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Randal E. Denny (Editor)
Olivet Nazarene University

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DECEMBER / JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1994-95

THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

EVERY PASTOR'S NIGHTMARE

PREACHER, DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE TIMES?

OVERCOMING INSECURITY IN THE MINISTRY

THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

Volume 70 | December/January/February 1994-95 | Number 2

Cover Photo by Sheila Lee

Editor
Randal E. Denny

Assistant Editor
Cindy Osso

Consulting Editors
Bill M. Sullivan
Director of Church Growth Division Church of the Nazarene

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Director of Pastoral Ministries Church of the Nazarene

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Does anyone know the source for "The Modern Pilgrim's Progress," a parody on Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress?*

Contact:
William H. Benson
17275 S.W. 256th St.
Homestead, FL 33031

Wash One Another's Feet

During the American Revolutionary War, a rider on horseback came across soldiers trying to remove a fallen tree straddling the road. The tree wouldn't budge. A corporal stood aside, shouting commands to the straining men.

The quiet man on the horse asked the corporal, "Why don't you help them?"

"Me? Why, I am a corporal!"

Dismounting, the stranger took his place with the soldiers. Together they heaved the large tree out of the road.

As the stranger mounted, the corporal asked, "What is your name, sir?"

"Washington. George Washington." (General of the American Revolutionary Army and future first president of the United States)

In a similar scene, Jesus' 12 apostles sullied the sacred celebration by refusing to do the menial, lowly task of washing the guests' feet. Their heated discussion strangled over who would be the greatest in Jesus' coming kingdom. With a deep sense of superiority, none would stoop to serve. If those apostles loved one another, it had not bubbled to the surface yet.

Jesus cut through the ceremony and the euphoria of good feelings: "Wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:14-15).

The Early Church took note of Jesus' humility. An early Christian hymn sang of Jesus, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself" (Phil. 2:7-8). Our Lord did not tell us to do *what* He did. That would make foot washing a ritual. Jesus told us to do *as* He did. Kneeling at the feet of others, He gave us an example.

by Randal E. Denny
Spokane, Wash.

We have an example of a humble heart. Servants usually washed travelers' feet. So we are to serve. Our world asks, "How high up the ladder of success did you climb? What is your exalted position?"

However, Jesus asks, "Have you knelt to wash others' feet? Are you low enough yet to minister?"

"Not me! I'm nobody's doormat!"

Today preachers puff up, trying to be the greatest, have the greatest church, and conduct the greatest program. Yet Jesus calls us to unselfish service. He explains, "No servant is greater than his master" (John 13:16).

We have an expression of a holy life. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands" (v. 3, KJV). What happens next? "He . . . took a towel" (v. 4, KJV). If you had everything in your hands, would you take a towel? When we realize God has given us all things, we don't have to pretend greatness any longer. We don't have to impress people with how big and important we are! Why? Because we have everything. Paul says, "All things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21). We no longer need to struggle for our rights or insist on our prestige.

We have an experience of a happy servant. To wash another's feet is to bless him. It means to refresh him. Paul wrote of those who came to help: "They refreshed my spirit and yours also" (1 Cor. 16:18). Are you washing the feet of others and refreshing them, or do you pile more mud and dirt on their feet?

Rather than make a ceremony of taking off our shoes and stockings to wash one another's feet, I would rather that we find useful, needed ministry—even if lowly—and do it for Jesus. Jesus found a needed function to perform, and He was willing to stoop to do it. Seek a useful function and perform it well in the name of our Lord. That's better than an unnecessary ceremony.

We added a new wing to our church building. The first event in our new fellowship hall celebrated a famous Christian law officer as speaker. A huge crowd was served coffee and snacks, and they went away with good memories of inspiration and fellowship.

When I came back into the fellowship hall, I saw Bonita down on her hands and knees, scrubbing a coffee spill stain on our brand-new carpet. She was working hard to restore its beauty. This fine lady is a pastor's wife. Her husband had left his former church under pressure after serving there seven years. I watched Bonita for a moment. She had every reason to be bitter against any church. She had suffered a tough, long year while they had no employment. Her spirit had remained bright and forward-looking. From the start, Bonita entered into our congregation's fellowship, helping wherever asked to serve. Now, there she stooped—wife of a former senior pastor, down on her knees, scrubbing someone's careless spill. Bonita perfectly demonstrated Jesus' command: "Wash one another's feet." That's love in action.

After all, we are family!

Every Pastor's Nightmare

Brad Kimball serves as pastor of a large, sprawling church situated in suburbia. He is young with a charismatic style that draws people from far and wide. As a matter of fact, the congregation doubled in size under his leadership, and he was a bit overwhelmed.

One winter evening in the month of December, Brad had what he thought was a small breakdown. However, the angel of the Lord was hovering over him, so actually it was a large breakthrough—a vision that cleared his perception for a lifetime.

Pastor Brad put his troubled head down on his desk. He not only felt anxiety and panic over the eighth meeting that week, but he had a bad head cold that left the poor man with aching body as well as perplexed spirit. He had his agenda ready for the church board meeting just 30 minutes away—yet, oh, how he wanted to sleep.

* * *

Brad made his way down the hallway and burst in the door to the shock and amazement of his board. His usual even temperament gave way as he exploded, "I'm tired! I come to dozens of meetings. I am responsible for hundreds of people. I marry and bury on the same day and am expected to laugh and cry in the same breath! I have had it! I can't take it anymore!"

The church board secretary rose with a twinkle in her Irish eyes. She was an elderly woman, slim, with slightly graying hair. Although she lacked formal education, she had a wisdom to match her years. "Parson, we went and got you a Christmas present," Mrs. O'Malley said in her simple, unschooled way. "You know how you and the missus have wanted

by Laurie Lechlitner
Freelance writer, Elkhart, Ind.

to go to Tahiti? Well, we got you two tickets."

"Mrs. O'Malley, you don't seem to understand," said the young minister, gaining his composure. "I have responsibilities here. I can't leave."

"Oh, but that's not all, Parson," the old saint beamed. "This here's Eldon Brooks. You see, he's on sabbatical this year, and we brought him on board to help you."

"You mean you hired an associate?" Brad was flabbergasted.

"No, no, you don't understand, Parson. Eldon here's a full-fledged senior pastor just like you. He's coming to pick up all the loose ends. Now you can take time off for those refresher courses at the seminary you've been talkin' about."

"But, Mrs. O'Malley, I've got to preach the sermon this week and chauffeur the senior citizens' bus trip to the mall."

"Parson, Eldon's got all that taken care of. Don't you worry none about your visitations neither. Eldon even got the Sleepy Valley Rest Home today. And you know the carpeting the women have been bickering about? Well, they settled it in 15 minutes with Eldon this afternoon. Oh, by the way, Eldon's brother will take care of the plans for the new gym—and we don't need an organist. Eldon's wife does mighty well on the keyboard; yes, she does. Well, Parson, I expect you won't have to do nothin' round here but supervise. Merry Christmas!"

As Brad and his pretty, blonde wife were boarding the plane for Tahiti, she squeezed his arm affectionately as she remarked, "Isn't it comforting to know that Eldon's got everything under control?"

The words echoed through Brad's head: "Eldon's got everything under control . . . under control . . . under control . . . under control!"

Brad put both hands to his ears, shouting, "No, those are my people! I'm the shepherd of this flock!"

Just then he felt a gentle nudge outside of himself. Mrs. O'Malley woke him from a rather heavy sleep.

"Parson," the motherly voice consoled in a firm but calm tone. "I believe you're havin' a nightmare. If you don't hurry, the board's liable to meet without you."

"Not without me, Mrs. O'Malley," the pastor asserted.

"You look a little tired. Are you feeling all right?" the wise, angelic soul commented with the familiar twinkle in her eyes.

"Me, tired? No, Mrs. O'Malley. I never felt better in my life," Brad commented. Actually, he spoke the truth, much to his own surprise. He felt much better than when he first laid his head on his desk—miraculously better. He had a spring to his step, and his head felt clear as he inhaled deeply the scent of Christmas pine.

Mrs. O'Malley followed her beloved pastor out the door of his study. However, if Brad would have cast a momentary glance behind, he'd have seen that merry woman cock her head to the side and wink in the direction of the heavenlies.

An Inn for Christmas

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.
Pastor, Church of the Nazarene, Windham, Maine

"I will bring you another blanket."

With that, I left the church and went to my parsonage nearby. One more blanket would do it.

"Greg, when you leave in the morning, make sure that you turn out the lights. I have been finding them on when I have come over here in the morning. I'm trying to save on electricity. The church folk are not rich, you know."

Greg smiled, understanding that he did have a habit of forgetting to turn out the lights in his one-room shelter. He also had a habit of leaving dirty dishes in the sink downstairs in the church kitchen. Furthermore, he forgot to turn down the thermostat when going off to work each morning.

"I guess it is part of being in your early 20s," I mused as I left this fellow.

How could parents put their child out at Christmas? That was one question that was eating away at my heart ever since he had knocked on my parsonage door.

The next day I twisted my master key into the lock, opened the door into his room, and found that he had done just as I had asked—lights off, heat turned down. But those crusty dishes were still in the sink.

"I had better clean up this mess before the women of the church come in here to complain."

Then I scolded myself for putting that on to the women. They knew his plight. I knew down deep inside that there would be no complaining. They too had sons.

"How is it that they told you to leave?" I had asked him when he wandered into my living room that desperately cold night.

"They said that they had had it with me being a Christian. At first I thought they were taking to this new life of mine. But then, flip. It all turned over the other way." He looked down at the carpet, hardly able to take in that his own mother and father had sent him packing.

Where else could he go? There were no relatives nearby. It was the church. That was where he would have to end up. And so there he was on my front doorstep with his suitcase pressed against his side.

"You can use the rest rooms—shave, bathe. You can use the church kitchen to make your meals. Sometimes we will invite you over for supper. How's that? And there is your own thermostat. It heats up just this room off the sanctuary." I pointed out all the conveniences of being sent out in the cold at Christmas.

"Of course, the sanctuary is a good place for you to go in quiet, getting your thoughts together," I suggested. Greg was a student of the Word. Since becoming a believer, he could not get enough of Scripture.

"There are some of my study books in the shelves around the corner. Take your pick. Enjoy!" I tried to be cheery, though it was not all that easy—talking to a young man who was bunking out in a side room in the church. Yes, it was the house of God. But on cold, wintry nights it was also a lonely place to walk into all by oneself. Creaks sounded in the night. Radiators croaked some at odd hours.

"Just don't get caught in the rest room taking a sponge bath when someone with a key decides to case the place," I said, chuckling.

He was game. What else was left? He had finished college and come back home to make some money to pay off some bills. And now this.

"How can parents put their own son out like that?" he asked me one especially empty evening.

"It is hard to answer that one," I shrugged, not wanting to appear too serious. I figured that if we moved on to another subject, the pain just might go away.

On Sunday the congregation was told gently of Greg's plight.

After the worship, people needed no prodding to get heads and hearts together. In short order, whisperings on behalf of goodwill toward the young man were filling the halls.

It was coming up to the Sunday just before the Big Day. We were going to enjoy our fellowship meal after the morning service.

"Have you got the box decorated?" someone asked. I assured her that Marie had everything in place—mostly hidden from Greg's view.

"Where do we put the presents?"

"Over there, behind the table. I'll get them later and put them in the box so that everything will be put together."

What fun it was to poke about, doing things in secret when it all added up to warm a heart.

"Good morning, Greg," I called out to him as he left his one-room abode to join the rest of us for Bible class.

"Good morning to you, Pastor," he replied, cheerily.

Greg had been invited to his parents' for Christmas Day. Would he go? He had said that he would go. Why? "To show them that I love them in spite of what they have done to me." Fine. Then go. And what would they have wrapped up under the tree for their son-put-out-of-their-home-because-of-his-faith?

The meal was eaten with relish. Such delicious tastes.

"Now?" Sally asked as she tugged at my coat.

"Now," I whispered back.

The huge box was brought out into the center of the fellowship hall.

"Greg."

It was not easy to get Greg's attention when he was eating!

"Greg, we have something special for you today. Here are some presents we have wrapped up just for you. May this be a blessed Christmas after all."

The young man—not all that tall—rose to extra height with gladness as he sauntered over to the gifts with his name on them. One by one he lifted them, poking his ear up to their sides, feeling their shapes, looking at each of us in wonder and thanksgiving.

"How can I say what is in my heart?" he asked, hardly able to say much more.

"You don't have to say anything. Just your being with us this Christmas has made this season very special for our church family," I said.

Christmas Day came and went.

How the church became a sanctuary and a homeless lad found the real meaning of Christmas.

"Greg." I knocked on his door late Christmas night. Loud music was blaring out from inside his room. What if someone from the church had come into the building to hear that mash called "music"? I thought.

"Greg." I knocked again. Presently he came to the door.

"What are you listening to?" I asked whimsically, as if not caring all that much, just making conversation.

Greg turned down the volume, then sat on the sofa made into a bed.

"I guess that I was just trying to drown out something inside with that noise," Greg said haltingly.

"That bad, was it?" I ventured.

"That bad."

"And what did your parents get you for Christmas?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Nothing at all? Nothing? Just plain nothing?"

Greg nodded. At the other side of the room were all the gifts given by the church folk. They were now unwrapped and neatly stacked in one corner.

"My parents are not very happy people. I feel sorry for them. I am beginning to understand that they really do need a lot of help."

I did not know what to say.

"Their not giving me anything was really getting to me tonight. I turned up the radio so that I could drown out some of the hurt inside. I figured that no one would be here on Christmas night this late. So I thought it would not harm anything—the loud music and all that."

"No problem, Greg. No one would have stopped by. I just wanted to see how you were, and that is why I decided to walk over to check things out," I said.

"Yet, Pastor, through this whole mess, I have realized one precious gift that stands out more than anything else."

"What is that?"

"It is that I *do* have a family. They are more than I have ever had in my whole life. They are all those people who come into this church. They love me. They gave me those gifts over there."

I left him and walked back home.

"How's he doing?" my wife asked as I walked through the door.

"Not too well. But not too badly either. I mean, I think that this Christmas is one of the most precious Christmases that Greg will ever know. For some very important reasons, this season will no doubt stand out in his memory as one of the most meaningful times in his life."

Time has passed. Greg has grown older with the rest of us.

He left the church room for a second shelter and then a third as he moved from one situation to another.

Yet with the passing of the seasons, I have looked back to realize that not only for Greg, but for the entire congregation, that will be one Christmastide that will highlight all the others.

The reason?

It was that year all of us came to understand what it means to have been put out of an inn, only to be sheltered by the hearts of those who care enough to love.

The Magi— How Did They Know?

Their brief appearance on the stage of history is nothing short of sensational. There is both mystery and astonishment surrounding their identity, their knowledge, and their discernment. One must first ask, "Who were they and from where did they come?"

The caste of the Magi may be traced back in Scriptures to Babylon during and after the Exile. In Babylon, they were first known as the wise men. This included "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers" (Dan. 2:2). It is clear from verses 12-13 that Daniel and his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were considered a part of this caste of men known as the wise men of Babylon, who were advisers to the king on a great breadth of subjects, including religion, science, philosophy, and politics. They had a mixture of varied religions and disciplines.

by Gary L. Durham
Pastor, West Valley Church of the Nazarene, Yakima, Wash.

When the Persian Empire conquered the Medes, there was a priestly caste among the Medes known as the Magi. When the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon, as recorded in Daniel 5 as well as secular history, they brought this Magi caste with them. It is clear that Daniel was one of those from among the wise men of Babylon that were absorbed into this class. From this class of men came many of the satraps that Darius appointed to help rule this diverse kingdom. Daniel was chosen as one of three administrators to which the 120 satraps, selected by this Medo-Persian king, were accountable. It was Darius' plan, as expressed in verse 3, to put Daniel over the whole kingdom—which seems to have been done after the "den of lions" event (see Daniel 6).

Daniel was a very powerful and influential Magus. The Magi that appear during the birth of Christ are most likely members of a sect of Magi that followed the teachings, the prophecies, and the God of this most famous of the ancient Magi, Daniel.

Here we get our first clue into the incredible understanding of these men concerning the timing of the appearance of the Messiah and the purpose of His coming. These men were light-years ahead of even the best theologians at Jerusalem, who seem to have been totally ignorant concerning the signs of the times—something for which Jesus would reprimand them in the days of His ministry (see Matt. 16:1-4). They were equally confused concerning the nature of Jesus' mission—something the Magi seemed to marvelously understand.

Many point to Balaam's fourth oracle, as recorded in Num. 24:15-19, especially that part of verse 17 that says, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" as the point of revelatory insight for these Magi. While they were aware of this prophecy, by itself, even with the appearance of the star, it was hardly enough to cause them to set out on such a long and dangerous expedition. There had been other great stars and heavenly wonders. This star became significant to the Magi because of a prophetic timetable given by the angel Gabriel to Daniel, which they most certainly understood and gave much attention to.

In Dan. 9:20-27, Daniel is told that God has determined to set the rest of time from that day forward into a timetable of 70 "sevens" or "weeks" (our word "week" means "a seven"). These six important things on God's agenda for all mankind will be fulfilled in this time frame: "[1] to finish transgression, [2] to put an end to sin, [3] to atone for wickedness, [4] to bring in everlasting righteousness, [5] to seal up [fulfill and make no

longer needed] vision and prophecy and [6] to anoint the most holy [One, which is Messiah]" (v. 24).

Daniel was further informed that there would be definite divisions to these 70 "weeks" ("sevens"). First, it would all begin from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild the destroyed Jerusalem, which is the context of Daniel's interaction with God in this chapter. From the issuing of this decree, there would be **"seven 'sevens'"** until the city is completed. From that point onward there would be **"sixty-two 'sevens'"** until Messiah ("the Anointed One") will be "cut off [put to death] and will have nothing [fathering no fleshly descendants]." Then, Daniel is told, there will be another destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary, followed by a time of war and desolations. This time of war and desolation will continue until a ruler arises who is **"of"** the people that destroyed Jerusalem and its sanctuary the second time. He will start the clock ticking again to complete the last "seven," the **seventieth "seven,"** by "confirm[ing] a covenant [treaty] with many [many people or nations]."

From history the Magi knew that the clock on the *Seventy Weeks* given to Daniel had started ticking in 453 B.C. when Cyrus, king of Persia, ordered that the Temple and the city be rebuilt, as recorded in Ezra 1:2-4 and 6:1-12. They also knew that the city and its walls were not completed until 404 B.C., 49 years later. This was the first division of the *Seventy Weeks,* which was to be 7 x 7. So it was clear that each "day" in these prophetic "weeks" was a year of real time. This made it possible for them to calculate the general time of the arrival of the Anointed One. Daniel had been told that 62 "sevens," or 434 years after the 7 "sevens," this Messiah would be cut off (suddenly put to death).

Who were they and from where did they come?

Realizing the Messiah must reach full manhood (30 years of age in Hebrew and most ancient cultures) and carry out His ministry before this time of death, the Magi in 4 B.C., the time of Jesus' birth, knew when they saw the star that there was only a little over 33 years left until His sacrifice had to take place. They knew that Messiah had to come soon, because the Scriptures could not be wrong!

It is important to note that these were men of Scripture reading the face of the "prophetic sky," not astrologers reading some hidden occultic wisdom. Yes, they were of the ancient priestly caste called the Magi, which included wise men from almost every known religion of the day. But these men were obviously followers of the greatest and most powerful Magus of both Babylon and Persia—Daniel, the servant of the most high God.

They further demonstrated their great learning and knowledge of Messiah and His mission by the gifts they brought. Gifts were always brought to a king or an important official. They were chosen to demonstrate the knowledge and estimation of the givers concerning their host. Since the Magi spent nearly two years finding the young King, you can be sure that such devotion indicated they had thought carefully about the meaning of the gifts they were to bring to this High King of the ages.

Gold was a common gift for a king. By this, they declared their understanding of His royal lineage, both earthly and heavenly. **Incense** was offered only to a god (pagan kings, declaring themselves gods, often demanded incense from their subjects). By this act they declared their understanding that He was Immanuel, which means "God with us." By bringing **myrrh,** the bitter herb of death and burial, they revealed their understanding of Daniel's prophecy that the "Anointed One" would be cut off (put to death). They knew He was the Sacrifice for the sins of mankind—King, God, and Sacrifice all in One!

These men stand out as a sharp rebuke to the ignorance of their day. All could have known and responded as they. But the rest were not watching the signs of the "prophetic skies."

When He comes again, will there be any "wise men"?

Reprint from *The Counselor* magazine, December 1990, Dr. Gary Durham.

Pontius' Puddle

Overcoming Insecurity in the Ministry

by Richard S. Taylor
Retired elder, former editor of The Preacher's Magazine, *and professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Edmonds, Wash.*

The underlying nemesis of many pastors is insecurity. This explains much of their fumbling and floundering. Actions and words, which to others may seem like ego or carnality or even stupidity, may be prompted by the simple fact that the pastor is unsure of himself.

Insecurity in one's first pastorate can be expected. Some persons, however, never seem to outgrow the malady. They are still struggling with its symptoms and its uncomfortable unease even in their 40s and 50s.

If insecurity drives pastors to their knees and prods them to depend more completely on the Lord, and if it induces them to be alert and guarded, and if it stimulates them to work harder on their weaknesses, then we must say, "Hurray for insecurity!" Many persons with a deep inferiority complex and profound professional fears have struggled through these conflicts to eminent usefulness. Even nervousness in a speaking situation often has the effect of intensifying one's powers and augmenting the dynamism of an electrified personality.

But too much insecurity can play havoc. It can paralyze one's brains and chloroform native good sense. Insecure pastors tend to lose their poise under pressure, tend to do methodological flipflops, and react foolishly to opposition and criticism. When a pastor is chronically on the defensive, he is pathetically off balance. He becomes touchy, supersensitive, even paranoid. In such cases, the insecurity is an enemy, not a friend.

What are the feeders of insecurity?

One is the uncertainty of inexperience. Everything is new—the ministry itself for the beginner, and this local church to the arriving pastor.

Inexperience creates problems in different areas. A young pastor may feel awkward in the pulpit. The painful awareness of this weakness may feed on itself, thus compounding the problem. Or, he may have had little or no experience in conducting church board meetings or conducting weddings and funerals. All of these are threatening situations that may tie a pastor's nerves in knots.

In many cases, a pastor has simply not learned how to understand people. As a result, he takes their every mood too seriously or completely misreads it. He broods over their offhand remarks, reading into them meanings of which they probably never dreamed.

It was a great day for this writer when as a young and very green pastor, he learned that one setback did not spell *finis,* that the loss of one member to another church was not the end of the world, and that upheavals in the church would pass if a quiet, confident hand stayed at the helm. It was a tremendous release to discover that churches have an inherent toughness. They are not easily killed. When this insight finally seeps into the cranium of the panicky preacher, he will more quickly learn to roll with the punches.

At base, of course, insecurity is simply a lack of self-confidence. While an exaggerated self-assurance is obnoxious and foreruns a fall, an exaggerated self-deprecation results in apologetic cringing. Such persons are unduly hesitant and timid. God wants a leader to be aware of his dependence on Him, yet at the same time believe in his own powers to do the job He has called him to do. Self-confidence and humility are not antithetical.

Jesus is the perfect example. He was meek and lowly in heart—utterly selfless, constantly dependent on the Father, totally without pride of person or position or

selfish ambition. Yet He moved among men with poise and authority. He had no identity problems. He knew who and what He was and conducted himself with that sureness of touch that makes for power.

Of course, we cannot be expected to match our Lord's poise. Even as a man, His ability to think, His instant discernment of people, His skill in the exact words for the occasion, all reflect a level of wisdom we can never equal. To say nothing of an instant understanding of the Father's mind that can never—at least in this life—be ours. Yet we can be filled with His Spirit and be sure of sharing His motives, so that our service for Him can be courageous and constructive. We may never match His perfection, but we can bear a reasonable likeness and, as such, be an effective instrument of His power.

Also, **insecurity can be the product of finding oneself in a job for which one knows in his heart he is not ready.** The so-called Peter Principle is that pastors tend to be promoted to the level of their incompetency. That is, they do well at a lower rung of the ladder, but their very success at that level thrusts them upward, until suddenly they find themselves in over their heads. So they flounder. The job calls for a higher level of knowledge, judgment, experience, and skills than they have. They run scared. Their anxiety multiplies their errors.

If they have really been pushed into the job by the Lord, and not by their own conniving, they can cast themselves on Him for supernatural wisdom and guidance. In such cases, the Lord sees natural endowments exactly suitable that the person himself or herself is unaware of, but which the new responsibilities will bring out. But until one gets his bearings in such a strait, his sense of insecurity will be acutely painful.

Sometimes insecurity is magnified by the presence of persons obviously beyond one in maturity, ability, education, and experience. Feeling like a pygmy among giants is understandable in such situations. Escaping a feeling of intimidation is hard to manage.

How do pastors act when afflicted with the malady of insecurity?

Often, foolishly. They burn rubber, as if they were in a drag race. They make snap judgments, trying to prove they are on top of everything. They hide their insecurity by bravura. They pretend a knowledgeability that they do not have. In the pulpit there is apt to be excessive dogmatism. There may be a tendency to throw down the gauntlet over leadership issues. Or, their basic insecurity may manifest itself in exactly opposite ways: excessive timidity, slowness to lead, chronic indecisiveness.

Is there a remedy for insecurity?

Yes! Perhaps the following suggestions may help.

1. Come to see that your acceptance with the people and your ultimate success does not depend on being a superman. So stop trying to be one. Stop trying to impress people that you are.

> Insecurity can paralyze one's brains and chloroform good sense.

2. Let your hair down. This does not mean to publicly parade your weaknesses, but it means to relax, laugh at yourself, play with others, and be human. Don't take your gaffes too seriously. If you have offended someone, try to rectify it. But don't lose too much sleep if you don't succeed.

3. Understand that people don't hold your mistakes against you half as much as you hold them against yourself—*provided you admit them!* Stubborn rigidity and being opinionated are symptoms of the problem you are trying to overcome.

4. If your insecurity springs out of youthfulness and inexperience, then be willing to accept those twin facts, and operate within that context. Seek the guidance of the most mature and reliable saints in the church. Be humble enough to be taught by your own people. Listen to them. If you hang on, you will, by and by, shed your youthfulness. Your inexperience will become experience. Then you will feel more sure of yourself in the pastoral role.

5. If your insecurity arises because of ineptness in some facet of the ministry, such as preaching, **then systematically go about the business of rectifying the weakness.** Learn to preach!

Learn to conduct church board meetings! Understand that skill as a chairman requires sensitivity to the moods and needs and opinions of your church board, with full respect shown to everyone and an absolute refusal to ramrod your ideas through —*ever.* Then, as they respond to this kind of leadership, things will begin to smooth out, and your own self-confidence will grow accordingly.

6. If you find yourself in a job that really is beyond you at this stage of your development, have the courage to back out. Because of J. Glenn Gould's great promise as a young man, the district superintendent engineered a call to a prominent church. At the end of the first year, young Gould went to his district superintendent and said, "I am not ready for this yet. Give me the smallest and toughest church you have. Let me learn there." That's what he got. That's where he could grow in sync with the load, ultimately becoming a great preacher and an influential leader as a college pastor.

7. Give your people the benefit of the doubt. They are not out to get you. Occasionally this may be the case, but not nearly as often as the unsure pastor imagines. Express confidence in them. Act at ease around them. Get especially close to the persons who may represent the power structure of the church. Don't allow fear and suspicion to create a social distance between you and them. Play golf with them, fish with them, eat with them, pray with them—whatever is necessary to come to know them intimately and create a bond of unity and understanding. Their strength then will be your strength.

8. Finally remember that the bottom line is the empowering of the Holy Spirit. You can never learn to do the job in your own strength and by your own efforts alone. After all, it is God's work, not yours. Cast yourself on God, live close to Him in prayer, and *rest* in Him. He will teach you and enlarge you and use you. And beyond *His* use of you, who cares?

The Sacred Word of God Preached

In many ways, the general public in our generation has become like Paul's description:

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths *(2 Tim. 4:3-4)*.

by Neil Hightower
Editor, Grow Magazine,
Calgary, Alta.

The percentage of the population who want the pure Word of God declared has declined significantly in Canada over the last 45 years. From 66% of Canadians who claimed to attend church on a weekly basis in 1946, the figure had dropped to 33% in 1986. Certainly, this reflects the widespread decline of spiritual foundations and the embracing of secular values in North America. Probably it also reflects the church's abdication of *vital* communication of the Word. We spend too much time in ecclesiastical concerns and not enough time devoted to attention upon everyday needs of families and individuals. Vital, meaningful communication of the Word has little to do with the ability to quote Scripture and to use "sacred language." It has much to do with application of biblical principles to everyday issues.

Many people today have "itching ears," which have caused them to prefer modern myths about morality and spirituality. They have embraced a collection of teachers who feed them a vitaminless diet of secularism. They will not accept sound doctrine from the church.

Surely, this reflects the worldliness that has entered the hearts of 20th-century sophisticates. Does it also reflect something about the quality of our teaching and preaching? For many persons "sound doctrine" has come to mean splitting theological hairs rather than penetrating spiritual definitions about current moral and social issues. Ought not the evangelical church to recapture its voice on the moral and social issues with which families and persons grapple on a daily basis? Where the Word of God intersects these issues, surely a sound word of spiritual principles can be formulated and clearly set forth. They can be set forth in a style that is dialogical, even though spoken by one person. This style typically suggests questions that are left unanswered by the speaker, yet cause an inward debate in the minds of the hearers, a wrestling with truth. When this style is touched by the presence of the Holy Spirit, conviction grips the hearers.

Reading and expounding the Word of God in this way will result in exploding mental circuits coursing through the hearts of listeners. The ability to preach dialogically requires a regular, strong exposure to the Holy Scripture. Counsel from Carlo Carretto, a Catholic monk, underscores this and offers good advice: "Do not begin the day by reading the newspaper; that will make you slaves of public opinion, even though involuntarily. Rather, begin your daily labors waiting for the dawn in prayer, as the psalm suggests to you: 'Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!' (108:1-2, RSV)."

A habit of saturation in the Word and in God's holy presence would put the breath of freshness and relevancy upon our word to the congregation. It would make us slaves of God's revelation rather than slaves of men's opinions. We would gain an authority not conferred by human permission or legislation, and thereby we would gain a hearing. If we would couple with that saturation a healing compassion for people like our Master, it would be said that "the whole town gathered at the door" (Mark 1:33).

The meaning embodied in a lovely prayer, whose author is unknown, would then be seen in the ministry of our churches:

> Our Father, we have listened to Thy Word and loved it; we have found comfort and inspiration in song and psalter; we have enjoyed the companionship of those who, with kindred minds and hearts, have praised and worshiped Thee. Now help us understand that, as we leave this sacred house of God, we shall become Thy Church in the street.

Our hearts say, "Amen," to that prayer. There may be some question as to whether our people leave our sanctuaries sensing and affirming that they are indeed a microcosm of the Body of Christ. Where they do view themselves in that manner, a spiritual and moral revolution is taking place in their communities. We need that. The most powerful sermons have always been those walking around our communities, in the forms of devout and committed Christians. Those powerful sermons are, however, fueled first by sermons preached by godly leaders in pulpits that are free from intimidation and who "correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Many years ago, I was walking down a street in a Canadian city before being picked up for a Sunday morning preaching experience. I came across a very striking notice posted upon a church door: "The Word of God will be preached in this place at 12:15 sharp." I have forgotten what city and the name of the church, but I have never forgotten the message and its impact. It is somewhat audacious viewed through the eyes of the world. But it speaks to the essence of why persons gather in church on a Sunday morning or evening. I wonder: do we gather a congregation so that the people may be entertained musically or intellectually, or do we bid them to experience the proclamation of the pure Word of God? I love music and can't think of an interesting world or church service without it. But the choir presentation or the special music is not the high point of the service. Music may contribute to the effectiveness of the high point when it is viewed by the singers as an offering given to Almighty God, not a performance for the people.

The Holy Spirit will not be tied to our perceptions.

The high point of every Protestant service is the preached Word. That is the moment when the pastor or preacher proclaims the Word in such a way that, as Paul Rowntree Clifford says, "The Lord Himself confronts the believing congregation in saving and sanctifying grace, calling for adoration, thanksgiving, repentance and self-oblation."[1] In that personal encounter with Jesus the Living Word, men and women, youth and children see themselves as they are in truth. Only in that personal perception of "seeing" is there hope for spiritual clarification and change.

Clifford is right when he reminds us that the understanding of preaching in Luther's mind was something entirely different from human speech. "Preaching in the Reformed tradition is not the delivery of an address on a religious topic; it is a sacramental act whereby God visits and redeems His people."[2] That, I believe, was the prevailing understanding in the Early Church. It is the reason why, in my judgment, the Christian priest of the second century kissed the page of Scripture from which he had read before preaching the sermon. It is also the reason why some denominations within the church practice the custom whereby the preacher prefaces his sermon with the words, "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." While I do not contend for such a practice among us, in my opinion, both we and our people would have a different view of preaching if we gave it a sacramental "environment." That stops short of calling it a sacramental act.

Albert Einstein once wrote, "I want to know God's thoughts . . . the rest are details." Though I cannot recall the source of that quotation, its impact is valid. Einstein was speaking about scientific research and study, and the fact that discovering scientific axioms is discovering the mind of God. His words also have application to the church. It ought to be the aim of every preacher to know God's thoughts. If we truly gain that perspective, and were sure of it every time we came to the pulpit, there would never be a dull sermon. The fact that we have heard a few dull sermons and ourselves have been the authors of some proves that we aren't 100 percent successful in this respect. When we do, the "magic" of congregational rapport takes place because the unseen Holy Spirit breathes upon the Word and upon the people.

There is another side that we ought not to ignore: there are times when we have judged our pulpit ministry on a given occasion as being dull and uninspiring when, unbeknown to us, someone has received new and deeply moving insight. We can be grateful when they tell us, but often they never do. That too is a part of the mystery of proclamation. It underscores the fact that we cannot control the Holy Spirit. He is sovereign and will not be tied to our perceptions. Paul underscores this Christian reality where he speaks of the several gifts of the Spirit: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, *just as he determines*" (1 Cor. 12:11, italics added).

Nevertheless, the very essence of church ministry is to discover the thoughts of God and to let them shape our communication.

1. Paul Rowntree Clifford, *The Pastoral Calling* (New York: Channel Press, 1961), 50.
2. Ibid.

Preacher, Do You Understand the Times?

by Morris Chalfant
Evangelist,
Bourbonnais, Ill.

Someone told G. Campbell Morgan that the preacher must catch the spirit of the age. Immediately this great preacher answered, "God forgive the preacher who does that. The preacher's business is to correct the spirit of the age." We may add that a witness for Christ must endeavor thoroughly to understand the spirit of the age—without conforming to it—in order to know what to correct.

