHERS,  
THE FREE WILL OFFERINGS  
HAVE GREATLY IMPROVED.



As you drive through your neighborhoods and see the homes adorned for the season, every light stands as a reminder that Jesus is the Light of the world. And God put that Light in eternity's window—just in case.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Organ Prelude	
Call to Worship	Children's Choir
Carol	"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"
Invocation	
The Meaning of the Service	Reader
Hanging of the Sanctuary Wreaths	
Scripture	Gen. 1:11-12; Isa. 60:13
The Symbol Explained	
Chorus	"I Heard the Bells"
Hanging of the Pulpit Wreath	
Scripture	Isa. 61:1-3
The Symbol Explained	
Carol	"Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
Lighting of the Christmas Tree	
Scripture	Ps. 1:2, 3
The Symbol Explained	
Message in Music	(Solo or Duet)
Placing of the Poinsettias	
Scripture	Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20-22
The Symbol Explained	
Carol	"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"
Placing of the Advent Wreath	
The Symbol Explained	
The Litany of Praise	(Responsive Reading)
Lighting of the Advent Candle	
Message in Music	Sanctuary Choir
Morning Message	Pastor
	"A Thousand Points of Light"
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Carol	"Joy to the World"
Organ Postlude	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

This order of worship represents a typical Hanging of the Greens service for us. Any good Christian bookstore can supply other examples with the explanation of all the symbols.

We conduct this service on the first Sunday of Advent.

This past year we produced a devotional booklet with special readings for each day of Advent. The book title was the same as my sermon title for that morning.

# THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

by Tim Stearman

Luke 2:8-20

Dec. 12, 1993

## INTRO:

It seems that on many occasions it has pleased God to bestow upon the poor some special token of appreciation or some special recognition. Many times He has even chosen them in preference to all others. At times it seems that He has saved His most distinguished favors for the poor.

So it was that when God sent His Son into the world, He commissioned an angel to announce the news of the event.

But to whom did He send the angels?

To poor shepherds who, for the security of their sheep and their mutual convenience, were keeping watch over their sheep in rotation by night.

Their day had started out so ordinarily, so similar to all the others that had gone on before. As evening drifted into night, they began one by one to fall asleep as specified watches were posted.

The night was cool and brisk, yet clear and cloudless. The occasional bleating of sheep was almost completely ignored as sweet sleep stole in upon them and the shepherds surrendered to its plea and eyelids grew heavy.

Suddenly the sky seemed to be on fire and the ground was as light as noonday.

That group of humble shepherds watching their flocks—they were to receive God's glad tidings. They stirred from their slumber, rubbed their drowsy eyes, and gazed up at the source of the light—and they listened. Scared to death, they listened.

They listened as the angel of the Lord said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:10-14 KJV).

Can you picture it? The grassy, green, sloping meadow. The still of the night. Stars flashing in celebration. Poor, lowly shepherds pulling back in fear and covering their faces from the light—then slowly, sneaking a peek at the one who spoke from the clouds of glory.

Can you hear the gentle yet firm voice of the angel as he says, "Fear not"?

Can you see the relief of the shepherds?

Can you feel the growing anticipation in their hearts as their minds began to grasp the message of the angels—a message that the Jewish people had waited to hear for so long?

Can you sense their excitement as they jump to their feet to listen more intently?

Can you sense their feeling of humble honor as they realize that God chose to reveal the news to them first?

Can you picture the angel hovering near and sharing the message?

Do you see the multitude of heavenly hosts?

Can you hear their anthem swell as they join together in praising God?

Can you hear their songs of praise filling the countryside and ringing out through the hills?

As quickly as they had appeared, they were gone. The shepherds stood stunned in the afterglow of that sacred moment. No doubt they were breathless—speechless. No doubt they gazed at one another in astonishment.

Slowly they began to gather their wits about them and wondered what they should do.

Talking among themselves, they decided to go to Bethlehem, for "The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us" (v. 15, KJV).

On feet of jubilation they started their journey to Bethlehem.

Notice three reactions of the shepherds.

## I. The Shepherds Recognized That the Message Was from God

We read, "Let us . . . see this thing . . . which the Lord hath made known unto us" (v. 15, KJV).

The source of the announcement was unmistakable. It was from God.

They realized that this display of angelic splendor and heavenly harmony could only come from God.

The message came from God, and they recognized that fact. The Scripture teaches that we are to "Try the spirits" to be sure that they are from God (1 John 4:1, KJV). But these shepherds felt no need to try the spirits, for they immediately recognized that the message came from God himself.

We should be as wise. For time and time again we have refused to recognize the message from God.

God revealed the good news to those shepherds in a unique way. "How could one doubt the message being from God?" you might ask. With angels hovering and praising God and singing, you would have to believe it.

The shepherds might ask you, "How can you doubt that the message of Jesus is from God?" For God has preserved the same message over 2,000 years for you. He speaks to you personally and you feel Him tugging at your heart. He reveals himself through music and message, yet you refuse to believe.

Those shepherds recognized the message as coming from God. It was a message of Jesus and joy.

Since Adam and Eve fell victim to temptation in the Garden of Eden, God's people had been waiting and looking for a Savior, a Messiah.

They had suffered under the oppression of dictators and political opportunists. They had struggled for survival under wicked kings and greedy leaders, always with

the thought that the Messiah was coming. He would release them from their captors.

For thousands of years this had been their central thought, the one hope to which they had fearlessly struggling.

Only one who has been oppressed all his life could know the joy that the angel's message brought. For to those shepherds, the message read, "freedom," "a new king," "no more oppression."

No wonder they were thrilled. No wonder the message filled them with joy.

When the angel stated, "I bring you good tidings of great joy," he wasn't teasing.

Yet when the same joyful message is proclaimed today, people may react with "Ho, hum."

The same Jesus who came to deliver Israel has come to deliver you from sin. The angel said, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to **all** people" (Luke 2:10, KJV). That statement was made for you and me.

The message of Jesus and joy that those shepherds heard is the same message God has sent for you and me: "For unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (v. 11, KJV).

We should experience the same joy as did those shepherds when we realize that Jesus came to liberate us from the oppressors of sin and ignorance and poverty and hell.

Jesus came to liberate us. Let us rejoice!

## II. The Shepherds Believed the Message They Received from God

Not only did they recognize that the message of Jesus and joy came from God, but when they heard the message, they **believed it**. Nowhere in recorded history do we read of one shepherd holding back, voicing his doubts or misgivings. Nowhere do we read of a shepherd arguing with his companions, trying to persuade them not to be so gullible.

Everything that we read points to a unified opinion among the shepherds. **They believed it.**

Unless you recognize that the message came from God and unless you believe the message He gives, you will have wasted the benefits of Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross.

Sometimes we read history and think, "How gullible those people were." Yet, when I read the Scripture, I sometimes feel that those people were much more fortunate than we. Those simple people had simple faith. They often put us to shame. Our technology and training seem to cause us to demand proof.

Oh, for the faith of a simple shepherd! To listen to the message of God, to believe it with simple faith, no questions asked, no reservations, just to believe it because God said it!

## III. The Shepherds Obeyed the Message They Received from God

They hastened to find the infant Jesus. "And they came with haste" (v. 16, KJV).

Perhaps one shepherd had to stay behind to watch the sheep. Oh, the sinking feeling he must have felt as he watched his fellow shepherds hurrying to Bethlehem.

They rushed into Bethlehem and started searching for

the Baby. The only clues they had were the words of the angel, "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (v. 12, KJV).

With the diligence of detectives, they began looking in every stable in town until at last they reached the right one, dimly lit, containing the Christ child.

They quietly approached the manger, knelt down, and worshiped the infant Savior.

How long they stayed no one knows, but they stayed as long as they felt necessary. Then, standing to their feet, they hurried back toward the hills and their sheep. Yet as they walked, their hearts were almost to the point of bursting, for they were filled with great joy. It was all they could do to keep from running through the streets and shouting the good news!

As they walked out of town, their laughter filled the air. While mortals slept, the Son of God had been born. They had been let in on the secret that couldn't be kept a secret for long. For the scripture says, "They made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child" (v. 17, KJV).

Simple faith has its rewards, and these shepherds had collected.

The songwriter says, "Kneel at the manger and make it thine altar."

The shepherds had given heed to those words long before they were ever written. They returned with their hearts filled with joy.

Would you heed the words of the songwriter and follow the example of the shepherds to "kneel at the manger and make it thine altar"?

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

#### WE SEEK HIS PRESENCE

Prelude	
Call to Worship	Children's Choir
Scripture Reading	Luke 2:8-20
Lighting of the Advent Candle	
Hymn	"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"
Hymn	"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

#### WE SEEK HIM IN SPIRIT

Call to Prayer	"Here We Are"
The Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Choral Response	"Holy Ground"

#### WE GIVE TO HIM

Choral Offertory	Sanctuary Choir
	"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Family Greeting	
Choruses	"Jesus, What a Wonder You Are"
	"Jesus, Name Above All Names"
Message in Song	
Morning Message	Pastor
	"The Hills Are Alive"

Moments of Commitment
Benediction
Postlude

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Family Greeting

We have designated these moments in the service to invite the congregation to welcome one another.

# NOBODY WANTS TO BE JOSEPH

by Tim Stearman

Matt. 1:18-25

Dec. 19, 1993

## INTRO:

"Pastor, nobody wants to be Joseph!" That's what the director of our annual children's pageant said to me several years ago. What a dilemma! How can you portray the Christmas story without the typical Mary and Joseph?

I met with the most likely candidate, a boy not yet four, with big tears dripping off of his chin. He sensed the inevitable.

As I visited with him, I tried to make the part seem more desirable. I even offered bribes. Finally, I said, "Ryan, if you don't want to play Joseph, what do you want to play?"

"A donkey," he said.

Nobody wanted to be Joseph.

I can understand why. Joseph has been described by some as being simple. Certainly not scholarly. He was neither a rabbi nor a leader. He only worked as a carpenter.

Nothing about Joseph's life speaks of glory or power or fame. He wouldn't wear a Rolex and would have felt overwhelmed by a DayTimer.

As a result of the visit with my young friend, I realized that after 20 years in the ministry I had never examined Joseph's life nor had I ever heard anyone preach about Joseph. Oh sure, I had heard plenty of sermons about Mary and Joseph, but never any only about Joseph.

Think about it. Nobody wants to be Joseph. I think I know why.

## I. Life Was Out of Joseph's Control

A. Joseph lived in Nazareth, a little backwater town that was held up for ridicule.

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). It isn't mentioned in the Old Testament, the Jewish Talmud, or by the historian Josephus.

B. Joseph was engaged to a young girl who became pregnant, and he knew he wasn't the father.

Yet, he was trapped by tradition. The marriage procedure in that day had three steps.

1. The engagement: often made by the parents.
2. The betrothal: which was absolutely binding and lasted one year. The couple would be known as husband and wife, but did not have the rights or privileges of man and wife. Only divorce could stop the process.
3. The marriage.

C. Joseph was ordered by the Roman emperor to make a trip he didn't want to make. So he packed up, closed his shop, and went.