It is recorded of the sons of Issachar that they were "sound judges of the times when Israel should take action, and the way to do it" (1 Chron. 12:32, JB). "Men who had understanding of the times" is the way the *Revised Standard Version* puts it. *The Living Bible* paraphrases it, "Men who understood the temper of the times."

Faris D. Whitesell said, "A preacher should be able to feel the pulse and sense the mood of the age in which he lives. To do this, he must be in touch with the currents of life and thought. Such understanding will help him slant his preaching to today's world rather than to yesterday's."

But there is danger here. It is possible for the preacher to become so submerged in the thought forms and ideas of his day and so impressed by the latest happenings that he becomes a mere reflector of the times rather than a prophet to the times. We are not called to preach the times. We are called to preach *to* the times. If we keep this in mind, it will save our preaching from being a pedestrian running commentary on current events sprinkled with a few Bible texts and quotations.

Our ability to preach to the times does not necessarily depend on knowing every detail of current history—for example, how many wars are going on at the present time, how many earthquakes occurred last year, the percentage increase in major crimes during the past decade, or any other such data. In order to preach effectively to the times, we must know what time it is.

The judgment that John the Baptist was severe, stern, and harsh is farthest from the truth. John the Baptist understood the temper of his time. He was a tenderhearted, loving, sympathetic man, with too much love to let the churchmen of his day go quietly to hell unwarned and unrebuked. He recognized that the greatest calamity that could befall the human soul was to be lost forever in hell, and that strenuous, earnest, persistent labor to prevent so dire a calamity was the highest expression of courageous love—preeminently a labor of love!

Mr. Gladstone was seated by an Anglican clergyman at a state dinner. He said to him, "I have a thing against the clergy. I think they are not severe enough with their congregations. They do not sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts and bring their whole lives and actions to the bar of conscience. The clergy are afraid of dealing faithfully with their hearers."

D. L. Moody said that you have to get a man lost before you can get him saved. He was simply saying that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, KJV). But man must hear the message of his lost condition. He must hear it in no uncertain terms and tones if he is to believe it.

Man must feel in his conscience a deep sense of lostness if he is to enjoy a deep experience of repentance. No skin-deep experience will suffice!

Sin must be pictured as black and hopeless. Then the better way described by Paul as the highest way of all must come to the fore to captivate the individual.

God paid an awful price that His message of judgment and love might be proclaimed to the whole world. His innocent Son went to the Cross to die for the ungodly. This all hurt Him deeply! He will not brook sin, will not act softly toward it. His righteousness stands forever against sin in any form.

The lost must know, however, that closely behind the rumble and roar of God's judgment may be heard the whisper of Christ's forgiving love. The blood flecks of the Son of God compound the true ingredients of total redemption. That is what I will preach!

In a recent issue of a periodical dedicated to the insurance business, an article appeared titled "Will They Blame You?" The author went on to say that it is the duty of the agent to see that his clients are always covered according to prevailing replacement costs. The spiritual and eternal significance of this insurance article is readily apparent.

Preacher! Will lost souls blame you? Will they charge you for not sounding forth the truth? In your ambition to please, are you withholding the solemn message of impending doom and judgment? Because of your fear of offending, are you ignoring the prophetical command to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1, KJV)? Our message must be as pertinent and pointed as Noah's when he cried, "Repent or perish." Preacher! You dare not, in jot or tittle, withhold, "Thus saith the Lord."

Draw Strength from Your Call to Preach

by C. Neil Strait
District Superintendent, Church of the Nazarene, Grand Rapids, Mich.

If anything can happen, it can happen to a pastor." That is what a pastor said after a hectic week. Who could argue with his conclusion? The pastor is at the center of life's agony and action. If there is a crisis, a death, an accident—to name only a few possibilities—the pastor gets involved. All such activities, added to the regular agenda of the pastorate, adds stress, time pressures, frustration, and physical weariness.

Pastor, be encouraged. The God who called you to ministry is with you in the traumatic times, walking the tight moments with you. Draw strength from His presence and from the confirmation and assurance of your call to preach. While the "call to preach" has been debated and kicked around a little, it has not lost its validity. Make sure of your call to preach before stepping into the pastorate. More than one pastor will tell you that it was his call to preach that kept him going, surviving the hard times.

One's call to preach is a sacred and inspiring trust. With the assurance of a call ringing in the heart and soul, a pastor can survive about any crisis and endure the deepest disappointment. I heard a pastor say, some years ago, that the "call to preach" wasn't nearly as important as it once was. That's news to me. In fact, while I don't think it ever becomes more or less important in one era as opposed to another, I do believe that for these times, and for these pressures, a pastor had better make sure of his or her calling.

May I share some thoughts about the call to preach that I hope will be meaningful and helpful to you?

First, when God calls, He forms a partnership with that individual to strengthen, equip, and guide. It is a truth from which we need to draw, perhaps more than we do. Ever and again we need to return to our call and be encouraged by its reality. Dr. Holland Lewis, pastor of First Church, Detroit, spoke at our Pastors' Revival one year. He encouraged our pastors to live again the reality and assurance of their call to preach. As one gathers strength from his or her call to preach, motivation, inspiration, and even strength comes for ministry.

Second, plant your crises, your discouragements, your frustrations in your call to preach. Let your call be the reference point to which you return, ever and again, to gain perspective for all that is happening. The temptation is, in the low times, to see other options and pursue other jobs. Do not let the hard times force you to regretful decision making. Pastor, be encouraged—the deepest crisis will pass.

I would not want to be interpreted as saying one should never leave pastoral ministry. There are times when God releases a pastor to pursue other occupations or other forms of ministry. What I am stressing is that the pastor should keep the perspective of his or her call when the pressures are on and the going is rough.

Third, do not doubt your call to preach in the midst of your deepest crisis, when the emotions are being assaulted, and all the arrows are pointing downward. Such moments are not the best for clear thinking and decision making. In those moments, rest on your call and let its strength bring healing for recovery and renewal.

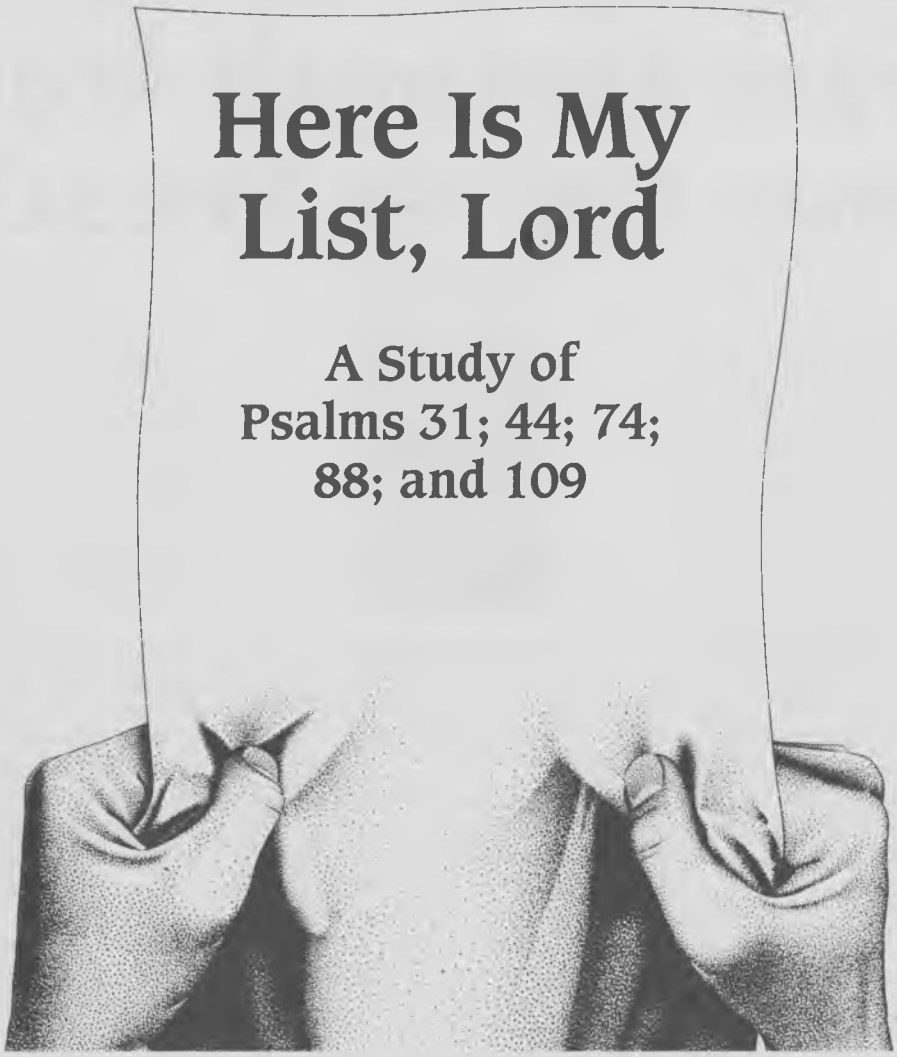
Fourth, even when one has the assurance of a call to preach, that is not enough. One must stay spiritually fit. The call must be nurtured and given a heart in which it can grow and accomplish its purpose. Prayer and study of the Word must be priorities for the person with a call to preach. One may have all the gifts available and the advantages of education, but without channeling these in a heart warmed at the altar of God, they will fail. Usually, one's spiritual life will determine how well one survives the rough terrain of pastoral ministry.

Fifth, one's call to preach must be fulfilled in a body that is fit and a mind that is equipped. Physical fitness is important in pastoral ministry. Exercise should be priority. Much stress builds simply because the physical has not been attended. Also, the mind must be exercised. If one is focused only on problems, crises, buildings, finances, etc., the romance of ministry soon fades. A deterrent to such possibilities is to study, read, and fill the mind with thoughts that lift one above the battles. A good organizational system will also help relieve one from the haunting thought of "what am I forgetting?" Attention to these items will help one fulfill his or her calling in a better way.

Pastor, be encouraged. The God who called you wants to be Partner with you in ministry.

Here Is My List, Lord

A Study of Psalms 31; 44; 74; 88; and 109



The Psalms bring to us the prayers, the songs, the travail, and the hope of David and the other writers, both for individual needs as well as the needs of their people. Many times we see evidence of the Psalmist talking directly to God. Many other times we see God's response as recorded by the writer.

However, in the five psalms to be discussed here, we have an unusual situation: in each one there is a list of concerns or problems that is given to God so that He will handle it. The effect on us is one of amazement and humility as we realize that one so long ago had such a close relationship with God that he could act in this way. We see no evidence of sin here, nor do we see pride or bitterness. Rather, we begin to appreciate the close walk each of the writers had with his God. In such times of distress, he could talk directly, even argue, with God, knowing He listened, He understood, and He would respond.

by Arthur E. Parry
Free-lance writer
Plano, Tex.

Psalm 31, of David, describes the tremendous conflict of the writer. It begins with a prayer. Subsequently the Psalmist catalogs his many griefs.

The list, beginning in verse 11, becomes extremely personal. It is as if David were saying, "Lord, just listen to this list of troubles I have. Help me before I die."

The King James records as follows:

> I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life *(vv. 11-13)*.

While we begin to see the pressure and the heartaches, the list itself might have been made sharper. Looking at other modern translations, we see similar approaches. But consider how much stronger the emphasis might be if written as follows:

> I am dishonored with so many enemies. I am a burden to all men. I bring fear to my friends. I cause people to flee from me. I am forgotten, a dead man. I am cast away, a broken vessel. I always hear the lies. I know of their terror; I know

of their counsel. I know that they plot to destroy me.

The Psalmist was pouring out his heart in listing all the troubles he has. He freely gave the list to the Lord because, in his faith, he knew that God would respond.

Psalm 44, by another Psalmist, also records the very close, personal relationship the writer has with the Almighty God. After reciting the history of God's wonders and His protection, the writer begins in verse 9 a listing of things God did not do or actions He "should not have taken." Certainly such a confrontation could only be a true worshiper with his God.

Here, again, the King James:

> But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price. Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people *(vv. 9-14).*

Part of the list is easily seen as a set of parallel expressions, both grammatically and thought-wise, but not the entire listing. Both the *New International Version* and the *New American Standard Bible* have tried to capture this listing in its entirety but do not quite succeed. We quote:

> Yet Thou hast rejected us and brought us to dishonor, and dost not go out with our armies. Thou dost cause us to turn back from the adversary; and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. Thou dost give us as sheep to be eaten, and hast scattered us among the nations. Thou dost sell Thy people cheaply, and hast not profited by their sale. Thou dost make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scoffing and a derision to those around us. Thou dost make us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples *(vv. 9-14).*

Consider how much more effective the list might be if the entire set of complaints were in parallel form:

> You, however, abandoned us. You caused us shame. You did not escort our armies. You made us retreat from the oppressor. You let those who hated us take spoils. You have delivered us like sheep to be eaten. You spread us among the heathen. You sold us for next to nothing. You did not require a high price for us. You made us a disgrace to our neighbors. You made us a shame and a contempt to those around us; You made us a proverb to the heathen. You caused us to be an astonishment to the peoples.

"Lord, just listen to this list of troubles I have. Help me before I die."

The next example is one of praise. In Psalm 74, another Psalmist is rejoicing by reminding God of the many things He has done for His people. This praise list becomes more impressive when shown as a set of parallel expressions. Then the language would not obscure the sense. We quote:

> But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters . . . and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter *(vv. 12-17).*

It is noted that whereas "You" begins most lines, there are several beginning, "It was you," and two which begin with a conjunction.

Consider the following alternative:

> You have been King from times past, O God; You delivered us on the earth. You divided the sea by Your power. You did break the heads of the enemy on the waters. You cast them up as food for the desert creatures. You brought water out of the rock. You parted the river. You own both day and night. You made the moon, also the sun. You set boundaries on the earth. You established both summer and winter.

Psalm 88 is a gloomy psalm, yet one in which the writer is able to call to the "God of my salvation." In calling, he wants to be miraculously healed and to be able to praise God for the healing. But these cannot occur if he should die. The Jewish version of Leeter renders verse 11 through 13 as follows:

> Wilt thou display wonders to the dead? Shall the departed arise and thank thee? Shall thy kindness be related in the grave? Thy faithfulness in the place of corruption? Shall thy wonders be acknowledged in the darkness? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Once again, compare the above with a straight parallel listing of the questions:

> Will You perform miracles for the dead? Will those, who are dead, stand and give You thanks? Will Your mercy be proclaimed in the grave? Will Your faithfulness be named in the place of corruption? Will Your power be known in the darkness? Will Your goodness be spoken of in oblivion?

As illustrated previously, the changing of the language clarifies and heightens the meaning.

The final passage comes from Psalm 109. In this psalm, we see the Psalmist calling for God to handle his enemy. Whereas we might refrain from the asking of vengeance, we should remember that the Psalmist is giving the problem to God and then "forgetting" it. He will hold no future grudge as he knows that the problem has been given to the Lord. The *New American Standard Bible* renders the passage as follows:

> Appoint a wicked man over him; and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him come forth guilty; and let his

prayer become sin. Let his days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes. Let the creditor seize all that he has; and let strangers plunder the product of his labor. Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; in a following generation let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the LORD continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth *(vv. 6-15)*.

Compare this with the following:

Lord, appoint a wicked man over him, let Satan stand at his right hand; let him be guilty, in judgment, let his prayer be sin. Let him die suddenly, let another take his office. Let his children become orphans, let his wife become a widow, let his children wander, begging; let them cry out, far from his ruined home. May the creditor go after all that he had, may strangers plunder his property. May no one continue kindness to him, may no one give to his orphans. May his posterity be uprooted, may their name be wiped out. May the Lord remember the guilt of his fathers, may the sin of his mother not be forgotten, may they ever be in front of the Lord, may his memory be gone from the earth.

In looking at this severe list of "What You should do, Lord," we might fail to realize that the writer began his plea from a position of weakness and adversity. Even though we may not understand the vengeance characteristic of the Old Testament saint, we can rejoice that even in his listing and his cataloging of what he wanted done, he remained in fellowship with his God. We could say that, as he was asking, he was not consciously sinning with his request. Here was a troubled man committing to the Lord the future of the one wronging him. True, it is almost as if he wanted to provide a complete description of what should be done lest God forget or overlook any particular penalty. But fundamentally the faith of the writer comes through. That is what is important to us in the reading.

In times of distress, he could talk directly, even argue, with God.

It is believed that changing the structure to a parallel one greatly enhances the meaning and the emotion of each passage referred to above. As different as the situations are, in each we see the relationship of faith that the suffering writer has with his God. In all of the lists reviewed, we have seen evidence of a very close relationship between the writer and the Lord. No one else, we believe, could write as boldly and yet with such meaning in these situations. The restructuring of the lines was intended to heighten the intensity of the writer's expressions and, in so doing, to make his meaning clearer. What we observed in the change was the tremendous faith of each writer in his direct presentations to God. Each writer, in effect, said, "Lord, here is my list. Now I want You to listen and then to answer me. For I know You are a God of compassion and understanding and that it pleases You to be able to show mercy to Your own. Thank You in advance for what You will do."

Are You the Perfect Preacher?

At times my husband becomes very frustrated as a pastor. Now, don't get me wrong. His preaching is excellent; the members are very responsive to God's Word; and he has many caring and strong leaders in the church.

The reason he becomes frustrated is because he wants everything to be perfect. He wants the sermon to go smoothly, the congregational responses to be right on target, the choir to be perfect pitched, the leadership to be dynamic, and more. Is he asking too much? Yes, I think so! His frustration is a problem—one he must deal with each day.

How about you? Is your life perfect? Is every detail of every moment fine-tuned so that each day is flawless? Do you spend days and nights dwelling on the imperfections of the previous day in order to avoid such mistakes in the future? In short, are you a perfectionist?

Pastors who are perfectionists usually can't handle change or failure in the church. Warren, a newly ordained minister and father of three preschoolers, told me, "I became so tired and overextended after preaching every Sunday it began to show up in my personality. I wanted everything that happened during the worship to be perfect. And I didn't have a very Christian attitude toward my own children after church if something had gone wrong."

Other pastors who are perfectionists talk about being their own best critics. "I begin to feel like a failure if my attempts at ministry aren't perfect by my high standards," Sam, an older pastor, reported. "I reprimand myself in hopes I will work harder on planning or in following up on visitors. But I become so moody and angry inside, no one can stand to be around me."

by Debra Fulghum Bruce
Pastor's wife,
Jacksonville, Fla.

If you are like Sam and Warren, you want everything perfect. You take to heart Jesus' command to be perfect (Matt. 5:48). Not only do you strive for excellence in all you attempt, but also you want perfection in all areas for which you are responsible. Always struggling to achieve the best in whatever you do, you are driven to get ahead no matter what. While your calling to Christian discipleship demands that you do your best, a constant push for perfection can cause undue stress, which results in hazards to your mental and physical well-being.

Look at the following questions. How do you rate as the perfect preacher?

1. Am I unrealistic in my expectations of myself and others at the church, including staff members?

True or False

2. If I make a mistake during worship, the congregation will think I am unprepared.

True or False

3. Mispronouncing a word or forgetting a Bible character's name upsets me.

True or False

4. If I work hard enough at preparing my sermon, it will go perfectly.

True or False

5. I feel embarrassed and resentful if my members yawn or act bored during worship.

True or False

6. I'm less of a person if I can't preach the gospel so that all members respond.

True or False

7. If the members don't come on Sunday morning, I'm a failure at motivating them.

True or False

8. I think about leaving the pastorate sometimes because of the pressure I create for myself.

True or False

9. I'm unsatisfied with myself if I feel my sermon was only average.

True or False

10. If I do make a mistake, I scold myself after church and feel miserable.

True or False

Recognize the Problem

One of the biggest stumbling blocks of trying to be perfect is that you develop unrealistic expectations of yourself. These expectations can become self-defeating when events and persons outside of your control thwart your perfection.

Having to be perfect may become a form of trying to earn your way into God's favor. In doing so, you may block the grace of God in your life. Perfectionism can be a burden when you don't allow yourself the risky necessity of making mistakes.

See Perfectionism Through Faith

The Bible recognizes perfectionism as an issue for Christians. Jesus commanded us to be perfect, yet Paul recognized our imperfection: "For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:9-10, RSV). Again Paul said that he was not already perfect, but that he was pressing on to become something more (see Phil. 3:7-14). Christians are to rate their abilities with sober judgment, each according to the degree of faith apportioned by God to them (Rom. 12:3-8).

As a human being, you are imperfect. Yet as a person of faith, you are pressing on to become something more than you are now. Knowing this tension, you can begin to make some changes in your expectations of yourself. These changes can help you relax so that you can enjoy God's grace at work in you to bring you to wholeness and well-being.

Cope with Perfectionism: Set Goals and Priorities

First, it is necessary to get our priorities straight in our personal lives. If you are overcommitted in other areas, initiate a plan to restructure where you spend your time.

Get your priorities straight in your life. One way to do this is to make lists. Write down all of the activities, organizations, and commitments to which you devote yourself. Be sure to include tasks that you must do as well as activities that you do for your own pleasure. When the list is complete, number the commitments according to their importance. Place a reasonable limit on the number and variety of commitments that you make.

Set attainable goals for each area on your list. Make sure that when you set goals, you consider the time involved to attain each goal. Don't confuse daily, short-term, and long-term goals. When you set attainable goals, you insure that the goals will be within your reach. Perfectionists usually try to outdo the world by reaching for goals that are far too difficult. Then, when faced with failure, they feel personal humiliation.

"When the Blakes moved their membership to another church, I took it as a personal loss," Warren said. "They had helped start my church. Did I do something to make them unhappy? Now that I look back, I realize that they always enjoyed the church, but the new church was closer to their neighborhood."

It's All Right to Be Average

Allow yourself the privilege of being average in some areas of your life. Athletes attest to the fact that they excel in only a few sports because of the special development of the muscles required for each sport. Great golfers may be lousy football players. Good writers may not know how to bake a layer cake. Similarly, if you are good at preaching, be average at something else in your life. It is really all right! If you are creative at telling Bible stories to the children, but can't stand organizing a financial crusade, pull in someone with this skill to assist you.

Paul says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:6, RSV). He implies that you need to rely on others and their gifts as well as on yourself and your gifts. He also affirms your uniqueness and encourages you to use your special talents. Rejoice in the gifts and endurance God is giving you. Also recognize and accept your limitations and the need to allow others to exercise their gifts.

Carl, a pastor of a church nearby, loved music and also sang in the choir. In a moment of enthusiasm, he accepted the assignment of taking over the choir after the director took a leave of absence.

"I know nothing of directing," Carl complained after a frustrating rehearsal. "Here I am, trying to count beats, read notes, and teach lyrics at the same time. Then I get uptight just thinking about the sermon I have to write and the hospitals I need to visit. I am overwhelmed and feel so inadequate. Yet, I have a commitment to fill." As the year ended, Carl gave up his volunteer position and gratefully went back to being a member of the choir.

Realize what strengths you do have, and use these to the best advantage in Christ's service. Understand also your limitations, and work with them as best you can within the community of faith.

Grow Through Failure

In trying to break the perfectionist habit, you have to learn that it is all right to fail. Failure can lead to disappointment and depression if not handled in a positive way. Perfectionists need to interpret a failure, not as a personal rejection, but as an opportunity to grow.

Once you learn to risk failure and disappointment, you can begin to grow. Many stories from the Bible teach us how others dealt with personal tragedies and rose above them. For example, Job's struggles with living give us insight into suffering and how faith in God can sustain us. During times of failure and disappointment, God offers us comforting assurance, loving forgiveness, and tremendous strength.

Learn to Laugh

As you begin to accept your imperfection, learn to laugh at yourself. There is probably nothing more difficult than to take yourself lightly. But in order to break the perfectionist habit, you will need to stop taking every mistake so seriously.

Be at Peace with God

Finally, in breaking the perfectionist habit, be at peace with God. God can fill any inadequacies or insecurities you feel in your life. God's grace forgives you and frees you to live with your imperfection. God's love will strengthen you to move toward perfection. Through daily prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians, you remember God's presence and can know yourself to be loved for who you are, not for what you do or how well you do it.

So are you a perfectionist? If you are, why not make plans now to slow down, get your personal life in order, and let yourself make some mistakes. Remember the song "Jesus loves me! this I know, / For the Bible tells me so." Radiating this love in the local church is the pastor's primary goal. Most important, learn to relax and enjoy each day. Life is too short and too precious to spend it trying to be perfect.

Chancy and a Little Bit Lonely

by Charles Dickson
Freelance writer,
Hickory, N.C.

A few years back, Matt Dillon of the popular television series "Gunsmoke" described his job: "I'm the marshal, the first man they look for, and the last man they want to meet. It's a chancy job, and it makes a man watchful . . . and a little bit lonely."

Dillon's words seem to express an apt description of present-day ministry. The enormous changes that have occurred in the past several decades have left their mark on the pastoral office. Gordon MacDonald of the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has identified five major trends that have emerged in recent years, altering the dynamics of ministry. These trends, he says, are (1) the church renewal movement, (2) the proliferating parachurch groups, (3) the charismatic movement, (4) a new separatism and conservatism, and (5) a call for social consciousness.

The renewal movement has manifested itself in a call for more relevance in preaching. One observer said, "Clergy need to stop answering questions people aren't asking." There has been an increased emphasis in Bible study and dialogue groups, which are indicative of the movement toward renewal.

Parachurch groups took on many forms, some of which called for more evangelistic fervor. Yet this reaching-out spirit generally emphasized more near-to-home concerns with less interest in cross-cultural ministries that seemed to appear more threatening. Then came the charismatic movement to claim a new affinity for the work of the Holy Spirit in such areas as healing, revelation, and worship. This caused some division in congregations between those with strong feelings in both directions. Neither side made it easy for the pastor, who was often caught in the middle.

The conservative movement raised issues about theological orthodoxy and left questions in the mind of clergy as to whom they could cooperate with in joint ecumenical ventures. Even questions were raised as to which scriptural translations were appropriate for worship services. The present-day pastor remains affected by the strident call for social consciousness and its attendant concerns of civil rights, liberation, and justice. Again the pastor gets often caught midstream and finds it nearly impossible to keep the confidence of both advocates and reactionaries.

Despite such tensions, new and exciting vocabularies have developed. We now talk about multiple-staff ministry, church-growth principles, and management. These are being dealt with at a host of seminars, conferences, and workshops.

Today's pastor must deal with a ministry that has been segmented into specializations. We have clergy for worship—or education, youth, music, counseling, and more. Many parishioners no longer refer to a person as "the pastor" but have many hyphenated titles to identify a particular piece of the action.

Even the sermon has changed. Time-honored quotes from Longfellow and Emerson, or even Napoleon, have been replaced with new insights gleaned from the *Wall Street Journal, Newsweek,* or the local rock music station.

The pastor has come a long way in the past decades. Ministry has been shaped and reshaped by many forces, both from within and without the church. These forces sometimes produce tremendous opportunities for good, but they are also not without their dangers. For example, take the capacity of the electronic church to reach into people's homes. That's the good part. But what about its potential to intimidate the small parish pastor who has a rough time believing that the local leadership can compete with the multimillion-dollar glitz?

There is much for today's pastor to feel excitement. There is also much that needs the focus of his or her concern. Having found fulfillment in the call to ministry, the pastor should naturally encourage other committed people to listen to God's call. Keep in mind that those who answer such a call must be prepared for moments of agony and ecstacy, but many more times of routine in answering the call of duty.

Today's pastor lives with all these tensions, filled with both opportunities and dangers. Marshal Dillon had it right. His job, as that of the pastor, is chancy and a little bit lonely. Those who love ministering to God's people, who have learned to accept both pressures and privileges, look forward to the future with faith in Jesus. For us who consider these things vital, we can confidently say, "Bring on God's future!"

Healing Scars of Childhood Abuse

As a little girl, Andrea was the picture of beauty and innocence. Secure with her parents and eight brothers on a small farm that was her world, Andrea loved the country.

"My dad was poor, but I loved him and thought he was wonderful," Andrea says.

"I would run to him, and he'd lift me up to the ceiling. I felt so proud to be his only daughter. He called me his 'angel,' his 'sweetheart,' his 'princess.'"

But when she was 13, Andrea's father added one more term of affection. Lover.

"It was around 6 A.M., already light outside. I woke to find my dad lying on top of me, sucking my breasts. Scared to death, I hated him for what he was doing to me. Most 13-year-olds were talking about boys, but I had this man—my father—damaging me forever.

"I looked at the ceiling and prayed he would finish without going into my underpants. When he didn't, I felt lucky. The only words spoken were when he said, 'Nothing's wrong with what I did,' and 'You don't have to say anything to your mother about this.'

"When he walked out of my bedroom, I thought I would hate him forever. I knew my life would never be the same. My mom continued working nights, so I spent many sleepless nights after that, scared that Dad would come in my room again. He never did, but I wanted someone to protect me."

For nearly 20 years, Andrea told no one her terrible secret.

"I coped," she recalls, "by pretending it didn't happen or minimizing its effects. I never forgot, but I told myself it wasn't that bad. It only happened once."

"And yet," she continues, "I really

by Al Miles
Hospital minister,
The Queen's Medical Center,
Honolulu

hated my dad. When Mom asked me why, I was too ashamed to tell her. Somehow I thought what he did was my fault. I thought Mom wouldn't believe me, or if she did, she'd hate him. And I didn't want to break up the family."

Church had always been important to Andrea. As a young adult, it became her refuge from the past. She focused her energy into her spirituality. In her mind, she recreated her father into the man she wanted him to be. Her faith in God and involvement in the church provided her with a deep sense of peace. But the abuse she thought she'd left behind had never really been dealt with.

Nearly 10 years later, married with two young children, Andrea and her husband moved into a new home in a large metropolitan suburb. They became successful in their professions and faithful members of a church. The secret of Andrea's childhood sexual abuse was 20 years and 100 miles removed. Her life was at peace.

Or so she thought.

One day while having brunch with a friend, Andrea unexpectedly found herself talking, for the first time, about her abuse.

It is not unusual for victims of childhood sexual abuse or other traumas to minimize or repress these events for years. Then suddenly, in adulthood, they may encounter confusing, often painful memories from the past.

The memories can surface during an unrelated trauma—being in an automobile accident, for instance, watching a violent movie, or hearing about someone else's abuse. Even happy events can trigger difficult memories—getting married, having a child, or moving into a new home.

Other triggers might be a partner's request to engage in a new act or position during lovemaking or being touched—even in a gentle way.

Andrea told her friend about her abuse. "I hadn't planned to tell anyone, but I felt safe enough to talk about it without feeling ashamed. I felt like I was the only one who had a sick dad."

After her secret spilled out, Andrea realized she had to deal with it so that she could be healed and free from her past, knowing she was not at fault.

How Prevalent Is Childhood Sexual Abuse?

If Andrea were the only girl to be sexually abused by an adult—even one time—she would still be one too many. But one out of every three females will suffer some form of sexual abuse during their lives.

Sexual abuse of children by adults has a history that can be traced back to Bible times. No age, race, sex, socioeconomic group, or religion is spared this tragic history.

The stories told by survivors of sexual abuse have often been discounted, minimized, or ignored. Such responses make victims feel more alone than ever.

When we understand the dynamics of childhood sexual abuse and its on-

going effects on the victims, then we'll be able to begin providing support and healing.

Lynn Powers, a clinical psychologist who, for more than 15 years, has worked with women abused as children, says that perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse are "people who have power over children. It could be any adult, but it tends to be adults closest to them—the people in their own homes. It's fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, stepfathers, mother's boyfriends, teachers, baby-sitters, the next-door neighbor."

In their book, *I Never Told Anyone,* Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton write that 97 percent of the perpetrators are males. The Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Protective Services reports that approximately 85 percent of the reported cases are committed by persons known to the child and/or her family.

So the places where a girl feels most secure—in her home, church, school, and among the people she trusts—are the places where she faces greater risks of sexual exploitation.

Though one out of every five boys are also sexually abused, we'll focus here on ministering to adult women survivors.

Susan's Story

Susan was the second of six children, the older of two daughters.

"We looked like the perfect family," she says. "Mom was Sunday School superintendent and the president of a church women's group—a caring, giving person who always said yes. Dad was on the church council and taught Sunday School. He knew all the influential people in town. All of us children were respectful and responsible. We were always being patted on the head and told how good we were.

"We moved a lot when I was growing up," Susan recalls, "so I never had any long-term friendships. I went to five grade schools and three high schools. My father had a job in sales. Now I see that he was insecure. Anytime anyone challenged him, he quit because he could get another job."

She continues: "Our family was the only nucleus of people I was close to as a child. Dad isolated us from Mom's family, and he had no family of his own. Family became central—even sacred—and he became the center of our family. He was both intelligent and manipulative."

He was also a child abuser. When Susan was in the fifth grade, he began a sexual relationship with her.

"Dad took us children, by turn, on his sales trips—it was supposed to be a special time to be alone with Dad. But during those times, he started touching my private parts and asking probing questions such as, 'Does this feel good?' and 'What turns you on?' This made me feel nervous, nauseous, and confused. He also started showing me pornography.

> It is not unusual for victims of childhood sexual abuse to minimize or repress these events for years.

"By the time I was in seventh or eighth grade, I was almost fully developed. Dad began abusing me even more. I became torn with confusion: part of me wanted to be his little girl, denying the abuse, and part of me didn't trust him.

"I also felt an immense guilt. When my mother was angry with me, I thought it was because she knew. Or I thought she was jealous because he paid so much attention to me. He would buy more for me than the other kids, which also made me feel guilty. I didn't understand that I wasn't responsible for the abuse.

"Sunday morning became a dangerous time. With no senior high group to attend at church, I would be left at home with Dad while everyone else went to Sunday School. I would sleep until the last minute. Dad would often pull the covers off me and try to wake me. I felt terrified and pretended to still be sleeping. I think that's when I developed a habit of always being five minutes late for everything. Then I had to rush around to get ready, and he would leave me alone. Dad would be angry, ***but his anger was easier to deal with than his 'affection.'***

"The sexual abuse stopped when I was a junior in high school, but the emotional incest never stopped. Dad never developed his own boundaries. Two years ago he sent me a negligee for Christmas, and he still asks me if I'm alone when he calls me at night. To him this is not being inappropriate. His actions make me both angry and sad."

For 12 years, Susan told no one about the sexual abuse.

"My way of dealing with the secret was to forget it—to be part of the facade of the perfect family. I honestly did not remember the abuse."

At age 22, Susan began seminary and took a human sexuality course. On the first day, the group leader asked the students about their first experience with masturbation.

"I cried the rest of the day. Every time he'd come to me in the discussion group, I'd start to cry. So he'd skip over me. About two days later, I told one of the leaders about my abuse. Crying all the time, I had no control over my emotions and became depressed. Not understanding what was going on, I planted myself on my professor's doorstep. Finally I went into counseling."

The following summer, Susan confronted her father about what he'd done to her.

"I told Dad I remembered. He apologized—and to him that simple apology made everything right. 'I said I'm sorry,' he protested. 'No big deal.'

"After that, anytime I brought the topic up, he would say, 'You're blowing it out of proportion.' It became obvious to me that, in his mind, I had started the incest.

"Dad justified his actions," Susan continues, "by talking about the incest of African pygmies or animals. Or he'd say it's society that doesn't accept incest. He even said the church was making me feel guilty.

"He offered to pay for my counseling, but now when I ask him about it, he denies his promise. He lives in his own reality, but it's different than everyone else's."

Perpetrators rarely take responsibility for the abuse they inflict. They are seldom remorseful for their actions. Many feel it is their right to do what they want to any member of the family. Often they justify their actions or construct an elaborate system of blame to trap or threaten their victims.

Susan's father had told her, "People wouldn't understand if they knew about our relationship. People look at this differently, but I'm not doing anything wrong—I'm teaching you. Your mother is a cold person. Nobody ever taught her. I'm trying to teach you to become more comfortable with your body so that you'll have more to offer and can be a happier person."

"Everything was for my sake," says Susan. "He diverted any guilt away from himself. He still believes he didn't do anything wrong."

Lynn Powers says, "Some children are told they dreamed everything that happened. We hear stories of sophisticated brainwashing techniques. For example, an abuser might say, 'Do you know what happens to bad little girls who tell on their daddies? I once knew one who was put in a closet'; or 'Her mother decided she was a bad little girl and disowned her.' They use language the child can understand so that the child accepts the adult version of events. The messages are extremely powerful, so in many cases, they take a long time to get turned around."

Ongoing Effects

Childhood sexual abuse can plague a victim for the rest of her life. It influences the way she feels about and reacts to situations, the way she selects friends or partners, the way she raises her children, and the way she views her relationship with God.

Andrea realizes the long-term effect of her abuse.

"The abuse I endured still affects my self-esteem," she says. "I think I'm ugly. If I do anything wrong, I immediately feel dirty or bad. I want to be perfect at everything. But since I'm not, I become angry and mean to myself and others."

"The abuse," she continues, "affects my relationships, my family dynamics, my choice of a husband, and the way I parent. I have a lot of hatred for men. This is painful because it affects men in my life whom I love—my son, my brothers, my friends, and my husband. I have a lot of rage—sometimes it comes out jokingly, sometimes pointedly. For a long time, I never understood why some women hated men. Now I could be the leader of the pack. I'm much more sensitive to others' abuse or rape."

Helping Victims Escape Their Past

Pastors have a unique opportunity to help victims of childhood sexual abuse in their lifelong process of healing. Here are some things we can do:

Listen to her story.

A survivor must be believed if she is to be healed.

> One out of every three females will suffer some form of sexual abuse in their lives.

"When people reveal these tragic events in their lives, the most important thing they need is to be believed," says Powers. "They need someone who can imagine what it was like without reacting strongly. Being too sympathetic or too repulsed probably will not help. Strong emotional reactions generally don't."

If I as a minister think the perpetrator might be innocent, I still will not invalidate the genuine feelings of the woman. If I think she might be exaggerating, I never imply that she is. Raising questions about excessive grief and pain undermines the healing process. If she picks up signals from me that suggest she is out of control or making unfair accusations, she will retreat and suppress her feelings even deeper. Treating the symptoms will not take care of the deeper problem.

Reassure the survivor.

Let her know she is not to blame for her abuse. Remind her that she was the victim of someone older and more powerful than she.

Watch your words.

Some phrases meant to help the victim gain perspective may actually be harmful to her recovery. I try to avoid the following:

It only happened once.
That was a long time ago.
It's time for you to move beyond this.
He said he was sorry. Forgive him and get on with your life.
God wouldn't want you to harbor any resentment toward your perpetrator.
If you were a mature Christian, you'd forgive him.
He just made a mistake; we all do.

Such phrases discount or minimize the victim's story and make her a victim again.

"When you've been abused, you don't have a lot of self-esteem or trust," says Andrea. "To hear these kinds of responses knocks you one step lower into the ground."

Keep the process open-ended.

It's my nature when solving problems to want closure. However, imposing my own timeline or expectations on the survivor can be counterproductive.

Make referrals.

Help the victim get to a therapist who specializes in sexual abuse. When we're over our heads, we can hinder the healing process. However, even after making this referral, we still have a responsibility as ministers to continue our love and support.

The Question of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complex issue, both psychologically and spiritually, for survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

"Some find themselves differing on the issue of the need for forgiveness," says Powers. "While many have found that forgiving perpetrators is essential for spiritual growth and union with God, psychologists often tell victims that forgiveness is on one end of a healing continuum. Many of them feel it is not necessary for recovery and consequently do not push for it."

Since, however, many survivors

have been raised in a religious environment, they will often struggle with the issue of forgiving their abusers. They've been taught that forgiveness is a Christian virtue—necessary to bring them into harmony with God and others.

As director of a transitional housing program for women, Nelda Rhoades Clarke has ministered with hundreds of women recovering from alcohol, chemical, and sexual abuse.

"Women who have been sexually abused struggle with what they have endured," she says. "Being able to forgive will keep eating away at them, especially if, as is so often the case, they are women of faith. When someone tells them they need to forgive their abuser, they often think that means they have to pretend it wasn't so bad, that they should get on with their lives and forget the abuse ever happened.

"What happened to them is not OK," Clarke insists. "Forgiveness does not necessarily mean they have to return to a trusting relationship with the perpetrator. He may not be trustworthy."

Forgiveness may take different forms. For some it means finding personal peace. Others discover the perpetrator, though disturbed, is a human being as well. Some survivors experience forgiveness only when they can forgive themselves and complete the healing. According to Powers, "Sometimes a victim must accept the fact that as a child, she was powerless to prevent the abuse that occurred."

Anger is a natural part of this often lifelong process. "Women say," concludes Clarke, "'I'm still angry because he continues to victimize me.'

"I tell these women, 'Your anger is legitimate,' and they find this helpful. They're often told, 'If you've forgiven, you shouldn't keep thinking about it,' but they will continue to think about it and to have feelings. As a minister my concern is that their anger does not rule their lives."

Survivors of sexual abuse need the freedom to set the agenda, the tone, and the pacing for forgiveness to take place. Andrea eventually confronted her father, but she still struggles with the question of forgiveness.

"He acknowledged he did it. He cried and said he was sorry," Andrea recounts. "Then he asked if there was anything he could do to help me. I said, 'You can't help me because you hurt me.' There was a lot of pain in that."

Andrea remains confused about her relationship with him, unsure of what she wants.

"I still love him," she says. "I still want to take care of him. I'd like to go to his deathbed and say, 'Dad, I forgive you,' and have him die in peace and go to heaven. And yet, I think he was so terrible to do that and everything else he did to me. I know he's sorry, but we will never really have a relationship. Still, I try to be kind to him and include him in family activities, even if only so that my mom can find peace. He looks so sad and lonely in the corner when no one talks to him. But if it were just me and my dad and no one else, I don't know if I'd ever talk to him or see him."

My role as a minister is to remain with Andrea as she continues to struggle.

Susan also struggles with the question of forgiveness: "I can understand my father—his insecurities, pain, and his own abuse. I love him, and in a sense I forgive him for what happened because the memories are mine to deal with. But he continues to be a problem.

"I don't excuse his actions; I hold him accountable. He hasn't corrected what he did. Our relationship is still strained because he can't be trusted. I end up getting sabotaged and hurt every time I go into it naively. I keep doing that.

"There is a sense of a child's love being unconditional; that's gospel to me. I still love this man and probably always will. He did good things for me, and I needed to love him. But I wish the love was two-sided. Until he recognizes the pain he caused, the love can't be completely restored."

Adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse are all around us. They sit in the pews of our churches; teach catechism, Sunday School, and confirmation classes; serve on our boards; sing in our choirs; and speak from our pulpits. So did their perpetrators. As pastors, the most effective support we can offer survivors is to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the pain they endure daily.

This article first appeared in the summer 1992 issue of *Leadership Journal*, and it is reprinted with permission 1992 by Rev. Al Miles.

Perpetrators rarely take responsibility for the abuse they inflict.

What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

Because experiences of sexual abuse affect a survivor's ongoing emotional and spiritual health, it is helpful to know the full range of past abuse that may cause her problems today. Sexual abuse is not limited to intercourse. Some of the other manifestations include:

1. *Touching a child's vagina, buttocks, breasts, or mouth in a sexual manner.*
2. *Showing a child sexually explicit material, including video, photographic, or printed forms.*
3. *Telling a child sexually explicit stories, even by letter or over the phone.*
4. *Recording a child sexually on film, audiotape, or videotape.*
5. *Coercing a child, whether physically or emotionally, to behave in a sexual manner.*

A Good Death

Two funerals are etched in my mind. Not because of their similarities—for one honored an 84-year-old woman, the other a 12-year-old boy—but by the marked contrast in the circumstances that surrounded each death.

The woman was my mother. She had cancer. A week before her death, I visited Mom in the hospital. I knew she was dying; she knew she was dying. I wanted to talk to her about it, to ask her how she felt about death. Did she have fears? Were there things she wanted to see, or say, or do? I wanted to tell her how much I would miss her. I wanted to assure Mom I'd see her again—in heaven. But I did none of these things because I didn't know how. I began the 2,000-mile journey home knowing it was unlikely I'd ever see my mother alive again. I was right. Five days later she was gone. I hadn't even said good-bye.

The other funeral was for a youngster in our community. Darren had leukemia, but unlike our family, Darren's had talked frankly and openly about death. Darren was ready. He'd discussed his thoughts, his wishes, his fears, and been affirmed and reassured by his family, his physician, and his pastor. He'd made his preparations. His bicycle went to a friend who didn't have one; other possessions were personally gifted to those he loved. When the moment of death became imminent, Darren's family gathered close so that he could say his good-byes. No one was forgotten. There was even an apology for a family friend whom Darren feared he had hurt by something said during the course of his illness. Darren left no unfinished business. Unlike my mother, he had a good death.

I am not alone in this inability to articulate death. In the words of H. Fiefel, a student of North American attitudes toward death, "We are a society uniquely ill-equipped to deal with death. We glorify youth and expect modern medicine to triumph over disease. To a great extent, we have lost our sense of faith and, through urbanization, our contact with the normal cycles of life."

by Darlene Polachic
Freelance writer, Three Hills, Alta.

According to Dr. Balfour M. Mount, professor of surgery at Montreal's McGill University and director of the Palliative Care Unit at Royal Victoria Hospital, "Western health care today is, by and large, focused on investigating, diagnosing, prolonging life, and curing." Anything less smacks of failure.

Mount goes on to say: "The moment must come when the medical team accepts further treatment as pointless. Then the emphasis can shift from curing and prolonging life to alleviation of suffering. The appropriate goal is treatment aimed at producing the optimal quality of life when its duration is beyond control."

This process is known as palliative care. It recognizes that the needs of dying persons are different from those of the healthy. Hopes are more simple: the absence of pain and suffering; family, friends, and a physician who won't abandon them; reassurance that they won't die alone; a hospital bed when they need it; assurance regarding the welfare of loved ones after they're gone.

While palliative care is sometimes carried on in the home, ideally it is dispensed in a specialized in-hospital unit that is staffed by an interdisciplinary team of trained nurses, physicians, psychiatrist, therapists, a social worker or counselor, dietitian, trained volunteers, and a member of the clergy. Its aim is to provide active, compassionate care that meets not only the needs of the dying person but the needs of the family as well.

The clergy person plays a crucial role on this palliative care team. With the patient's physical life coming to a recognizable close, his spiritual well-being is of highest priority.

It is said, "There are no atheists in the foxhole." The same is true of the terminal hospital bed. "There are few people who are not anxious to make things straight with God when they realize death is imminent," observes one who has worked closely with a number of palliative patients.

Being actively involved in a pastoral capacity with a terminally ill person requires a special sensitivity. Above all, it is essential to have a grasp of one's own personal feelings about death in order to understand how the dying person feels.

Consider these basic fears common to every person facing the reality of death:

1. Fear of the process of dying.

Will the moment of death be painful? Will I feel anxious? Or afraid?

Wrote Jill Tyson in "Reflections of a Dying Patient": "Thanks to an obliging doctor and compassionate head nurse, I've been allowed—more or less—to have control over the administration of my pain medication. What a relief this has been! For my greatest fear in dying was that the pain would become more than I could bear."

In reality, says Dr. Mount, "When death comes, it is usually painless and peaceful for the patient dying of a malignant disease. Mental and physical pain commonly recede during the last few days and almost always in the last hours."

Patients also fear loss of body image. This is of particular concern to cancer patients who can see their bodies being ravaged by the disease as death approaches.

2. Fear of loss of control.

As humans, we strive for independence. Terminal illness obliterates it. It affects fathers who can no longer care for their homes, children who can no longer play with their peers. The patient under hospital care is fur-

ther robbed of dignity by having his clothes taken away, and his medications. He is told when he can have meals and when he will receive personal care. He is told when he can have visitors and who can visit. Often he is given little or no control over his own treatment.

3. Fear of what will happen to loved ones when I am gone.

Who will care for my family? Will there be enough money to put the children through school? Will my wife have to go back to work? How will my husband cope with the children and the home without me?

4. Fear of isolation and being abandoned.

The dying person fears that because he is dying, friends and family will stay away. Patients sense isolation in the frequency and duration of visits and in nonverbal body language, which communicates far more than we realize.

Ironically, when a patient is acknowledged as terminal, studies show that a subtle change takes place in caregiver attitudes. The medical team tends to adopt a halfhearted approach in seeing to the welfare of the dying. It takes longer for nurses to answer the bell of a dying person than that of a patient expected to recover. Nurses do not welcome assignments to dying patients and find communication with them awkward. As death approaches, physicians visit less often; nursing care decreases. The result is exactly what the patient fears most—a sense of isolation and abandonment.

And, above all, the person fears dying alone.

5. Fear of the unknown.

Even for the Christian, there is a certain anxiety about what life after death will be like and if, indeed, there really is life after death. Even more threatening is how much physical suffering the person can expect to endure prior to leaving this world for the next.

6. Fear that one's life has been meaningless.

It has been said that death is the time when the mind's own camera is forever turned on self. The dying person looks back on life and wonders: Is the world a better place because I've been here? What have I done to make me worth remembering? Or has my life been for naught?

To be effective in the role of spiritual guide and counselor to the dying person, a pastor must be prepared to address these fears, not with cliches and pat assurances, but with insight, sincerity, and genuine Christ-love. Remember, you don't need to have all the answers. Simply being there, acknowledging the person's pain, and offering to share it in any way you can is enough.

It also helps to know and recognize the various stages of grieving through which a dying person moves.

"It is very difficult for people to come to grips with their own mortality," says Elaine, a trained lay volunteer who has worked with a number of palliative patients. "But that's understandable. It's a part of the grieving process."

Elaine is referring to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's observations that in the face of impending death a patient goes through a predictable sequence of reactions.

First, there is denial. It is the "No, not me" stage. Knowing you're going to die, but not wanting to know.

"The most helpful thing a friend or pastor can do for a person at this stage is to simply sit and listen. When the person is ready, he will open up and share his loneliness—sometimes with words, sometimes with little gestures or nonverbal communication. A dying person needs someone to listen, someone to understand how he or she feels," Elaine observes.

After denial comes anger: "Why me?"

"There's a lot of bitterness in the person at this point, and biting comments are often directed at the health care professionals, even family and friends." It helps the listener to understand if he tries to empathize with the patient—to put himself in the patient's shoes, to know how he would react if his career, his family activities, his life itself was cut short by death.

Then there's bargaining. After having lashed out in the anger stage, the dying person may try to make deals with God. "Bargaining," says Elaine, "is the beginning of acceptance. And close on its heels comes depression.

"*Depression* is the most painful part of the whole process, but it is also necessary. For the person to have a good death, he must come to terms with dying. He must say, 'Yes, me! Now, what am I going to do about it?' Preparatory grief takes place here. The dying person grieves for his own life. The counselor or caregiver can be most effective by offering a simple touch of the hand and a patient, loving, listening ear."

Gradually the patient is able to consider the reality of death and to recognize that before he can have a good death, there are things that have to be dealt with.

"Sometimes the person has to work on forgiveness. He may never have reconciled with his own parent. Or he has an unresponsive child who he has perceived as being uncaring or not there for him. He has to forgive.

"Others may have secret sins they've never revealed to anyone. They still can't tell the family, but they feel the need to tell someone before they can satisfactorily relinquish life." This, Elaine believes, is where the pastor or Christian volunteer can direct the person to Christ's mercy and forgiveness. "I just let the Holy Spirit work, and I do as He leads. Often He will reveal some area of the dying person's life that needs to be dealt with. The counselor can gently steer the person toward committing that matter to God."

Elaine remembers an atheist gentleman for whom she cared. "He'd been deeply hurt by the church many years before. But now that he was dying, he wanted to find God. We started with 'Our Father . . .'

"Above all, the person at this stage needs to know he is deeply loved—by you and by God. He needs to be assured, and sometimes reassured, that God has indeed forgiven his sins. Often his illness has left him so physically drained, he hasn't the strength even to pray. He needs you to pray for him."

The dying one who has made his peace with God can then move on to the final stage: *acceptance.* "Some do move to that point," one palliative care worker comments, "but I think it is rare. I've been with some who just withdraw. . . . They've closed up to coming to grips with what's happening."

"It's a precious time," Elaine says,

"when acceptance does happen. It's like a final rest before the journey."

It is also the hardest time for the family. They are never quite able to accept that their loved one is going to die. They don't want to think about dying; they want to hang on to hope. A caring pastor will be a tremendous support at this time.

Part of acceptance is relinquishment, or letting go of things that have been precious during life. For some, it will be loved ones—a husband, a wife, children. For the young person, it may be a dream that will never be fulfilled. For another, a well-loved career.

To complete relinquishment, the dying person—like Darren—may wish to say verbal good-byes to family members.

"The family must be prepared for this step," Elaine warns. "It's a very traumatic time. But they have to be encouraged to keep in mind that the person's death is his own, and we must respect his need to do certain things in order to have a good death."

The final relinquishment for every person is of his life. "It's hard. We humans tend to cling to life. But for a good death, the person must relinquish his life and trust his soul and spirit into God's keeping. Then the focus is on the life beyond." In Elaine's experience, death usually follows very quickly.

Pastoral responsibility does not end with the final graveside benediction. Now, as the family begins its own grieving process, it will need a generous measure of understanding and support. Discern who is the most vulnerable family member, and give that person special love and attention. To all the family, offer encouragement and friendship by frequent calls and visits in the days and weeks that follow their loved one's passing.

Death is not an easy process, but it is appointed unto every man once to die. How that moment is approached may, like my mother's last days, be shrouded by a conspiracy of silence. Or it may be transformed through understanding, compassionate caring, and wise pastoral counseling into a time of fulfillment and reconciliation. In giving the dying one the opportunity to die with dignity, we clear the path for those left behind to come to grips with reality and their own sense of mortality.

Practical Dos and Don'ts for Pastoral Visiting

1. If you've arranged beforehand to visit, don't break the date. It can be a big disappointment, even a message of rejection to the patient.

2. Always identify yourself at the desk or nursing station before going into someone's room.

3. Knock before entering a room, and walk in slowly. Look for clues as to what is going on. Is the privacy curtain drawn? Is the person undergoing treatment? If the person appears to be sleeping, check with the staff. Sometimes people sleep out of boredom and really need a visitor.

4. Identify yourself by name, and let the person know why you are here if the person is not well known to you. Use the person's name when addressing him or her.

5. If at all possible, sit down so that eye contact is on the same level. Make sure you are in a position where you can be both seen and heard and that the patient doesn't have the glare of a window or bright light shining in his or her eyes.

6. Some illnesses or medications shorten the span of emotional reaction and control. For example, someone will laugh or cry easily when a family name is mentioned, familiar hymns are heard, or a prayer is said. Know your limits. Be alert to the possibility of overexciting the patient.

7. Keep the visit short, at least at the beginning, and watch for clues that suggest it might be a good time for you to leave. For example: "I'm waiting for the public health nurse." "I've had a hard time today." Conversely, if you find yourself uncomfortable or having difficulty listening, terminate the visit. There is no need to stay a specific time. Sometimes, for a palliative patient, five minutes is a long time.

8. Your role is one of companionship on the journey of life at this time. As a pastoral agent, you are invited to sustain and reconcile; yet it is God's action—sometimes mysterious and beyond human understanding—which is at work in human lives. Statements like "If you pray, God will heal you" are out of place at this time.

9. Listen carefully. The person you are visiting will let you know how much she or he is willing to share. Often a short, friendly visit is all that is needed or wanted. Your presence speaks loudly of the Christian commitment of caring.

10. The biggest gift you can offer is yourself. So look after your own needs and concerns before you make the visit. For instance, if you receive word of being laid off your job, you probably won't be a lot of spiritual help to the needy patient today. If problems are personal and serious enough to interfere with your visit, arrange to call another day.

Personal Funeral Profiles

People attend funerals for very personal reasons—because they cared about the deceased. He meant something to them. Therefore the most comforting funerals incorporate both memories of the deceased and the hope of Jesus' victory over the grave.

Sharing the gospel is easy; personalizing a funeral can be more difficult. What keeps most of us pastors from personalizing funeral messages is a lack of knowledge of the deceased and an uncertainty of how to present what personal details we do know.

Preaching a personalized message is not as difficult as you may suspect, even for people you have never met. Let's see how to glean personal details and to organize them into a personalized funeral profile, also called a biography or a eulogy.

Most personalized funeral services have three sections—the introduction, the personal profile, and the sermon. The introduction examines the occasion of the funeral: "Why we're here." The profile focuses on the deceased. The sermon declares the hope we receive from Christ.

The profile is to the funeral what a family room is to a home. A family room contains family portraits, snapshots, comfortable furniture, and family memorabilia. A personal profile contains memories, word pictures, and comforting stories of the deceased.

Visualize the introduction as a porch of a home, the biography as the family room, and the sermon as the dining room. A funeral message without the gospel is like inviting a family to your home, getting acquainted with them in the family room, then sending them away *empty.* A funeral sermon without a biography is like skipping the family room, going straight to the dinner table, then staring at each other—like strangers seated together at a fast-food restaurant.

But sharing memories of the deceased opens the mourners' hearts so that you can introduce a friend—Jesus.

To create a personal profile, glean

by Kenn Filkins
Freelance writer, Farwell, Mich.

details from three areas: your interview with the family, your knowledge of the deceased, and writings of the family. Let's see how to select material from each area.

Details from the Interview

Your interview with the family and friends is your richest resource for the profile of the deceased. Before every funeral, visit with the family and ask questions about the deceased from five categories:

Personal: childhood details and memories

Professional: his or her lifework

Family: relationship with spouse, children

Favorites: books, sports, songs, Bible verses

Faith: church activities, stories of their faith

For the profile, select details and stories that highlight a specific aspect of his or her life.

In Theresa Pointon's profile, I shared these details, which highlighted her determination. They were from the *personal* category of the interview.

"One day Theresa drove their Model T car up an icy knoll, only to have it slip and slide back down the hill, where the car wound up backward in the road. After she got it stopped, she simply slipped it into reverse and *backed* it up the hill. She was ahead of the game with front-wheel drive cars."

For Chester Scott's funeral, I shared these details, which demonstrated his *professional* background.

"Chester was born on December 26, 1902. As a lifetime resident of Ora, Ind., Chester often worked seven days a week to provide for his family. He drove a milk truck, then later he ran a general grocery store and gas station and became well known in the area for his mechanical abilities."

The *family* category of the interview revealed these details about Oscar Taylor, Sr.

"Oscar was a loving husband to

Martha, his wife of 54 years. During the years of her illness, he was her faithful companion as well as her eyes and hands. He had made a commitment to love his wife. Love is a commitment to *do* what is best for the other person. Oscar demonstrated that. Paul's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 rings true with Oscar and Martha. . . .

"Oscar learned how to cook—and to cook well—during Martha's illness. She would tell him how to cook the meal, and he would. He wasn't afraid of new recipes either. Two of Martha's favorites were his pies and his pork steaks in mushroom gravy.

Sharing memories of the deceased opens the mourners' hearts so that you can introduce a friend—Jesus.

"Oscar fulfilled his vow, 'to love, honor, cherish, and comfort her until death do you part.' Oscar said, 'I do.' And he did."

During the months that Joan Persinger struggled with cancer, her *favorite* hymn was "It Is Well with My Soul," by Horatio Spafford. Surprisingly, that hymn was written after Spafford had lost all of his daughters to a storm at sea. Later as he sailed across to Europe, he wrote these words when the ship neared the spot where the storm had taken his daughters.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

From the faith category of the interview with Nellie Williamson's family, I selected this story.

"Any account of Nellie's life would be incomplete without mentioning her faith in God and Jesus Christ as her Savior. Her faith was demonstrated by her daily prayers for her family. When Nellie lived with Patti's family, her room had an intercom connected with the rest of the house. Nellie prayed her evening prayers aloud. One night she mistakenly left the intercom on. When Nellie prayed for each family member in detail, her love poured out with every word. One family member mentioned that it humbled her to hear Nellie's positive prayer for her.

"*Much* later, Patti told Nellie about that night. Nellie was a little shocked at first, then said, 'Well, now you all know how I feel about you.'"

Details from Your Knowledge of the Deceased

The second-richest resource for the profile is your relationship with the deceased. Personal comments from the minister are appropriate even when you're not related to the family. Consider this example from Marguerite Prestin's funeral profile.

"On a personal note, I agree with many others who said that Al and Margy easily befriended people. They befriended me. Less than two months ago, I visited the Prestin home to deliver a cookie and candy basket from the church's Senior Saints' group. While we visited, Al told me about his past hunting experiences and how they both loved wild game. After I heard that, I promised to bring them the next wild rabbit that my trained hawk would catch. Fortunately, my hawk bagged four rabbits the next day. When I arrived at their house, they had just returned from one of their daily drives."

In Joan Persinger's profile, I mentioned this story, which demonstrated the love between Joan and my oldest son, Micaiah.

"At church, my three-year-old son, Micaiah, would often sit with Joan. When she became too ill to come to church, he always asked about her. One day recently, when we passed their house, Micaiah said, 'Joan doesn't feel good. I'm going to make her something.' He was thinking of chocolate chip cookies, though he cannot even turn on the oven."

Writings of the Deceased and Family

The writings of the deceased and of the family can offer encouragement and comfort to the mourners. For Clarence McCullough's profile, I read a recent letter sent to him from his son in California. It illustrated their relationship and the son's love for his dad. At Mona Williams' funeral, I read some poetry that her son, Don Williams, had written to her.

Your interview with the family and friends is your richest resource for the profile of the deceased.

In Katie Wild's profile, I read *her* poem, "Smiles," which showed her attitude about life and encouragement. I also quoted some stanzas of Katie's poem called "Time," which warned us to make the most of our time for Jesus.

Presenting Personal Profiles

Now that you have gleaned details from the family interview, collected your personal comments and the family's writing for the personal profile, how do you organize it into a presentable format?

First, remember to write and deliver the personal profile with a conversational tone. Speak as if you're talking with a friend over coffee in his family room. Use eye contact and your message's tone to bridge the gap between you and the mourners.

Organize the personal profile into topics and themes in a loosely chronological order. Organizing the biography by themes gives you free-

dom to shape the direction of the message. For example, the order of the themes in Katie Wild's profile was crocheting, cooking, generosity, poetry, family, faith, evangelism, and heaven. Katie's illustration of heaven became a perfect bridge to share about Jesus and His resurrection.

As an example of how personal profiles flow together, consider these excerpts from Katie's funeral profile.

"Katie Wild was a Christian lady with many talents and deep character. She expressed her concern for others by crocheting afghans, lap blankets, and slippers for people in the nursing home. Last year, she created handmade doilies—each had the family's name embroidered into it.

"Katie was an excellent cook, especially of wild game that Rayford brought home, but *she* never ate wild game. She also enjoyed the Old Testament and told me that she experienced it on the day that 'Ray brought home his first wild turkey, and I made it into a *burned sacrifice!*'

"Katie's attitude about life is shown in this poem she wrote called 'Smiles.'. . .

"Many of you here have received poetry that Katie wrote for your birthday, family gatherings, retirement, or for the Gilmore church. Katie's wisdom shines through her two volumes of poetry. On September 23 last year, she wrote these lines from a poem called 'Time.'. . .

"Katie cherished her children and grandchildren. She read to her grandchildren book after book. Her home is filled with photos of her grandchildren. Katie and her granddaughter, also called Katie, sang special music together, including the song, 'Lord, You Are More Precious than Silver.'

"How was Katie Wild like this? She loved Jesus and His Church and spent her life striving to be like Him. She simply let her light shine for Jesus. While most people carry a candle, Katie carried a torch. . . .

Personal comments from the minister are appropriate.

"She carried at least four torches: Love, Generosity, Encouragement, and the Gospel. I already mentioned her love and her generosity. She encouraged others in many ways, including writing notes to the discouraged or depressed. Many people have mentioned Katie's encouragement as the reason they first came to this church.

"Katie's faith in Jesus gave her hope, which she shared with others. On the night she learned about her cancer, she said to her daughter, Brenda, 'If the Lord takes me tonight, I'm ready.' The last time Katie was in the hospital, she said to her son, Grant, 'Now maybe, I'll see Jesus.'

"Years ago, an insurance lady stopped to sell Katie some insurance. Katie listened to her for a few minutes, then said, 'I don't know anything about insurance, but I know about Jesus. Let me tell you about Him.' That insurance lady turned out to be Pat Mogg, whom Katie won to Christ.

"Katie believed in the hope and assurance of Jesus. When Grant was in high school, he asked, 'Mom, what is heaven like?'

"Katie replied, 'Do you know what it's like when you're running the ball in a football game and the crowd is yelling and cheering?'

"'Yes,' Grant replied.

"'Then you cross the *goal line* and everyone mobs you?'

"'Yes,' he said.

"Then Katie said, 'That's what heaven is going to be like.'"

Transition to the Gospel Message

Following each biography is the transition statement that transports the audience from the profile to the sermon.

Many times the transition statement is as simple and direct as: "The occasion that drew us all here today reminds us of life's most difficult question: 'If a man dies, shall he live again?'"

When the stories in the profile open the mourners' hearts, it's time to introduce a friend—Jesus, who can comfort them and give them hope.

And the stories of Jesus are the most comforting of all.

Adapted from Kenn Filkins' book *Comfort Those Who Mourn*, published by College Press of Joplin, Mo.

Pontius' Puddle

The Sanctifying Work of the Spirit

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(2 Thess. 2:13-14)

by James W. Tharp
Editor, Christian Renewal, *Bozeman, Mont.*

Christian leaders all over the world are reporting an unprecedented hunger in the hearts of God's children for the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This passion for the deeper things of God should not surprise us. The greatest evangelistic harvest in the history of the Church is taking place during this decade. We should expect that every new healthy babe in Christ will have a ravenous appetite for more and more of the grace of God. The Church must be ready to feed hungry infants with the prepared Word. The gospel must be preached to saints as well as to sinners.

Our Christian gospel includes more than justification by faith; it also includes sanctification by faith. The apostle Paul declared that it was God's plan all along to include in our salvation "the sanctifying work of the Spirit."

I
CALLED TO BE HOLY

The call to holiness is conspicuous throughout both Old and New Testaments. First, there is God's call to His children to become like Him in His holy nature (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). And then there is the call of the redeemed heart itself to be made holy—an instinctive longing for purity that stems from the new nature inherited from Christ (Ps. 51:10; Matt. 5:6; Eph. 4:24).

The Meaning

Holiness is a condition of moral wholeness. Sin is a moral disease that entered the human family through the disobedience of Adam, and it has infected us all (Rom. 5:12, 19). A biblical understanding of sin requires that it be treated as both a principle and a practice. Sin involves character as well as conduct. This is why theologians speak of *original sin* and *actual sin. Original sin* means a condition of moral estrangement. Classic theology refers to natural man as being "totally depraved." By *actual sin* we mean that all have made the choice to sin (Rom. 3:23). Our individual sins cannot be charged to Adam; each of us must take responsibility for his own sins.

When God calls us to be holy, He is calling us to an inward purity as well as to an outward conduct of righteousness. Christian holiness might be defined as "that state of spiritual wholeness wherein the believer is freely forgiven, abundantly alive unto God, graciously cleansed from all unrighteousness, totally devoted to Christ as Lord and Savior, and mightily empowered for life and witness by the infilling of the Holy Spirit."

The Means

Sanctification is the divine grace by

which Christians are made holy. *Holiness* and *sanctification* are related terms, but they are not synonyms, despite such usage in some English translations of our New Testament. George Allen Turner explains the intimacy of the terms:

> The relation of holiness to sanctification is that of noun to verb. Holiness is a state or condition of sanctity; sanctification is a process by which it occurs. Holiness is associated with being; sanctification with becoming. Holiness is the static concept; sanctification is the dynamic.[1]

God calls each of us to be saved through the sanctifying work of His Spirit. This work begins in justification, at which time the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and we are cleared of all guilt before God. This is known as *initial sanctification.*

The greatest evangelistic harvest in the history of the Church is taking place during this decade.

Our new covenant gospel is a gospel of grace, but it never proposes a justification of "cheap grace," as Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned against.[2] Christ's atonement addresses both original sin and actual sin. His gospel never offers justifying grace apart from the divine purpose of sanctifying grace. If justification is that act of grace whereby the believing sinner is *cleared from the condemnation of sin,* then sanctification is that act of grace whereby the believing child of God is *cleansed from the condition of sin.*

II
SANCTIFIED BY FAITH

Justification by faith must lead to sanctification by faith. True justification is never completed by a sanctification of works. Good works will inevitably result from salvation, but both justification and sanctification are the workings of the Holy Spirit—both come by faith and not by works.

The Sanctification Controversy

For over 1,900 years, the gospel of Jesus Christ has addressed the problem of sin in the hearts of believers. The consensus is clear among nearly all branches of the Church that sanctification is an important work of the Spirit in the soteriological process. But the controversy heats up when we get into the *what,* the *when,* and the *how far* of the experience.