D. Joseph couldn't provide housing for his wife when they arrived at Bethlehem.

E. Joseph was forced to live as a fugitive, running to

Egypt to save his son's life.

Nobody wants to be Joseph because everyone wants to have more control over his life than Joseph had.

We might characterize Joseph as a loser today. He hadn't planned for the future, and forces outside of his control dictated his decisions.

Ted Turner apologized several years ago to a crowd of Baptists for calling Christianity a religion for losers. Yet, if you look at it from a totally secular viewpoint, you may understand his statement. Society looks at the Christian, sees his similarity to Joseph, and decides that Christians are not in control—and society is right.

What's important is not what we discover about Joseph. It's what we discover about God.

## II. Life Is Never Out of God's Control

Since God was in control even when Joseph wasn't—

A. Joseph became part of the greatest love story ever written.

B. Joseph became Jesus' earthly example of a father. At age 6 or 8 or 10, Jesus did not see himself as the Messiah. As a little boy, Jesus learned from a godly man the art of living.

C. Joseph taught Jesus what he knew—how to work with wood and care for customers and keep the business's books. With calloused hands, he taught Jesus about sacrifice and love.

D. One day the Messianic awareness dawned upon Jesus. God had many lessons to teach Him, but the groundwork had been laid by a good, conscientious, godly man. God had selected the perfect foster father.

## III. Lessons Are Learned by Letting Go

A. Certain areas may be out of our control.

1. Work may not be all that we would want or wish.
2. Lack of education may hinder us.
3. Disease may rob us of opportunities.
4. Family members may make decisions that affect us adversely.

B. We may never climb some of the mountains.

I often wonder if Joseph died feeling that his life was a success. I wonder if he felt good about what he had achieved.

**ILLUS.** I recently heard of a corporate executive earning \$500,000 a week. Few will ever provide like that for their families.

**ILLUS.** I have a wonderful aunt who suffers from multiple sclerosis. Apart from a miracle of God, she will never walk again. She can't control that fact. She will not conquer this mountain.

C. Yet, like Joseph, with Jesus we can find contentment in the midst of our confusion.

1. We can say with Paul, "I have learned . . . to be content" (Phil. 4:11, KJV).
2. Joseph willingly used the gifts he had. He may not have been as gifted as some, but that didn't stop God from blessing him.
3. Joseph took advantage of the opportunities he had been given. He didn't back away simply because risk was involved.
4. Joseph served as a good example of a godly man.
5. Joseph worked to be the best that he could be. We do not compete with anyone regarding the kind of person we can become.
6. Life's storms seemed only to strengthen Joseph.



"SYLVESTER PACKENHOFFER? O.K. IF I  
USE TWO BADGES FOR THAT?"

Joseph may not have been flashy, but he stood by faithfully.

The good news of Jesus isn't interested only in superheroes, and our world doesn't need another superhero. But we desperately need an army of men willing to stand faithful, who, in spite of their obscurity, are willing to be Joseph.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Call to Worship	Choir
	"Hallelujah Chorus"
Scripture Reading	Matt. 1:18-25
Lighting of the Advent Candle	
Hymn	"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Hymn	"Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
Message in Song	Sanctuary Choir
	"O Little Town of Bethlehem/Silent Night" (Poorman)
Hymn	"The First Noel"
Call to Prayer	
The Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Choral Response	
Receive God's Tithe and Our Offering	
Family Greeting	
Message in Song	Duet
Morning Message	Pastor
	"Nobody Wants to Be Joseph"
Men's A Cappella Ensemble	"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Postlude

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offering

Our offering is taken immediately following the pastoral prayer. As soon as those kneeling at the altar during the pastoral prayer have returned to their seats, the ushers come forward. The offertory begins and the ushers proceed to receive the offering. No mention is made of the offering, and no special prayer is given. It works very well for us. It also eliminates the temptation to make a lot of announcements.

# WE'VE GOT JESUS TO SING ABOUT

by Tim Stearman

Eph. 5:18-19

Dec. 26, 1993

## INTRO:

In the days of the Great Depression, Clarence Darrow, the brilliant attorney, addressed the members of a black church in Chicago. Most of them were desperately poor, without jobs and without hope. When Darrow began to speak, he recounted all of their troubles and summed up their problems.

Then, remembering how they had sung so beautifully, he said, "And yet you sing! No one can sing like you do! What do you have to sing about?"

Quick as a flash, a lady in the congregation shouted out, "We've got Jesus to sing about."

We've got Jesus to sing about.

Paul seems to be alluding to the same thing in Eph. 5:18-19: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord."

Paul was making a comparison: "Don't get drunk. Find your fullest degree of joy in God's Spirit." He, too, was saying, "You've got Jesus to sing about."

I've thought a lot about that verse. I've tried to ponder what it really means. I believe it means that even when life bombards me with difficulty and disappointment—even when I've lost possessions or position—if I have Jesus, I have all I really need.

That's a mouthful. Many people don't believe it. But Paul told us that Jesus can bring a sense of peace and acceptance that transcends any other experience.

How? Jesus brings:

**Salvation**—I can have that when all else is gone.

**Friendship**—such as cannot be found in any other relationship.

**Strength**—like no one else can give.

**Peace**—that passes understanding.

We consider our church as a "singing" church because many have choirs and lots of special music! However, that's the most insignificant part of a "singing" church. Paul says we all have a part to sing. We may not participate in some ensemble, but we do make **some** kind of music.

"Oh, but, Pastor, I don't sing!" Look at what Paul says—"Speak to one another with psalms."

## I. Our Speech Makes Music

Do you mean that my speech can be like a song? Yes, like a song to God's ears and to those who surround you. "Speak to one another with psalms" (v. 19).

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14, KJV). Some times we are careless with our words. We say things that hurt people deeply.

**ILLUS.** Some time ago a writer in *Christianity Today*

made the following observation: "Most churchgoers born after 1955 are theologically more conservative than their parents." That's good—and a little surprising. Then he spoke of a freedom that these young ones feel. "The freedom of the younger generation to ignore the denominational labels and shop for a church that meets their needs."

What happens when they come to your church? What do they hear you say?

We need to sing a new song. We've got Jesus to sing about. We can sing no sweeter song than a word of encouragement.

I travel some and visit great churches with great pastors. Most of those great pastors were made by great churches. You can't criticize anyone toward greatness—but you can encourage.

If we have discord with our neighbors, we're out of tune with our fellowman. Then how can we expect to be in harmony with God?

Speak about Jesus.

## II. Our Song Makes Music

Paul says, "Sing." Some people may feel that we overemphasize music. I don't believe we come close to doing that.

Have you ever noticed in the Bible the references it makes to music?

A. Look at the Psalms.

"He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (40:3).

"By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me" (42:8).

"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day" (96:1).

"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song" (95:1-2).

"My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul" (108:1).

"Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs" (100:2).

B. Look at the prophet Isaiah.

"Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains." Why? "For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones" (49:13).

"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (55:12).

C. Look at the Judges.

"Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to



the Lord, I will sing; I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel" (5:3).

D. Look at James.

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise" (5:13).

E. Look at the Revelation.

"And they sang a new song" (5:9).

"They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb" (15:2-3).

What is that song?

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (vv. 3-4).

The Bible speaks to us of mountains singing, of all nature rejoicing.

We learn of David, the sweet psalm singer of Israel. Over and over again reference is made to song.

Recently I reread the incident in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. Luke says, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners **were listening** to them" (v. 25).

That's the reason most of us **don't** sing. We're afraid someone might be listening.

I can't sit in a service without singing. My wife teases me.

I used to sit by my father. He's no singer, but he thought that was what you were supposed to do during the song service.

If he did, I would.

Your song is so important.

Aren't you glad God even loves us monotones?

### III. Our Spirit Makes Music

It suggests a feeling of praise in the heart.

The silent music of the rejoicing heart is to accompany the praise of anointed lips.

The central thrust of both inward and outward rejoicing is **thanksgiving**.

"Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

When our world around us starts to self-destruct—as it seems to sometimes—we can make music in our hearts because of the fullness of God.

This new "musical you" is a by-product of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's a theme of Paul's writings. Look back at Eph. 3:19 to Paul's great prayer for the church. "And to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

**ILLUS.** A prominent evangelist told of a revival campaign that he conducted in the Pennsylvania Dutch country. He

preached one Sunday morning on "all the fullness of God."

Following the service, he was invited to the home of a Dutch farmer for the noon meal. The farmer openly admitted that he didn't understand what the preacher meant about the fullness of God. If you're filled with God, how can you contain more?

The preacher took the farmer outside and found a bucket. They took the bucket to the potato cellar and filled it with potatoes. "Is the bucket full?" the preacher asked? "Certainly," said the farmer.

The preacher then took the bucket to the grain bin and carefully scooped handfuls of grain into the bucket. It sifted its way down around the potatoes. The preacher again asked, "Is the bucket full?" "Sure is," replied the farmer.

Again, the preacher picked up the bucket. This time he walked to the well where he emptied several cups of water into the bucket. The water found plenty of room to still exist. Then the preacher said, "Is the bucket full now?"

The farmer said, "I get the point. As much as I allow God to fill me, there's still room for more of Him."

Paul said that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). Don't you think He can fill you with His power and presence?

"Don't get drunk on wine . . . Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18-19).

In our speech, in our song, in our spirit, "We've got Jesus to sing about."

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Call to Worship	Sanctuary Choir
	"Blessed Be the Lord God" (Chambers/Smith)
Scripture Reading	Eph. 5:18-19
Hymn	"All Hail the Power"
Chorus	"Bless the Lord, O My Soul"
Hymn	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
Chorus	"Holy Ground"
Call to Prayer	
The Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Choral Response	
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Baby Dedication	
Family Greeting	
Choruses	"How Great Our Joy"
	"His Name Is Wonderful"
Message in Song	
Morning Message	Pastor
	"We've Got Jesus to Sing About"
Choral Benediction	"Press On"
Postlude	

# HELP WANTED: NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

by Tim Stearman

Matt. 9:37-38

Jan. 2, 1994

## INTRO:

It was only a day and a half. But those hours would have to be listed among the most miserable in my life.

At 14, I'd grown up in an area where wheat fields surrounded our house. I'd watched combines more than once slowly devour the golden grain and leave behind evenly-cut stubble, but I had never helped. Not until that one particular summer morning.

Instead of caddying at the golf course, I had agreed to help a distant family member bale hay. I had never been around much farm machinery. I hadn't driven much besides go-carts. I didn't trust animals. I had no business on a farm. But they had offered to pay me the unheard of salary of \$1.25 an hour. I was determined to get a start on accumulating my fortune.

I found myself sitting behind the wheel of the farmer's old red Ford pickup truck, driving down a country road toward the field. I had visions of driving a nice tractor and watching a machine spit out perfectly shaped bales of hay.

When I arrived at the field, I discovered that the farmer's 12-year-old son would be driving the tractor pulling a baling machine that was pulling a trailer. I was placed on the trailer with a hay hook and instructed how to hook the bales and stack them.

I wasn't thrilled, but I was determined. The farmer left. The 12-year-old and I started making even smaller circles around that field. The baling machine performed beautifully—spitting out bales faster than I could grab them. I'm sure the 12-year-old thought it was funny when he had to stop and come back to help me stack the bales.