Wesleyan-Arminians cannot ignore the debate, but we really should be more concerned at this hour about the confusion that permeates the ranks of the holiness movement over the meaning of sanctification. Our preachers report that in their meetings (revivals, camps, and chapel services), the most common request on doctrinal issues is, "Can you help straighten me out on the meaning of sanctification?" These inquirers are for the most part men and women of integrity. They aren't cynical or backslidden, despite abuses and contradictions they have suffered from supposed advocates of sanctification. If this question is coming from our collegians, seminarians, and young pastors (and some not so young!), imagine the frustration that is represented in our churches over this doctrine. Little wonder that so many sigh in disappointment when the preacher announces that his subject is on sanctification.

The Sanctification Commitment

The Wesleyan movement with its special commitment to the truth of sanctification has an urgent obligation to address this confusion. The hunger for holiness of heart today is transdenominational, but it would be tragic for those of us who profess this theological distinctive to lose our voice at this critical hour. We must pray for informed and inflamed messengers who will powerfully, joyously, and intelligently communicate the good news of the sanctifying work of the Spirit to saints and sinners everywhere.

Our renewed commitment to the doctrine of sanctification might well begin in a spirit of humility before the Lord. We need His forgiveness for our shallow and partial treatment of such a comprehensive doctrine. We have all too often dealt with one aspect of sanctification as if it were the whole. We have authorized messengers who could not give a holistic presentation of this grace, and this has caused much of the confusion.

Each of us must take responsibility for his own sins.

Sound Wesleyan theologians have faithfully pointed to the New Testament approach to sanctification with its three phases: *positional, personal,* and *progressive.* No one single aspect can be treated as the whole; the whole cannot be presented if any one of the three is ignored.

The late Paul S. Rees, to whom this writer owes so very much, often spoke of our *common* sanctification in which we are declared holy *provisionally,* our *crucial* sanctification at which time we are made holy *penetratively,* and our *continuous* sanctification as over a lifetime we are made even more holy *progressively.*

Positional Sanctification

Holiness people understandably shy away from the more Calvinistic tradition of provisionalism when it comes to the doctrine of sanctification. We simply don't like such a casual (and sometimes presumptuous) response to the biblical call to holiness. Nevertheless, we must join our Calvinist friends in the understanding that, once we are in Christ, there is a judicial cancellation of all sin. The believer has eternal life at the point of believing—then and there! He does not await full acceptance in the family of God at some future experience of cleansing. Christ is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). While the Word plainly states that "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), we need to see from the Scriptures that God graciously imputes holiness before He imparts it. The penitent thief

on the cross was told by Jesus, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Sanctification begins in justification. We are declared holy because we are in Christ. But let us not forget that those who are in Christ are "called to be holy" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Personal Sanctification

Committed followers of Christ cannot view sanctification as strictly provisional. They must not ignore the need of their own sinful hearts and the promise of their Heavenly Father to cleanse His children from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

The experience of appropriating by faith the promise of heart purity was called "entire sanctification" by John Wesley. When he challenged believers to be sanctified wholly, some responded that they were already sanctified in that they were justified by faith. Wesley agreed that they were sanctified provisionally, but he affirmed that they were also called to inner cleansing—an aspect of sanctification distinct from what they had already experienced.

> We should be concerned about the confusion that permeates the ranks of the holiness movement over the meaning of sanctification.

In a conference held June 16, 1747, Wesley and his colleagues coined the term *entire sanctification* to designate that spiritual crisis occurs when a believer is "wholly sanctified."[3] Despite its connotation of an absolute sinless perfection, Wesley never intended the term of *entire sanctification* to mean anything other than a relative evangelical perfection. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop defends Wesley's use of the term on expedient grounds, but she concedes that there is only one text in the Bible (1 Thess. 5:23) that refers to "entire sanctification." And she is quick to note that even here it is not sanctification that is qualified by "entire," but rather the persons participating in sanctification—they are to bring their whole beings into this holy and moral union with God.[4]

Regardless of our terminology, the Church must teach and preach—and believers must be brought into—an instantaneous faith experience in which the sanctifying work of the Spirit is definite: the power of the Cross must be allowed to crucify the self-mind, which would rebel against God and mar the image of Christ (Eph. 4:22-23; Rom. 8:4-14); the double-minded heart must be integrated to worship and serve God in a single-hearted purpose (James 4:8); and the children of God must be empowered to love (which is the essence of holiness)—to love God with *all* their heart (Matt. 22:37), to love their brothers and sisters even as Christ loves them (John 13:34-35), and to even love their enemies (Matt. 5:44-45). Such love comes from God—it is poured into and flows out of sanctified vessels by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

Progressive Sanctification

The sanctifying work of the Spirit does not end with a crisis; beyond His *crucial* work of the moment is His *constant* work of a lifetime. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul Rees insisted that crisis sanctification must blend into process sanctification:

> The earnest Christian life is a perpetual paradox of gift and growth, of arrival and non-arrival, of perfection and imperfection: a gift of radical cleansing and a growth in radiant Christlikeness.[5]

To our renewed commitment to the sanctifying work of the Spirit there is another ingredient that must be added to humility and a clear presentation of the doctrine—that of *prayer.* If we are to see believers sanctified, we must do more than present a doctrine; our preaching and teaching must be drenched and driven by intercessory prayer. It requires prayer to get people saved; it requires more prayer to get them sanctified. Paul was a great holiness preacher, but he lived on his knees in order that Christians might discover the fullness of God's grace (Eph. 1:15-21; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; 1:28—2:5; 1 Thess. 1:2; 3:11-13; 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 1:3-14). Doctrine alone does not make a holiness church; prayer must prepare the way for the Spirit of holiness to do His work.

> Wesley never intended the term of *entire sanctification* to mean anything other than a relative evangelical perfection.

III
FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Our text makes it clear that the experience of God's sanctifying work is not an end in itself. The ultimate purpose is that we "might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The apostle loved to talk and write about "the riches of Christ's glory." Jesus explained to His disciples how He would be glorified by the Spirit's working in them to reveal His wisdom and purpose and power (John 16:14).

At Pentecost, the fullness of the Holy Spirit released early Christians to share in the glory and power of Christ. Every believer today who is serious about the glory of Christ in his life should prayerfully make a New Testament study of the word *fullness* as it pertains to the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the glory of Christ in the Church.

The Concept of Fullness

Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit"

(Luke 4:1). On the Day of Pentecost, the Upper Room believers "were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). And throughout the Book of Acts we note various forms of the term that witness to the divine enablement that Christ had promised.

What does it mean to be "full of the Holy Spirit" in the New Testament sense? Richard S. Taylor comments on the most commonly used words to express the fullness of the Holy Spirit:

> They suggest completion, full of, wholly occupied with, completely under the influence of. To be filled with the Spirit may be said *(a)* to find our personal fulfillment in Him, *(b)* to be pervaded by His presence, and *(c)* to be completely under His influence.[6]

The Command of Fullness

The apostle Paul commanded Christians to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Greek scholars insist that this text be studied carefully, and that at least three things be noted about its verb: (1) it is in the *imperative mood,* meaning that being filled with the Spirit is not a mere human suggestion but a divine command; (2) it is in the *passive voice,* meaning that we are to let (allow, give consent to) the Spirit fill us—our yielding to Him without reservation is the condition of His filling us beyond measure; and (3) it is in the *present tense,* meaning that the action must be continuous—it must be repeated again and again and again. A proper translation of the text might well be, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit."

> It requires prayer to get people saved; it requires more prayer to get them sanctified.

The Cost of Fullness

Salvation in all of its aspects is offered freely to the believer—all by faith. But let us never interpret God's grace as meaning that He requires nothing from us—no obedience, no self-denial, no purity of heart, no worship, no love. There is a price tag on the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit, which is clearly marked throughout the New Testament. The problem is that too many Christians are shopping for bargains.

In essence, the cost of divine fullness is *prayer.* Jesus devoted himself to prayer above all else, and He was full of the Holy Spirit. Read the Book of Acts, and you will catch the profile of a praying Church—a people full of the Holy Spirit.

The experiences of prayer and the renewings of the Spirit are so interrelated that sometimes we are confused about the cause and the effect. The truth is that only praying hearts are filled with the Spirit. And it is equally true that only Spirit-filled hearts can prevail in prayer.

Churches are not revived through preaching alone; it takes prayer, Spirit-anointed prayer. May the baptizing fullness of the Holy Spirit set our hearts on fire to pray! May God raise up in all of our churches a good number of Upper Room intercessors who will weep and pray and fast for a mighty holiness revival—the kind that will feature the sanctifying work of the Spirit and show forth the glory of Christ!

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1. George Allen Turner, *The Vision Which Transforms* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), 32.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963), 45-60.
3. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., 14 vols. (1872, reprint; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978-79), 11:388.
4. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 304, 308.
5. Paul S. Rees, *Men of Action in the Book of Acts* (Revell, 1966), 89.
6. Richard S. Taylor, *Exploring Christian Holiness,* vol. 3, *The Theological Formulation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1985), 188.

BEYOND BELIEF

The Value of Infant Baptism

Is there a place for infant baptism in today's church? In my personal experience, the practice is seldom, if ever, seen. Most of the time parents have chosen the ritual of infant dedication over baptism. Why? Is dedication more biblical than baptism? Is infant baptism a rite that went down with the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic church? Is there any value in infant baptism?

Most Protestants reject infant baptism as a holdover from the Catholic church. There infants are baptized to assure them passage into heaven. Some of our Catholic friends believe that they are assured heaven solely because they were baptized as infants. But many people are surprised to find that infant baptism has always been in the church and can be traced back not only to John Wesley, who defended the practice, but to the foundations of the Church and all the way back to Judaism.

In our society, we are greatly influenced by the Reformed traditions. Those of that persuasion believe that salvation can come only by a mature, conscious decision to follow Jesus. Baptism is the act of a believer to show the community that he is a convert. To baptize an infant, who cannot testify to conversion nor understand the meaning of the ritual, is meaningless. The only result is a wet infant. However, in the Wesleyan tradition, we can find that there is a special meaning to the ritual of infant baptism, one that should encourage us to present infant baptism as an option to parents who want their child to have the best possible opportunity to grow up as a Christian.

To appreciate the practice of infant baptism, we need to understand its roots. We find these roots in Scripture and tradition.

by John W. Dally
Pastor, Church of the Nazarene, Burbank, Calif.

Was infant baptism practiced in Judaism?

Within the Judeo-Christian history, baptism was practiced in the nation of Israel. The rite of baptism indicated "washing" or "cleansing." Scripture references are found in the Old Testament in Exod. 30:17-21; Lev. 11:25; 15:8; and 17:15. There is further mention of baptism in Num. 19:17-18 and 31:22-23.

For the most part, baptism was used for the assimilation of proselytes into the Jewish community.[1] It was a rite of initiation. This proselyte baptism was not limited to adults. According to the Mishnah, the collection of Jewish oral tradition, children were baptized as well. Children of converts entering the Jewish community were baptized along with their fathers.[2] As for children born to parents already in the community, the rite of circumcision was performed on the eighth day in recognition of his rightful place in the covenant community.

Was infant baptism practiced in the primitive Church?

The rite of baptism was carried into the Church on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, following the sermon by Peter, 3,000 people were baptized (Acts 2:41). At this time, the emphasis upon baptism was a response to the gospel message and entrance into the new covenant. It played the role of proselyte baptism. If the tradition was carried over from Judaism, infants would have been baptized as well.

This practice of baptism was continued in the missionary activity of the Early Church. When Paul went to Philippi, he met Lydia. After speaking with her, she opened her heart to Paul's message. She, along with "the members of her household," were baptized (Acts 16:15). The term "household" in its use specifically included children.[3]

When Paul and Silas were arrested and placed in jail, an earthquake hit and everybody's chains fell off. The jailer, fearing a mass escape, drew his sword in an attempt to commit suicide. Paul prevented him and the jailer was converted. As evidence of his conversion, the jailer and all of his family, literally "his own," were baptized (Acts 16:33).

When Paul went to Corinth, his work resulted in the conversion of the synagogue leader, Crispus. In response to his conversion, he and all of his "household" were baptized. Being a synagogue leader, he would have been familiar with the Jewish proselyte baptism. Baptism of infants would not be a foreign idea to him. This fact would be supported by the use again of the term "household" (Acts 18:8). Paul again uses the term "household" in reference to Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16).

Based upon the Scriptures, it is apparent that infant baptism may have been practiced in the primitive Church.

What about infants born into Christian families?

In the Old Testament community,

every male child was circumcised on the eighth day, signifying his membership in the community and as a recipient of the blessings of the covenant. This practice would have been continued by the Jewish Christians of the primitive Church. However, as the Church spread into the Gentile world, circumcision was abandoned.

The apostle Paul reveals a development of the new covenant community that replaces the Jewish rite of circumcision with baptism. This can be seen in Col. 2:11-12: "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

The issue of circumcision became an issue of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). It was decided there that circumcision would no longer be required. This left only baptism as a sign of the new covenant. The result was a blending of two rituals into one, proselyte baptism and circumcision into one ritual of Christian baptism.

Was infant baptism practiced in the Early Church?

The Early Church fathers provide a clear witness to the rite of infant baptism. In the writings of Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Polycrates, we find mention of their discipleship and membership in the Church, which they date back to their infancy. Since baptism was the sign of membership in the Church, they were thus baptized as infants. Origen wrote that infant baptism was handed down from the apostles.[4] John Wesley cites the witness of St. Austin, St. Cyprian, Athanasius, and Chrysostom.[5]

Roland Bainton explains the importance of baptism and infant baptism in the pre-Reformation church.

> Baptism, the first of the Sacraments, washes away all previous sin, confers membership in the Christian Community, is ineradicable, and confers rights over the children of the baptized, even though the baptism be subsequently repudiated, as sometimes happened after forced conversion; baptism was conferred upon every child born into the community, who by that token became also a member of the Christian Community.[6]

There is a special meaning to the ritual of infant baptism.

As it can be seen, the idea of infant baptism was taken as an invitation into the community in the same manner as circumcision was used in Israel. It was viewed as one of the seven sacraments of the church, which included marriage and communion.

What of infant baptism in the Reformation?

With the coming of the Reformation, there were many changes in the rituals of the church but not in regard to the practice of infant baptism. Martin Luther defined sacrament as an outward sign of an inward grace, instituted by Christ and exclusively Christian.[7] To Luther, faith was the operative of the sacrament; without it, there was no effect. Yet Luther maintained infant baptism. He explained it by defining faith as awake or asleep. God provided faith; it was up to man to respond and use it. In a child, the faith existed but was not yet realized; faith was asleep. Therefore, the child was baptized in recognition of that grace present. He later "held that the child was sustained by the faith of the sponsor because children are from the outset participants in the life of the Christian Community."[8] Luther saw infant baptism in the light of membership in the community as well as the recognition of imparted grace, not yet realized.

Following the break between the Catholic church and the followers of Luther came the Reformers. Among them was Urich Zwingli. As a complete departure from the idea of sacrament, he despiritualized the rites. Communion became a memorial only, and baptism remained an initiatory ritual into the community. Yet Zwingli held to infant baptism for children as membership into the community just as circumcision was to the Jewish child.[9]

The first to truly object to infant baptism were the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were named for their practice of rebaptizing adults who were baptized as infants. They held to only the proselyte meaning of baptism. Their belief stated that baptism was a response to the personal experience of salvation. A child does not have that experience; therefore the rite is worthless.[10] Their doctrine of baptism was rejected by the Protestant churches of that day, and it resulted in terrible persecution for the Anabaptists.

How has infant baptism changed since the Reformation?

By the time of John Wesley, there was a definite division over the issue. Some followed the idea of proselyte baptism. Following the Anabaptists, baptism remained for those who made a conscious decision to join the church. Only adults could make such a decision (be converted, i.e., be proselytized); therefore only adult baptism was recognized. The other view followed the circumcision tradition, which viewed baptism more broadly as a sign of the covenant community. Anyone born into a Christian home would be, by birth, a member of that community and entitled to infant baptism.

Even though John Calvin recognized infant baptism, the Reformers who followed him took the position of the Anabaptists and recognized only adult baptism. The Anglicans and other churches (often referred to as the High Churches) continued the practice. John Wesley, being an Anglican, supported infant baptism. The influence of James Arminius on John Wesley supported his position, for Arminius was also on the side of infant baptism.[11]

Does infant baptism have any place in today's church?

Today, due to the strong influence

from the Reformed denominations, most Christians in America follow the understanding of proselyte baptism. Infant dedication has replaced infant baptism for most Christians. For this reason, most Christians do not understand, nor do they appreciate, the value of infant baptism. They have missed the important issue of community and a rich, meaningful tradition of the church. There are good reasons to maintain the practice today.

Theologically, infant baptism recognizes the important belief that every child is born under the grace of God. It is held that if a child should die before the age of accountability, his or her spirit will be ushered into the presence of God. We also believe in prevenient grace, that is, the grace bestowed upon every human being by God, allowing him to respond to the wooing of the Holy Spirit. With the idea that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, we are giving recognition to God's grace already bestowed on the child at birth. Where infant dedication testifies to the intent of the parents to raise the child in a Christian home, infant baptism recognizes the act of God's grace upon the child. Where dedication is an act of man, infant baptism recognizes an act of God.

Some reject infant baptism because it is believed to be a guarantee of salvation. However, infant baptism does not guarantee the ultimate salvation of the child. It only gives recognition to the relationship that exists in God's grace and "points forward to his (her) personal appropriation of the benefits of the Atonement when he (she) reaches the age of moral accountability and exercises conscious saving faith in Jesus Christ."[12]

There is a practical side to infant baptism as well. It has been the view that until a person comes to understand and accept Christ as his or her personal Savior, he or she is not a Christian. Therefore, we hear of mothers praying that one day they will see their child "become" a Christian. The message sent to the child is that until that time he is not a Christian. Not being a Christian means that he is not part of the community of believers and, therefore, is in some way either a probational member or not a member at all. Although this may not be stated, it is the impression given.[13]

This has resulted in young people growing up in uncertainty about their place in the church as well as their relationship with God. It can be partly to blame for the exodus of teens from the church. After all, they were never part of the church. They just decided not to decide.

Most Christians do not understand nor do they appreciate the value of infant baptism.

A child who has been baptized, in recognition of God's grace and as initiation into the covenant community, is not left with the decision to establish a relationship. They are given opportunity to maintain the relationship that already exists. It is more likely that a person will maintain a relationship already established than to initiate a relationship that did not exist.

In a day when our children are being stolen from the church by television, music, movies, schools, and peers, can we afford to leave it up to our children to make the right decision when they reach the age of accountability? We need to take every opportunity to hold on to our children. Infant baptism is a biblical, traditional, rational, and often effective means to incorporate our children into the covenant community.

Another element relates to outreach. I have had parents come from our preschool, seeking to do something religious for their child. I feel that I cannot perform a dedication because often they do not belong to a church, or they would have gone there. Yet I feel that I want to give some ray of hope for the child. Baptism would recognize God's grace already given, not parental intent; therefore the ritual would have meaning. These opportunities have also provided me opportunity to share the love and grace of God. What parent would not find it comforting to learn that God cares for his or her child? This has proven to be an open door to evangelize the parents who have not known God as a loving and forgiving God.

What is the value of infant baptism? The value is the rich heritage that it represents, a demonstration of our theological beliefs in prevenient grace, and a practical instrument for maintaining our youth and evangelizing parents.

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1. George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (IDB) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:384.
2. For a complete discussion of the Mishnah and infant baptism see Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 5:648.
3. Buttrick, IDB 1:352. See also Kittel, TDNT 5:130.
4. Buttrick, IDB 1:352.
5. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley (Works)*, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (1872, reprint; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978-79), 10:197.
6. Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 10.
7. Ibid., 46.
8. Ibid., 50.
9. Ibid., 89.
10. Ibid., 98.
11. For a full understanding of John Wesley's view on infant baptism see his "Treatise on Baptism," in *Works* 10:188-201.
12. *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1993), 232.
13. To illustrate the inconsistencies of this view, I knew of parents who would only accept adult baptism because a child cannot "understand" the meaning of being a Christian. Yet when their child came home from kindergarten Sunday School class and told them that he had become a Christian, they were elated. Just how much can a kindergartner understand?

Chaplains in the Storm

by Victor M. Parachin
Freelance writer,
Virginia Beach, Va.

In the early, moonless morning of January 17, 1991, diplomacy ended and the Gulf War began. Americans were riveted to their television sets, deeply concerned for the more than 100,000 American troops, women and men, who were in Saudi Arabia.

Largely unknown to the American public is the fact that stationed side by side with the troops were some 200 military chaplains. Uniformed but unarmed noncombatants, the chaplains traveled with their troops wherever they went.

Although the military chaplain's role is essentially the same as a civilian religious leader, their work in the Gulf clearly took on new dimensions and challenges. In the conflict they ministered while being subject to the same anxieties, boredom, loneliness, fear, heat, live fire, and minefields that affected combatants.

Recently, a group of navy chaplains assigned to the First Marine Division shared stories of their unique ministry during the Gulf War. Here, in their own words, is what chaplains in the storm experienced.

Shock

As Iraqi prisoners of war were taken, chaplains and other troops were shocked to discover that many Iraqi "soldiers" were simply children given uniforms and guns and ordered to fight. Marine Lt. Daniel Hall, a Catholic priest, describes his visit to a wounded Iraqi soldier.

"He had a bullet wound through the left eye. There was really nothing that could be done for him except to ease his pain," Hall says. "When we pulled out his identification card, we learned he was only 16 years old. News of this spread very quickly. Our Marines were irate! 'How could Saddam do this to his children?' they asked. I ran into one of our lieutenants later that morning. He broke down in tears when I told him the story. He said, 'I have a little brother that age.'"

Questions

For many troops this was their first engagement in war. Where previous military maneuvers were practice sessions, this was the real thing. As a result, chaplains found themselves being asked a variety of moral, philosophical, and theological questions about war.

"I remember numerous occasions on which I was approached by young sailors and marines and sincerely asked the hardest questions of life," recalls Lt. Kim Evans, a Southern Baptist. "'Is there ever really a time when it's all right to take another human life?' 'What about the sixth commandment—"Thou shalt not kill"—Chaplain?' We talked about the differences between murder and the defense of freedom. We struggled through these questions together," explains Evans.

Evans also notes that other questions were more personal and religious, with soldiers asking about death and life beyond. "'What will happen to me if I die?' and 'What will happen to my family?' We talked about death and the saving grace of Jesus Christ, which brings eternal life and hope. We talked about losses, grief, and the comforting peace of a loving Savior."

Spiritual Hunger

Because of the dangers and risks involved in war, a closeness to God and a deeper spiritual sense was deepened for many troops. Lt. Frank Johnson describes ministry in the Gulf as "phenomenal."

When he held his first service, "Over 150 men showed up in the cold, drizzling rain to worship God. Over the next few weeks it was not unusual for large crowds to gather for worship regardless of the inclement weather. This was a sign that God was at work in their hearts. They were spiritually hungry."

To skeptics who would attribute spiritual hunger to fear and "foxhole religion," Johnson remains adamant about the sincerity of troops in worship. "I'm convinced there was a liberation that occurred in the lives of many of these marines and sailors that would not have happened otherwise. It changed their perspective on life and the things of eternal value."

The Power of Prayer

What could have been a horrific bloodbath lasting months and years ended quickly with minimal losses. James Fisher, a lieutenant ordained in the Evangelical Covenant church, feels strongly that prayers were powerfully answered. "Consider how many letters were sent . . . with the simple words enclosed, 'I'm praying for you,' 'Our prayers go with you,' 'You're in our thoughts and prayers,' 'God bless you,'" Fisher recalls.

"I could tell you of the miracles and answers to prayer—low casualty counts, Iraqi mortars landing in groups of marines without any being wounded, a spirit of surrender that stalked the Iraqi camps, 16 tank rounds that couldn't seem to hit an ambulance silhouetted against the sky. After the battle, marines readily confessed, 'God was with us; He heard our prayers.'"

Enthusiastic Welcome Home

Americans opened their hearts in unprecedented ways to returning soldiers. "Amazing! Unbelievable! Overwhelming! These are the only words that I can use to describe the reception we received upon our return home from combat in Operation Desert Storm," says Marine Lt. Mark Gefaller, a Lutheran chaplain.

"As we touched down at Norton Air Force Base, we could see crowds of people waving flags. In Morongo Valley, the buses slowed to a crawl. In Yucca Valley, they completely stopped as the police sought to clear a lane for us to pass. An amazing number of people crowded the roadways, all trying to shake our hands and providing us with food, beverages, flags, and souvenirs."

Another chaplain who experienced an enthusiastic, warm welcome home was Lt. Daryl Person, a Baptist. "People who did not know us displayed a sense of love and kindness that overwhelmed." However, Person immediately became aware of the loneliness and frustration that characterized so many Vietnam veterans.

"I am saddened to think that those who served in Vietnam did not get the same sort of treatment," he reports. "I truly understand the bitterness and pain that a veteran would rightly feel if his or her country did not recognize nor appreciate the risks that a serviceman accepts."

Share Your Message by Listening

by Wayne M. Warner
Freelance writer, Three Rivers, Mich.

Many pastors are communication specialists who haven't learned to listen.

Writing requires a hook with which to capture the reader's attention. Having hooked the reader, the writer introduces the intended message. Many consider communication simply a matter of finding the right hook, grabbing the person's attention, then proclaiming the message.

Multitudes of educational media experts teach "methods" of communication. We are, it seems to me, becoming experts for gaining people's attention; but how many of us know how to listen?

Many a busy pastor feels the pressure of time when invaded by someone needing to visit. A man left the church where he was a lay member and became the pastor of a small, rural church. When he had an occasion to return home, he made an appointment with his former pastor and began to eagerly share the excitement of his new life.

As the younger man spoke, the older pastor straightened his desk. He put pens and pencils back into place and put things back into their proper places, making good use of the time. During this exchange, he hardly bothered to look at his young, enthusiastic friend.

The young man told his story and finally limped to a conclusion. Then, rather lamely, he left his friend's office filled with disappointment and disillusionment. The older man had communicated well, in spite of his few words. He projected a message of unconcern that later caused the younger man to write a book titled *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear.*[1]

Jesus communicated best with others when He listened with both His head and His heart. He listened with both ears, but He also listened with His heart. He heard from both men and God because He listened so well.

When Jesus listened, He communicated love and concern as He modeled His own oft-repeated maxim: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9). The most powerful communication of the gospel for any pastor may well be the awesome power of the listening ear.

An adventure in active listening may be the most effective means one has for communicating Christ to that person who has been so slow to respond to our well-planned sermons.

If it worked for Jesus, might it not also work well for us?

1. John W. Drakeford, *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1967).

For Ministers' Wives: *Why* You Do *What* You Do

by Kristy Roberts Dykes
Freelance writer, Lakeland, Fla.

I looked across the Bible college classroom of young women, many of them potential ministers' wives. I was teaching a course titled Introduction to Ministry, in which I explored the different facets of ministry. For part of the curriculum, I used excerpts from William J. Martin's *The Church in Mission.*

"The church is the largest volunteer organization in the world, and volunteerism has been wounded by the attitude that worth is tied to pay," I read from the book.

"Good statement," I told my class. "Many of you will be workers in a church when you leave college. You'll be Sunday School teachers, children's workers, choir members or directors, and the list goes on and on. You probably won't receive monetary rewards for these jobs. It's going to take something else to motivate you."

I related that the author said, "People in God's service must have a clear understanding of *why* they are doing *what* they're doing," so that they can experience true meaning to motivate and sustain them.

"There are so many tasks and jobs in a church. It's easy to become weary in well doing," I told the young women.

As a minister's wife, how well I knew the truth of my last statement. Perhaps the busiest time in the ministry—Christmas—had just passed. I had planned or helped plan a variety of activities during the month of December: the church Christmas banquet, the children's hayride, the young adult party of which I was teacher, the church board and staff dinner in our home, the Christmas Eve candlelight Communion service, and the refreshments for the New Year's Eve watchnight service.

Besides that, I had written the Christmas play, memorized my part in it, and supervised rehearsals. I had helped make costumes and designed the program to go to the printers. With a committee, I had made numerous trips to antique shops to borrow turn-of-the-century furniture for the play.

Decorating the church had to be done also. I organized a committee, and we met for a whole day, shopping for some new decorations and hanging garland and red velvet bows and wreaths.

Besides that, the family Christmas activities had to be done—decorating, gift buying, cooking, and baking. Without a doubt, I certainly understood the implications of the author's words: "People in God's service must have a clear understanding of *why* they are doing *what* they're doing."

Someone said, "The person who knows *how* is always servant to the person who knows *why.*" *Why* had I done all those tasks during December, as well as the rest of the year? Was I guilty of being "weary in well doing"? Was I letting the popular thinking of the day, "Worth is tied to pay," affect my service for the Lord? Would I be more excited about the varied duties required of a minister's wife if I were paid for doing them?

As a minister's wife, are you tired of all the tasks you must perform? Do you feel a compulsion to be involved in various ministries in order to lead and motivate people? Some ministers' wives aren't as visibly involved as others. However, all of us carry our own personal heavy load—sharing people's burdens and heartaches and sicknesses; counseling; interceding for needs; experiencing stress due to church matters; trying to live up to the often unreasonable expectations of church people.

Are you searching for new meaning in your life? Are you becoming "weary in well doing"? Do you know *why* you are doing *what* you are doing?

To discover *why* we ministers' wives do *what* we do, Martin says we must first understand that people have a deep desire to make their lives significant, to have purpose. Viktor Frankl, Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, discovered that Jews who lived through the Nazi prison camp experience survived because they were motivated by a strong desire to live. Frankl concluded, "It was meaning that made us uniquely human."

What should be our motivation for doing what we do? According to Martin, we discover our reasons why as we understand two important facets of our ministry: (1) We are here for God; and (2) We are here for other people.

What astounding statements! Let's bring them down into the demanding life of a minister's mate.

We Are Here for God

Think back to the days when you first entered the ministry, or felt called by God, or submitted to your mate's call. Were you anxious to

please the Lord? Were you more willing to lay your life on the altar than now?

Renew that commitment to God. Repeat to God your vow to have a servant's heart no matter what it takes. Pray sincerely: "Father, I'm weary in Your service. I realize life has no meaning apart from You. I've gladly given my all. However, right now I need Your renewal. Help me put all these 'things' that I'm doing in perspective. Let me realize that everything I do, I do for You and You alone. If I never receive any praise or credit or honor, I offer them to You."

As you pray such a prayer, God will empower you to accomplish all your tasks. He will renew you.

We Are Here for Other People

This aspect might be a little harder to face. I heard a pastor say, "I love souls. I just hate people." What a pity!

We must realize that if we are going to be ministers' mates, our work will revolve around people: nice people, cranky people, sinful people, gossipy people, good people, bad people. That's all we have to work with—people.

Let's face it: there are hazards to every trade. Electricians work around bare wires with all their potential danger. Nurses expose themselves to illness and disease. Mechanics get grimy and dirty. Ministers and their wives must work with people and all their problems. It's as simple as that.

To work with people, we must learn to love people. Most important of all, we must learn to empathize. The best definition I've learned of empathy is "to crawl into the skin of someone suffering through a trial or hardship and to feel the pain that person is experiencing as if it were your own."

Be Not Weary in Well Doing

Minister's mate, when the burden of your work overpowers you and when the pressures seem too great to bear, take heart! Do what you do in the light of Paul's admonition: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17, KJV).

As you do so, it will pay off: "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9, KJV).

Begonia Lesson

by Robert E. Norton
Professor,
MidAmerica Nazarene College,
Olathe, Kans.

I dug up the begonia in October while it was still green and lush, its orange-red blossoms loaded profusely onto the stems of the plant. I took it to my office and placed it in the best of soils to weather the winter. I have seen my mother begin cuttings during the cold months, and I decided if new plants can be started from cuttings, keeping the whole plant alive would be much better.

Shortly after I moved the plant to my office, it began to shed leaves. For no apparent reason, they simply shriveled and dropped. Next, the stems lost their turgor, becoming limp and black. Then they, too, dropped.

Now I am wondering if I should have cut off the old plant and cultured only a new part, the cutting, and not the leaves, flowers, and stems. Perhaps the old plant is simply tired and cannot grow until it is somehow rejuvenated by growing fresh from a basic cutting.

Sometimes I think that my life might be like a begonia plant at the end of the growing season. Perhaps instead of trying to hang on to all of the past and re-create a new life for myself, I should let the Lord pare back my old life and concentrate on the new, just the good stuff, just the cuttings. Maybe my cultivation of those old grudges, unconscious bad habits, supercilious attitudes, and bitterness of spirit is like a begonia plant trying to grow a new plant from old, tired stems.

Begonia Prayer

Lord, please prune those old, limp, useless stems from my spiritual life. Plant a freshly infused cutting of Your Spirit in the soil of my soul so that the green leaves and fragrant blossoms of a new life in Christ may flourish and properly grace the season. Amen.

—Robert E. Norton

New Feature

The Minister's Resource Library

by David Grosse
Director, Excellence in Ministry, Kansas City

Of making many books there is no end"—so said the writer of Ecclesiastes (12:12) many centuries before Gutenberg's movable type. Even he could not have anticipated the avalanche of books and other media coming from religious publishers today. Cokesbury's Robert Feaster says that 55,483 books are published annually in the United States. Of these, 2,746 are *new* religious titles. An additional 815,000 continue in print; 61,000 of these are about religion.

In the presence of such a mountain of books, not to mention all the other print, audiovisual, and computer media, how does one manage to climb the resource mountain to select those rarified titles most helpful in ministry support?

With this issue of the *Preacher's Magazine,* we inaugurate a new feature to help scale that mountain. We are calling it "The Minister's Resource Library." Qualified resource guides will lead us over the cluttered and sometimes confused resource landscape to a summit of carefully selected materials most deserving of our attention.

Over time we will attempt to cover the broad range of ministry concerns and activity to include: pastoral care, worship, theology and ethics, evangelism and missions, church growth, Christian education, spiritual formation, pastoral leadership and administration, social and compassionate ministries, among others.

How will the materials be selected? We will use the following criteria:

1. Content/Style: substantial, clear, interesting, balanced
2. Utility: topically pertinent, applicable to ministry
3. Author's Objective: clear, realistic, achieved
4. Authorship: knowledgeable, reputable, authoritative
5. Format: unified, sequential, coherent
6. Currency: fresh, "cutting edge"
7. Useful Supporting Elements: bibliography, notes, indices, appendices, graphics
8. Cost: good or best for the money

Contributors will include members of the Ministry Resources Group of the Division of Church Growth/Pastoral Ministries; college, Bible college, and seminary faculties; and others on the front lines of ministry. Feature editor is David Grosse, director of continuing education at Nazarene Theological Seminary, and chairman of the Ministry Resources Group. Send any comments, ideas, or review suggestions directly to him, c/o The Ministry Resources Group, Division of Church Growth, 6401 The Paseo, Kansas City, MO 64131.

One caveat: inclusion on this list does not imply blanket endorsement. Rather, it is an assessment by the reviewer that at least some of the content can be useful in providing new information, ideas, understanding, or inspiration to strengthen ministry.

Here, then, is a suggestive list of some important titles in the areas of church growth and evangelism. Next issue will feature resources in pastoral care and counseling.

Church Planting/Growth

C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray.* Gospel Light (PA083-071-5983, $15.99).

A leader in the American church growth movement sees prayer as the key to breaking down walls that inhibit the spread of the gospel.

Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles.* Broadman Press, 1993 (PA080-541-1577, $19.99).

Substantial, balanced, and dependable. Considered by some as the best available text on the subject. An important reference that goes far beyond the pop theology and shallow marketing mania of some church growth wannabees.

Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century.* Baker Book House, 1992 (PA080-106-2950, $19.99).

Subtitled *A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal.* Looks beyond strategy and technology to the nurturing of congregations. Another "best of its kind." Needs to be in every church planter's library.

George Barna, *User Friendly Churches.* Regal Books, 1991 (PA083-071-4730, $9.99).

The acclaimed church growth researcher considers "what Christians need to know about the churches people love to go to." Focuses on the worship experience and environment, while stressing proven principles of growth rather than imitating programs. "The best book on church growth for the 1990s." (Rick Warren)

Leonard Sweet, *Faithquakes.* Abingdon, 1994 (PA068-712-6479, $19.95).

A wake-up call for those out of touch with the times and trends, out of touch with the ministries that are succeeding today. Filled with cultural and theological insight, great imagina-

tion, and unconventional ministry applications. Hope-filled and idea-rich for "Christians who know that the church is the last hope for saving families, cities, businesses, and the earth."

Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change.* Bethany House, 1990 (PA155-661-1072, $13.99).
———, *A Church for the Twenty-first Century.* Bethany House, 1993 (PA155-661-2311, $14.95).

Rapid and complex societal changes have left many churches teetering between ineffectiveness and extinction. In *Dying for Change,* the author argues for fundamental, biblically based changes to meet the new challenges. Specific prescriptions come from the author's exceptional success in leading his own church through extraordinary transformation and growth. The second book takes up where the first left off, addressing the critical issue of our times, "How can the church remain effective into the next century?"

Roy Oswald, *Making Your Church More Inviting.* Alban Institute, 1992, pb. (PA156-699-0556, $14.95).
———, *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation.* Alban Institute, 1988, pb. (PA156-699-0203, $11.95).

The first book is a 15-session training manual, in workbook format, "for assessing a congregation's 'IQ' (Invitation Quotient)." Identifies the elements that make for an "inviting church" in the context of the total environment—physical, psychological, and spiritual. An action-oriented resource that goes well beyond theory.

The Inviting Church is an earlier work, useful for exploring such key questions as, "Why do some people never return after a first visit? Why do some join but are not active? Why do others return and become active?"

Evangelism, Missions, and Outreach

D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion,* 3rd ed. Tyndale, 1983 (PA084-230-7788, $12.99).

Explains ways of sharing the gospel in a plain and appealing way. A widely used text on personal evangelism, describing one of the most effective and widely used methods of communicating the gospel in today's world.

Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism,* 60th ed. Baker, 1992 (PA080-075-4670, $8.99).
———, *Nothing to Do but Save Souls.* Zondervan, 1990, pb. (PA091-514-3054, $7.95).

Master Plan is Coleman's classic, million-volume-seller work on the "evangelistic method of Jesus," i.e., investing in the training of a few in order to reach the many. An older classic that is still valuable to this day and probably for years to come.

The second is written against the background of Wesley's charge to his preachers. Helps us see the evangelistic passion and power of Wesley's own life and ministry, providing a Wesleyan paradigm for evangelism.

Charles "Chic" Shaver, *The Bible Speaks to Me About My Witness.* Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991, pb. (PA083-411-4046, $7.95).

An engaging book that lays important foundations for the practice of evangelism. Helpful chapters include "Overcoming the Fear Factor" and "Witness out of the Overflow." While new believers will find help in developing their own witnessing style, even the most experienced will discover challenge and insight from Shaver's own bold and highly effective approach.

George Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People.* Abingdon, 1992 (PA068-717-9300, $9.95).

Keen insights into the mind-set and attitudes of the secular world, as preparation for an effective evangelism. Workable strategies enhance the usefulness of this gem.

Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary.* Zondervan, 1993, pb. (PA031-037-5614, $9.99).

A former atheist who found Christ through the ministry of Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Church shares his unique understanding of how unchurched people think. Now an associate at the church, the author gives us important insights for reaching "friends and family who avoid God and the church."

An Inside Look at the Willow Creek Seeker Service. Zondervan (Video), (PAVA-7293, $29.99).

Watch this to understand how one highly successful church uses music, drama, and preaching to reach those most inured to the gospel. Numerous usable approaches are described and illustrated in this highly suggestive video.

Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* rev. ed. Wm. Carey Library, 1992 (PA087-808-228X, $15.95).

The most respected and comprehensive textbook currently in use on college and seminary campuses. A rich, massive work of nearly 1,000 pages, yet easy to access through carefully written articles addressing four perspectives on missions: biblical, historical, cultural, and strategic. Nothing out as good as this!

Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: The Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World.* Zondervan, 1993 (PA031-040-0317, $12.99).

A concise survey of "happenings" in *every* country in the world, with an abundance of facts and information about each country. Updated every three or four years, this edition was just published. Use it helpfully in missionary meetings of all kinds, for current information, statistics, and reports of evangelical mission impact near and far.

Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church.* Baker, 1990 (PA080-101-6418, $14.99).

An important recent title that places discipling at the center of the church's mission. Provides some very specific ways to achieve the title's objective.

Los Angeles Earthquake Video and Update

from Nazarene Disaster Response
A project of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, Inc.

THE VIDEO

Five minutes

During the week following the January 17, 1994, Los Angeles earthquake, a video crew from Media International happened to be in Los Angeles and agreed to produce this **five-minute video** to help describe the needs of Nazarenes and their neighbors as well as the relief work of **Nazarene Disaster Response.**

$75,000

It is sent as a thank-you to the many individuals and congregations who have contributed cash offerings (more than $75,000 as of March 1994) as well as sent emergency supplies and offered to volunteer in the ongoing relief effort.

Rebuilding

It is also a reminder that the relief effort goes on. Long after the Los Angeles earthquake disappeared from the nightly news, the costly rebuilding efforts continue.

The following update on the NDR relief work and the extensive restoration needed for Nazarene properties is intended to accompany a showing of the video.

UPDATE—APRIL 1994

NDR directors

The Nazarene relief effort is being led by John Rivas, Los Angeles District NDR director. John coordinates relief plans with NDR National Director Tom Nees, Western Region Director Randy Newcomb, Los Angeles District Superintendent Rev. Roger Bowman, and other disaster agencies.

Contributions

Several thousand dollars worth of supplies were delivered by Heart to Heart in Kansas City and distributed to various Nazarene congregations and other relief agencies.

Emergency grants

The first priority of the relief effort was to respond to the needs of Nazarene families. Over 30 requests for financial assistance have been received. Emergency grants are approved by a local NDR committee.

Rebuilding churches

The next priority is to help in the restoration and rebuilding of Nazarene church properties, including parsonages. Structural engineers have been sent out to assess damage; however, aftershocks have caused additional damage. Bids are still coming in from several contractors.

Churches	*Damage/ Estimated Cost of Repairs*
Fillmore	major structural damage $150,000
Newhall	minor glass, wall, floor, equipment 7,000
Northridge	minor structural, block wall damage 15,000
Simi Valley	church and parsonage, wood columns/walls 18,100
San Fernando First	minor structural damage 13,000
San Fernando Spanish	church and parsonage, water and plumbing 7,000
El Sereno Spanish	minor damage 1,500
Panorama City	church and parsonage, equipment loss 8,500
West Valley	minor structural and glass breakage 10,000
Montrose	minor damage 4,000
Los Angeles First	extensive plaster damage 22,000
La Mirada	minor damage no estimate
Structural engineer expense	4.000
TOTAL	***$260,100***

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE STILL NEEDED TO HELP REBUILD NAZARENE CHURCHES DAMAGED IN THE LOS ANGELES EARTHQUAKE

Please send your contribution to:
Nazarene Disaster Response/
Los Angeles Earthquake
General Treasurer,
Church of the Nazarene
6401 The Paseo
Kansas City, MO 64131

Important: Indicate the name of the congregation to receive "10% Special" credit.

To order additional videotapes, please call Darla Walker at: 1-800-821-2154.

Eight Principles That Stimulate Small Churches to Grow

No formula will grow a small church in every situation, but some issues need attention, and certain principles tend to bring growth. Knowing which issues need the greatest attention and which principles fit the local context is the task of pastor and people as they pray, seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The following suggestions cannot be neatly arranged by priority or by sequence. They interact. I assume you have accepted the pastorate of your small church with the goal to turn it around. You want to reach 100 to 150 in average morning worship attendance as a minimum. You expect it will take you five to seven or more years. You are new enough to your church that you have not made any major errors and perhaps are still experiencing the "honeymoon." What will you do to turn it around?

Consider interacting with these ideas in your local context.

1. Seek to understand the church.

This is a "Who or what is there?" question. Begin to analyze how your church actually operates. Where are the strengths and weaknesses? Who are the primary "influencers"? How do the people feel about themselves? Where do they fit in the community? Do they have a vision? Are the people compelled, comfortable, or complacent?

Experts give contrasting opinions concerning how fast you should move in the first year. The majority says, "Do nothing but love the people, and change nothing that they do not initiate." However, some advise, "There is never a greater opportunity

by Kim L. Richardson
Pastor,
First Church of the Nazarene,
Framingham, Mass.

for change, so take full advantage." In the small church setting, I would lean toward the majority opinion. Small churches normally want a lover first. Gaining their confidence is vitally important. Yet, we must not miss great opportunities. One of the reasons we seek to understand the church is to determine how quickly we should seek to move forward in changes.

Fifteen months ago I accepted another small church challenge. The church was averaging about 70 people in morning worship attendance. I was planning to go slow, but I soon discovered that the leadership wanted action. In analyzing the budget, I realized there was no money for evangelism. I suggested a faith challenge: 10% of all tithes to go into a local evangelism fund. We prayed for a month and then unanimously agreed to accept the challenge. This decision showed that my leaders wanted to see something happen. It was not a big change in the sense of asking people to change behavior patterns, but it did tell me something about my leaders' desires. As an aside, it is exciting to see evangelism proposals being discussed on their merit, not based on affordability.

Taking the time to understand your church—her hopes, dreams, fears, traditions, and more—will protect you from major mistakes and will guide you to wise decisions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

2. Develop positive morale.

A nationally known church consultant has been quoted as saying, "Ninety-nine percent of the small membership churches with which I work suffer from low self-esteem."[1] I remember going to a church that dripped with depression. They were in financial trouble and were going through the grief of losing a pastor that they loved. It is difficult to grow a church that is depressed or that simply does not believe in itself. A good attitude and self-esteem can be restored. We struggled for two years before there was a complete breakthrough. The next five years were times of continuous growth, allowing the church to show a decadal growth rate of over 100% in nearly every statistical category.

Sullivan suggests 10 ways to boost morale in the local church:

A. Pray until it spills over into your services.
B. Think positively.
C. Encourage enthusiasm.
D. Set realistic goals.
E. Communicate spiritual purpose and function.
F. Celebrate victories and successes publicly.
G. Focus on people's needs and on helping them.
H. Plan outstanding services and programs.
I. Develop inspiring worship services.
J. Secure guest speakers and

singers for interest and variety.[2]

Crandall and Sells give a different but similar list geared toward the small church membership:

A. Survey your strengths, not your weaknesses.

B. Pray and be open to God's Spirit.

C. Be positive and hopeful at all times.

D. Celebrate your victories and successes.

E. Encourage and support fresh ideas, new approaches, and new leadership.

F. Paint, fix up, and clean your house of worship, making it an attractive and beautiful place to gather and praise God.[3]

Your creativity and God's leadership can add to these lists. The key is finding something in your situation that will succeed and that you can celebrate. Build on positive aspects and almost ignore negative ones until you are ready to correct them. The early projects should not be too large and may not be the most important ones in *your* eyes, but be sure that they succeed. Then be sure to celebrate.

Projects related to the church building have the greatest potential for success. That may be a good place to start. It is hard to feel good about the church if the facility is run down and in disrepair. Even an excellent location cannot make up for a rundown facility. Working beside members on a project is also an excellent way to gain deeper understanding of the church, develop trust of the members, and accomplish ministry.

What you do is less important than the fact that you do something, that you succeed together, and that you celebrate. Then, build on your success.

3. Develop vital worship.

Worship is central in the small church. Worship is also the one place the pastor is expected to be in charge. This does not mean that we pastors are free to make wholesale changes in the traditional order of service. It does mean that we have a powerful tool at our disposal. Somewhere I learned that it is safer to add new things to the order of worship gradually than to take traditional things away.

When I arrived at my present church, I asked the board members what they did for morning worship. They said, "Anything you want." Jokingly I asked if they were trying to get me into trouble from day one! I played it safe and asked the woman who types the bulletin to continue to choose the hymns and arrange the service. This continues to work well in my present context because she is both capable and cooperative when I now suggest changes. Gradually I have made small changes and additions. I am convinced that gradual adjustments will win the day far better than radical change.

The most likely source of contention will be the music. Whether performance or participation is at issue, there are likely to be disagreements, especially as you begin to grow. I doubt that there are any right or wrong answers in this area. It is my conviction that I am not to educate people musically. Thus, I believe in using music styles appropriate to the cultural setting—whether gospel or classical. Worship and music are both designed to reach the heart. Culturally appropriate music will greatly add to the vitality of worship.

Preaching—not the order of service, the music, the prayers, or the offering—will make the primary difference in worship. Most of us pastors think we preach fairly well, but most of us probably do not preach as well as we think.

In preaching, you with God have the opportunity to raise morale, lift vision, build faith, and set direction for the church body. The small church that has settled on a plateau will not care too much if you preach poorly as long as you love them. But a growing church requires at least adequate preaching. In my last pastorate, I often said that people will come back if we love them and as long as I don't put them to sleep. You must *not* put them to sleep. Have something worthwhile to say, and say it with enthusiasm.

You can begin working on vital worship on day one, and *everybody* will be glad.

4. Develop lay leaders.

John Maxwell tells the story of Claude, the key lay leader of a church in Hillham, Ind. This was Maxwell's first pastorate, and the church was about to die. At the first church board meeting, Claude took the lead, and everyone else nodded agreement. It was not hard to recognize that Claude was the "church boss."

The next question was important: "Is he committed or carnal?" Maxwell soon discovered that Claude was committed, and the two forged an alliance. Before each month's church board meeting, Maxwell would visit Claude at the farm and suggest areas of concern. When it came time for the church board meeting, Claude would raise the issues and organize the workers. Everyone followed his leadership. Maxwell led the church without ever making a public recommendation. The church moved from near death to over 300 people in attendance.

Some church bosses prefer to be "big frogs in little ponds," but most are committed people who want to serve God. Those who carnally hold on to power and smallness will need to be cautiously, but courageously, confronted. Our strategy with committed leaders, however, should be to form alliances while also gradually raising up additional leaders.

You, as pastor, must lead as a leader among leaders. Small churches normally have one family and/or a church boss who basically calls the shots. This may be done in a formal manner in regular meetings, or it may be done quite informally by phone, over coffee, or in the church narthex. Whatever the process, you as pastor need to know at least two things: Who are the influencers? Are these influencers committed or carnal?

John Maxwell says, "Leadership is influence." If you intend to lead your small church into growth, you must be a person of influence. Some pastors have tried to gain leadership by declaring themselves in control. This is normally both unwise and unnecessary. If you need to say you are in control, you aren't! In *Growing Plans,* Lyle Schaller describes what he calls the Allies Strategy as a means of working with the key influencers of the church to make legitimate new ministries and growth that would never occur if the influencers were not blessing the process. Failure to work with these leaders will almost inevitably lead to conflict between

the established members and the newer converts. Guess who will be in the middle! Schaller writes, "The best tactic for minimizing this gulf is to include as many as possible of the old-timers from the inner fellowship circle as allies in helping to pioneer a new group or create a new program."[4]

In my present pastorate I began meeting with each church board member every month. We meet for breakfast or lunch or at their workplace so that no evenings are involved. I seek to know what they are thinking, to minister to them, and to share myself with them. I am developing allies. But all the influencers or future leaders may not be church board members. I am also recruiting prayer partners. We meet once a month, one-on-one, for breakfast or lunch, discussion, and prayer. Since I am male, my prayer partners are men. I am now looking for additional men who are not church board members but who show a genuine commitment to God and a potential for leadership.

Possible ways to develop leaders are endless. I strongly favor one-on-one contacts and small-group opportunities as avenues to invest my life into leaders. You will need to find God's method for your situation. You will grow the church as you grow leaders.

5. Evangelize.

Your people will not win people to Christ if you don't. You must lead the way.

A pastor of a small church in Connecticut began to make contacts outside of the church that he felt had potential for an evangelistic Bible study. He approached his committed church boss. Together they began to lead the study and to lead people to Christ. This was the beginning of an effective small-group ministry and the beginning of the end of that church being small. They now average over 150 in morning worship.

Gain the commitment of a key influencer, and begin to do personal evangelism or whatever evangelistic approach that you choose. Equipping 1 or 2 will probably gain better long-term results than trying to equip 10. Once your influencer is adequately trained, put him or her in charge of all of that ministry or a significant aspect of it.

Help your people to understand and use "webs of influence." I have a sermon called "Let FRAN Do It." Relationships with *F*riends, *R*elatives, *A*ssociates, and *N*eighbors are the natural lines through which we can effectively witness. Teach your people to pray for FRAN members by name and to develop strategies to love them into the Kingdom.

Classes and sermons alone will *not* move the member of a small church to evangelize. Your example and the example of key leaders are required to move the church into evangelism. If 10 percent or more of your adults respond to this challenge, you will begin to grow.

> Ninety-nine percent of small membership churches suffer from low self-esteem.

Be certain not to neglect the needs of your community as open doors to evangelism. There will always be more needs than you can meet, but prayerful participation of the church in one or two areas can make a big difference.

I recently heard a church planter tell how involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous became the door to leading many to Christ and consequent church growth. Where I serve, there is a pressing need for day care and English as a Second Language classes. Our facilities cannot handle day care without large financial outlays, but we do expect to begin free English as a Second Language classes, using the Bible as the text.

6. Develop corporate prayer.

This may be the first thing that you want to do, but my experience tells me that this is much harder than it sounds. We talk about prayer far more than we pray. Even prayer meetings are more talk than prayer.

Early morning intercessory prayer meetings are returning to the church. This is good news. But will they work in local churches where there are probably only 20 to 40 adults from which to draw? You must decide.

I have mentioned our prayer partner ministry. Prayer partners also pray with me before Sunday morning services. We meet quarterly for a prayer breakfast and annually for a prayer retreat. Our church also has a prayer group that meets on Wednesday evening and a night of prayer the third Tuesday of each month where everyone is invited. These are only examples of what may be done.

I have heard people from larger churches say things like, "You need at least 40 to have the power necessary." This is more a personal prejudice than a biblical truth. What are the needed numbers in a church of 25, 40, or 75 persons? I do not know. But I am convinced that we need to pray, we need to pray together, and we need to pray for specific needs that include the raising up of workers and the salvation of specific individuals.

A nod to God in Sunday School, a pastoral prayer in worship, and a comfortable Wednesday evening prayer meeting will not get it done. What will? I am not sure. I have no formula, but I am seeking to develop some men and a church family who will have a burden that sends us to our knees until we hear from heaven. Pray for it!

7. Develop a purpose, vision, and goals.

Since small churches operate as families, their vision is normally limited to caring for the family. Dudley says it this way: "It is committed to people, not progress."[5]

This is not to suggest that your church will not respond favorably to determining purpose, vision, and goals. This is one of the first things I did in my new assignment. The leadership of my church is predominately white collar and forward looking. We had a series of special meetings to brainstorm for ideas. I brought a "straw man" purpose statement, which reflected much of our thinking. We then tore it apart and put it back together in a new form. This same process can be used with vi-

sions and with goals. After leadership agreement, we presented the purpose and vision statements to everyone in the church on professionally prepared 3" x 5" cards. It excites me when I attend church board meeting and see members entering into discussion with those cards in their hands. They are being guided by a purpose and a vision.

Crandall and Sells correctly argue that church leadership will reach no further than the pastor allows. They write, "The pastor's leadership and vision is often like a tetherline to which the congregation is bound, walking and moving in constricted circles limited by the leadership skills and vision of the pastor."[6]

You need to know what you believe are the purpose, vision, and goals of your local church. If, in your process of coming to understand the church, you realize that they are not prepared for your vision, I suggest you hold off from conducting discussions of these issues. Keep working one-on-one with your influencers until you know your key people are moving in the right direction. You may not choose to formalize vision until you are well into your pastorate, but you must know where you are going.

When it does come time to consider formalizing the process, do *not* serve your idea on a silver platter. Your members must own this vision. Give them time to brainstorm. They will probably improve your ideas. Our church board certainly improved mine. Someone said, "Good ideas are my ideas, and bad ideas are your ideas." Everyone thinks that way to some extent. Involve your people in the process. They will turn the dream into a reality.

8. Change the structure.

Changing the church structure is vital. The small church is a primary group, one big happy family, not an organization. To move beyond being a small church, it must become an organization, a family of families, a church of many groups.

My present church is now attempting to change its structure from small church to large church in two significant ways. Most important, we have introduced a small-group ministry that makes the group leader the pastor to the people of that group. The laity is being released, showing that the ordained minister does not need to do all the ministry, and showing that not everyone has to do everything together.

It is also our goal that these groups will be entry points into the church by winning and assimilating new people to Christ. Multiplying entry points into the church is essential to structural change. We are using the same philosophy in Sunday School by moving from one adult Sunday School class for all adults to three adult classes with varied curriculum. Attenders are encouraged to take their pick.

Your example and the example of key leaders are required to move the church into evangelism.

The second change was to limit leaders to only one working committee. This rule opens the door for newer people to enter into the decision-making processes of the church, plus it frees some deeply committed people to move beyond maintenance ministry.

Goals of structural change are basic—moving from a single-cell to a multicell church, and moving from a narrow leadership base to a broader leadership base.

Hunter writes, "The leader's great opportunity is to help the people perceive that if they go multi-cell, each believer can still meaningfully relate to as many people as in a single-cell congregation, and that, for the most part, the long-standing members will still relate to one another."[7] He later adds, "The way to enable very significant church growth is by multiplying units, not through cellular division, but through cellular reproduction. This strategy advocates the creation of essentially new cells as ports of entry for undiscipled people. The strategy does not divide old cells, but leaves them intact."[8]

Imagine your church of 35 to 75 persons moving gradually to add one new adult Sunday School class and two new home groups to the church each year for seven years. Your "small church" would not be small any more!

Maner tells the story of seeing goldfish in a pond that were over a foot long, while his at home were only two inches long. The man at the pond explained, "You put your fish in a little fishbowl. They stay little. If you put them in a big pond like that one, they will, in time, be just as big as those are."[9]

If you want your church to grow, you must provide the structure that enables growth.

Turning the small church around can be a formidable task. Are you still interested? At least half of us are serving in small churches, and the evangelistic potential is incredible.

I am seeking to use these eight principles. Some days I know they are working. Other days I know nothing is happening.

God has called us to work hard *and* to work smart. We must accept the challenge of church growth, but ultimately we must recognize that it is God's church, and only He can turn it around.

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1. Crandall and Sells, *There's New Life in the Small Congregation!* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1983), 90.
2. Bill Sullivan, *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 76.
3. Crandall and Sells, *There's New Life*, 96-97.
4. Lyle Schaller, *Growing Plans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 37.
5. Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1988), 26.
6. Crandall and Sells, *There's New Life*, 43.
7. Donald McGavran and George G. Hunter III, *Church Growth Strategies That Work*, ed. Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 90.
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Building Your Church Leadership Team

Most businesses, beginning with those of 75 to 150 employees and ranging upward into the thousands of employees, have entire management teams. Starting at the top with a chairman, president, and board of directors, they range downward through a series of vice presidents, department managers, supervisors, and foremen. In some companies, the management team equals 40 percent of the workforce.

In many churches with an active membership of 75 to 150 persons and upward they have—a pastor. He is expected to serve as chairman, business manager, supervisor, project foreman, and whatever else might be needed. No wonder pastors sometimes decide to sell life insurance instead; no other job description requires so much of one person. No other position requires one person to wear so many different hats.

There is a solution, at least a partial one, to this one-man-many-hats dilemma. That solution is found in gathering around the pastor a strong staff, if possible, and a strong lay leadership team. Since the church seldom has the corporate income to justify large paid management teams, the pastor must develop a team of volunteer leaders who can supplement his ministry and ease his workload. His only other choices are physical exhaustion, on the one hand, or a growing list of incomplete ministry assignments on the other.

by Bill O'Connor
Evangelist, Church of the Nazarene, Newberg, Oreg.

Here are some suggestions for building a team that can help make the church more effective, ministry more diverse, and keep the pastor functioning longer and more efficiently.

First, if at all possible, provide the pastor with at least one staff member with whom he can share ministry and ministry concerns.

There is strength in a shared ministry. When there are two persons responsible to a congregation, the load is more than halved. Together the pastor and staff member can discuss concerns, share frustrations, seek solutions, and apply creative innovation. The wise man, Solomon, may have had team ministry in mind when he penned, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:9-12).

Whether Solomon was thinking of team ministry or not, he certainly presents some principles of teamwork that cannot easily be ignored. Pastoral ministry will be more efficient and effective when there are two people committed to sharing the load. They become the president and vice president of the effective ministry team.

The second step in building a powerful ministry team is to get the staff an outstanding executive secretary.

This person becomes the business manager, the one who keeps the chief executives on course, protects their time, handles their routine concerns, and keeps all the machinery running smoothly. The church secretary, more than anyone else, can be the lubricating factor that keeps the entire team functioning most effectively. A good secretary frees the pastor and staff members from the mundane, liberating them to concentrate on the ministry concerns that matter most. A good secretary serves as an invaluable ally in ministry and should be treated as a minister as much as the men and women who lead the team. She should be included in team meetings and treated as a ministry associate.

Now it's time to gather the other leaders of the congregation who are already in place and begin incorporating them and molding them into a team.

All too frequently the church has leaders in place, in positions to which they have been elected or appointed, who function independently of the whole. They have been placed in some ministry "Siberia" to survive the cold on their own. It's time to bring them in from the cold and make them part of the corps of ministers who work together to lead the church. I speak of Sunday School superintendents, missionary presidents, youth leaders, head ushers, fellowship group leaders, senior adult program directors, children's church leaders, men's and women's group presidents, and any other persons who hold key leadership roles in the congregation. Instead of functioning separately, their programs independent of one another, these people should be brought together and their programs shaped to contribute to the overall goals and direction set by the ministry team.

Once the team is gathered, the work is only begun. Now you must mold these people—professional staff, support staff, and lay leaders alike—into a working team.

The first prerequisite for doing so is time—time spent together getting to know each other, coming to appreciate and understand each other, and learning to work and play together. These goals require more than seeing one another in church on Sunday mornings; they require a deliberate effort on everyone's part to form themselves into a leadership team. Here are some suggestions that will help lead this diverse group of people toward the blending of their thoughts and of their lives that will result in an effective ministry team.

1. Give every member of the team a copy of a book on ministry that presents some basic concepts you want everyone to understand. Don't loan them the book. Buy one for every person and present it as a gift. Deliver it personally. Ask that the book be read by a certain date—give them about a month—and that they be prepared to share their understanding at a team retreat.

2. Plan a retreat and request every member of the group to attend. Announce the dates well enough in advance that everyone can fit it into his calendar. A full weekend would be ideal; a Friday night and full day on Saturday should be considered a minimum. Choose a place where the group can both study, pray, discuss, and play together. A mixture of intense study and discussion, planning times, and recreational activity is ideal. Suggestion: A raft trip down a river is a great way to break down barriers and really get to know each other.

There is strength in a shared ministry.

3. Spend your retreat time in team-building activities. Use some ice-breaking activity at each session that forces the members of the team to mix and to share themselves with each other. Bring in someone from outside the church to teach about team relationships. The pastor cannot do this best because he is also a member of the team. He needs to be part of the folding-in that you want to take place. Schedule some planning sessions in which every area of ministry represented by the team is discussed, and team members begin to explore ways of supporting each other and working together. Close the retreat with a time of intense spiritual focus leading to mutual commitment to Christ, the church, and to each other. Communion would be an effective way to bring the weekend to an end.

4. Schedule monthly potluck dinners after the morning service, on Sunday evenings after church, or on a weeknight if that best fits team member's schedules. Gather the team to eat together, play together (play with a purpose), expand their horizons together, plan together, and pray together. Make these monthly sessions times that focus both on team fellowship and on real ministry concerns. Do something at each meeting to strengthen and expand team relationships. Be sure that each meeting serves to strengthen and develop the ministries that the team members lead.

5. Treat the entire ministry team as your expanded church staff. There is no hierarchy anymore. Everyone is a minister, and everyone's ministry is as important as any other's. Though the professional staff will surely have their own weekly meetings, this monthly meeting is a staff meeting in every sense of the word. These meetings are times for sharing joys and sorrows, for reporting ministry concerns, for hammering out solutions to ministry concerns, and for goal setting, planning, and a future focus. Every session should include devotion, sharing, and times for prayer.

6. Lead the church through the combined efforts of the ministry team. Let this group become the body that recommends direction and program to the board. Use each team member visibly in congregational leadership. Have members of the team become active participants in leading worship. Make it clear to the congregation that all ministries are important and that all ministry leaders stand together in building the entire church program.

Team ministry works. It strengthens focus and gives direction. It provides the pastor and staff a level of support that they've not known previously. It places many more strong backs under the ministry load. It gives the congregation many leaders to follow who are all going in the same direction. It unites all ministries behind a common set of goals and a common sense of direction.

Concentrate on your leadership team. These are the 20 percent of the people who will do 80 percent of the work. They are the people who will help increase pastoral ministry by easing the workload and giving you time to concentrate on the things that matter most. A good team will support you, encourage you, stand by you, work with you, and make your own ministry a success. Rather than choosing to sell life insurance someday, the presence of a ministry team may affirm the decision you made years ago that pastoral ministry is the greatest calling in all the world. As Solomon said, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:12).

I Was Raped! Why?

by June M. Temple
Freelance writer, Abbotsford, B.C.

The radio blared out, "If you want the servicemen overseas to receive their packages by Christmas, they must be mailed no later than the end of the month."

Three of my friends were serving in the armed forces, and I wanted to send them each a little gift. I determined to leave the college campus on Saturday and ride the bus to town. I had been thinking about the tin of butter cookies, which the department stores sold, as something that my friends away from home might enjoy.

My college was located about 20 miles south of town, and the bus schedule did not seem at all adequate. There were only four runs each day. Then, too, the cost was excessive. Very often a student would accept a ride from a passing motorist, or some would hitchhike. The dean of women kept cautioning the girls against doing such a thing.

However, when one of us was waiting for the bus, and a local farmer offered a ride, it was often accepted. Twice I had accepted a ride. This Saturday I planned to catch the 1 P.M. bus into town and then get the late afternoon bus back from town. I would be back on campus in time for supper.

Saturday turned out to be a beautiful fall day, with the air a little crisp, yet still moderately warm. The bus was on time—something that did not always happen. It didn't take long to locate a department store that sold the butter cookies. The store also mailed the packages for the customer and only charged the postage. When I left the store, I suddenly realized that the total amount of three boxes of cookies, plus the postage, had used up most of my money. I counted the change, and there was not enough left for bus fare.

It seemed that my only recourse was to walk back to the campus. For several miles, the walking was pleasant. As the afternoon passed, the air turned more chilly. I only had on a light jacket. Thinking of the approaching deeper coldness and the darkness that was soon to descend, I stuck my thumb out in hopes for a ride.

A few cars passed.

Then an old car, with a young man driving, stopped to pick me up. I jumped into the front seat, and we continued south on the main highway. After a few miles he veered off onto a deserted side road and traveled about a mile. He stopped the car. I found myself sitting by a car door with a floppy handle, which I could not open.

I was brutally raped. By the time midnight arrived, I had been picked up by an elderly couple, treated by a doctor, interviewed by the police, had personally identified the rapist, and been taken home by my parents.

For two days at home, my mind was filled with the big "WHY?" Why did God allow this to happen to me? I belonged to my Savior! I was attending a Christian college! I wanted to serve the Lord! Actually, I was surprised that the Almighty had allowed such a thing to happen to me. My faith was not shattered, though. I believed that God was in control. I felt that God had lessons for me to learn even from this experience, and I wanted to learn them as quickly as possible.

This awful event took place during World War II. Many years have passed since then. It took about 10 years before I understood three lessons. My learning is continually being reinforced.

Before I returned to school, I spent my time at home playing the piano and at times singing. An emotional healing began. The peace of God folded around me. A strong idea came to mind: I was to put away recklessness and use the common sense that God had given me. It seemed that this was lesson number one.

The next lesson began the day that I returned to school. My spirit had been excessively proud in regard to my looks, my abilities, and my station in life. God allowed my poor judgment to humble me. I now felt dirty and ashamed. I wondered if every student in the school was aware of my rape. I didn't want to look anyone in the eye. I thought that no Christian young man would ever want to marry me.

In the spring, the trial took place. There could not be a more debasing experience. I was embarrassed on the stand and made to feel that I was the one on trial. The defending attorney for the accused tried to degrade my father. He also insulted the intelligence of the couple who rescued me. He even ridiculed the doctor after he said that I had been a virgin.

> Hardly a week goes by without the atrocious act of rape in the news.

While on the stand, the man who raped me admitted to performing the act. The reason he offered for raping me was because I had slapped him when he had tried to kiss me. The trial ended with a hung jury. The judge committed him to prison for the lesser crime of theft, since my empty purse had been found in his car at the time of his arrest.

Newspapers carried the news of the trial. More embarrassing days were before me.

Telephone calls started to come from well-meaning people who offered sympathy and understanding. They assured me that it was not my fault. These calls were probably an encouragement to my parents, but I wanted the matter dropped and forgotten.

There were people who talked behind my back, yet whispered loud enough for me to hear, "She got what she was asking for," or "Every girl really wants to be raped."

There were those who said nothing, but I could tell by their eyes and their faces that they could only think of one thing while they were talking to me.

There were those who called me "slut" to my face. Lesson two—to put away pride was difficult to swallow. A Bible verse enabled me to endure during these difficult times: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13, KJV). It kept coming to my mind and helped me to survive the hurt and humiliation without developing a bitter spirit toward God.