I worked for a day and a half—until all the hay was put up. It was hot and dusty. My allergies acted up. Solid blisters filled the palms of my hands until I couldn't fully open my hands. It was the hardest physical labor I had ever performed.

A harvest had to be brought in. I learned that I didn't really need experience to do the job. But there were some qualifications. I had to be able to endure the physical exertion. I had to have a certain amount of strength and a willingness to work.

### **There is a harvest to be brought in.**

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them" (v. 36).

Jesus looked at the multitudes of people. They were lost, and His heart was stirred with compassion. "Gripped" with compassion! "Stirred," because Jesus saw the crowds "scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (v. 36, KJV). The religious leaders were not fulfilling their responsible role as shepherds of the people.

So Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few" (v. 37).

His prayer is relevant for today. While the laborers

have increased, they have not caught up with the colossal increase of the harvest.

Nineteen centuries later, countless millions have never heard the good news that Jesus died to save them from sin.

### **There is still a harvest to be brought in.**

## **I. We Must Open Our Eyes to See People in Their Need**

If anyone knew the true condition of people, it was Jesus. He could see into the heart and discern need.

Matthew pictures how Jesus saw the multitudes (9:36-38).

### **A. "They fainted" (KJV).**

They were tired—weary with life. They were whipped by events, needing spiritual rest.

### **B. They were "scattered abroad"**

This expression comes from a verb form, meaning "to throw, cast, or hurl." He saw people thrown around by life's circumstances.

They lacked the leadership and protection of a shepherd.

What a description of our day. Multitudes trudge through life with no God, no faith, no love, no hope. They have no roots. They drift without an anchor to hold them. They exist without hope and apparently do not know it.

### **C. Jesus saw them as a ripe "harvest."**

Certainly they were ready for the gospel of hope.

**ILLUS. What do we see?** Billy Graham arrived at Sir Winston Churchill's residence in 1954 to find the great statesman looking pale and frightened. As the evangelist entered, Churchill looked up and asked, "Young man, do you have any hope?"

The multitudes ask that question today. They are asking you.

The harvest needs to be brought in. No experience necessary! But you must be qualified.

When God opens our eyes, we see people spiritually lost and critically hurting without hope and with all kinds of need. To adequately participate in bringing in the harvest, we must be able to "see" life in its true condition.

## **II. We Must Open Our Hearts to Care**

Seeing means much more than simply being aware of spiritual needs. It demands responding to those needs. It involves loving, caring, and receiving people.

Compassion is a deeply moving attitude. Jesus was "moved with compassion."

Compassion represents loving someone so deeply that we involve ourselves until the hurt is healed. The Good Samaritan illustrates compassion.

**ILLUS.** In a Vacation Bible School service in California,

the altar was opened for children to find the Lord. A Mexican-American boy didn't respond to the invitation, although he later indicated that he had wanted to do so. When asked why, he said, "I didn't think you'd want me." How many people feel that way?

**ILLUS.** A prominent pastor in the south heard of the financial struggle of a family outside his congregation. His church had the means to relieve the suffering, so one day he mustered his courage and approached the door of the ragged home perched gingerly on the side of a hill. The woman came to the door and didn't invite the pastor in. He introduced himself and told why he had come. With an icy stare, she simply said, "You don't really care."

At first he felt anger—then bewilderment and a desire to tell her how they really did care. But he eventually left with those words ringing in his ears. "You don't really care."

He began to ask himself, "Do we? Do we really care?"

The question is relevant for us. Do we really care?

The harvest needs to be brought in, but we are not qualified if we do not have the capacity to really care.

### III. We Must Open Our Time to Prayer

Only by prayer do we get a true vision of the harvest. Jesus said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest" (v. 38, KJV).

I am convinced that the reason so few carry a burden for the multitudes of lost humanity, or even the lost in our own families, is because we pray so little.

We have arrived at a place where we know how to go through all of the religious exercises without ever feeling anything.

We often exhibit a lack of sensitivity. "If people come to church, fine. If not, that's all right, too, but it's not **my** responsibility."

#### Wrong!

It is our responsibility. If we spent more time in prayer and fostered a closer relationship with the Lord, we would be eager for others to know Jesus too.

Shallow commitment advertises the lack of spiritual depth.

Teachers, do you pray for your class? Did you pray this week? Do you care about those students of yours? Do you have something worth hearing when they come to class? Do you see the tremendous potential in your pupils?

We all have responsibility to pray and care and visit and carry a burden for those who walk through our paths needing Jesus.

We need more laborers! Laborers for the harvest always come in answer to prayer.

Jesus said, "Pray . . . the Lord of the harvest."

The Holy Spirit in the atmosphere of prayer calls persons to special ministries. So we pray for laborers to minister to needs. We pray for the people and their needs.

**There's a harvest to be brought in where we live and work.**

### IV. We Must Open Our Lives to Go

A true vision means that we make ourselves available to become involved in the needs of the people. How?

We acknowledge our place in the Body of Christ as His servant to minister to others. We open our lives to touch

people with our love, words, and genuine help.

We open our lives to tell people the good news of Jesus' saving power. We teach them the Word of God. We minister to their need.

After doing some visitation, one man stated to his pastor, "I didn't know there were seeds like this. It opened my eyes as to why we need to go."

How can you respond to the harvest?

A. Respond to the opportunity you have personally, wherever it is.

It may be in your family, your neighborhood, on your job, in the church, or to a stranger.

B. Respond to opportunities your church offers you.

Get involved in visitation. Contact absentees. Use the special events to invite others.

C. Don't wait for a giant step.

Take the first step, however insignificant and unseen it may be.

The church faces the challenge today to lead people to life in Christ. That challenge is yours! So get off the bench on the sidelines and get into the harvest.

There is a harvest to bring in. "Help wanted, no experience necessary." But you must be willing to meet the qualifications.

1. Open your eyes to see the need.
2. Open your heart to care.
3. Open your time to pray.
4. Open your life to go.

**ILLUS.** The church telephone rang. The call came from a desperate person. "My father is dying. Would you send someone to see him?"

Someone went and discovered that the dying patient was not a Christian. As a result of his visit, the man was saved. Before the visit was over, five others of the family found Jesus Christ. Great! Yet, the sad truth was that the person who called the church had already contacted four or five other churches. No one had come—no one with eyes open to see and a heart open to care and willing to give time to pray and to sacrifice to go.

Don't let the **harvest rot in the fields.**

There is a harvest to be brought in. "Help wanted, no experience necessary."

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Choruses	"Open Our Eyes, Lord"
	"As the Deer"
	"I Will Praise Him"
Message in Song	
Call to Prayer	
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"In His Time"
Choral Offertory	"The Wonder of It All" (Shea/Marsh)
Hymn	"A Glorious Church"
Chorus	"Hallelujah, Praise the Lamb"
Message in Song	Solo
Morning Message	Pastor
	"Help Wanted: No Experience Necessary"
Moments of Commitment	
Postlude	Organ

# WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING UP—PRAY

by Tim Stearman

Neh. 1:1-11

Jan. 9, 1994

## INTRO:

You've followed the last lead—no job. You've been to the last expert—no answer. You've stood by helplessly unable to reach your child. With a sense of loss and despair, you've realized that your marriage is not going to survive. Your scholarship didn't come through. Or you're trapped in a dead-end job—dead-end marriage—dead-end life. Perhaps you've wondered if it's even worth living. You've said, "Why don't we just give up?"

What do you do when you feel like giving up?

Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king of Persia, was more like a personal adviser than a butler.

One of his brothers returned from Judah—Jerusalem, to be exact. Nehemiah asked him how things were going. It's too bad he even asked because, after hearing the report, he felt compelled to do something.

His brother told him that 50,000 people who had been allowed to return to Judah from exile faced great trouble and disgrace. They felt discouraged while the once majestic wall surrounding the city was still only a pile of rubble.

Before the report, Nehemiah had visions of the city of Jerusalem thriving with the marketplace filled, the walls standing proudly, and the people living in freedom. Now he was brought face-to-face with a picture that was far less glamorous.

The report devastated Nehemiah. It was worse than he had imagined: "I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (v. 4). Nehemiah was wallowing in his despair.

"Then I said, 'O Lord, God of heaven . . . who keeps his covenant of love . . . hear the prayer your servant is praying'" (vv. 5-6). After his days of despair, he began to do some serious praying.

Nehemiah's prayer led him to approach the king for permission to return to Judah and oversee the task of rebuilding the wall. Before he spoke to the king, he prayed again. The king not only gave him permission to return but eventually made Nehemiah governor of Judah. The prayer recorded in Nehemiah 1 is the first of many texts recording the prayers of Nehemiah.

As we read his book, we find prayer offered before the work was undertaken, while the work was in progress, and after the work had been completed.

Nehemiah went through despair and came out on the other side a winner. Yet, we do ourselves a disservice if we fail to adequately understand verse 4. In the *New King James Version*, it reads, "So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days."

Whenever we face the potential of tragedy or whenever we hear bad news, our first knee-jerk reaction is to pray. Even the agnostic may plead, "Oh, my God!" That's often our response too. "Oh, my God, help, save, cure, fix, do something." We weep and mourn for days.

After that initial awareness of loss, many of us drift into a valley of despair. Our prayer was not answered as we thought it should be—as we hoped it would be.

We begin to assume several things: God doesn't love us. God never answers our prayers. Either God can't or won't intervene in our lives.

If we're not careful, we begin to voice our complaint, "What's the use? Why try? I might as well give up."

In Nehemiah's life, it was after he had wept and mourned many days that he began to pray again.

Then it's a different kind of prayer. No longer does Nehemiah pray in panic. His prayer contains power. One reason is because Nehemiah has come face-to-face with his own failure.

## I. Prayer Brings Us Face-to-face with Our Own Failure

Problems in your life are not God's punishment for sin. But discouragement brought Nehemiah to his knees confessing his own failure.

Nothing in Nehemiah's book indicates that he was a bad person, living away from God. Yet, his deep concern for his people caused him to do some very deep heart searching. "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you" (v. 6).

The prophet Isaiah went into the Temple one day and received a vision of God. He first reacted with an awareness of his own failure and guilt. That awareness led to his confession: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5, KJV).

God gave Isaiah an awareness of cleansing as He made Isaiah clean and pure.

When you feel like giving up, pray.

You say, "Pastor, I've already done that." Could that prayer have been panic in the process of weeping and mourning? Pray again. Only now pray from power, letting God dig deeply.

I do not speak to you this morning as one who has not been there. I don't know your story, so you'll have to listen to mine.

In February of 1988, I was the pastor of a church at Independence, Kans. We had been there almost eight years.

We had relocated to 37 acres of property and built a new church complex.

A telephone call came from Kansas City. I had been elected to a position at our denomination's headquarters. I had two days in which to decide. I grew up under the old philosophy that if the church calls, you go. I went.

On my last Sunday, I preached to 438 people. The next week, I had no pulpit, no people. I felt in exile in a strange land. It was like a divorce—quick, easy, very painful.

My prayer was filled with panic. "God help me." I wanted to run.

But God was doing something in me that I would never have allowed Him to do in that church. I was too safe, too secure, too comfortable.

The Lord allowed me to be brought to the place where I felt like giving up. I remember wishing I could have a heart attack so I wouldn't have to go to the office.

For the first time in my life, I felt that I must be the moving target of God's wrath, rather than the object of His love. I felt myself moving from prayers of panic to the valley of despair. From there, I had a choice. Stay in the valley and give up—or pray.

Only this time I offered not a prayer of panic, but one of power. That prayer brought me face-to-face with my own failure—one of the most liberating experiences of my life.

## II. Prayer Brings Us Face-to-face with Our Father

Nehemiah says, "O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant" (v. 11).

Nehemiah knew he stood in the presence of God.

By its very nature, prayer brings us into God's presence. We become consciously aware of the presence of the living God.

One reason we doubt the power of prayer is that we generally talk to God when we're in trouble, in the panic mode.

**ILLUS.** I have two wonderful daughters. I love them more than I can express. When they face problems, I want them to come to me. But it's so nice when they simply come to my chair, put their arms around my neck, and say, "Dad, I love you."

I have to imagine that my Heavenly Father also enjoys—even relishes—those occasions when we simply bow before Him and tell Him that we love Him.

So often when trouble comes, we go to God and ask Him for help, but He's a stranger to us. We don't know Him. I once wrote and asked Sam Walton for money to finish a building project. He said, "No." Why? Because he didn't have the money? Hardly. **I didn't know him.**

Oswald Chambers explained, "The whole meaning of prayer is that we may know God."

When I felt like giving up, but prayed, I came face-to-face with my Heavenly Father. Three things happened.

A. I discovered power in praise.

I would kneel beside my chair in my basement study and tears would stream down my face as I praised God for my misery—honestly—for my fear, my insecurity.

Somehow I sensed God's cleansing, refreshing. It was a process of acknowledging that God was in control and I belong to Him.

I praised God for my job. It was a great task. I praised Him for the honor, for our house, our family, our health, my boss, my coworkers, our denomination. I went down the list.

I can't explain it. I can only acknowledge it. I found power in praising God.

B. I discovered strength in surrender.

The Psalmist said, "As the deer pants for streams of wa-

ter, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1).

Spiritual desire flows from surrendered despair.

I didn't like the job any better, but I found a new strength. God assured me that the assignment wouldn't last forever and that He had placed me here for a reason.

When you believe you're where God wants you, you have incredible endurance.

C. I discovered depth in devotion.

Whenever we suffer, we will eventually receive the precious gift of an intimacy with God.

The purpose of the despair is to move us beyond self-pity. God does not waste the despair. He uses it to give more than answers. The Lord **becomes the answer.**

I've discovered something else about devotion. Lloyd Ogilvie reminds us that God never allows more suffering than required for God and the sufferer to know one another better.

God does not intervene too quickly and thus keep us from discovering the meaning of our suffering. God loves us too much for that!

Nehemiah's despair turned to prayer and a city was fortified with a wall.

Nehemiah prayed. His prayer involved specific requests for God's people and for Nehemiah himself. The ministry of prayer has three important aspects: The **man** of God believes the **Word** of God in order that the **work** of God might be accomplished.

The secret did not rest in Nehemiah's resources or in his ability as a leader. It resided in his power with God.

**When you feel like giving up, pray.**

Watch Nehemiah as he rallied the people to build the wall. "So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (2:18, KJV). Some hecklers in the crowd made noise: "They laughed us . . . and despised us" (v. 19, KJV). Yes, but Nehemiah had prayed. "So built we the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work" (4:6, KJV).

When you feel like giving up—in your life, in your marriage, in your family, in your church—**pray.**

Let God help you build a wall around your **life, marriage, family, and church.**

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Call to Worship	"Be Exalted" (Chamber/Smith)
Hymn	"How Great Thou Art"
Chorus	"Majesty"
Chorus	"Praise the Name of Jesus"
Call to Prayer	"Pass Me Not"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choral Offertory	"The Wonder of It All" (Marsh)
Family Greeting	
Hymn	"Friendship with Jesus"
Chorus	"Hand in Hand"
Morning Message	Pastor
	"When You Feel like Giving Up—Pray"
Moments of Commitment	
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ and Piano Duet

# DEFEATING GIANTS

by Tim Stearman

Num. 13:26-33

Jan. 16, 1994

## INTRO:

The plan was set and the men were chosen. Twelve men, one from each tribe, approached Moses to receive their orders.

Moses told them: "You men are being sent on an intelligence assignment. Your job will be to spy out the land of Canaan, gaining all the information you can, and returning to me with that information."

Perhaps Moses bent down to the ground and sketched a makeshift map in the sand at his feet as he told them to go into the land from the south and follow the mountains.

One of the newly selected spies may have asked, "What type of information are you really interested in?"

Moses replied, "Find out everything you can. Check the land from top to bottom. Check the soil to see if it's suitable for growing our crops. Check the people living there, and find out if the population is many or few.

"Find out if the people are strong or weak and if they can be conquered easily. Scout the cities to see if they are weak and easily accessible or if they are fortified with walls. Check out to see if the land is prosperous. Are the animals fat or lean? Is there wood for construction and fire?

"Bring back samples of the fruit of the land so that those of us who stay behind have something on which to base our opinion.

"Most of all, be of good courage" (see vv. 17-20).

With knapsacks on their backs, they started their journey.

They did as Moses had instructed. Making their way southward, they came to the brook of Eshcol. There they cut down a cluster of grapes to return for the people to see.

They carried the bunch of grapes on a pole between two men, not only because of its size but also to keep from damaging the fruit. You can't very well carry a cluster of grapes in your hip pocket.

They also filled their knapsacks with pomegranates and figs until the weight made them a burden.

They spied on the people who inhabited the land. They followed orders to the letter. Forty days after they left camp, they returned to give their report.

Arriving with tired feet, they were immediately surrounded by neighbors, eager to hear their report.

Lowering knapsacks to the ground, they breathed a sigh of relief that the journey was over. No doubt they thanked God for His mercy to them.

When ushered before Moses, he asked for their report.

With breathless excitement, they began to speak: "We found a land flowing with milk and honey, a beautiful land of lush, green meadows and snowcapped mountains. A land of cool rivers and warm, windy plains.

"Look at the evidence we brought back with us" (see

v. 27). They unloaded the pomegranates and figs and had the large bunch of grapes brought forward for Moses to inspect.

The people pressed in to make their own inspection.

They continued with their report: "Nevertheless, the people are strong who dwell there, and the cities are walled and strong" (see v. 28).

As the crowd heard the report, they began to get restless. Their voices raised in excited clamor.

Finally, one of the spies named Caleb raised his hands and stilled the people. With his voice filled with excitement, he yelled, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (v. 30, KJV).

There were great shouts of victory at such a good report—especially over the fact that Caleb thought the land could be conquered.

But seconds later, the crowd was stilled again as another of the spies began to speak. He almost laughed at Caleb as he said, "What do you mean? We can't go up against those people; for they are stronger than we are" (see v. 31).

The scripture says, "And they brought up an evil report" (v. 32, KJV).

They told of a land that was hard and that ate up its inhabitants. They told of a land filled with men of great stature.

The straw that broke the camel's back came when their report told of the sons of Anak. "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (v. 33, KJV).

Although Joshua cast his vote with Caleb to go in and conquer the land immediately, the other 10 voted the motion down, the people cast their lot with the 10 who were pessimistic.

The main difference between Joshua and Caleb and the other 10 spies lie not in the facts they were presenting but in their interpretation of those facts.

Today we often face the same situation. Many times the difference between people is not the facts they face but the interpretation they give to the facts.

The experience of the 12 spies illustrates that truth.

Their purpose in spying was not to determine if the land should be taken. That had already been decided. It was to determine how best to accomplish that task.

All spies found the land to be an exceedingly good land, flowing with milk and honey. All saw the giants, the sons of Anak.

But Caleb and Joshua viewed the giants in the light of God's orders—and they didn't look so big after all. To Joshua and Caleb, the giants only represented opportunity. They say concerning those giants, "They are bread for us" (Num. 14:9, KJV).

Looking at the same situation, the other spies became



completely unnerved. "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (14:33, KJV).

Looking at the opinions given by the two sets of spies, we see two very different reactions.

Although that story took place thousands of years ago, those same two categories of people still exist today.

## I. Some People, Represented by the Ten Unfaithful Spies, Face Life, Seeing Only the Problems

We live in a problem-conscious culture. We are probably the best surveyed people in history. Those surveys disclose that we have a keen realization of our problems. We are aware of the pollution problem, the energy crises, the threat of mass starvation, the possibility of global holocaust. We are aware of church problems, national problems, international problems, and individual problems. These problems are very real, and we cannot simply ignore them.

But neither do we need to overemphasize problems, becoming so conscious of the problems that we are paralyzed by fear.

Too often people lacking faith look at all of the problems of life, settle down, and become very satisfied doing nothing.

This is what happened to Israel that day in the wilderness.

**ILLUS.** I'm reminded of the wild duck that came down into a barnyard while migrating south for the winter. He liked it so well that he stayed. In the fall, his companions passed overhead and his first impulse was to rise and join them. But he had eaten too well and could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. The day came when his old travelers could pass overhead without his even hearing their call.

When we first decide to become content taking the easy way out, we sometimes start to jump and help when a problem arises. But eventually we get so used to running from giants that we don't even respond to the problems.

Perhaps the giant is injured feelings or broken fellowship. Perhaps it started out small but, by trying to ignore the problem, it has become bigger and refuses to go away. That curt remark or that unkind word has become a giant in your life—a giant that you fear and refuse to conquer.

Because of the fear and lack of faith among the 10 pessimistic spies, the whole nation of Israel spent 40 years wandering needlessly in the wilderness.

Many times today the small problems that churches have allowed to become giants keep the whole congregation wandering needlessly in a spiritual no-man's-land.

But there was another reaction.

## II. Some People Can Face Up to Life, Seeing the Possibilities

That's what Caleb and Joshua did.

Their reaction and report doesn't mean that they were

any less intelligent than the other spies. It simply means that they weren't obsessed with the problems.

It takes at least three things to enable one to see the possibilities of life.

A. We need a sense of mission.

Joshua and Caleb had a sense of mission about what they were to do.

They went to find a way into the land, not to report the difficulties.

They had a sense of mission. With a strong sense of mission, anyone can succeed.

B. We need a vision of strength.

A person who thinks he's a failure will more than likely be a failure.

The 10 unfaithful spies saw themselves as grasshoppers before the inhabitants of the land. They considered themselves insignificant and too weak to act.

But Caleb and Joshua did not agree. "We are well able to overcome," they said. They had a vision of strength.

C. We need an awareness of God.

Real power comes from an awareness of God.

The secret of Caleb and Joshua's view was dependence on God.

Knowing as much about the new land as the other 10 spies, and knowing as much about the children of Israel as the others, if they had depended on their own strength, they, too, would have been discouraged.

But there was a difference. They depended on God.

Our dependence on God needs to be sincere and honest. God will help us defeat those problems dressed as giants.