By God's grace and strength, I was able to ignore people's remarks, to be kind to nastiness, and to look toward the future when this period of my life would be over.

Several years passed before I became very aware of lesson three. It came at the time when my mind kept screaming at me: "The rapist is going to be released from prison!" I had a comfort in the safety of my home and in the protection of my husband. God had chosen for me a man who loved the Lord. A man who loved me despite what had happened to me! A man who stood by me through the trial! He never condemned me for the mistake that I had made. All of this knowledge was at the core of my love for him. However, until now I had not comprehended how God had brought this good from an evil situation. Lesson three was in the form of an assurance. God had chosen this particular man just for me. I now realized that having been raped had played a part in my accepting this man's marriage proposal.

Every time that I read about, hear about, or see the story of a rape victim on television, I am very aware of that day in my life in the early 1940s. It's like instant replay. Yet, my story could have happened today. Hardly a week goes by without the atrocious act of rape in the news. Women of all ages are going through the emotional trauma of accusations, humiliation, and shame.

Here are some rules the Christian community should follow when coming into contact with women who have gone through rape:

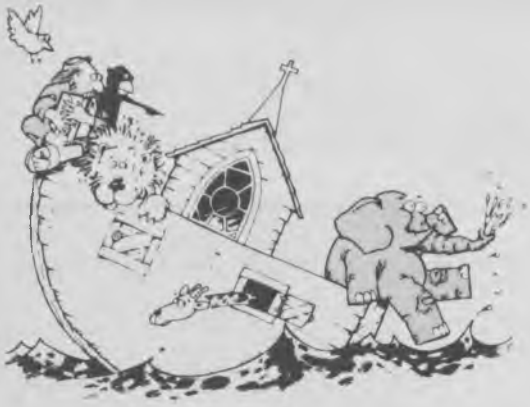
> I was surprised that the Almighty had allowed such a thing to happen to me.

1. Show love and compassion. Don't accuse; they already accuse themselves even when they aren't guilty.
2. Don't bring up the subject of their rape. There is a period when they need to put it behind them.
3. Go to the Bible when they introduce the subject. Help them find a verse that will encourage them and give them strength to deal with the trauma.
4. Pray with them and for them. Hold their hands or put your arm around their shoulder. This will help alleviate their inward feeling of being "unclean."

Be gentle. Be kind. Don't suggest that she will forget the incident in time. She will always remember every detail. However, the question, "Why did this happen to me?" will pass into unimportance when the victim feels the love of Christ toward her through you. This was true in my life.

I survived and became an emotionally whole person through the love, compassion, gentleness, and kindness of my family and friends. They were sensitive to my need of talking or not talking about the rape. They shared with me from the Word of God. They held my hands in prayer—this helped alleviate my feeling of being unclean. Most important was the healing power of God.

Perhaps today's victims would benefit if they, too, could experience the love and compassion with which I was surrounded.



Evangelical Spin

Smerdley is once again "fit to be tied," as they say. What got to him this time happened two weeks ago in the ordination service at Annual Luau. It got to him because, during his two-year "burnout sabbatical," he "read theology," as he says. Ironically, as he says, "[I] didn't think that I had read enough to make a difference."

What got him two weeks ago happened on this wise. We sang a hymn —it's in the new hymnal—written by The Best Known of All Modernists, and a shouting spell broke out. Well, it was what passes for a shouting spell these days; a dozen folks said "Amen" aloud. Most everyone really felt that the Spirit had moved on us. Conference Poob, obviously moved, croaked: "Hooey! This is just like camp meetin'! Let's sing that last verse again!"

We leaped to our feet, bawled out the last verse again, to that wonderful Welsh tune, sat down, and vibrated for a spell.

We knew what we felt that night, but Smerdley is quite sure that we did not know what we were singing. Immediately after the service Smerdley stormed the platform and interrupted the usual rounds of self-congratulations and polite fibbing indulged in by "platform parties" at the end of high occasions.

"Do you really believe what we sang?" he blurted through clenched jaws. "Can we really sing such stuff? Should we ever sing modernist garbage, let alone at an ordination service?" He addressed no one in particular, and of course, he wasn't really asking questions. But he had obviously taken a 120V AC shock in a 9V DC system, so Conference Poob drew him aside for counsel.

"Look, Brother Smerdley," said ConPoob, "we surely would not want to impugn the wisdom of the Hymnal Production Committee, would we? After all, the Ethereal Realms themselves appointed them. And, it's obvious that Doctor Modernist's words bore true faith, or we would not have had that great moving of the Spirit on the crowd, would we? I mean, a modernist doesn't have to be a modernist all of the time, does he? Couldn't he be led to write something that we all could sing? Again, can't we put an evangelical spin on this hymn?" (Smerdley's friends are grateful that he missed the non sequiturs here. He'd have endangered the ice caps for another month if he had caught on.)

"An evangelical spin?" choked Smerdley. "The modernists set out to fill the terms of the old-time gospel with new meanings acceptable to modern science and modern philosophy and modern etcs. Don't you see, man? We took their bait. And what about the integrity of the hymn writer? Do we have a right to put whatever meaning we wish upon his words? Evangelical spin, indeed!"

ConPoob, sensitive to Smerdley's "iffy" psyche, thanked Smerd for helping him think about something about which he had never thought before, warmly shook his hand, and invited him to lunch week after next ("when I get back from 'Poohbahs: Preservers of the Faith,' a seminar to be held in Cancun next week"). End of story. So far.

I must say, I wonder if Smerd doesn't have it wrong, again. I mean, there may be something to this evangelical spin thing. For instance, think of the possibilities of "Home on the Range," spun evangelically into a funeral hymn: it's a petition; it has a pleasant tune, suitable for either congregation or quartet. The mood's just right—a bit of longing, the promise of contentment, bucolic images. And the words . . .

"Oh, give me a home!"—certainly a worthy yearning as we wander wounded up and down the great mountains and valleys of life. And the recognition that such an end to our peregrinations will come as a gift.

"Where the buffalo roam"—"roam" might bother some if they think we are singing "Rome," as in "where the buff allow Rome," or "where the bu [whatever that may be taken to mean] follow Rome." Otherwise the phrase is a lovely recall of shady, lush, green pastures. The evangelical spin would understand "buffalo" to refer, not to the rather forbidding-looking mammal, but to the buffaloberry bush, heavy with sweet and dewy fruit, spread all over the verdant range. And there's an extra bit of evangelical spin here: the botanical name for the buffaloberry bush is Shepherdia. How much more Psalm 23-ish can you get?

"Where the deer and the antelope play": The first word that comes to mind as you watch deer and antelope gambol (not gamble!) is grace. Grace, of course! "Oh, give me a home . . . where grace fairly leaps and plays in a sort of free abandon." Brother, that'll not only sing. It'll preach!

The evangelical meaning of "Where seldom is heard a discouraging word," applied to our eternal reward, is transparent. You may not even need to spin the phrase. And, we can take spinfree as well, "And the skies are not cloudy all day."

We'd have the perfect funeral hymn if we could just spin the older folk away from thinking "oven" when we sing that word "range."

WORSHIP & PREACHING HELPS

Leslie Krober

December/January/February 1994-95

Prepared by Leslie Krober

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Mission Viejo, Calif., has influenced thousands of pastors in their communication style. I am one. He shares his sermon outlines and urges us to try to make them better. In this series, I have adapted some of his outlines and made them my own. You should now do the same: make them your own and make them better.

Effective preaching must prod the Christian toward changes in behavior and attitudes, but at the same time be a seedbed of challenge to non-Christians. It must be more than the giving of information. It must encourage by telling how things could be with faith in Christ and how they may change attitudes and behaviors.

When I began to pastor 22 years ago, my sermons were longer, more tiresome, and filled with references to theologians and commentaries. They did not give the needed "how tos" that effective preaching requires. Paul's letter to Philippi teaches how to live with joy and contentment in spite of difficult circumstances.

You will preach Phil. 2:5-11 before 2:1-8 so as to have the more appropriate sermon for Christmas Sunday, December 25.

The final sermon from 1 Peter is designed to give you a practical sermon on holy living, describing four adjustments that must occur in believers.

Blessings on you.

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 1:1-11
Dec. 4, 1994

INTRO:

Philippi was a Roman colony and the leading city of Macedonia. The Philippian Christians became the first believers in Europe in A.D. 51-53. Lydia, a businesswoman, was the first convert. Paul's ministry made economic impact on the city, and so the leaders opposed, flogged, and jailed him without a trial, even though he was a Roman citizen. Through this the jailer was converted also. Paul wrote this Epistle while under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:14-31) in A.D. 61.

Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to stand firm and rejoice regardless of circumstances. He warned of two destructive groups who were following him and teaching heresy: the Judaizers (legalists) and the antinomians (lawless ones).

Paul knew the believers wanted to make a difference; they wanted to count for eternity. This adds value to our existence and aids in facing difficulty. Knowing that what we do helps others and God's cause, we are more likely to hang in there.

ILLUS. One saying is, "Life is like a mother dog with puppies gnawing on her tail." If you have a sense of purpose in life or value in what you do, it's no big deal to let the puppies chew away. As Paul expressed his gratitude for the Philippians, he told them how to make an eternal difference in the face of difficulty. First, it was:

I. Find a Cause and Stick to It (v. 5)

"I always pray with joy because of your *partnership in the gospel* from the first day until now" (vv. 4-5, italics added). To become a person of influence making a difference in the world, find a *cause*. Become a *partner in the gospel* of Christ.

Partners don't work alone. Thus, when you are weak, a partner carries the load. When you don't know how or what to do, a partner plugs the gap. Becoming a *partner in the gospel* of Christ is to work with others to tell the Good News. But you also have to stick to it. Paul assures: "He who began a good work . . . will carry it on to completion" (v. 6).

ILLUS. Mike Pattinson, Washington State quarterback, rode the bench for four years behind now-NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe. Other potential QBs quit or transferred to other schools. But Pattinson hung in there and got to start for a Pac-10 school as a fifth-year senior.

God will work it out in you. "From the first day until now" (i.e., from A.D. 51 till A.D. 61), they had held on tenaciously to Christ. Sometimes great things happen only because someone refuses to give up. You don't have to be smarter, stronger, or more powerful; simply hang in there longer.

ILLUS. Sticking to it is not easy. Leslie married Lee Strobel in 1972. She was into banking; he was a writer for the *Chicago Tribune*. Neither were Christian, and God wasn't on their agenda. Linda Lenssens befriended Leslie and led her to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus. Lee believed that church was: boring, hypocritical, money-grubbing, and irrelevant. Not a good prognosis.

Lee was often infuriated; Leslie's godly behavior increasingly accentuated his own cynical, bitter, self-centered life. Leslie learned restraint and prayed. Two years later, Lee chose to follow Jesus. Today, he is a pastor at Willow Creek, using his writing skills to share Jesus. (Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary,* 140-57). Find a cause and stick to it—"hangeth in there."

II. Find a Faith and Commit to It (v. 7)

"Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you *share in God's grace* with me" (italics added). To become a person of influence, to make a difference in your world, find a faith.

Be a living, talking illustration that the only path to forgiveness is the path of God's undeserved kindness and not through personal effort to do more good than bad. Constantly remind people by your life that you are not inherently better than they, just forgiven by grace through faith in Christ.

ILLUS. Bob Costas interviewed Coach Bobby Knight of Indiana University on television. Because Knight was again guilty of negative courtside antics, Costas asked about Knight's perception of himself. "I'm a pretty good guy. When I get to the pearly gates, St. Peter is going to say: 'Come right on in, Bobby.'" His comments reflect the common view: "By means of good works, I'm going to make it. No big deal." He doesn't understand that it's by trusting, not trying.

A. Lydia trusted first (Acts 16:11-15).

Paul's missionary work illustrates that each person has to share in grace. In Philippi, the Lord opened Lydia's heart first to respond to Christ. "When she and . . . her household were baptized, she invited [Paul] to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded" them.

B. The jailer trusted too (Acts 16:25-34).

The jailer also had to find a faith. He asked, "'What must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.' . . . He and all his family were baptized." The whole family "was filled with joy because [they] had come to believe in God."

These were the first to find a faith and commit to it, not through works, but by God's unmerited grace. They accepted God's Word, which says forgiveness is through faith in Jesus. To make a difference in your world, find a faith and commit to it.

III. Find a Standard and Rise to It (vv. 10-11)

"That your *love may abound* more and more" (italics

added). To become a person of influence, making a difference in your world, find a standard and rise to it. Learn to love like Jesus. Become a partner in loving.

ILLUS. The Air Force Academy is a good example of setting high standards: first-year cadets can have no personal possessions during the first semester, just clothing, bedding, books, toiletries. Thousands compete to be a cadet, volunteering to commit to the United State Air Force Honor Code: "We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does. Furthermore, I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, so help me God." USAF commentary says: "As bearers of the public trust, it is the code which helps build a personal integrity able to withstand the rigorous demands placed upon them."

If the Air Force can do it, certainly it should not be out of place for God to ask a similar thing. Paul's prayer reveals the standard to which we are to rise: "That your love may abound more and more."

A. Love needs to abound in knowledge (v. 9).
Learning God's law, not just man's, is crucial.

ILLUS. Pope John Paul II said: "Good is clearly distinct from evil. Morality is not situational. Right is right. Wrong is wrong. If each individual conscience becomes supreme, then moral confusion reigns. Only absolute morality provides the basis for a healthy society." His purpose? To counteract moral erosion among Catholics (*Time,* Oct. 4, 1993).

B. Love needs to abound in insight (v. 9).
Insight is sensing the implications of love and learning how to apply love when boundaries get blurred. Insight includes learning to discern what is best, having a sense of what is vital. It is developing a nose for good and evil, like a hunting dog does for birds. Such a growing Christian takes a long view of life and doesn't make decisions based only on today.

C. Love needs to result in purity (vv. 10-11).
If you begin to live on the basis of what you have discerned as the best, then your behavior will change. You will be "filled with the fruit of righteousness": "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). These come when Jesus lives His life through us. It is produced by Jesus, not by hard work or effort. It results from our consecration: giving oneself to the higher purposes or standards of God.

CONCLUSION:

Christians need to be trained to hit the target of righteousness. It is similar to the process of learning to hit the mark in target shooting.

ILLUS. The target shooting facility at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs is unique. It is free of air currents and sound distractions. Each person wears a lead-weighted vest to reduce the vibrations in the arms from the beating of the heart. The shooter becomes aware of his heartbeat and learns to pull the trigger between the beats. Such training is the only way of producing the precision necessary to win in world competition.

Point? Training someone in walking with God to hit the target of righteousness is not automatic. One is not always able to do what one wants to do in his mind. Paul described this internal wrestling match in his writings. God's program for changing the world is geared to: *truth*—changing people's thinking; *love*—changing people's hearts; and *grace*—removing people's guilt or shame. This means that we will walk with new Christians as they learn the meaning of holy living.

Our task? Become partners in the gospel: find a cause and stick to it. Become partners in God's grace: find a faith and commit to it. Become partners in the goodness of Christ: find a standard and rise to it.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"We Will Glorify"
	"I Will Bless Thee, Lord"
	"We Have Come into His House"
	"The Solid Rock"
	"O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
Prayer of Praise	
Choir Special	"O Magnify the Lord"
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Scripture	Phil. 1:4-6, 9-11
Song	"O Jesus, I Have Promised"
	"My Jesus, I Love Thee"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings	
Offering	
Special in Song	
Message	"HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE"
Song	"I Sought a Flag to Follow"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

Father, Your very presence causes us to choose whom we will serve. Inspire us to joyfully choose You always. Anchor us in the storms of conflicting motives so that we might always focus our desire upon You and bring glory to Your name. Amen.

Advent Wreath

Each Sunday of Advent has its distinctive theme: Christ's coming in final victory (first); Prophecies and John the Baptist (second/third), and the events preceding the birth of Jesus (fourth).

You may want to set your wreath on the Communion table or a table brought in for it.

This first Sunday of Advent, light one purple candle and read Isa. 9:1-2, 6-7 and 60:1-3. An alternative song to be used is: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The wreath, the candle, and the song could be inserted in the first 10 minutes of the service while two other songs listed could be deleted.

TURNING ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 1:12-26
Dec. 11, 1994

INTRO:

Joy is missing in many lives. One pastor said: "Many Christians look like they've been baptized in vinegar." Why? Circumstances have worn them down. Their joy is dependent upon a "perfect" life, and there is no such thing. God has designed life to throw grit in the gears to move you toward himself and growing up. Joy is an internal, constant reality, but happiness is external, a fluctuating happening.

Paul's life, for example, was no piece of cake. He didn't live in luxury and wear silk robes. He spent four years in jail (two in Caesarea; two in Rome), all because of trumped-up charges. He was shipwrecked on the way to Rome, snakebitten, chained to bodyguards 24 hours a day in 4-hour shifts with no privacy. Yet he said: "I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice." What was his secret for staying positive in prison?

I. Accept Suffering as Normal (v. 13)

"I am in chains for Christ." What did he prefer? To go to Rome and hold an evangelistic crusade in the Coliseum with 50,000 people. What was reality? Prison, but with Nero footing the bill—fed and housed at government expense. Nero's guards also protected him. Paul used the time to write much of the New Testament, and he had two years to convert many of the up-and-coming military men, who were chained to him on a rotating basis every four hours.

ILLUS. Fad exercise machines promoted on television try to convince you that their machine allows you to lose weight, get in shape, and never break a sweat. How preposterous! Muscles only develop when they are stressed, and fat is burned only when strenuous exercise puts demands on the body's fuel supply. Genuine conditioning always includes exertion, pain, and suffering. You have to push yourself to grow. Football and wrestling coaches often say, as they push their athletes in conditioning: "It's not doing any good until it hurts."

The lesson? God develops a purpose behind every one of my problems. V. 12: "What has happened to me . . . served to advance the gospel"; v. 13, it spoke to unbelievers (whole guard); and v. 14, it encouraged believers to evangelize. When we accept that problems are not meaningless, and when we see that God develops a purpose behind each, we can have joy in the middle of it all. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28).

What is Paul's next secret to turn adversity to advantage?

II. Know What Is Important (v. 18)

"What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." Paul could have been angry: "All my life they've ripped on me." He could have been jealous: "Someone else will become famous." He could have been vindictive: "Just wait till I get out of here!" Rather, knowing what was important—the gospel, Paul had joy!

With godly priorities, circumstances didn't steal his joy. Prov. 3:6 gives us a clue: "In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success" (TLB). Let that simmer in you. You see that much of what we fight over is not worth it. Pick your battles.

Don't go to war over nonessentials. Learn what is trivial or significant. How does God help us put life in the right order? V. 19: "I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." Jesus helped Paul keep hope alive. You've got to have hope to cope!

When daily "grit in the gears" wears you out, or daily crises almost put you down, and you are sick and tired of being sick and tired: put God first. Focus on what really counts, and nothing can devastate you. Wound you? Yes, but it will not devastate you. Get God first.

ILLUS. Kathleen was a lively 13-year-old. One night, she asked to buy a leather miniskirt, one like "all the other girls" in her class were wearing. Even as she described the benefits, she was expecting a negative response. Her mom did say, "No."

Kathleen then launched into a diatribe about how she would be the only one without a leather miniskirt. Hearing "No" again, Kathleen stomped off but quickly turned to explain, "If I don't have this miniskirt, my friends won't like me."

Mom still said, "No."

The daughter got huffy and played her trump card. "I thought you loved me," she wailed.

"I do," Mom smiled, "so the answer is no."

Kathleen's mom says: "Even though I had won the battle, I felt I was losing the war. Then one of those unexplainable things happened: An inner voice said to me, 'Hold fast!' It dawned on me that Kathleen and I were not skirmishing over a miniskirt but, rather, were having a battle of wills."

Soon, Kathleen, her nose and eyes red from crying, walked down the stairs in pajamas. "Mom, I'm sorry. I was scared that you were going to let me win!" she sniffed. Mom was perplexed, but then realized that Kathleen had wanted her to win! She was convinced Mom had done what a mother needed to do (*Focus on the Family,* October 1993).

You have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives. Bankruptcy? Yes. Poor health? Yes. Divorce? Rebellious child? Loss of job? Yes. With God's power at work, and you focusing on what really counts, you do not need to be devastated. Rather, you can have joy.

III. Do the Most Necessary (vv. 24-25)

"But it is more necessary for you that I remain . . . I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith." Ready to die and wanting to go to heaven, Paul chose to do what was best for others. Paul had a purpose for which to live: the good news of "grace." That purpose directed his decisions.

ILLUS. A woman wanted to get married in her early 20s, but her sense of duty to aging parents made that impossible. She committed herself to caring for them in their illness. Nursing them for years made courtship impossible. But the right man was willing to wait. He in his upper 30s and she in her lower 30s, they finally married. They were blessed with two children. God honors those who do the necessary things.

If you had to fill in this sentence: "For me to live is _____," how would you? (Career? sex? kids? marriage? nice house, sports, food, divorce, wealth, possessions, pleasure, power, prestige, position?) Examining the trends in society today, you'd find that the three most common answers are:

A. Possessions. We are a consumer-driven society. We believe that fulfillment comes via things. We strive to keep up with the Joneses, but as soon as we catch up to them, they refinance and shoot out ahead of us again. We buy things that we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like.

ILLUS. Consumer debt continues to rise through economic ups and downs. Credit card companies now pitch their cards to college students, some of whom run up bills of $10-20,000, even though they do not have jobs. Why? We buy the lie that things make us happy. And we highly value happiness.

B. Pleasure. Monday through Friday are endured so that we can party on weekends. Our motto: "If it feels good, do it." We tie into the latest thing and fret if we are not going to see, taste, or enjoy what others do. Yielding to peer pressure doesn't end when you leave your teen years.

C. Power or position. Andre Aggasi's advertisements say it all: "Image is everything!" So, buying from the name stores is crucial. Owning the right car or truck is essential. Having a gold card to flash at lunch is vital. Having titles is seen as significant, and working for the right company is helpful.

All these things are seen as bringing fulfillment, but these don't last. Only investing our lives in things that last really satisfy. "Only what's done for Christ will last."

As Paul wrestled with his own desires to get out from under the burden of house arrest and his coming execution, he decided that he needed to hang around: first, for the benefit of others; next, to bring the good news of forgiveness; and third, to encourage believers by his presence and faith. What is the lesson here? Joy is found in putting Jesus first, others second, and yourself third. Simple? Yes! Simplistic? No! Doing the most necessary thing is the third secret for turning adversity to advantage.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. Donald Trump, once worth $5 billion and then nearly bankrupt, has rebounded financially. He also divorced and remarried. Starting over seems to be something he likes. He told a television interviewer in 1994: "I like to make stars of my wives, but once they are, the challenge is gone. I need to look for something else to satisfy."

Why is there so much unhappiness in society? Because of our preoccupation with "me, myself, and I"! When self is number one, eventually unhappiness will abound. God has made man for relationships. Relationships work best when you put Jesus first, others second, and self third. That is the foundational principle upon which God designed mankind.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"He Is Exalted"
	"Lift Up Your Heads"
	"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
	"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
Congregational Greeting	
Song	"Let There Be Glory and Honor and Praises"
	"Thou Art Worthy"
Prayer of Praise and Adoration	
Scripture	Rom. 5:1; Col. 3:15; Isa. 26:3
Open Altar	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
	"In His Presence"
Family Information	Recognize Visitors
Offertory	"God So Loved the World"
Message	"TURNING ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE"
Closing Song	"God of Grace and God of Glory"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

We come before You, Father, in all of our weakness, seeking Your strength. We are far from the model You have set before us. Give us courage to yield ourselves to Your workmanship, realizing that sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us, we pray. Amen.

Benediction

No spur can move us toward tomorrow more effectively than suffering.

Advent

Today, you will light the first purple candle again and light a second purple candle. Following the reading of scripture, Isa. 40:1-5, you could sing "Of the Father's Love Begotten." Let the candles burn throughout the remainder of your service.

LIVING WITH A PURPOSE

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 1:27—2:2
Dec. 18, 1994

INTRO:

People who identify and commit to a purpose beyond themselves find life both meaningful and stimulating. It doesn't have to be a religious purpose to motivate. Professional athletes, entrepreneurs, or having and loving children could be reasons to live.

ILLUS. Fidel Castro hated America and its influence in his country. He hated Cuban dictators, so he began to resist and to plot, going through much hardship for the sake of becoming the leader of Cuba. Paying the price, he succeeded. Having a purpose, you find meaning in life.

But nonreligious causes will ultimately come up short. Only a purpose that derives from God—dealing with who and why we are—withstands the test of time when it comes to the ultimate meaning and motivation. Paul lays down a challenge worthy of our consideration: "Stand . . . firm in a common spirit, fighting side by side [Moffatt] with one strong purpose—to tell the Good News [TLB]" (v. 27).

This challenge is worthy of you and will carry you all your life. Regardless of the many secondary purposes to which you might commit, becoming a warrior in the cause of making Christ known will keep you fulfilled and motivated for a lifetime. Let's consider Paul's insights as to how Christians are to present Christ to our world.

I. Stand Firm: Resist Cultural Tides

ILLUS. The Annapolis Royal gorge off the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia has a 35-foot differential in water levels because of the tides. A dam built across its mouth allows for two-way flow of the water. The moon and planets pull the water in without resistance. Gates close and water flows out through turbines. 20,000 watts per hour of hydroelectric power have been produced since 1984. Resistance to the flow of tides has great value. Christians who stand for Christ, resisting cultural tides, also bless their world.

Paul says: "Resist the tides of secularism as you try to tell the Good News. Resist the idea that 'tolerance' is the best response as long as others don't hurt you. Resist the idea that man is just a smarter animal. Resist the materialistic and pleasure-seeking trends. Don't let the cultural mood shut you up or scare you off. Our society calls for the exchange of ideas and values." Let's sell our thinking in the marketplace of ideas.

Next, Paul urges us to present the Good News . . .

II. Be in One Spirit: Hearts Knit Together (v. 30)

"You are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have." What is his point? When we know that we are *not alone* in tough times, we can take it. Misery loves company. When we know that others are willing to go through the same challenge that we are, we take courage from it and hang tough.

ILLUS. Jesus said: "A house . . . divided against itself . . . cannot stand" (Mark 3:25). And, "If the world sees that you love one another, they will know that I am who I claim to be" (see John 13:35). When the world looks at Christians, the most powerful evidence that Jesus is real is that we care for each other differently than secularists do.

III. Fight Side by Side: Like a Team (v. 27)

"Contending as one man for the . . . gospel." When you are busy fighting a common enemy, you don't have time to quarrel with one another. Families often squabble with one another, but let an outsider get on a family member, and they are ready to draw blood. Christians should keep the main thing the main thing: majoring on majors and minoring on minors. Professing believers are not the enemy: i.e., extravagant televangelists, fiery Pentecostals, or ritualistic Presbyterians. None of these is our enemy.

Satan, the world that ignores Christ, and the flesh are our enemy. Any force or person or institution that would work against or prohibit the preaching of the Good News is the enemy. Our task is to get shoulder to shoulder against these to fight together for the cause of Christ, to be teammates.

ILLUS. The movie, *Hoosiers* immortalized the classic David versus Goliath story of high school basketball. A small school beat the big city team. At the first practice, the new coach had to gain control. He asserted his authority and built a team. He got them to sacrifice personal glory—scoring points to play a role so that all could reach the goal: winning! The coach said: "Let's be real clear about what we're after here: team, team, team. Five players on the floor functioning as one single human being. OK? No one more important than the other."

Christians are called to learn to live, love, and work together, resisting all who oppose the Good News. People who identify and commit to a purpose beyond themselves find life meaningful and stimulating. In your vocation, your family, your education, and your recreation, keep focused on the main task: making Christ known and loved.

All believers are part of a team contending for the gospel. Some may be injured and others sitting on the bench. Some are still in the locker-room getting taped, while others are exhausted. But everyone has a vital role to play. Paul was confident: "I will know that you stand firm; resisting the cultural tides that erode, fighting side by side, operating like a team, each filling his role."

IV. How Do We Contend for the Faith?

A. Let our conduct be according to a high standard (v. 27).

"Conduct . . . worthy of the gospel of Christ." Owning Christ's cause has a *lifestyle implication:* we are to be the best we can be in Christ. Profession without practice invalidates our profession. The most common

excuse used by those outside the church is hypocrisy. Though it may not be a deliberate double-life, those observing don't know what is going on inside you. They cannot see that you really wanted to do good but failed. They think you are professing one thing and living another.

How crucial it is that our conduct reinforces our profession of faith! We can say all the right things and go to church every week, but our lives will be destructive to non-Christians if our attitudes and actions do not match the biblical standard.

B. Let our attitude show that we understand and resist fear (v. 28).

"Without being frightened . . . by those who oppose you." Owning Christ's cause has a *psychological implication:* People will oppose what and who you are. But most are not deliberately out to destroy our faith. Rather, they are wrestling with their sin—feeling guilt and shame, while not wanting to stop sinning. Yet, second, they perceive the church as standing in the way of coming to God.

Their perception is that the church offers boring services, irrelevant sermons, hypocrisy, and chances to get conned out of your money. What is reality? Millions want what Jesus offers: meaning, assurance about eternity, contentment, peace of mind, and a healthy marriage. Our task is to clearly say that to hurting people. If we would live up to what we say we believe, the message would get through. People are not against Jesus. They are against their perception of how we have packaged Jesus.

ILLUS. When you start to live differently—being with friends, but not getting drunk; spending time with your spouse; cutting out marginal movies; going to church; walking away from profane jokes; defending those whom your coffee mates defame—friends don't like it. You hold up a mirror—your changed life, and what they see by comparison is how bad their lives are. They don't like what they see. What is the result? Psychological pressure from them and frustration in them causes them to pressure you, to tease you, to tempt you to yield and sin with them. Then they can relax, because they have proven that you are no better than they are. Don't be frightened by those who oppose you.

In God's providence, you believe in forgiveness and suffer for Christ (v. 29). Count it an honor that you are trusted to be one on whom Christ can rely, knowing you will stand firm against opposition.

C. Experience enjoying Christ's blessings (2:1-2).

"If you have any encouragement from . . . Christ, if any comfort . . . if any fellowship . . . if any tenderness and compassion . . . be . . . one in spirit and purpose." Owning Christ's cause has an *emotional implication:* God does not simply say: "Buck up, keep a stiff upper lip, don't cry." Rather, He provides all that we need for emotional health.

There is no greater cause than that of bringing atheists, agnostics, and secularists to personal trust in Jesus as the Giver of eternal life. Our message is: come clean (confess) and come home (repent) to God. There is a team that needs you to tell the Good News to self-centered, wounded people.

ILLUS. The song "There Is a Balm in Gilead" says: "If you cannot preach like Peter, / If you cannot pray like Paul, / You can tell the love of Jesus / And say, 'He died for all.'" You've a role in telling the Good News.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude
Praise and Worship in Song "Holy Is the Lord of Hosts"
"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"
"Lead On, O King Eternal"
"Holy, Holy, Holy"
"Holy Ground"
Prayer of Praise and Invocation
Scripture
Choir Special "Holy Is He"
Congregational Song "Crown Him with Many Crowns"
Congregational Greeting Recognize Visitors
Family Information Announcements
Song "Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings
Offertory Vocal Solo
Message "LIVING WITH A PURPOSE"
Benediction
Postlude

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

Father, open our eyes to the human need all around us. Help us focus our caring on a few things we can do. Put a desire in our hearts to intercede for those concerns that are beyond our reach. Use our particular gifts to make a difference where You have placed us.

Benediction

Give us clear vision that we not stumble but walk a straight path in Your glorious light.

Advent Wreath

Today, you will light two purple candles and one pink candle and let them burn for the remainder of the service. Read Luke 1:46-50. Consider singing "As with Gladness, Men of Old." Pray at the conclusion of the song a prayer that is built on the closing sentence: "His *mercy extends to those who fear Him,* from generation to generation" (italics added).

Build your service today "across the generations" by having a student and a senior saint share their experiences of God, helping them find meaning in life.

INCARNATION IMPLICATIONS

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 2:5-11
Dec. 25, 1994

INTRO:

When North Americans celebrate Christmas, stores are crowded, retailers work overtime, and credit cards are "hot" from being used so often. It's amazing that a 2,000-year-old event still causes traffic jams. Even though He is the Centerpiece of Western history, and even though the calendar is dated accordingly (A.D.—In the Year of Our Lord; and B.C.—Before Christ), Jews do not believe the Messiah has come.

ILLUS. The Lubavitch Hasidim (pious ones) announced their Messiah candidate with a $400,000 publicity campaign (billboards, pamphlets, and neon signs): 90-year-old Rabbi Schneerson. They believe every generation produces at least one righteous Jew with credentials for Messiahship. Regarded as more than an ordinary man, he has the capacity to heal the world and unite Jew and Gentile. But on April 14, 1992, Rabbi Schneerson had a stroke that impaired his speech and movement. Though discouraged, they kept insisting the Messiah is coming soon. But he recently died, shattering their fond hopes.

I. The Relevance of Christmas Is: God Has Come to Earth

"Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God" (vv. 5-6). "We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen" (Col. 1:15, *The Message*).

ILLUS. In 1991 the Coalition Forces invaded Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. 500,000 soldiers with all their equipment were carried halfway round the world for a one-week ground war costing $20+ billion. That invasion is nothing compared to God's invasion. It was big news when man landed on the moon. It's bigger news when God comes to earth. God invaded the earth in the person of Jesus.

Many say: "Jesus was a great man." Others say: "He was a prophet." Even Muslims think He was second only to Muhammad. But Jesus never claimed to be a great prophet. He claimed to be God. It is a problem when a good man claims to be God.

ILLUS. I could say: I have a word from God for you. You could accept that and you'd listen if I were trusted. But if I started calling myself "God," you'd leave. Jesus said, "I am God." No "good" man claims that. Only crazy men or God could claim that.

It probably surprises many people to hear that Jesus didn't come into existence in a stable. Rather, He existed before time began; He came to earth at the right time. "Christ . . . existed before God made anything at all" (Col. 1:15, TLB). It is hard to relate to an unseen entity in the sky, but when you see God and read about His actions and attitudes, you can relate. The Bible says: If you have seen Jesus, you've seen God. If Jesus is God, and God came to earth, then Christmas is the most relevant event in history.

II. The Reality of Christmas Is: God Became a Man

"He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!*" (v. 7, *The Message*). Jesus was a real person, not a myth.

ILLUS. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has more pages on Jesus than any other person. More schools, hospitals, and social ministries have been started because of Him than any person ever. He was a real person who took our flesh. Why? That's the best way to communicate to us.

A. Jesus was born like we are (Luke 2:6-7).

Jesus came like billions of others. Though destiny hinged on His presence, He made no flashy entrance.