The way that you face up to life will depend on the interpretation you give life and upon your dependence on God.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Call to Worship	"Be Exalted" (Chambers)
Hymn	"O Worship the King"
Choruses	"Bless His Holy Name"
	"I Just Want to Praise You"
	"He Who Began a Good Work"
Sanctuary Singers	"Jesus Will Make a Way" (Cymbala)
Call to Prayer	
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Something Beautiful"
Family Greeting	
Choruses	"Hand in Hand"
	"Thanks"
Message in Song	
Morning Message	Pastor
	"Defeating Giants"
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ

# THE HERITAGE OF THE SERVANT

A Sermon to Honor Our Senior Adults

by Tim Stearman

Isa. 54:11-17

Jan. 23, 1994

## INTRO:

In the spring of 1903, John Robert and Fanny Stearman put nearly everything they had on the auction block at the old home place at Summerville, Ky., in Green County. Then they headed for the promised prosperity to be found on the plains of Oklahoma.

With their nine children, they cautiously boarded the first train they had ever seen. Standing on the platform and watching that old steam locomotive belching black soot and cinders into the air, they had to question the wisdom of their decision.

Two of the older boys carried between them a bushel basket with a red-checkered tablecloth neatly covering the contents and tucked down in the side. Inside that bushel basket nestled the fare they would be eating for the next three days aboard the train. The contents included fried side meat, biscuits, and a crock of frog-eye gravy.

On the journey to Oklahoma, the train stopped at Birthright, Tex., and the family piled out of that old Pullman car, thrilled to be back on solid ground. There to meet them was cousin Tom Chaney in his covered wagon.

They had hardly loaded the wagon when Tom said, "Fanny, the Hudson-Taylor band is holding a brush arbor meeting over near Sulphur Springs." After traveling three days with nine children, she consented to go.

They preached on second blessing holiness, and she realized that although she knew Jesus as her Savior, something was lacking. That night she was sanctified holy. She only shouted once in her life, but that night she shouted.

In her declining years, she spent hours in her upstairs bedroom in a creaking rocking chair praying for her family.

Today she lies beneath the red clay of an Oklahoma grave, but her memory lives on in the hearts and lives of her family.

I never knew her. But I think I can identify with some of the things she experienced and some of the things she felt, because her actions and her life are part of my heritage.

Our heritage is made up of more than history and genealogy. Heritage also includes precepts—beliefs.

In Isaiah 54, we have a narrative from God. The symbolism in this passage is twofold.

1. God speaks words of encouragement to the city.
2. God speaks as though He's addressing a bride.

Throughout the Scripture, the Church is referred to as the bride. So we have a passage that could be interpreted as directed toward the Church.

We read these words, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" (v. 17). Certain things concerning my heritage and yours are the same.

Whether or not a new generation receives its full heritage depends a great deal on you and how you preserve it. You are currently in the process of giving to a new

generation the reins of the church. It reflects your personality and your interpretation of Scripture.

The mechanics of the church have your fingerprints on them because it was constructed and developed under your prayerful leadership. You give to a new generation beautiful church buildings, sprawling campuses, international headquarters, publishing companies—multiplied millions of dollars worth of property. You have done well.

But if we fail to inherit your spiritual values, the spiritual "fire," and the desire to "keep the glory down," we have inherited very little.

In Isaiah 54, I see the things you really want a new generation to inherit—the things worthy to be claimed as heritage.

## I. Peace Is a Worthy Inheritance

"Great shall be the peace of thy children" (v. 13, KJV).

Humankind has continuously searched for peace since Cain slew Abel. Historians and sociologists insist that peace is impossible. One quick glance backward would cause us certainly to agree.

World War I found the world engulfed in a cloud of smoke from the exploding charges of many nations as humankind continued its search for peace. It was claimed to be "the war that ends all war." It left 37 million people dead or wounded, cost the United States alone \$250 billion.

In reality, the blue smoke had hardly cleared from the battlefield when the world plunged into the depths of war again. Adolf Hitler marched through the throne rooms of Europe and struggled to shackle the world with his twisted, demonic dynasty. Three hundred thousand Americans were killed in battle and \$350 billion was spent by the U.S.A. alone.

We have experienced the heartbreak of Korea and witnessed the tragedy of Vietnam. The testimony of our world continues to shout, "Peace is impossible."

In our homes, divorce shatters marriage. Peace is not possible.

Our heritage of God's Word tells us differently. "Great shall be the peace of thy children."

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27, KJV).

Again Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, KJV).

The apostle Paul wrote from a Roman prison, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7, KJV).

You have taught us by your examples the truth of Paul's statement.

When the world is being blown apart and nations are falling, I can know **peace**. It's part of my heritage. The Bible teaches it, and you have presented it—the knowledge that I can come to Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and receive peace.

The world claims it's impossible, but my heritage says all things are possible!

**"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."**

## II. Purity Is a Worthy Inheritance

"In righteousness shalt thou be established" (v. 14, KJV).

You have taught us that righteousness is only possible with purity of heart.

Sir Galahad is immortalized by the fact that his "strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure." As long as the purity involves a fictitious character, it's acceptable by most. However, people scoff at the idea of having a clean, pure heart, even though they desperately long for it. People say it is an impossibility. Yet again, our heritage of God's Word tells us that it's not simply possible, but it's a promise.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the **pure** in heart for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8, KJV).

The Psalmist sang, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3-4, KJV).

Paul insisted, "Keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22, KJV).

You have passed that heritage on to this new generation. In a very real sense, this portion of our heritage sets us, the holiness movement, apart from other popular theologies.

You have proven to our satisfaction that it's true—that the cleansing, refining fire of the Holy Spirit can purify our hearts by faith.

**"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."**

## III. Power Is a Worthy Inheritance

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (v. 17, KJV). Those words speak of power.

**ILLUS.** In 1942, man, in his search for power, straddled the Columbia River with the Grand Coulee Dam. It cost American taxpayers \$785 million. They poured 11 million cubic yards of concrete into it—three times that of Boulder Dam.

The Grand Coulee stands 550 feet high and stretches almost one mile long. When they straddled the Columbia River with the Grand Coulee, it backed that river up beyond the Canadian border, 133 miles to the north.

The reservoir that it forms irrigates 1 million acres. Its 10 generators provide 1 billion kilowatts of electricity, which illuminate the Northwest.

That is great power.

But there is another form of power. God's Word speaks about spiritual power. Our heritage demands we possess spiritual power from God.

If a new generation fails, it will fail at this point of spiritual power. Too often the power that Uncle Bud spoke of, that C. B. Jernigan testified to, and that R. T. Williams experienced is only a sweet reminiscence. Puny amounts of spiritual power trickling from behind weak pulpits are but remnants of the power that used to explode when the man of God stood to deliver his message from God.

Spiritual power is almost a forgotten commodity in so many religious corners today. It's easy to become so entangled with the buttons and banners and promotions and slogans that we relegate the "power of God" to the back room.

Jesus reminds us, "Ye shall receive power" (Acts 1:8, KJV).

Paul declared, "In the last days perilous times shall come for men shall . . . [have] a form of godliness, but [deny] the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:1-2, 5, KJV).

If what we have witnessed in your lives is correct, then there is power in the blood of Jesus Christ. We dare not stumble through a generation without it because spiritual power is a vital heritage of the Lord's servant.

If an aspect of the church today is certainly not finished, it is in God's spiritual power in His people. You must not lay down the tools of your toil until a new generation fully inherits the spiritual power that you have experienced.

If you worry about turning over the keys of the church to a new generation, don't worry.

You have taught us well.

Jesus promised, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18, KJV).

**"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."**

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Call To Worship	Quartet
	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
Choruses	"To God Be the Glory"
	"Let There Be Glory"
	"We Will Glorify"
Hymn	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
Special Music	"Wonderful Peace"
Call to Prayer	"Pass Me Not"
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"God Is So Good"
Offertory	Piano and Organ Duet
Family Greeting	
Hymn	"Hidden Peace"
Sanctuary Singers	"Peace in Jesus" (Wolfe)
Morning Message	Pastor
	"The Heritage of the Servant"
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ

# COME BEFORE WINTER

by Tim Stearman

2 Tim. 4:21

Jan. 30, 1994

## INTRO:

Daniel Webster defines a friend as "one attached to another by esteem, respect, and affection."

Somehow those words hardly seem adequate to describe the way we feel about a close friend, someone that we really love.

True friends are entirely too few. We have our acquaintances, but true friends—best friends—don't come along every day.

Paul and Timothy felt that way about each other. Perhaps they were best friends. I think Paul liked being with Timothy simply because he was Timothy. Something magical in their personalities drew them together.

Out of that sense of friendship, Paul wrote these words to Timothy, "Do thy diligence to come before winter" (2 Tim. 4:21, KJV).

Why do I say that? Because on at least two other occasions in this letter alone, Paul urges Timothy to come to Rome.

Paul says that he had been "greatly desiring to see" Timothy (1:4, KJV). He says, "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me" (4:9, KJV). Then again in closing his letter, Paul writes, "Do thy diligence to come before winter."

## I. Paul's Request Was "Come Before Winter"

Because of friendship, Paul made a request that he wouldn't make of someone who wasn't his friend. "Come before winter."

Although it's a request made of a friend, there's something unique in this request.

### A. Paul gives an urgent request.

It was an urgent request for several reasons. Not only did he long to see Timothy, but he needed Timothy's help. Not only did he ask Timothy to come, but he asked him to bring some things with him.

Three things were mentioned (v. 13):

1. His books—his small traveling library.
2. His parchments—probably his legal papers, perhaps to prove he was a Roman citizen.
3. His cloak—his coat. The little dwelling where he lived let in the brisk autumn air through the cracks in the walls. Paul felt the cold. Winter was approaching, so he wanted his coat. "Come before winter."
4. He also requests that Timothy bring John Mark: "For he is profitable to me for the ministry" (v. 11, KJV). What a change in heart! Do you remember that Mark had so disappointed Paul at an earlier date it eventually caused the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Now Paul wants Mark.

Whom does he ask to bring him? Friend Timothy. When does he want them to come? Before winter.

"Come before winter"—an urgent request because Paul knew that before long the winter storms would

make travel hazardous. He urges Timothy to make the trip soon.

### B. Paul gives a revealing request.

Shrouded within the words of this plea, I see a revealing request.

Paul tells Timothy that Demas, Crescens, and Titus had left (v. 10). For various reasons, they were gone. The only one remaining with Paul was Luke the physician. I can imagine him as a scientist whose mind was consumed with the latest tests and methods, poring over experiments and extracting splinters, busy writing his own memoirs. Perhaps Luke was not really an individual to whom you could get close.

I see in Paul a great hunger for some real fellowship. Paul is a prisoner without human hope. He's eager for old friends to reminisce once again. He pleads with Timothy, "Come before winter."

## II. Our Prayer Is "Come Before Winter"

Another hunger consumes the human spirit like a cancer. That's a hunger for God.

Have you ever been really hungry?

Have you ever faced spiritual famine to the point of starvation? Have you ever been so hungry for God the Holy Spirit to descend and fill your life that you were willing to do anything to receive Him?

Jesus tells us, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6, KJV).

Paul reminds us, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst" (1 Cor. 4:11, KJV).