ILLUS. "Jesus stood and removed His royal robe. He took off His crown and stepped down. Down into time. Down into the womb of a peasant girl. Down into a cow's feeding trough. Down into servanthood. Down" (Roger Shoenhals, *Light and Life,* December 1993).

ILLUS. Imagine God walking through the halls of the largest building on earth to a door marked "Andromeda" to enter the room marked "Milky Way." Inside are long rows of cabinets filled with trays of billions of glass slides. He goes to one cabinet marked "Orion Arm," to one drawer, which He pulls open and finally to one glass slide with the tiny label, "Solar System." The electron microscope magnifies until a tiny bluish green speck comes into view, a planet called "Earth." He watches over His Son there. One speck on one tiny slide from one drawer from one bank of files in one room of one building among the millions of buildings in the universe (Needham, *Close to His Majesty,* 104-5).

The mystery of Christmas is Jesus' willingness to leave heaven and descend into His own creation as a defenseless baby on a bluish green speck.

B. Jesus grew like we do (Luke 2:52).

"Jesus matured, growing up in . . . body and spirit, blessed by both God and people" *(The Message).*

ILLUS. Jesus may not have had acne, but He would have frustrated His mother: growing fast and wearing out clothes playing games.

He was unique, but He never showcased it. He declared His divinity the last three years of his life. He didn't go round in a white robe with a halo. He looked every inch a Jewish carpenter.

C. Jesus was tempted like we are (Heb. 4:15).

"Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin!" (CEV). He had the same pressures, desires, needs, and drives we do, but He stayed pure.

D. Jesus suffered like we do (Matt. 26:38).

He felt pain and suffered disappointment. He got fatigued and felt lonely. He grieved and cried. He asked His Father to release Him from the Cross. What is the point? He can relate to you where you are.

III. The Reason for Christmas Is: God Came to Die

"He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (v. 8). Jesus didn't stay in the crib. He grew up, set His face toward Jerusalem, and allowed himself to be killed. Why? He, as God, did not have to do it. No one could have nailed Him there without His permission. Why did He do it?

A. Jesus demonstrated God's love (Rom. 5:8).

"God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (NRSV). You want to know how much God loves you? Look at the Cross!

ILLUS. Bill and Gloria Gaither produced a video of a Christmas reunion of gospel singers. On it, they sing a song with the line: "When He was on the Cross, you were on His mind." That line wraps time and eternity together, reminding us that all mankind is under the umbrella of grace.

Jesus did it, knowing that most would reject Him. Many humans have given their lives for another in heroic situations, but Jesus gave His, knowing we might reject His love. "It was not the soldiers who killed Him: it was His devotion to us" (Max Lucado).

B. Jesus paid sin's penalty.

When you break man's laws, you pay man's penalty. When you break God's laws, you pay God's penalty. The consequence of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life (see Rom 6:23). What He did 2,000 years ago has eternal consequences: we can be totally forgiven. But as long as we try to save ourselves, God can't save us. Until we realize our need of a Savior, we can't be saved.

IV. The Result of Christmas Resounds: Jesus Is Lord!

"God exalted him . . . that . . . every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (vv. 9-11). Christmas began the story; the Cross was the climax; and His resurrection is the end of the story. Because Jesus humbled himself to obey the Father's plan, God gave Him top honor in the universe along with a new name: "Lord!" Over 600 times in the Bible it was used of Jesus.

ILLUS. "Lord" was also used for Caesar, the Roman leader. In some decades, Caesar was worshiped as God. People said: "Kurios Kaiser—Caesar is Lord," and bowed to him. It became a test of loyalty. Would you be willing to say: "Kurios Kaiser"? When Christians refused to say that, saying instead: "Kurios Iasous Christos" (Jesus Christ is Lord), they were put to death.

But one day every knee will bow, every tongue will confess: "Jesus is Lord." One day, all of the arrogance in this world that puts itself up against Christ, and all the denial and all the pseudoscientific, psychological, and philosophical debates that are put up to deny Jesus as Lord, will fall by the wayside. All people will confess: "Jesus is Lord."

ILLUS. One day, politicians and rock stars will say: "Jesus is Lord." Scientists, businessmen, homemakers, and professors will say: "Jesus is Lord." Marx, Stalin, Lenin, Khrushchev, and Gorbachev will say: "Jesus is Lord." Playboy's Hugh Hefner and atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair will bow and say: "Jesus is Lord."

The issue is not, will you confess, "Jesus is Lord"? Rather, when will you confess it? Will you admit it willingly, in love and respect, or in brokenness? Christianity's greatest need is to understand and live by the truth: "Jesus is Lord."

It may look like the other side is winning right now, but Jesus is Lord. You may think: I can't cope anymore, but Jesus is Lord. You believe there is no way out of your dilemma, but Jesus is Lord. Circumstances and people may pile up against you, but Jesus is Lord.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Opening Song	"All Creatures of Our God and King"
Opening Prayer	
Choir Special	"Season of Light"
Scripture Reading	John 1:1-5
Continue in Worship	"As with Gladness Men of Old"
	"This Is My Father's World"
	"Crown Him with Many Crowns"
Congregational Greeting	Recognition of Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory	
Special Music	
Message	"INCARNATION IMPLICATIONS"
Closing Song	"He Is Lord"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Introduction to Opening Song

It is said that St. Francis of Assisi wrote these words during the hot summer of 1225, when he was very ill and losing his sight. To add to his discomfort, a swarm of field mice were trying to take over his little straw hut. Apparently, by the words of the song, St. Francis encouraged even the mice to praise God! The message St. Francis proclaimed was that love for Christ leads to a life of sacrifice and of brotherly love among men.

Christmas Sunday

Today you light all the candles. If you wish, you may also add the white candle in the center of the wreath and light it: the symbol of Christ. Read: Luke 2:13-15. Sing one or more of the following: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," "Away in a Manger," or "Once in Royal David's City."

GAINING CHRISTIAN UNITY

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 2:1-8
Jan. 1, 1995

INTRO:

Strained relationships make us unhappy. Conflict is a killjoy. Unity in our relationships is a key to fulfillment in life. Business employees must work together. Players must play together. Legislators and executives must cooperate. When there is unity, great things happen.

Paul urges: "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." We'd all love to be able to say, "That describes my family and my business," but people often have difficulty getting along. So how do you reduce conflict? and increase cooperation?

I. Defuse Competition (v. 3)

Paul says: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition" (motives of rivalry). Too often we compete with our friends or workers for attention, money, power, and friends. In many marriages, couples do not complement one another, rather they compete.

ILLUS. A Christian couple sat in a restaurant with many friends. They were cutting each other with sarcastic put-downs. Obvious tension filled the air. Friends were embarrassed. Both served in Christian ministry, but they were not teammates.

The solution? Somebody has to give in and say, "I'm sorry." "To defuse" means to reduce the tension and hostility. Put-downs and cuts stir things up.

"Fights and quarrels . . . come from your desires that battle within you. You want . . . but don't get it" (James 4:1-2). The first cause of conflict is competing desires. Influential leaders in churches can also want opposing things and destroy a church because of it. Our society teaches us instant gratification. So, when our desires conflict, it's "instant trouble." We live in a competitive world. But if we want unity, we've got to defuse competition. What is the cause of conflict? Competing desires.

II. Delete Conceit (v. 3)

"Do nothing out of . . . vain conceit." Deal with pride. Deal with ego. An egotist is an "I" specialist. Unity comes only at the price of somebody's ego. Solomon says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Will Rogers said, "The person who gets too big for his britches will eventually be exposed in the end."

What is needed? Regular motive checks and a willingness to accept loving confrontation. We agree that no one is right 100% of the time. Sometimes we get in arguments where we know we are wrong, but we won't admit it. Why? Pride!

ILLUS. The song "You're So Vain, You Probably Think This Song Is About You" was supposedly written about actor Warren Beatty. One of the women he used and dropped, Carly Simon, wrote and sang it in revenge. It was an American hit. If ego were yielded to Jesus, most human problems would be resolved. Pride causes conflict.

III. Decrease Criticism (v. 3)

"In humility consider others better than yourselves." Yes, better; not so superior to you that you have to grovel. All are worthy of respect. You don't put people down. You treat them better than yourself. This is the opposite of our cultural norm, where we've elevated selfishness to an art form. Best-selling books cater to it. There's even a magazine named *Self.* This is our cultural attitude.

Paul challenges, "Do the opposite of society and decrease conflict by considering others better." Why? When you are critical, it is often because you think that your way, idea, goal, or suggestion is better. Without listening, you criticize and destroy unity. Andrew Murray defined: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather, not thinking of yourself at all." The focus is not on yourself. You aren't thinking about What's in it for me? or How will I look? Your focus rests on other people. You are other-centered as God so desires.

The person who thinks he is humble isn't. The humble person doesn't even know it, because he's focusing on everybody else. James asks, "Who are you to judge your neighbor?" (4:12). Judging another is like playing God without knowing the motives, intentions, or circumstances. But it's fun to criticize. Admit it. Because it makes us feel superior.

"Well, look at so and so . . ." or "Well, I never . . . !" It makes us feel good. We think we build ourselves up by putting others down. The Bible says the exact opposite. Do you want to get rid of conflict in your life? Decrease the criticism. Stop judging other people.

ILLUS. At the funeral of a man named Buck, the pastor said: "Buck had a critical spirit under Holy Spirit control. He was always lifting others up because he was secure in himself and didn't have to pull others down to feel good about himself."

The third cause of conflict is devaluing people—treating them with less respect than deserved.

IV. Demonstrate Consideration (v. 4)

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." It's contrary to the norm of humanity.

ILLUS. What about that word "look"? The Greek is *skopas,* from which we get the word *scope,* like a scope on a rifle. Paul says: "Hone in on it. Pay attention to the need of others."

That's so simple, but we don't do it, and that is why we have conflicts in our relationships. We don't pay attention to others' needs, and they most likely don't pay attention to our needs. However, if we don't start paying attention to their needs and, in so doing, break the vicious cycle of selfishness, no one will ever get their needs met.

ILLUS. How do you demonstrate consideration? By looking and listening. Think of the person(s) closest to you. Could you name his or her five biggest needs? After naming them, could you honestly say you are meeting even three of them on a regular basis? It is so easy to get preoccupied with self and be insensitive.

ILLUS. We come home from work. We're tired and want to bury ourselves in our activity or lack of activity. We forget that there are other people who need our love. We too often think only of ourselves: "I'm tired; I need a day off; I'm going to do my thing." If you want to lower conflict and increase unity, demonstrate consideration.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives . . . so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Pet. 3:7). Ouch! The next time you blow it, husband, and you forget consideration toward your wife, say: "You're right. I should have done that. I'm sorry. I was only thinking of myself. Next time I will try to be considerate of you and remember that you have plans too." She will faint first, but then she will love you for your honesty. The fourth cause of conflict: insensitivity to needs.

V. Develop Christlikeness (v. 5)

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Jesus is the Model for relationships. Look at Jesus and get His attitude.

A. He didn't demand His rights (v. 6).

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." You never saw Jesus going around Jerusalem saying: "Now I have My rights." The person who yields his rights to God gets God as the Defender of his rights. Whom would you want defending you? Who could do a better job? Jesus gave up His rights.

B. He had a serving attitude (v. 7).

"[He] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." How do you know if you have a serving attitude? By the way you answer this question: "How do you respond when people treat you like a servant?" There's your answer.

C. He was willing to sacrifice (v. 8).

"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" He sacrificed for the benefit of others. When I yield my rights to God, God assumes my defense. That is so totally different from what the world teaches. It is impossible to live selflessly in our own power. It is our nature outside of Christ to be selfish. Only God can change it. The fifth cause of conflict: living without Christ.

CONCLUSION:

Unity is a gift from God's Holy Spirit. "Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together" (Ephesians 4:3, TEV). Implication? For you to get along with people, you need to grow more and more like Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of imitation, rather one of habitation—Jesus in you.

It is not: "I'm going to be like Jesus if it kills me." It will. It is a matter of habitation. Every day we consciously choose to put someone else's right before our own, to serve our spouse, children, and fellow workers, to build people up instead of tearing them down, to sacrifice for the sake of others. In these ways, we become more like Jesus.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"I Will Enter His Gates"
	"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
	"Let There Be Glory and Honor and Praises"
	"We Three Kings"
	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Prayer of Praise	
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Continue in Worship	"In His Image"
	"O to Be like Thee"
	"I Would Be like Jesus"
"More About Jesus"	
Special Music	"We Are an Offering"
Offertory Prayer	
Special Music	"Abide in Me"
Message	"GAINING CHRISTIAN UNITY"
Closing Song	"I Want to Be like Jesus"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Benediction

Goodness is something so simple: always to live for others; never to seek one's own advantage.

New Year's Sunday

This week presents another golden opportunity to confront the issues of everyday life. The sermon theme on reducing conflict and increasing unity is a natural, especially when New Year's resolutions are a topic of conversation. Plan on an invitation to prayer at the conclusion of the sermon. The major relationships need the "oil of forgiveness" applied: wife/husband; parent/child; employer/employee; and friend/friend.

Personal Testimony

Plan a testimony from a person who came to saving faith in Jesus in the previous 12 months. Let him affirm his hope for living a complete new year forgiven with peace of mind.

LEARNING HOW TO CHANGE

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 2:9-18
Jan. 8, 1995

INTRO:

What needs changing in your life? If you could change one thing, what would it be? People often testify, "Jesus changed my life. He made me a different person." If it's not brain surgery or drugs and not getting zapped, how did Jesus do it?

Confusing advice is given: "Wait on the Lord" (passive approach) or "If it is to be, it's up to me" (activist approach). Others say, "Just hang on" or "Just let go" or "Pray it through." How do I change? Is it all God? Is it all me—or is it a combination of the two? Verses 12-13 clarify: "My dear friends, as you have always obeyed . . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you . . . according to his good purpose." "Work out" is my part. "Work in" is God's. We work out what God has worked in.

ILLUS. Top fuel drag cars have aerodynamic bodies, supercharged engines, and wide, soft tires. Their top speeds used to be below 200 mph, but technology boosted it beyond 300 mph. Yet, an owner and crew without a great driver win no races. The man behind the wheel has to accelerate, shift gears, and pop the chute better than others. Thus he must be "working out" and making real the potential speed that is built-in.

Christians also need to apply the truths of God, making real the potential that Christ has provided.

I. *Work Out* Your Salvation (v. 12)

Paul says, "Practice the skills the Bible teaches." Develop what you already know. Work out the implications. You have been obeying; keep on obeying. Practice what is crucial. Repeat it often!

ILLUS. What do you do in a workout? You run, climb stairs, swim, etc. You exercise to maintain or restore health and sometimes to reduce weight. You do not exercise to get a body, but to develop the body you already have. You practice to develop the necessary skills.

An orchardist cultivates, fertilizes, prunes, and sprays to develop the potential that is already latent in his trees. Christians are expected to "work" or practice to develop their relationship to God. That is, "Work out the implications" of your salvation.

II. Work Out *Your* Salvation (v. 12)

This implies an individual assignment: accepting personal responsibility for your growth. God needs to do things in your life that He doesn't need to do in mine. Likewise, what you do has very little bearing on my salvation. Your works cannot confirm my salvation, only your own. Paul implies specialized experiences for Christians. He doesn't force us to be cookie-cutter or cloned Christians.

ILLUS. Soldiers in boot camp are drilled for hours each day to learn skills, to work as a unit, and to never question an officer's commands. As they march in close ranks, hour after hour, they lose their individuality for the sake of the whole. Their clothes are identical, their hair is cut off, and they eat the same foods. This kind of authoritative, forced "losing of oneself" is not God's discipleship plan. God gives freedom to develop your unique gifts and identity as His child.

What does the gospel mean in *your* life? Work it out! Watch other Christians for basics, but then go to your own practice area and work out your unique version of being a Christian.

III. Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling (vv. 12-13)

Our attitude should not be one of dread and dismay, fearful that one little slip means hell. Rather, we learn deep respect and trust, recognizing that each step with Christ has eternal implications. In other words, take your spiritual growth seriously. Change is a cooperative program. You can't do it on your own. Yet God won't do it without your permission and cooperation.

Note three important words in verse 13: God "works" in you to "will" and "act." To paraphrase: "Keep on working out the implications of your new life in Jesus. But remember: God is effectively at work in you and is completing His design for you."

A. God works on your will (your controller).

"To will" means God is "inspiring" your "will" (NEB), "helping you want to obey him" (TLB), stimulating your action upon your good intentions.

B. God works on your desires (your motivation).

God helps you act obediently because your desires line up with His desires. "To act" means inspiring the deed, helping you do what He wants and giving you the passion to do it.

IV. What Is God's Part in Change?

A. God provided the Bible.

"The . . . Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, TLB). God teaches us right and wrong, preparing us for anything that comes. But you have to read, study, and know it first.

B. God provides the Holy Spirit.

"Once the Spirit . . . lives within you he will . . . bring to your whole being . . . new strength and vitality" (Rom. 8:11, Phillips). What is the prerequisite? A daily surrender, a yielded will. "As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him" (2 Cor. 3:18, TLB).

Most of us will not change until we are forced to do

so. We have to hurt a lot before we will get serious about it (see Prov. 20:30).

V. What Is My Part in Change?

A. Choose what you think about.

Guard your thoughts, filter the destructive ones, reject all that will lead away from Christ, and be aggressive about it. (See also Eph. 4:23-25, JB.)

B. Choose to depend on God's Spirit.

"Take care to live in me, and let me live in you. . . . a branch can't produce fruit when severed from the vine. Nor can you be fruitful apart from me. . . . I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in me and I in him shall produce a large crop" (John 15:4-5, TLB).

C. Choose your response to circumstances.

"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives . . . don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you . . . become men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots" (James 1:2-4, Phillips).

Here's the impact of attitude:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. . . . It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. . . . The remarkable thing is, we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. . . . I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it" (Charles Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982], 205).

CONCLUSION:

What are the evidences of salvation? We've been talking about changing to be like Christ and how that comes about. What are the things for which we should look often?

1. Effective progress: "As you have always obeyed . . . continue to work out your salvation" (v. 12). Growing Christians will be able to look back 5, 10, and 15 years and see measurable progress in Christlikeness.
2. Respect and trust of God: "with fear and trembling" (v. 12) desire to never grieve God. Growing Christians will become increasingly aware of the need to walk humbly, respectfully before God.
3. Serenity and certainty: "without complaining" (Don't I deserve better?) and without "arguing" (Yes, Lord, but what about . . . ? (v. 14). Growing Christians will deepen in spirit so that their lives are more like water in the deep pool than like water flowing over the rocks: serene.
4. Purity: "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault" (v. 15). Growing Christians will find an enlarging chasm between the sinful activities of the world and their behaviors and attitudes.
5. Mission endeavor: offer a message. You'll share "the word of life," witnessing to the change that Christ can bring; you'll shine like stars" (vv. 15-16).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"The Lord Is Lifted Up"
	"Lord, I Lift Your Name on High"
	"O Worship the King"
Prayer of Praise	
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Choir Special	"Purify Me, Lord"
Scripture	Ps. 51:1-3, 7, 10-12
Open Altar	"Change My Heart, O God"
Pastoral Prayer of Confession	Affirmation of Faith
Organ Interlude as worshipers are seated	
Communion	"There Is a Redeemer"
	"At the Cross"
	"And Can It Be?"
Dedication of Tithes/Offerings	
Offertory	
Message	"LEARNING HOW TO CHANGE"
Closing/Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Benediction

Father, in all the choices I make today, be in my choosing that I may know I have chosen wisely for You. Be in my loving, that I may love in self-giving ways.

Change Is Never Easy; Pray About It

Have the worship leader prepare transition comments in advance between various service components. Have him focus on the active work of the Holy Spirit to help us face or own our unique personality and its "hard edges" when it comes to relationships. Then, building from Psalm 51, move the congregation to a time of prayer about that at the altar.

Testimony

Endeavor to have a testimony how drawing closer to God and making a commitment to do His will leads to a major change of career, relationship, or location. Implication? Spiritual growth means change. You can't have one without the other.

World Focus

Ask someone from your Mission Board or Committee to share about a person that your congregation is supporting with your missions offerings.

GOD'S MODEL FOR MANHOOD

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 2:19-30
Jan. 15, 1995

INTRO:

In 1993 Houston football player David Williams skipped a game to be with his newborn son and wife. The team fined him $125,000. The radio call-in shows debated who was right or wrong. Many said it wasn't manly. In Fremont, Calif., a principal wrote to teachers: "If boys don't let girls play games with them on the playground, they could be guilty of discrimination or harassment."

The book *Missing from Action: Vanishing Manhood in America* by Weldon Hardenbrook describes four false models of manhood:

1. *Macho Maniac:* Dirty Harry or Rambo. They deny all their feelings, ignore the law, never worry, complain, or apologize. They just sweat and bully people, taking whatever they want.

2. *Great Pretender:* Archie Bunker. Belittling others (especially wife or children), they build themselves up. Out of fear, they hold the world at arm's length with tough talk and criticism.

3. *World-class Wimp:* Dagwood Bumstead. He's inept, being outwitted by children, wives, and dogs. He's a passive bumbler whom no one takes seriously.

4. *Gender Blenders:* Michael Jackson or Boy George. They don't even pretend to be masculine. They play with the image and mix feminine/masculine. *People* magazine reported a psychologist who asked his seven-year-old nephew: "Is Michael Jackson a boy or a girl?" He thought about it and said, "Both."

Being a male is a matter of birth; being a man is a matter of choice. We can learn, choose, and grow. We do not need to settle for society's false models. The Bible provides godly examples. Timothy (v. 20) and Epaphroditus (v. 29) show us five qualities men should seek.

I. Seek to Be Men of Compassion

Put people before profits. Why? Relationships are more valuable than things. Compassion means protecting the needs and rights of other people. Timothy took a genuine interest in others' welfare, not just his own interests.

ILLUS. A developer bought land for a housing subdivision. He drilled wells, paved streets, and put in all the utilities. After the entire project was done, the wells went bad. He put in a pump house at a nearby river. Following a spring flood, the river shifted away from the pump house. He paid to dig a trench to the pump house. Then he paid to dig new wells. This compassionate response was beyond the law's requirements and his contracts.

Too often, we care about ourselves, not others. It is possible to get so caught up in business and career that family is forgotten. People say, "I'd like to help, but . . . I'd be there except . . . I'd serve on the committee if . . ." God looks for men of compassion who put people before profits.

II. Seek to Be Men of Consistency

Putting character before conformity (v. 22). God wants men who are not afraid to be different from the culture and to stand alone: "Timothy has proved himself . . . he has served with me in the work of the gospel." Timothy was known and tested. This is integrity. Timothy's name—"honoring God"—meant one who did not cave in to pressure. Such godly men can't be bought.

The Bible says: "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out" (Prov. 10:9). The bottom line for manhood is integrity. A nice personality makes good first impressions, but success over the long haul is built on character, not image. A man of consistency "walks securely."

ILLUS. He has no secrets like Senator Packwood's 8,200-page diary to be kept from the Senate Ethics Committee, no *Playboy* magazine in hiding, no whiskey hidden in the trunk, no juggling of the financial books to hide expenditures from the wife, and no affair with a former girlfriend.

God wants consistent men because inconsistent men produce insecure children and unstable marriages. God wants consistency, not conformity.

III. Seek to Be Men of Cooperation

Putting cooperation before competition (v. 25). Paul was a spiritual superstar, but he knew that you get more done working together. That's why he had time for fellows like Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul used three words to describe their spirit of cooperation: *(a)* brother; *(b)* fellow worker; *(c)* fellow soldier. Each word has an implication: *(a)* "Brother." We are a family. We are related in Christ. In churches worldwide, we use: Brother Bob, Brother Smith, Sister Williams. One hundred thirty-three times in the New Testament Paul used the word "brother." We are a family. *(b)* "Fellow worker." We are a fellowship. We are engaged in the same task: making mature disciples. *(c)* "Fellow soldier." We are in a fight. Christians have a common enemy, the devil. We are called to defend and support one another in the spiritual battle. Would others easily say that you are a brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier?

ILLUS. Some research suggests that only 10% of men in America have real friends. That should change in the church, but even Christian men don't automatically know how to relate to one another. It is hard to risk letting others get close to us, even though there is tremendous power in unity.

The more men who are able to unite in the cause of Christ and cooperate instead of compete, the stronger their local church will be.

IV. Seek to Be Men of Commitment

Putting the cause of Christ before comfort (vv. 25-27). Epaphroditus, "your messenger . . . was ill, and almost died."

Paul was in prison in Rome. The people in Philippi sent an offering to help him. It was 800 miles and six

weeks of travel over rough roads. Epaphroditus went by foot and got seriously ill, almost dying. Yet he kept on and completed his task. He was persistent in spite of pain. His feelings were secondary. The cause of Christ came before comfort.

Many men are great starters ("Yes, we're going to go for it; we're going to do it!"), but they never finish. They quit because it's inconvenient or causes stress. Ministry always costs. You pay a price. God is looking for men who are willing to pay the price. If you want to serve God without any cost or inconvenience, forget it. There is no such thing.

ILLUS. VMI, an all-male school, came under attack. Women wanted in. Lt. Col. Thomas Linn resisted: "Society desperately needs male developmental education. It needs men who are assured and responsible in their masculinity. We need strong, committed men to channel aggression and instill an inner compulsion to do what is right. Schools like VMI do this well" (*USA Today*, Nov. 18/93). Recent news indicates women are now admitted.

Committed men finish what they start. God wants men to be aggressive in spiritual things and in work. God wants men who put Christ's cause before comfort.

V. Seek to Be Men of Courage

Put service before security (vv. 29-30). Today we are told, "Build a nest egg to provide security for yourself." The goal of life is security. Serving others drops down the list in importance. Becoming a pastor is rejected because you can't make enough money. Ministry teams are neglected because you don't want to give up a vacation. Working in the youth weekend is dropped because you can get overtime on Saturday.

ILLUS. Serving Jesus calls for reckless abandon. It means driving your car a year longer to support that missionary. It means passing up the new dress to help that refugee. It means selling your boat to buy that mission a generator. It means giving up Saturdays to build houses for the poor.

"Welcome him in the Lord . . . Honor men like him . . . he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life" (vv. 29-30). "Risking" means "hazarding" (Weymouth) your life—a gambling term—or staking everything. Epaphroditus was God's gambler, risking his life for Paul and for the cause of the gospel. If we only play church and come to sing our songs and to hear our sermons, we do God a disservice. God looks for men who put service before security.

ILLUS. A 77-year-old man with an attitude of service retired 12 years ago. He has worked on construction missions eight times overseas and three times stateside. All were at his own expense and for no pay. This retired man is fulfilled. He cares about service, not just security.

ILLUS. You can be for or against Jimmy Carter and his politics. But after he held the most prestigious job in the nation, he began volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, building houses for the poor at his own expense. Put service before security!

Any church is healthy when there is a reasonable number of men who are willing to serve. Women will always serve the church, but the difference is the number of men who will join them. Paul calls us to make a living sacrifice of ourselves to God. If you don't volunteer to minister, you are not sacrificing. If you are not tithing, you are not sacrificing. The result is bored and unfulfilled men.

CONCLUSION:

"Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live" (Mark 8:35, TLB). Do you want to live? Go for broke! Get out on the limb. Risk and give up your life. God is looking for men. Get usable, and God will wear you out.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Opening Song	"All Hail King Jesus"
Scripture Reading	Neh. 9:5*b*-6
Praise and Worship in Song	"His Name Is Wonderful"
	"Jesus, Name Above All Names"
	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Prayer of Praise and Joyful Expectation	
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Continue in Worship	"King of Heaven, Lord Most High"
	"My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory	
Special in Song	"Worship Medley"
Message	"GOD'S MODEL FOR MANHOOD"
Closing Song	"Rise Up, O Men of God"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

In this moment of prayer let us hear again, O Lord, that it was not we who first chose You, but You who chose us. Save us from all false pride, which might dare lead us to believe that You chose us because of merit. Amen.

Valentine's Day Preparation

Another slant you could take would be to remind men of the importance of expressing romantic love and verbalizing feelings! This is needed so much more by the females in our lives. In line with Paul's teachings in Ephesians 5, husbands are called to sacrifice themselves for their wives. Perhaps a list of suggestions could be placed in the bulletin, guiding men in ways that they could prepare to honor their wives in mid-February.

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR JOY

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 3:1-11
Jan. 22, 1995

INTRO:

It is easy to lose your joy. Early in a Christian's life everything is fantastic. But you spring a leak and the joy dribbles out. We muddle through with our spirit deflated. Paul hammers the expectation home 17 times in this book, saying, "Rejoice!" How do you maintain joy? He gives us three safeguards.

I. Resist Legalistic Attitudes (vv. 1-6)

Legalism is a major "joy buster." If you major on rules, keeping the letter while forgetting the spirit of the law, you turn sour fast. Legalism ruins people, families, and churches. Legalism substitutes rules and regulations for a relationship with Jesus. It subtly changes the focus from what God has done to what you have to do. When you flip the focus, you lose your joy. Dos and don'ts, unbalanced by grace, dry you up.

The legalists were called Judaizers. They said: "Yes, believe in Jesus. Trust Him with all your heart, but you must also 'do Moses' to be saved: i.e., keep the dietary laws, Sabbath rules, and circumcision." They tried to convert Paul's converts to their perspective. Paul got steamed up. "Some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel . . . Let [them] be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:7-9). He said, "Watch out for those dogs" (like pit bulls that attack humans) (3:2).

SAFEGUARD NO. 1: LIVE BY GRACE

Grace is the key to joy. In fact, the two words go together. The word for grace is *charis.* The word for joy is *chara.* Grace and joy go together. Realize that everything God does in you and through you is of grace. It is not by your working for it or earning it. To resist legalistic attitudes is the secret of joy. Paul used his life as an example of legalism. He had tried pleasing God through law keeping. It brought no joy (vv. 4-6, CEV). Paul pulled out his trophies and said: "If you want to compare lists, I'll beat by a longshot, but it did not make me holy or bring me joy."

He gives us five examples (vv. 5-6). If we begin to trust in them, we are becoming legalistic:

1. *Rituals.* "Circumcised on the eighth day." Our rituals are baptism, Communion, catechism. These bring false security and no joy.
2. *Race.* Born into a Jewish family (not a proselyte). From the tribe of Benjamin (an elite tribe). Named after Saul, the first king, a Benjamite. Our heritage is that my parents are good people, upstanding citizens. Big deal! You get religion by osmosis, but you can't get Jesus by osmosis!
3. *Religion.* A true "Hebrew of Hebrews" (v. 5). Hoping in having a particular brand of religion is fruitless. Religion is man's attempt to get to God. Jesus is God's attempt to get to man—a relationship. If you find yourself relying on being a Presbyterian or a Baptist or a Nazarene, you're already disqualified. No group has a patent on God, so that being in it saves you.
4. *Rules.* "In regard to the law, a Pharisee" (v. 5). Pharisees were not all hypocrites. Never more than 6,000, they were the spiritual elite. They took the Ten Commandments and eventually developed 613 commands (legalist's delight). They worked hard at making God happy. They wouldn't eat an egg laid on the Sabbath (it was work). They wouldn't scratch a mosquito bite on the Sabbath (it was work). Paul says: "No more. I don't trust in that stuff anymore."
5. *Reputation.* "As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (v. 6). Today we say: I read the Bible, I pray, I go to church. I write letters to the editor and defend morality. I work on political issues. There is nothing wrong with doing these, but don't count on them getting you "points" with God. Live each day by trusting in Jesus' sin-bearing work, not in rituals, race, religion, rules, or reputation. You'll be joy-filled.

II. Reevaluate Your Activities (vv. 7-9)

"What I once thought was valuable is worthless. . . . I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is . . . to know that I belong . . . because of my faith in Christ" (CEV).

Everything Paul had been taught to do growing up as a Jew was now seen to be worthless when it came to making himself acceptable to God. Garbage? Translators are being delicate. The word means "dung"(KJV), manure. All the rituals, superior attitudes, rules, and even his reputation were worthless.

SAFEGUARD NO. 2: PRIORITIZE TO KEEP PERSPECTIVE.

Know what's valuable. Don't lose joy over things that don't count: paying taxes; dent in your car; a missed television show. Don't let anything or anyone take your joy because you have mixed up your priorities. What matters most is not your position or your power, pedigree, prestige, or your possessions. You can have them all and still be unhappy! "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). You cannot have it all. Life is a matter of trade-offs. Paul implies: "I gave up religion in order to have a relationship."

ILLUS. Barbara Walters, television journalist, says: "You can't have all three: marriage, children, career. No woman can manage all three. You can handle two out of three, but one of them will suffer."

Do you want Christ? What will you give up to know Christ? You cannot live two ways at the same time. If you are trying, you have your priorities messed up. Unbelievers fear they have to give up something to become a Christian. They're right. But what you discover is that God changes you so that what you were afraid to give, you no longer want. Jesus changes your "wanter." Former things become empty and shallow.

When you become a Christian, you give up all you've

got, you've never had it so good. Trade-offs! Paul says: "When I consider what I used to think was valuable, they aren't worth 'dung.'" What I got was worth much more than what I lost. I gave up guilt for a clear conscience and forgiveness. I gave up worry for power in living. I gave up frustration for meaning and purpose in life. I gave up going to hell for heaven. That's not a bad trade-off!

III. Refocus Your Ambitions (vv. 10-11)

"I want . . . to know Christ and the power that raised him to life. I want to suffer and die as he did, so that . . . I also may be raised to life" (CEV). Paul declared after a lifetime of religious activity: "It all comes down to knowing Jesus intimately," based on personal experience (as in married persons' sexual knowledge of each other).

"[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [Christ]—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding [Him] more strongly and more clearly" (v. 10, Amp.). This knowledge is personal, progressive, and ongoing.

ILLUS. I know about Hillary Clinton, but I don't know her. I know she attended Methodist churches most of her life, but I don't know if she has saving faith in Jesus. She is a lawyer, but I don't know how good she is. Knowing about Hillary is not the same as knowing her. But I know my wife and what makes her tick. I understand her moods and what makes her laugh. Too many of us know about Jesus, but we don't know Jesus.

SAFEGUARD NO. 3: GET TO KNOW JESUS.

ILLUS. A little boy fell out of bed. His mom came to ask him what happened: "I guess I stayed too close to where I got in the bed."

That describes many Christians relative to their relationship to Jesus. They have hopped on the train to heaven but haven't changed one bit, haven't grown up or matured. Stuart Briscoe says: There are three ways to grow in knowing Jesus: *(a)* Time alone with God (invest in the relationship) reading the Bible with the radio or television off. You can't be intimate in a crowd. Sunday worship won't even do it. You've got to get alone with God often. *(b)* Talk to God. Prayer is vital. When couples stop talking, marriages die. Let God talk to you through His Word and Spirit. Much prayer means much joy. *(c)* Trust God. Relationships are built on trust. God will allow all kinds of problems to force you to learn that He is reliable. This often takes years, even decades.