When we get that hungry, our prayer agrees with Paul's plea, "Come before winter."

O Lord, come before winter! Don't let us labor through the icy months ahead without a new touch from You.

Of all the friends we ever hope to have, none can be so true as Jesus. I join Paul in his request of a friend, "Jesus, come before winter."

Joseph Scriven wrote the words,

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

That's friendship—and I hunger for that friend that makes me call out, "Come before winter."

It is a hunger for Jesus, the One who said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35, KJV).

What if we continue to pray and hold on and it seems God doesn't come? What can we do?

Keep looking! Keep praying! Keep waiting! Keep urging Jesus to "come before winter."

Paul said, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7, KJV), and that's what I'm going to keep—believing that Jesus will come if we want Him.

I'm not interested in a superficial emotional moving, spurred by oratory. I'm interested in the deep moving of the Holy Spirit.

Like Paul, I want something. That's why we shout together, "Come before winter."

I'm so hungry for fellowship with Friend Jesus that I pray with Paul, "Come before winter."

### III. God's Invitation Is "Come Before Winter"

Shrouded in these words may be "God's invitation" to you.

You are lost. You have wanted to accept Jesus for years. You have put it off time after time.

So often you have heard the words of Jesus: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28, KJV). Apply the words of Paul to that verse and you may hear Jesus saying, "Come before winter."

The trees are almost bare. December is nudging November into history. Winter will soon be upon us.

That day so long ago they stripped a bramble of its beauty and wound the thorny stem into a crown. They led Jesus away and, with the efficiency of masters at torture, they crucified Him.

Blood trickled down His arms and dripped from His elbows. His hands, feet, and side were on fire with pain. Do you know what? He didn't die for the world. He died for you.

And if you were the only person who needed to be saved, He would have died only for you.

**II. I. I. S.** A little boy snuggled under his covers. He felt mistreated and rejected, taken for granted. The next morning he wrote the following note and slipped it under his mother's breakfast plate.

For cleaning out the barn	7 cents
For taking out trash	3 cents
For feeding the dog	2 cents
For bringing in the mail	4 cents
For cutting weeds	<u>8 cents</u>
Total	24 cents

The next morning as his mother was fixing breakfast, she noticed the note. Her heart began to swell and tears to course down her cheeks. She turned the page over and on the back she wrote—

For going to jaws of death to bring you	No charge
For cleaning your clothes and ironing	No charge
For fixing your meals each day	No charge
For sitting up with you all night	<u>No charge</u>
Total	No charge

P.S. I did it because I love you.

The little boy discovered the note and started to cry. He hugged his mother around her waist and said, "I didn't realize."

We come to Jesus with our petty little complaints and demands. He points to Calvary's cross and says, "No charge." Today He stands before you with the request of a friend. He pleads for you to "Come before winter."

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Chorus	"As We Gather"
	"The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silent before him" (Hab. 2:20, KJV)
Choruses	"Holy Ground"
	"In Moments like These"
Hymn	"My Jesus, I Love Thee"
Call to Prayer	"Jesus Is Waiting"
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Learning to Lean"
Family Greeting	
Chorus	"Let Your Love Flow Through Me"
Morning Message	Pastor
	"Come Before Winter"
Choral Offertory	"He Sees Me Through the Blood" (Rambo)
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ

# A CUP IN HIS NAME

by Tim Stearman

Mark 9:38-41

Feb. 6, 1994

## INTRO:

Standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon, wind blowing your hair, you have an unusual opportunity. Your perspective is far different from the view of one riding the rapids below. They see only a few hundred feet at a time. Their vision is blocked by the bend in the river and the sheer rock walls.

But from the vantage point high above the canyon floor, you have opportunity to see where the river is coming from and where it's going. You have an overview that is at once breathtaking in beauty and overwhelming in scope.

We get a similar feeling when reading Mark 9. We watch the disciples bob along from one event to another, totally unaware of what might lie ahead. We, however, hold the Word of God in our hands and have the advantage of seeing the disciples all along their journey.

Four questions arise and at least two observations emerge. Let's look at the questions and consider the truths.

Mark 9 begins with Peter, James, John, and Jesus on a mountain. Jesus was transfigured, or visibly glorified, in the presence of the three disciples. Moses and Elijah made an unexpected appearance. They talked with Jesus as an old friend. A cloud appeared engulfing them, and they heard a voice from the cloud say, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 9:7).

Peter gets caught up in the whole scene and says, "Rabbi, it is **good** for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters" (v. 5). In effect, he's asking the first question.

## I. Why Not Stay?

It was a pretty heady experience for some fishermen from the sea to suddenly be in the company of Moses and Elijah.

I'm not certain they completely understood the scope of Jesus the Messiah, but they understood Moses and Elijah. They were common men in the company of religious superstars. They even heard the voice of God speak. Who wouldn't want to stay? It is a question we ask by word and deed over and over.

A. Occasionally, it's when the Spirit of God is near.

Our mountaintop experiences! The songs are so good. The fellowship is so warm. The presence of God is so real! We may wonder aloud, "Why not stay?"

B. Often we ask that question in the church.

We grow discouraged. The church has "existed" but not grown for years. Our morale hits bottom. Our community hardly knows we exist.

Our attitude and actions speak louder than our feeble protest, "Why not stay? We've done rather well. We've managed to survive. If we do anything different, it will involve more work, more wear and tear on the building.

And certainly it will take more money. That new preacher's always talking about money as it is."

"Why not stay?"

A good argument for maintaining status quo could probably be made—if we were anything but a church.

"Why not stay," either on the mountain of a great spiritual high—or in the valley "getting by?"

The reason is portrayed forcefully beginning with verse 14. There we find the story that asks the second question.

Mark tells of the three disciples and Jesus coming back down the mountain where things had been wonderful and finding nine disciples and a spirit-possessed boy (vv. 14-29). They rediscovered life as it really is down in the valleys. Turmoil, disease, rumor, talk, criticism, anger, frustration, and disappointment.

Our second question asks:

## II. Who's Got the Problem?

A demon-possessed boy or nine disciples who had been unable to cast out the demon? In reality, both do.

The boy is receiving no help from the prayers or urgings by the disciples for the demon to leave. The disciples have been discredited and ridiculed. Their claims to special power in the name of Jesus seem to be empty promises.

Who's got the problem? The world we face or do we? Is it the world where petty dictators order people to their deaths and abortion clinics can slaughter the innocent? Or do we have the problem? Is it the church gathering in our sanctuaries of safety?

These nine disciples had gone through all the motions, but they had nothing more to offer until Jesus arrived. We may know the right words to say. We may do all the right things, but unless we seek Jesus—His forgiveness, His fullness, His power—our world will never be healed.

Our problem is that we seldom get beyond being forgiven.

Who's got the problem? "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV). Jesus makes the difference!

## III. Who's the Greatest?

The disciples left and went through Galilee (v. 30). Finally they came to Capernaum. There in a house, Jesus confronts them about their conversation while on the road. "What were you arguing about?" Their reply becomes the basis for our third question: "Who's the greatest?"

You wonder if the question wasn't brought on by events in the preceding verses. Three had been with Jesus on the mountain. Nine had been left behind and couldn't cast out an evil spirit.

Can you imagine the conversation as they had walked down the road?



Peter: "What's wrong with you guys? Why couldn't you cast out that spirit? Now I know why Jesus took us to the mountaintop. You can't even handle a simple exorcism."

John: "Yes, I'll bet Jesus has big plans for the three of us. He's probably going to divide this country into three districts, and we'll each get one."

James: "No, it will be two districts. You and Peter will each get one, and I'll be the bishop over you."

Why do you do what you do? Do you desire important roles? Do you want recognition? Do you shy away from some assignments because they are beneath you?

We all have ways of establishing "Who's the greatest"—our pecking order. Who's the greatest?

It happens in the church too. What committee do you serve on? What church do you attend? How many votes did you get? How large is your church? How many people do you preach to? How much authority do you have?

"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all'" (v. 35).

Jesus' words shake us because they are diametrically opposed to everything society teaches us. Our world says, "Be like Lee Iacocca." Jesus says, "Be like a little child." That brings us to our fourth question.

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward" (v. 41). The question is:

#### IV. Who's Got the Water?

Maybe I should restate that. "Who's got the courage to extend a cup of water in Jesus' name?"

"In my name" involves a recognition of Jesus' authority.

"In my name" involves a recognition of need.

"In my name" involves a recognition of my responsibility.

Who's got the water? We do! We have the ability to change the world around us for the better with the equivalent of a cup of water in His name.

#### CONCLUSION:

Now, let me make two observations regarding these questions.

1. We're not as great as we think we are. "Who's the greatest?"

Mark 9 is perhaps unequaled in its teaching against religious bigotry. Look at the incredible sequence of events. In verse 18, the disciples were perplexed because they could not cast the demon out of the little boy. In verse 34, they're arguing over who's the greatest. In verse 38,

they're reporting to Jesus that some other man was driving demons out of people in Jesus' name: "And we told him to stop, because he was not one of us" (v. 38).

They weren't able to do it in verse 18, but they sure didn't want the fellow in verse 38 doing it, because "he was not one of us" (v. 38).

God has a great way of leveling us at times. He reminds us here that when we proclaim the name of Jesus we are all equals.

2. We're not as powerless as we pretend to be.

Look again at verse 41, "Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name . . ."

That's referring to you and me. We can give a cup of water in the name of Jesus. Many of us shrink from service because we feel that we have nothing to contribute. Oh, but you do. Even a cup of water, which we might consider trivial, is big business in God's eyes.

Here, Jesus stresses the high evaluation of elementary kindness and service. Strangely enough, we need His constant reminder. There are some things that, because we see them all the time, we never see them at all. Familiarity doesn't always breed contempt. Sometimes it breeds blindness. The elementary basic necessities are often the forgotten obvious. Christianity can be "spiritualized" out of real touch with common need.

We're not as powerless as we pretend to be. Every one of us here today can be bearers of the cup. When we extend a cup of water to one of Jesus' own, it is as though we were giving it to Him.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Call to Worship	"Be Exalted" (Chambers)
Chorus	"All Hail King Jesus"
Hymn	"All Hail the Power"
Choruses	"Thou Art Worthy"
	"Alleluia"
Call to Prayer	"Jesus Is Waiting"
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Hand in Hand"
Choral Offertory	"My Faith Still Holds" (Ovid Young)
Family Greeting	
Children's Choir	
Sanctuary Singers	"Put All Your Trust" (Cymbala)
Morning Message	Pastor
	"A Cup in His Name"
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ

# IT ONLY TAKES A SPARK

by Tim Stearman

Ezek. 20:47

Feb. 13, 1994

## INTRO:

On a hot summer day in 1891, cowboy Bob Womack was going about his usual duties, watching the herd as they grazed contentedly on the lush green grass in the meadows surrounding Pikes Peak. Bob worked as a cowboy on parts of his father's ranch, but that was just to help him get enough cash to fund his favorite pastime—prospecting.

On that day in 1891, Bob rode into a gulch to find a cow that had strayed from the herd. While in that gulch, he noticed a chunk of rock with the delightful color that immediately told a part-time prospector that the gold content in the ore was very high. It didn't take Bob Womack long to trade in his spurs and saddle for the delights of a pick and shovel.

Word spread across the plains of Oklahoma and Kansas like a wind-whipped prairie fire—gold had been discovered at the foot of Pikes Peak on Cripple Creek!

Soon Bob Womack was joined by other fortune hunters. His little mining shack no longer sat alone. He was joined by scores of other men who came to strike it rich.

At first, the town was little more than a tent city, as men tacked any kind of a makeshift shelter together. Gradually, as more mines were opened, more buildings were quickly constructed from the rough pine lumber so prevalent on the surrounding hills.

The population continued to grow in those years until Cripple Creek became the boomtown of Colorado. Three separate railroads served the community. The mines were worked three shifts around the clock. Some days 100 trains loaded with ore pulled through the thriving city. The dress shops in Cripple Creek stocked the latest Paris fashions. Ladies from Colorado Springs would journey there to do their shopping. Over 100 bars and saloons went into operation during the days of gold mining in Cripple Creek.

It happened on an evening of 1896. Most of the town was asleep when a dance hall girl and her cowboy friend got into an argument and then a fight. During the fight, a kerosene stove was kicked over and the flames jumped immediately to the curtains at the window. The curtains were quickly devoured, and the hungry fire leapt to the walls and started consuming the floor. In a matter of minutes, the entire room was on fire and finally the building.

The fire quickly spread from one building to the next as it continued to destroy everything in its path. The makeshift shanties of the suburb and the multistoried buildings at the heart of the city were all quickly engulfed by flames. Brick and concrete were building materials almost unheard of at the time. The fire, aided by a good wind, whipped through the city and burned the pine buildings like tinder.

When the smoke finally cleared, virtually every build-

ing in the town had been destroyed or severely damaged. The entire city had been destroyed by the carelessness of two people.

It had all started with just a spark.

In Ezekiel 20, we read a parable about Judah's destruction by fire. God is saying, "I will kindle a fire," or "I will send war." "And it shall devour every green tree, . . . and every dry tree . . . It shall not be quenched" (vv. 47-48, KJV).

These words refer to the destruction of Judah. Let's apply them to ourselves. In that threat I can hear a promise:

"I will kindle a fire in thee . . . and all . . . shall see that I . . . have kindled it: **it shall not be quenched**" (vv. 47-48, KJV).

It's as easy for God to kindle fires of revival and renewal as it is for Him to kindle the fires of destruction. In fact, God desires to kindle fires of renewal more than fires of destruction.

As we apply those words to the spiritual life of God's Church, they begin to throb with promise: "I will kindle a fire in thee . . . and all shall see that I have kindled it: **it shall not be quenched.**"

What a revival that would be! Can you imagine that promise being fulfilled for us? God, kindling a fire of revival within our hearts, and "all flesh" or all of our community seeing that God has kindled it! A burning fire of revival and renewal that shall not be quenched!

Somewhere in the Church there is a spark. Maybe its in you—but somewhere there's a spark. Somewhere is a person who by simple obedience to God could set this Church on fire.

If "it only takes a spark," and somewhere that spark exists right now—a spark that will ignite God's Church—maybe you are that spark.

In every case, the spark centers around the word *obedience*. To be a spiritual spark, you must be obedient to God.

What does that obedience call for?

## I. The Spark of Obedience Calls for Repentance of Sin

People in every congregation across our world could set their churches on fire by simply repenting. There are, no doubt, people in our congregation who could do the same thing.

Perhaps people are praying for you and carrying a burden for you. Your simple act of repentance could be the spark that would ignite our church. Your simple act of repentance could spread excitement and joy through the congregation like a prairie fire. You may be the spark of revival that begins with a repentance.

Spiritual fires don't sweep the church until you are set on fire. "It only takes a spark." Are you willing to be God's spark?

"I will kindle a fire in thee . . . It shall not be quenched." It only takes a spark. Are you willing?

## II. The Spark of Obedience Calls for Refilling with the Spirit

The Bible says, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31, KJV).

The men referred to had been in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. But they realized their need to be refilled.

Perhaps your act of obedience is needed to set the blaze. "It only takes a spark." Would you be that spark?

"I will kindle a fire in thee: It shall not be quenched."

It only takes a spark—are you willing to humble yourself in order to be God's spark for revival?

## III. The Spark of Obedience Calls for Renewal of Fellowship

Notice that on the Day of Pentecost the scripture says, "They were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1, KJV).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Upper Room was filled with people who were there with the same purpose in mind. They were **together**. They formed a bond of unity and love. They were seeking the same thing.

You may need a renewal of fellowship. Until that comes, you will lead a defeated Christian life. The more defeated you feel, the more defeated your church will be. But, "It only takes a spark."

Would you be willing in obedience to the Lord to go to someone and apologize? Will you give up holding thoughts of dislike and lack of love? Whatever hindrances might be pointed out by Jesus, we all need a renewal of fellowship.

You may have the most glorious joy of being the spark that ignites the fires that God is kindling. You could be that spark. Would you?

He was born in 1837 in Northfield, Mass., to a family with eight other children. Life didn't offer much. When he was four, his father passed away. At a very early age, he began doing everything he could to support the large family.

By the time he was 16, he was already making a name for himself as a shoe salesman. When he was 18, a Sunday School teacher named Edward Kimball walked into the Boston shoe store where this young man was working. He spoke to him about Jesus Christ.

Kimball used such compelling, convicting force that the two were soon on their knees in prayer. The young shoe salesman found Christ that day, and Jesus changed his life.

Shortly thereafter, he moved to Chicago to make his fortune selling shoes. But he never did, for he spent too much time winning people to Jesus.

He organized a Sunday School class for little ragged street children. The 18 children that he started with soon blossomed to over 1,000 people.

One day, this shoe-salesman-turned-soul-winner heard the statement, "It remains to be seen what God could do if He could find one man who would completely surrender to Him." Dwight L. Moody said, "I will be that man."

Moody preached in every large city in America. He conducted four campaigns in England, preaching to 30,000 people at a time. He preached in missions, in slums, on skid rows.

If you had told that shoe salesman in Boston—the one that had a tendency to stammer when he became nervous—that one day he would preach to over 30,000 people at a time, he would have called you crazy.

But God kindled a fire in Dwight L. Moody's heart—a fire that "shall not be quenched." That holy fire of love revolutionized his life. It all started with just a spark.

God's Word still rings true, "I will kindle a fire in thee . . . and all shall see that I have kindled it: **it shall not be quenched.**" But it takes a spark to ignite it. Would you be that spark? Even if it means repentance of sin or refilling with the Spirit, or renewal of fellowship?

"It only takes a spark."

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Call to Worship	"Be Exalted" (Chambers)
Hymn	"Praise Him! Praise Him!"
Choruses	"To God Be the Glory"
	"Great Is the Lord"
Hymn	"I Want to Be like Jesus"
Choruses	"My Desire"
	"O to Be like Thee"
	"Jesus Is Waiting"
Call to Prayer	
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Surely the Presence"
Offertory	
Family Greeting	"How Majestic Is Your Name"
Special Music by Family	
Special Music	"And Can It Be?" (Young)
Morning Message	Pastor
	"It Only Takes a Spark"
Choral Benediction	"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)
Postlude	Organ

# SURRENDER TO THE SAVIOR

by Tim Stearman

Col. 1:1-9

Feb. 20, 1994

## INTRO:

To the south of Colorado Springs proper and in the area of the Broadmoor Hotel, there are two canyons—South Cheyenne Canyon with Seven Falls, and North Cheyenne Canyon with lesser-known, but free, Helen Hunt Falls.

From my childhood days, North Cheyenne Canyon with its sheer rock cliffs and clear, flowing stream has been one of my favorite places. I have passed that feeling on to my daughters. We spent two days in the canyon this past summer.

Only recently I've discovered some very beautiful hiking trails through the area. I walked the two-mile Columbine Trail. Then I decided to try the Mount Cutler Trail. We would take the whole family. What a delight! Starting in the canyon floor, we zigzagged up the trail through tall stands of blue spruce and ponderosa pine. We paused to listen to the rustle of the aspen and the roar of streams, not really realizing how high we were climbing until the altitude and a few extra pounds began urging that we rest. Not wanting to be the first to submit, I continued to walk until finally my lungs screamed for oxygen, my heart pounded, and my legs ached. My wife said, "Let's rest." Thanks, dear.

Sitting on the root of a pine tree growing out of the side of the mountain, we gathered together and laughed about our poor physical fitness. Then we looked out and noticed that we had crested a ridge. In fact, we had done so some time earlier. We had literally climbed out of North Cheyenne Canyon and were looking over into South Cheyenne Canyon. We caught our breath as we realized that from this vantage point, we had the greatest view possible of the Seven Falls—and it was free.

How long had we been in view of the falls without seeing them? How long had we struggled up the climb without reaping the benefits?

When we finally surrendered to our need for rest, we caught sight of the most beautiful scene that our entire vacation would offer.

Surrender?

In our 20th-century mentality, surrender means to lose. It is the "way of the wimp." As usual, Jesus has a different way of looking at things.

The dictionary gives us fresh insight: "To yield to the power of another—to give up possession—to relinquish."

Reading through the Book of Colossians several months ago, that theme of "surrender" kept coming through. I want us to hitch onto that theme today, "Surrender to the Savior."

"Yield to the power" of the Savior. "Give up possession" to the Savior. "Relinquish" all to the Savior.

Life resembles climbing a mountain. When we surrender to the call of the Savior, we finally discover the beauty we've been missing.

By way of background, Colossae was the least impor-

tant church to which any epistle of Paul was addressed. But Colossians is a great epistle, performing a great service. By A.D. 400, the city of Colossae no longer existed.

Epaphras (v. 7) was probably a convert of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. As a minister, he evangelized the Lycus Valley for Christ.

When Paul wrote, a form of heresy had cropped up. The exact form of heresy has never been determined. Yet, in the heart of this city and this heresy, there existed a church. Paul loved the church.

## I. Surrender to the Savior Produces Holy People

"Holy and faithful" (NIV); "Saints and faithful brethren" (KJV).

A. The fundamental necessity for Christian service is holiness.

The word "saint" in the KJV means holy one. What is a saint? One is a saint in biblical terms only because he is "in Christ."

To be "in Christ" is to be possessed by Christ—to be under His control or influence. *Beacon Bible Exposition* says, "The phrase 'in Christ' should be understood as being in the 'power of another.'"

That's almost the exact terminology the dictionary uses to define *surrender*. To be a saint means surrender to the Lord Jesus.

Surrender to the Savior doesn't stifle. We catch the Spirit of Christ.

As the spirit of a person can influence another person without violating his freedom or his individuality, so the Spirit of Christ can transform into new creations those who live in Him without ever denying them freedom of the fulfillment of their personalities.

B. Another fundamental necessity for Christian service is brotherliness.

"We heard of your faith . . . and of the love which ye have to all the saints" (v. 4, KJV).

Good news travels fast. Paul in Rome thanks God because he had heard that the Colossians were showing two great qualities—faith in Jesus and love for their fellowmen.

These are two important aspects of the Christian life. The Christian must have faith. He must know what he believes. He must also have love for his fellowman. It's not enough only to have faith. It's not enough only to love our fellowman.

The Christian has a double commitment. He is committed to Jesus Christ and as a result he is committed to his fellowmen—the two pillars of the Christian life.

"We have heard of your faith."

Good news travels fast.

## II. Surrender to the Savior Produces Fruit

"All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and

growing, just as it has been doing among you" (v. 6).

The Church of the living God is alive and growing and successful.

The good news of Jesus is universal, meeting people's needs everywhere.

False gospels are limited, growing out of local circumstances and displaying narrow characteristics. The gospel of Jesus Christ has two distinguishing marks.

A. It produces spiritual fruit (see Gal. 5:22-23).

B. It "grows" or "spreads."

A spiritual church can't stay small and isolated. We who love Jesus Christ belong to something more than a little puny human organization. We belong to the Church of the Living God. His Church produces fruit and grows. If not here, then somewhere else. But the Church is alive.

How does this happen? By surrender to the Savior.

### III. Surrender to the Savior Produces Prayer Without Ceasing

"We . . . do not cease to pray for you" (v. 9, KJV).

What a beautiful thing it is to hear the prayers of a saint for his friends. That's what we hear in this passage. We learn a great deal about prayer from Paul.

A. Unceasing prayer asks for the discernment of God's will.

B. Unceasing prayer asks for the power to perform God's will.

"We have not stopped praying."

A pastoral friend of a Southern Baptist congregation told me recently that a survey taken in their denomination reported that the average pastor prays less than three minutes a day.

The average layman prays less than six minutes a day. When do we pray without ceasing? Only when we're in trouble!

**ILLUS.** Several years ago, my parents rented a cabin in the mountains of Colorado for a week. My wife and I drove by to see them. While we were there, I decided to pull a prank on my father. I reached up and pushed the "tester" button on the smoke alarm, knowing that the loud noise in unfamiliar surroundings would startle him.

However, the smoke alarm was not the usual \$9.95 model available at the local hardware store. It was part of a complete security system protecting the house.

When I pushed that button, bells started ringing, horns began blowing, and a recorded voice shouted from under the eaves, "Fire, fire, fire." Suddenly, I was the one in trouble.

For the next half hour I walked around the house searching for ways to disarm the system. All the while, I was praying, "Lord, get me out of this."

When the bells are going off and the alarms are screaming, we're ready to pray. I'm glad to serve a God who really does have a life preserver!

For what was Paul praying? Knowledge—not simply intellectual knowledge, but spiritual understanding and the knowledge of God's will in practical, everyday issues.

Paul often insists that by yielding ourselves to God, we can know His will.

What is yielding? Surrender to the Savior.

Notice how Paul spoke of the people in the Colossian church. They were "holy and faithful." They had a "love for the brethren." Because of them, "the gospel is producing fruit." Then he says, "We have not stopped praying."

How do we possess those qualities? By surrender to the Savior.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	Organ
Special Music	
Hymns	"How Great Thou Art"
	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
	"Holy Ground"
Choruses	"Father, I Adore You"
	"Search Me, O God"
Call to Prayer	
Open Altar	
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"
Offertory	Preschool Children
Family Greeting	
Special Music	
Morning Message	Pastor
	"Surrender"
Moments of Commitment	
Choral Benediction	"Be Exalted" (Chambers)
Postlude	Organ

# BRUISED REEDS

by Tim Stearman

Isa. 42:1-4

Feb. 27, 1994

## INTRO:

A young shepherd boy cut down a dried reed from a marshy area around a pond where he watered his sheep. Very carefully, he began to carve with his crude instruments. He cut a notch in one end and gently punctured small holes down the length of the 12-inch shaft of hollow fiber. His sheep grazed contentedly while he lay in the sun on a rock and worked like a craftsman. Music raced through his mind and heart. He wanted to do more than hum. In a short time, his work was finished. He held in his hands a new reed flute.

He wondered if it would play the notes he heard in his mind. Almost timidly, he placed the flute to his lips and started to breathe through its chamber. A grin creased his face when a clear, steady note penetrated the afternoon air. Every day he would sit on an area overlooking his sheep and play his homemade instrument.

The sweet music would mingle with the sound of the breeze on the upland hills and with the murmur of the pines.

One day as he led his sheep back to the marshy pond to drink, he, too, bent down to drink and didn't notice the little reed flute gently drop from his shepherd's bag.

He started leading the sheep back to their grazing area—his mind wandering somewhere else. Some time later he reached in his bag for his flute, only to discover it was gone.

At first he almost panicked—then he decided to simply retrace his steps. He didn't walk; he ran all the way back to the pond and to the place he had knelt to drink. There lay his flute. While he had been gone, a large animal had walked to the water's edge to drink and stepped on the flute, crushing it and driving it into the mud.

He gently picked it up and estimated the damage. Then he finished snapping the little flute in half and flung it into the midst of the pond. The ripples hadn't even reached the shore before he had cut down a new reed and started all over again. His prized reed flute had been crushed and would no longer play.

There are people like that broken reed flute. They've lost the music from their lives.

When God breathes upon their soul, they give no musical response.

## I. Some People Have Been Broken

How do these human reeds become bruised? There are many ways.

A. Some are broken by personal sin.

We can be driven by an appetite to the place where the music from our spirit is destroyed.

B. Some are broken by heavy burdens of grief and sorrow.

I remember hearing of a beautiful vocalist who experi-

enced a period of such deep personal sorrow that it was said of her, "No one ever heard her sing again." The fragile reed was bruised and splintered.

C. Some are broken by anxiety and care.

Undue anxiety can break the music of the spirit.

D. Some are broken by failure.

We all identify with failure. We know how it feels to be bruised because we've failed.

## II. Some People Have Been Bound

The question is not really so much, "How do the reeds become bruised?" But rather, "What can we do with them after they're bruised?" Or more importantly, "What will the Savior do with these bruised reeds?"

A. Jesus has no desire to finish our destruction.

He won't discard us, abandon us, or toss us aside.

The little shepherd boy snapped his reed in two and threw it into the pond, but our scripture teaches us that Jesus won't do that to us. "A bruised reed, He will not break."

B. Jesus will restore us.

We call him the Great Physician, can't He restore a bruised reed?

Can't Jesus restore a broken, bleeding, bruised man or woman to fullness of life?

Unlike the shepherd boy, the Great Shepherd can mend the broken flutes.

C. Jesus himself gives an example in a story.

A young man whose life was strong and full went and "wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:13, KJV). "He began to be in want," and what did the world do to help? "No man gave unto him" (vv. 14, 16, KJV).

He was broken, rejected, tossed away!

Ah! But here's the best part: he went home. Notice the words, when the elder son came near the house, "He heard music" (v. 25, KJV).

What was that music? It was the restored music of the repaired flute. The bruised reed had been mended. Our loving Lord can deal with bruised reeds—and with us when we have been beaten by sorrow, or care, or sin.

God's word says, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken" (Ezek. 34:16, KJV).

## III. Some People Have Been Blown by the Wind

God's Word speaks of another kind of reed.

Go back to the meadow marsh where the shepherd boy first started to fashion his flute. There on the edge of the pond stand a whole cluster of reeds and cattails. Red-winged blackbirds drop from the sky and perch on those reeds.

Notice how the winds blow them, how they sway, how pliable they are.



Jesus spoke of these reeds, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" (Matt. 11:7, KJV).

These reeds yielded to the wind; they were swayed—anyhow, anyway, anywhere.

They bent with the wind, from whatever direction it blew.

But the Scripture speaks of not just a swaying reed—but a "bruised reed." Broken on its stem, it begins to wither at the place of the fracture—broken because there was a place of weakness.

There are people like those marsh reeds. They change their opinion every hour, until the power of conviction is gone. They change their movements. They become bruised by the wind and broken.

What can we do with them? Toss them aside? What will the Savior do? Again, "A bruised reed he will not break." He will turn the bruised reed into an iron pillar.

The New Testament tells us of a man "driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6, KJV). How that sounds like many weak-willed people.

One day someone said to Peter, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth" (Mark 14:67, KJV).

But Peter denied it, "I don't know the man!" (Matt. 26:74).

A poor, bruised reed—blown and breaking before the wind. Surely, Jesus will cast this one aside.

But after Jesus' resurrection, the angel said, "Go . . . tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:7, KJV).

What is the significance of that word? It is the Lord at work on a bruised reed.

Later Jesus asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:15, KJV).

It's the Lord at work on a broken heart.

Look further in the narrative and you will read, "When

they saw the boldness of Peter" (Acts 4:13, KJV). What is the significance of that? It is the old, trembling, shaking reed, converted into an iron pillar.

Do you ever feel like you're the only one who ever failed God? Who really blew it? The enemy wants you to think that.

He wants you to believe that when you're at your lowest, God is somehow pleased. The enemy is a liar suggesting that when you're bruised, God is anxious to cut you down, snap you in two, and cast you away.

What does God want you to think?

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude

Introduction of Babies

Baby Dedication

Hymn

"How Firm a Foundation"

Chorus

"I Love Him"

Hymns

"The Old Rugged Cross"

"When We See Christ"

Call to Prayer

Open Altar

Pastoral Prayer

Chorus

"Seek Ye First"

Choral Offertory

"Sinner Saved by Grace" (Gaither)

Family Greeting

Special Music

Children's Choir

Chorus

"Hand in Hand"

Morning Message

Pastor

"Bruised Reeds"

Choral Benediction

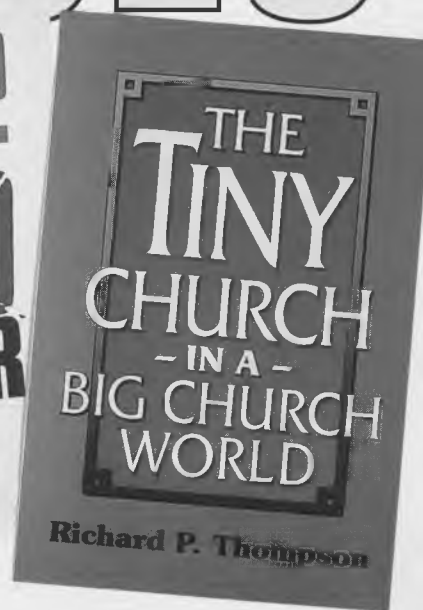
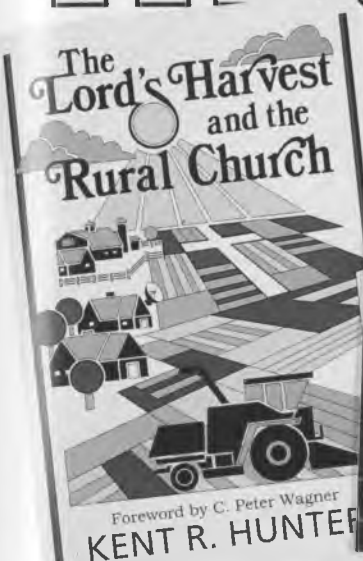
"Now Walk with God" (Skillings)

Postlude



"THE CENTERPIECE IS FOR YOUR BENEFIT."

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