CONCLUSION:

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR JOY?

1. Have you substituted rules and regulations for relationship? Legalism seeps in and chokes the joy. Perhaps you never trusted Jesus for forgiveness. You are a moral person, going to church, keeping the Ten Commandments, but you think God grades on the curve, so you've got it made. No! God grades according to a perfect standard: Jesus. Thus, if you fall short of His holiness, you miss heaven.

Putting trust in religion instead of a relationship is "churchianity," not Christianity. Let go of religion and take hold of Jesus. Let go of rituals, race, rules, and reputation. Get to know Christ.

(1) Admit that you cannot save yourself, and thus you need a Savior. (2) Believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sin and to provide forgiveness and eternal life. (3) Believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive to intercede for you. (4) Turn from sin and seek righteousness, which comes as Jesus changes your "want-tos."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"Come Celebrate Jesus"
	"Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts"
	"I Will Sing of the Mercies"
Prayer of Praise	
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
Continue in Worship	"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story"
	"Jesus Is All the World to Me"
	"Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts"
Choir Special	"He Is My Hiding Place"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory	
Message	"HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR JOY"
Closing Song	"We Come, O Christ, to You"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

Father, thank You for the joy that You bring when You come into our lives. Your peace is ours when You bring us new life in yourself. We ask that You come to live and reign within us now and forever. Amen.

Experiment in Trading Things

To illustrate one of the key ideas in the sermon, that life is a series of trade-offs: We give up things we like for things that are essential. Do the following: Hold up a new pencil and ask if there is anyone who would trade you something they have with them in church (in purses/billfolds/diaper bags, etc.) that might be more valuable. After one trade is made, do it again, and then again. After perhaps five, six, or seven trades are made and you hold an object of significant value, make the application. To get something that is better, we have to give up something good. Then to get something that is best, we have to give up something that is better. God calls us to be making those kinds of value judgments every single day.

ATTITUDES FOR EFFECTIVE LIVING

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 3:12-21
Jan. 29, 1995

INTRO:

There are hundreds of books written on "How to Succeed," but more than books, Christians need relationships and models. We need to learn from someone who has done it, a mentor. In this way, we develop our character rather than just our ability to make money, gain status, or build a business.

ILLUS. *The Success Syndrome,* by Steven Berglas, says people without character often implode and fail. Such people often lack self-esteem. When their success surpasses their self-esteem, they feel guilty or unworthy of it. So to ease the pressure, they set themselves up for moral failure. Arrogant and isolated, they risk and destroy all that they built.

Paul teaches how to develop one's character as a foundation for success: "Following my example . . . take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave" (v. 17). He warns of harmful models: "Many live as enemies of the cross . . . Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame [bragging about sin]. Their mind is on earthly things" (vv. 18-19). Models and mentors are all around; so choose the best. Paul offers himself and four keys:

I. Use the Key of Evaluation

Face your faults.

An apostle and theologian, yet Paul said: "I need to grow." Admit it too. Take an inventory of your life. You have to know where you are before you can grow. Some people fear being that real. They imply that they have no problems or doubts. Not so. Effective people never stop growing.

ILLUS. Gold mining companies spend millions of dollars drilling holes for core samples. They evaluate the ounces per ton of rock to decide the profit potential. There might be millions, but if it costs twice that amount to get it blasted, crushed, and chemically removed from the bedrock, they won't do it. Inaccessible? Forget it. Costly evaluation ultimately saves money.

Facing your faults with brutal honesty opens the door to effective living. "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Such transparency fosters emotional maturity. Effective people leave their reputation in God's hands, choosing to obey versus simply wanting to look good. The question must be asked: "Where do I need to change?"

II. Use the Key of Elimination

Forget the former!

"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind" (v. 13). Let go of the past. Turn your back on it at least to the degree that you stop being manipulated by memories. There's a time to put hurts and failures behind you. Effectiveness means learning to forget.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isa. 43:18-19). How do I forget that which has wounded me so deeply that daily there is a trigger that reopens the wound in me?

ILLUS. (*U.S. News,* 11/29/93, pp. 52-63) An article titled "Memories Lost and Found" tells of adults who, having been abused as children, struggle with memories. Memory is essential to life. It can't easily be erased. But we can't let it debilitate our faith.

So what would forgetting mean? Get amnesia? No! It is to stop letting the past control or manipulate the present. Effective people learn from the past but don't dwell on it—learning, then letting it go. Human nature tends to remember things that we should forget and forget things that we should remember. THERE ARE TWO THINGS TO FORGET:

1. *Forget your failures.*

Many Christians rehearse things that God has forgiven. Satan's favorite pastime is to paralyze us with the past and manipulate us by our memories. Paul says: "I forget the past. I refuse to condemn myself, saying, 'If I had only . . .'"

We've all blown it. We all have things we regret, but we are no worse than Paul. Get on with life. Nothing will ever totally reverse the past, so stop beating yourself with it. Restitution? Of course, where it's possible. But restitution is not always possible. If not, then forget it and move on. Learn from it and let it go.

2. *Forget your successes.*

Refuse to rest on your past accomplishments. It's easy to glory in successes, to base security on past performances. Success tends to make you complacent and fills you with pride. You stop growing and learning. Forgetting the former things includes successes!

The questions here are these: "What memory continues to haunt me? What person keeps causing my pain?" Face your faults and forget the former things.

III. Use the Key of Concentration

Focus on the future.

"But one thing I do: . . . straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal" (vv. 13-14). Effective people are goal-oriented, focusing on the future. Paul says: "I do one thing"; not "These 40 things I dabble in." "Fragmentosis" is defined as trying to do 100 things. It is an all-too-common social disease in most lifestyles.

ILLUS. Ed Sullivan used to have "plate spinners" on his television program. You'd get anxious just watching them get 15 to 20 plates spinning at the same time atop wooden rods. They'd stress out: starting plates, adding plates, respinning wobbly plates, running back and forth! What a parable of modern urban life.

Most of us are spread too thinly, overly involved. We need to decide what counts and focus on it. A life dif-

fused is weak, powerless, meandering. A life focused is powerful, accomplishing much.

ILLUS. When a river overflows its banks, you end up with a shallow and smelly swamp. But if you confine a river to its banks, channeling it, you have depth and flow, energy and power. It becomes a liquid commercial highway for products and people.

Almost all who accomplish something significant in life specialize, concentrating their energies, narrowing the field. Ninety percent of the people never think through their goals. The ones who do usually reach the goals they choose. "In a race . . . only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. . . . I do not run . . . aimlessly . . . I beat my body and make it my slave" (1 Cor. 9:24, 26-27). Run to win, not just to finish! What is Paul's overarching goal? "We make it our goal to please him [the Lord]" (2 Cor. 5:9).

Even without writing down a specific life goal, if you focus on pleasing only the Lord, you accomplish valuable things. Ask: "For what am I living?" "What is my goal?"

IV. Use the Key of Determination

Fight to the finish.

Persistence! Absolutely nothing worthwhile occurs without effort, without determination. "Straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize" (vv. 13-14). Effective people refuse to quit. Great people are usually ordinary people with much determination. They don't know when to quit. Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task . . . given me . . . testifying to the gospel" (Acts 20:24).

Finish the race. Complete the task. Determination! God saves for a purpose. See it to completion. Don't quit. That idea ought not to be in our thinking! The world is full of quitters: giving up on their marriage, giving up on their children, giving up on their business, giving up on their relationships, and giving up on their dreams. There is too much whining: "Well, it just didn't work out. It was harder than we expected." Paul says, "Don't quit."

ILLUS. Dennis Byrd, an American football player, broke his neck and became a quadriplegic. He had only slight movement in his arms. Jesus Christ helped him to never quit. Through months of therapy, restoration occurred. Muscle tone returned and he walked. His doctors did not believe it was possible, but his fighting spirit, honed in competition, carried him.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul is going to live longer in eternity than in time. So, he urges us to build for the future with determination. "We will reap . . . if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9). To grow, ask: "Why am I lagging in spirit, wanting to quit?" Consider Paul's suggestions:

A. Realize your need for growth.

"All of us who are mature should take such a view of things" (v. 15). All of us need to face our faults, forget the former or past things, focus on the future, and fight to the finish. Never become complacent!

B. Be teachable and slay your ego.

"If on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you" (v. 15). Stay open. God will teach you. When you stop being teachable, you stop learning! Stop learning? You stop growing. Stop growing? You're dead spiritually!

C. Practice what you already know.

"Let us live up to what we have already attained" (v. 16). "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (1:6). What God starts, He finishes. You do your part, and He will do the rest!

CONCLUSION:

THESE ARE VALUABLE ATTITUDES FOR EFFECTIVE LIVING:

1. *Evaluation:* Face your faults. Be honest and transparent. Jesus will help you face what you fear.
2. *Elimination:* Forget the former things. Learn from the past, and then let it go.
3. *Concentration:* Focus on the future. Cut out the lower priority things. Do only a few things well.
4. *Determination:* Fight to the finish. God can strengthen your resolve, your willpower.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude
Praise and Worship in Song — "Glorify Your Name"
"Emmanuel"
"Jesus, Name Above All Names"
"Go, Tell It on the Mountain"
"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Prayer of Praise
Continue in Worship — "In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified"
"Open Our Eyes, Lord" (Invitation to Altar)
Pastoral Prayer and Organ Interlude
Family Information — Announcements
Congregational Song — "One Day"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings
Offertory
Message — "ATTITUDES FOR EFFECTIVE LIVING"
Closing Song — "Reaching for Excellence"
Benediction
Postlude

Creative Worship Ideas

Benediction

You are God's field, God's building. Everything you have and are should be concentrated on discovering this treasure. Seek first the kingdom of God in the depths of your heart, and all the rest will be given to you over and above. Stand always in the sight of God, devoid of pride and clothed in humility.

A STRATEGY FOR STRESS REDUCTION

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 4:4-9
Feb. 5, 1995

INTRO:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (v. 4). Is that really possible or only a pipe dream? Rejoicing implies that you have a healthy adjustment toward life's uncertainties. Even when life pushes us off-balance, stressing us to the maximum, in the Lord we are able to rejoice.

Paul deals with the issues of trust and anxiety. When we become fretful and concerned, our joy dissipates like morning dew. With many life details beyond our control, anxiety becomes a consuming passion, misshaping all relationships and events. We can become anxiety-driven people.

ILLUS. Dr. Walter Cavert studied typical sources of worry: 40% never happens; 30% concerns the past; 12% are needless concerns about health; 10% are petty concerns. Only 8% were legitimate concerns. Worry cannot change the past. It cannot micromanage the future. It steals joy from the present. It is not worth the energy expended or the damage caused.

M. Robert Mulholland's book *Invitation to a Journey* (pp. 87-94) describes what anxious people do: (1) They *manipulate others* near them. Others have to conform to their need to maintain control. (2) They *force order upon events* in their life. Layers of defense are built up to keep the unpredictable and the unexpected from intruding into their structured world. Pouring energy into self-protection, they fail to be agents of God's grace, love, and healing. Most sad is that these layers of protection tend to insulate them from God as well. (3) They even use God to try to control their world. They buy God off! God is made to be the author and protector of the status quo. What is the result? Anything or anyone that threatens the fragile order and control of life becomes an enemy of God.

Such people, closed within the fragile shell of their own limited order and control, are plagued with stress, anxiety, fear, doubt, and depression. Tense and troubled, they spend incredible energy to maintain control, while all nearby suffer.

I. Become Gentle

"Let your gentleness be evident to all" (v. 5).

Paul witnesses to a radical alternative: Let go of anxiety about everything by "letting go."

A. Let go of abusing. Stop beating up on those nearest and dearest to us verbally, emotionally, and possibly even physically.

ILLUS. Life's uncertainties, with its disruptive events, often make us feel like victims. Men especially build up hostility and pour out anger on those around them. The most dangerous men in American society, for example, are divorced husbands or spurned lovers. They are the ones who most commonly take gun in hand to seek revenge. Inner anger results in abusing those we love.

But becoming gentle means responding graciously because we look at life differently. We know God's long-range plan. It means we lean on the Lord, who is always near. Jesus brings the needed security, which frees us from the need to gain security by an angry control of our environment.

When Jesus Christ becomes the core of Christian existence (Christ in us, near us, for us), He salvages and redeems life's uncertainties. We can actually put up with disorder and uncertainty and, thus, be gentle toward ("forbear," cf. ASV, etc.) those near us whom we love. The basis for Christian gentleness is Christ.

B. Let go of "controlling."

Our identity and value are found in vital living through Christ, not from our ability to control. We are set free from dependence on the systems and structures that we've developed for self-worth. We no longer have to cling to our ordering of life, for we cling to Christ, the Lord of life.

ILLUS. Jimmy Johnson was the coach of the Dallas Cowboys football team. He's what I call a "control freak." He led his team to two Super Bowl championships, but he's not easy to live with. The newspaper describes him as "fastidious, fussy, tough, a stickler, impatient, and sometimes hyper." In his effort to control his destiny, he sacrificed a marriage. (*USA Today*—Jan. 21, 1994).

Verses 4 and 5 describe the foundation for rejoicing, which is learning to lean on God, who enables us to be gentle toward those whom we love.

II. Download Through Prayer

Each concept has a different slice of meaning: "prayer," "petition," and "present your requests" (v. 6).

A. Prayer.

The Greek word focuses on our inner attitude characterized by (1) open receptiveness and (2) pliable responsiveness. It is an orientation toward God at the deepest levels of our being.

ILLUS. Thomas Kelly describes it as "an inner discipline of life . . . which . . . leads the heart to swing like the needle to the polestar of the soul." Just as the compass needle automatically swings north, so our spirit should be magnetically drawn toward God.

B. Petition.

This is an attitude acknowledging that we are powerless to change things. God alone is adequate and able to work. Paul calls us to admit the insufficiency of our resources and skills in responding to the pressures of life. Prayer and petition are not our reactions to circumstances. They are habits or attitudes of the heart by which we confront the hard events of life.

C. Present your requests to God.

If we have not first entered into the posture of re-

ceptivity, responsiveness, and dependence, then our requests will tend to be narrowly focused. Our agenda will take center stage. But if we pray as Paul teaches, our requests will begin to bridge the gap between our desires and God's purposes. When this happens, our requests become the means of off-loading anxiety. The need to control will die, and our more gentle self (Christlike) will emerge.

We will begin to place the situations of our lives into the deeper matrix of God's presence and purpose and to release our need to control things.

III. Download with Thanksgiving

"It is the joyful release of our life and being to God in absolute trust, without demands, conditions, or reservations" (Mulholland, p. 91). If gentleness is worked out in a posture of prayer and petition, thanksgiving results and we rejoice in the Lord.

ILLUS. Dan Jensen skated on the American Olympic team in the 500- and 1,000-meter races at Lillehammer. Though he held world records in both races, he won no medal at three previous Olympics. Yet, he maintained an attitude of gratitude throughout. He focused on the joy of his wife and new baby daughter. He gave thanks for a long and spectacular career, refusing to focus on the failures. In Lillehammer in 1994, he finally won Olympic gold. Keeping his focus on thanksgiving helped him let go of the past.

IV. Enjoy the Bonus of Peace

"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts [emotional/feeling side] and your minds [rational/willful side] in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

A. The bonus of peace is beyond rational explanation (v. 7).

It exists in people who, according to all human expectations and considering what they are experiencing by way of life pressures, should not be at peace. Peace is a result of God at work. That is the only way to explain it. Secular counselors cannot produce peace. It is beyond "works." It is all of "grace."

Jesus' peace guards your heart and mind against the return of anxiety and the need to control life. Formerly you sought security through your ability to control things. Now, downloading by means of prayer allows you to stay free and calm. This peace resembles a platoon on guard against the return of anxiety. The peace of God issues a warning. You can pray again, keeping anxiety at bay. There is no problem too big for God's power or too small for His concern.

B. The bonus of peace is secured by right thinking (v. 8).

Think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

ILLUS. A computer is only as good as its operating chips, its software program, and the bits of data that are entered into it. Without a software program, the data will never be stored and organized in the RAM (Random Access Memory). Without data, the RAM will sit there all day and do you no good.

You function in similar fashion. Your brain is like the computer chip. Your conscience—that God-given capacity to know right and wrong and the sense that you ought to do right—could be compared to the software program. Your thinking is comparable to the millions of bits of data that are entered into the computer.

The old Gaither children's song says it well: "Your mind is a computer whose input you can choose." What is the implication? Garbage in; garbage out! Paul urges us: Think about the right stuff; your peace depends on it. Paul concludes with a call to a mentoring relationship: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (v. 9).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude
Praise and Worship in Song "Lift Up Your Heads"
"Let There Be Glory and Honor and Praises"
"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
"Great Is the Lord"
"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"
Congregational Greeting Recognize Visitors
Family Information Announcements
Scripture Reading Luke 10:38-42
"In His Presence"
"Abba, Father"
Choir Special "In Holy Reverence, Lord, We Come"
Open Altar "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"
Pastoral Prayer/Offertory Prayer
Offertory
Message "A STRATEGY FOR STRESS REDUCTION"
Benediction
Postlude

Creative Worship Ideas

Offertory Prayer

Teach us, O God, to use this world without abusing it and to receive the things we need without losing our dependence on You. Put into our hearts the willingness to give wholeheartedly to Kingdom building.

Congregation Interaction Time

Take a few minutes early in the service to introduce the sermon topic—stress reduction. Using an overhead projector, ask them to call out things that they or others commonly do to reduce stress. Build a list of 15-20 items. It will speak for itself. Stress is a given in most cultures. It matters not whether one is rich or poor, educated or not, white collar or blue. Encourage them that you are going to open the Word and teach them "God's Plan" to cut stress.

FOUR KEYS TO UNLOCK CONTENTMENT

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 4:10-13, 19
Feb. 12, 1995

INTRO:

An American dad wrote: "When our children go to McDonald's Restaurant, they always want the same thing. They don't want food, but the prize. The prize may be worth only 10 cents, but getting it is all that matters. McDonald's calls it the 'Happy Meal.'

"You're not just buying french fries, McNuggets, and a dinosaur stamp; you're buying happiness. Their advertisements convince children that their hearts are restless till they find their rest in a 'Happy Meal!' But the 'happy' in a 'Happy Meal' wears off. It's an illusion.

"You would think a child would catch on, but it doesn't happen. When the excitement wears off, they need a new fix, another 'Happy Meal'" (John Ortberg, *Christianity Today,* May 17, 1993).

When we get older, our "Happy Meals" simply get more expensive. We forget that contentment is not instant. People say, "If I could only win the lottery!" But winners and wealthy alike tell you that winning—be it money or a job or a spouse—doesn't bring contentment. Contentment is a learned attitude (v. 11), not fulfilling our desires. For desires, once fed, tend to grow on us. Contentment is learning independence from circumstances versus finding ideal circumstances. In Philippians, Paul learned this, and now he shares his "keys" to contentment.

I. Avoid Comparisons

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (v. 11). Our tendency is to look around and compare our circumstances to others'. Comparing self to others always brings discontent. Why?

ILLUS. Have you ever gone to a "Street of Dreams" where they have model homes, and then gone home to your suddenly terrible "shack"? Have you ever spent $500 fixing up your car, only to see a new one in your neighbor's drive? Have you been treated respectfully at work, only to come home to a spouse who puts you down? Have you worked hard all week, then had sick children, and Sunday morning finds you "frazzled and frumpy," sitting next to "Miss Beauty Queen" with perfect hair and a happy mood?

The comparison game is the pits, for you can always find someone who makes more money, who has greater opportunities, who has fewer problems, and who gets more breaks. If you are "learning to be content regardless," that should not affect your happiness. Paul says: "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Paul looks up, not around; he refuses to waste energy making comparisons.

There are three misconceptions about happiness:

A. You must have what others have to be happy. Children say, "But, Mom, everybody has one of these." This is the myth behind all fads and fashions.

B. I must be liked by everyone to be happy. Not so. People who march to a different beat are often more content. It is not the number of people who like you that is the key issue. Rather, does God like what you are doing and do you like yourself?

C. Having more will make me happy. If this were true, then billionaires would be the happiest people in the world. In fact, statistics show that the wealthiest people have as many or more problems and brokenness than poorer people, not fewer.

ILLUS. Someone asked Howard Hughes, "How much money does it take to make you happy?"

He answered, "Just a little bit more."

Paul taught that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). Comparison to others makes us want what others have. It is always counterproductive. Stop comparing!

II. Adjust to Change

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty . . . well fed or hungry . . . in plenty or in want" (v. 12). Life is often a series of shifts from one situation to its opposite—a movement from being up to being down: physically, emotionally, financially, relationally, and mentally. Dealing with the swing—adjusting to change—brings contentment. Learning to adapt and flex makes life relatively content. Paul wrote during his house arrest, "I am acquainted with all circumstances" (v. 12, NBV), and he had learned to be independent of them. Paul's attitude was, "I choose not to be a victim. No matter what people do to me, they are not going to control my life."

ILLUS. A boy was kidnapped in California as a four-year-old and raised by the woman who did it. She taught him, "I am your mother."

Upon finding his real family at 18, he said, "I am choosing not to think about the negatives of the past. I am being positive and moving on. I am not going to let my past cripple me now."

ILLUS. People ask, "How are you?"

We commonly say, "Pretty well, under the circumstances."

Someone wisely retorted: "What are you doing under them? Christians should resist getting 'under' the circumstances." Absolutely true!

There are three kinds of circumstances: (1) ones I can control and do (i.e., If I'm hungry, I eat; if I am cold, I put on a sweater); (2) ones I can control and do not (perhaps because of complacency or laziness); and (3) ones I cannot control (when things are out of our hands). We need contentment to relax and trust God.

III. Draw on Christ's Power

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (v. 13). The contented person has *learned* to

draw on Christ's power. This is not automatic. With Christ's help you can learn to handle life. If you are depending on your own strength, you get tired. Life wears you out.

What is it that you need to control in your life? Time? Mouth? Temper? A bad habit? "There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength" (v. 13, JB). By faith and by prayer, Jesus brings self-control that allows you to stand up to life. Adjust to the unexpected changes that life throws at us through the power of Christ at work in us; this is contentment.

IV. Trust God to Meet Your Needs

"God will meet all your needs according to his . . . riches" (v. 19). God is willing to do much. Learn the biblical promises and appropriate them by faith. Rest in them.

Do you remember Matt. 6:31-33? "Do not worry . . . What shall we eat . . . drink . . . wear? . . . pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Jesus says, "If you are unhappy and unsatisfied, it is because you are not seeking the Kingdom as a first priority."

We often seek fulfillment in all the wrong places, running from this to that, looking for something to satisfy. We run from relationship to relationship, looking for love and security. We run from job to job and from hobby to sport to recreation, looking in fads, in therapy, in seminars, looking for the "key."

God has laid it out clearly. You are made with a vacuum in your life, and nothing will fill that void except God. None of these commonly pursued things fill the void: possessions, people, pleasures, prestige, popularity. They don't last. So, if you are discontented, it most likely means that Jesus Christ is not the center of your life. When you are not contented, it means you are probably looking to something else to satisfy. Jesus came to provide life, and life that is abundant (see John 10:10, KJV). But you have to learn to trust to become a contented person.

CONCLUSION:

What key do you need to learn?

1. Avoiding comparisons?

Remember that it only makes you jealous, envious, prideful, miserable. It is faith in God that allows you to accept the difficult circumstances that come your way. Remember: difficulty does not mean you have been abandoned by God. In fact, it could mean that God is hard at work chiseling you into Christ's image.

2. Adjusting to change?

Circumstances will rarely be perfect. Paul calls us to learn to be independent of circumstances. This means that when the low times come, our spirit will keep steady because we are anchored to the Lord. Life means change. Our task is not to resist change, but to put our hand in Christ's and walk forcefully through it.

3. Drawing on Christ's power?

By faith and prayer, we may rise above the hurts and losses of life. Face life through Christ, who is at work in us. It is a privilege of the redeemed. If we fall short of appropriating the resources, that's our fault. When God says, "I have a spiritual warehouse full of 'capability' and "copeability,' we cannot blame Him if it sits there unused.

4. Trusting God to meet your needs?

Are you tired emotionally and spiritually? It probably is a sign that you need to quit trying to do all in your own power. Thus, God can infuse you with His power. Remember Paul's insight that "[His] power is perfected in [our] weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NASB, Weymouth). Let us confess our weakness so that, in Christ, we can become strong (12:10).

Contentment is our privilege. Contentment is only four basic steps away. These spiritual principles can be implemented by any Christian. Since this is the case, let us delay no longer.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude
Praise and Worship in Song "Crown Him"
"You Are the Mighty King"
"All Hail King Jesus"
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving
Song "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"
Congregational Greeting Recognize Visitors
Family Information Announcements
Baby Dedication
Special Music "Children Are a Treasure from the Lord"
Song "God Will Take Care of You"
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings
Offertory "Give Thanks"
Message "FOUR KEYS TO UNLOCK CONTENTMENT"
Closing Song "Trusting Jesus"
Benediction
Postlude

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Focus on praise to the Father for His goodness and faithfulness to us and for specific blessings that we enjoy from His hand.

Benediction

And now, as we return to the duties of life, let us go in the confidence of Your protection that we may come to the end of each day in peace and happiness.

Illustration

Pastor, come dressed for church today in the worst clothing you own. Plan to wear it all morning at the services and Sunday School. You are going to become a living illustration of how we fall into the trap of making comparisons. In your sermon, you could apply the truth that their contentment with you and your message should NOT be based on what you wore into the pulpit this day.

GOD WILL MEET YOUR NEEDS

by Leslie Krober
Phil. 4:14-20
Feb. 19, 1995

INTRO:

Between Christmas and New Year's Day, I commonly do two things: write thank-you notes for gifts and go through my file of receipts to get ready to pay taxes. The Philippian letter is a thank-you note and encouragement. Paul writes: "Epaphroditus got here with your gift. Thank you; now let me encourage you."

Trying to encourage them, Paul teaches one of the greatest biblical promises ever: "My God will meet all your needs" (v. 19). We know many Christian people who still have needs. Why do Christians still have needs if verse 19 is true? Is God a liar? Is this promise no longer valid? It is valid. However, this promise is not for everyone. It doesn't even apply to all Christians. As with most promises, there is a premise, a precondition! God says, "If you do this, I will do that."

Many people want to take the promise of verse 19 and apply it to their lives while avoiding the premise of verses 14-18. You cannot claim verse 19 unless you are doing verse 18, namely, making "an acceptable sacrifice." These Christians had already given sacrificially. Thus, Paul said, "God will meet all your needs." What is the premise upon which the promise is based? Generosity!

I. What Is the Premise? Christians Are Generous

Solomon affirmed it: "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed" (Prov. 11:25). Jesus taught it too: "Give, and it will be given to you. . . . with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38). It's our option: if we be generous, God will be too. We must first be generous. God has no obligation to meet my needs. Such a promise only takes effect when I live according to the premise. You can short-circuit God's blessing by being stingy. To counteract it, Paul gives us four results of generosity.

A. Generosity is an encouragement to others.

Paul was the encouragee; they were the encouragers. Again and again the Christians gave, even though they were poor (vv. 14-16).

ILLUS. A pastor had served three churches faithfully for 21 years without any break. Each one had grown significantly and brought extra burdens in leading and caring for the sheep. When the church board realized what was happening to their pastor, they generously gave him a two-month leave of absence with pay to go thousands of miles home to be with family. They also generously paid for train fare to take the trip. The physical and emotional tiredness was addressed. Their generosity greatly encouraged the pastor and his wife. They came back ready to serve faithfully once again.

Christians who give generously have a wider ministry than normal. Paul calls it a partnership with him in his work (Phil. 1:3-5). Without actually being there, they were still part of it. You become a full partner of whatever you support. Not all can teach, preach, or cross cultural barriers. Yet when we give, we widen our ministry through others' ministry skills. As we tithe to our local church, everything that happens is ultimately part of our ministry!

B. Generosity makes me more like Jesus.

In fact, the most Christlike thing you can do is give. Jesus sacrificially gave all His life. The Philippians had a reputation for generosity. Paul wrote about them in his second letter to Corinth (8:1-5).

C. Generosity is an investment in eternity.

Paul said: "Though I appreciate your gifts, what makes me happiest is the well-earned reward you will have because of your kindness" (v. 17, TLB). Giving benefits the giver as well as the receiver. There is an eternal reward for generosity in this life. It's like accumulating interest in an eternal bank account.

Spiritually, Jesus said there are rewards for faithful following, loving, giving, going—30-, 60-, and 100-fold. What's the point? It's like you have an account in heaven, and every loving act, every unselfish deed, every gift given, God takes note of in your account in heaven. Every gift is recorded, and it is rewarded. Giving shapes eternity. The "Bank of Heaven" pays interest.

ILLUS. Suppose I were to go to my bank and ask how much my account earned in interest last year. The banker says, "Well, how much did you deposit?"

I'd say, "Well, nothing!"

The banker says, "My friend, we have a rule. You don't make any interest if you don't make a deposit."

It's true in the Christian life too. How do you store up treasure in heaven? By giving time, talent, and treasure. Paul wrote to Timothy: "Command them . . . to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves . . . for the coming age" (1 Tim. 6:18-19). Your giving is an investment for the future. It is being noted and rewarded by God.

D. Generosity is a sacrifice to God.

"[Your gifts] . . . are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (v. 18). Do you want to please God? Of course! Sacrificial giving makes God smile. Why? Because it is done in faith. When we give sacrificially, not knowing the future impact it might have on our security, we express faith in God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6). Nothing else shows genuine dependence on God. Nothing else is so much like Jesus. Sacrificial giving is being like Jesus. It pleases God.

ILLUS. In Old Testament times, when a thank offering was given, either it was burned with incense, or a liquid was poured on the flames, making steam. Everyone in

the Temple area could smell it. Paul says: A sacrificial gift is like that to God—a sweet-smelling aroma" (v. 18, NKJV). It is similar to the impact of a favorite perfume.

Let's review. Generosity encourages others; makes me more like Christ; invests in eternity; and is a sacrifice pleasing to God.

The premise is that we are to be generous. The premise always precedes the promise. You can't claim verse 19 without doing verses 14-18. Meet the premise? Claim the promise!

II. What Is the Promise? God Meets All Your Needs

A. What is the source?

"And *my* God will . . ." (v. 19, italics added). Here is a personal God who takes responsibility for needs. You are not unknown to God. In fact, when Jesus hung on the Cross, you were on His mind.

B. What is the scope?

". . . will meet all your needs." You can count on the promise. God will do it! Many people misuse this verse. It doesn't cover the following:

1. The consequences of laziness. "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). In other words, "No work, no eat" and "Sloth forfeits 'broth.'"
2. All your wants. If you "ask with wrong motives" so as to spend it "on your pleasures" (James 4:3), then forget it. Wants are not always the same as needs. The promise does cover legitimate needs!

Financial? Yes, you have a right to ask God to providentially meet your money needs. Physical? Yes! Relational? Absolutely! Emotional? You are crying out to the greatest psychologist ever.

C. What is the supply?

"According to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." It's like giving you a signed blank check so that you can fill in the amount. That's more than just a check for $1,000. Paul said, "Remember . . . sows sparingly . . . reap sparingly . . . sows generously . . . reap generously . . . in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:6, 8).

CONCLUSION:

In World War II, Missionary Darlene Rose was imprisoned by the Japanese. She had malaria. One day she watched the courtyard from her cell. Prisoners were allowed to walk there. Darlene saw one lady sneak over to the fence covered with Honolulu creeper. Someone was handing bananas in to her. She'd hide them under her sarong.

Darlene was starving to death at 80 pounds. She was being beaten and was near a breaking point. She could smell those bananas. She got on her knees and cried: "Lord, I am not asking for many; I want just one banana." But she began to rationalize, seeing no way that God could get her a banana.

Shortly, a Japanese camp commander from her former camp came to visit her. She had witnessed to him, and he had become her friend. After he left, the guards returned to her cell, opened the door, and threw them in. You know what they were—bananas. God brought Darlene 92 bananas.

Those who make acceptable sacrifices (the premise) can count on needs being met (the promise) according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"There Is a Redeemer"
	"We Will Glorify"
	"To God Be the Glory"
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Continue in Worship	"He Is Exalted"
	"I Exalt Thee"
	"Lord, I Lift Your Name on High"
Scripture	Ps. 34:1-9
	"The Lord Is Good"
Open Altar	"Seek Ye First"
Pastoral Prayer	
Dedication of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory	
Message	"GOD WILL MEET YOUR NEEDS"
Closing Song	"The Battle Is the Lord's"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

Father, You truly meet our needs. We thank You for Your gracious mercy toward us and Your abundant blessings. Inspire us, we pray, to share our blessings from hearts that are touched with gratefulness and humility. May we give freely from the cup that You have filled to overflowing. Give us eyes to see the needs You mean for us to meet.

Illustration

Purchase as many bananas as you can afford, 92 if you are able. Place them on the Communion table or another table in front for the entire service. Just prior to the benediction, tell the children, youth, and senior citizens that they may take a banana home with them. It will remind them of Darlene Rose's story (see closing illustration in sermon).

Offertory Prayer

Lord, be so kind to us as to hold up a mirror so that we could see ourselves truly, as You see us. For we believe that if we see as You see, we cannot help but be driven to our knees in prayer. Once we have prayed, we will rise to serve You in newness of life. Amen.

Benediction

You, our gracious Provider, are a Promise Keeper. Your reputation is staked on it. You've told us that our generosity triggers Your caretaking. Move our hearts to support Your cause generously. Not for selfish or manipulative reasons, but so that You may show yourself in grand ways in our world. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

GOD'S DREAM OF A HOLY PEOPLE"

by Leslie Krober
1 Pet. 1:13—2:3
Feb. 26, 1995

INTRO:

In Michigan, a Laotian-American family was killed when their van was deliberately driven into a semitruck head-on. The parents had received $15,000 from Pong, the man driving the van. They had promised him their daughter, Kai, in marriage. But Kai wanted to choose her own husband and resisted marrying Pong.

Her parents were still living the Laotian way with arranged marriages. Rejected as her fiancé, Pong deliberately sped up and drove into the truck, taking the lives of seven people (AP News, Feb. 2, 1994).

The parents resisted assimilation into a foreign culture and lost their lives. We may not commend the concept of a "bride price," but immigrant families probably should hold on to much of their culture. The same is true for Christians.

Peter says we should be like "strangers" in this world (1:1, 17; 2:11). For we are a people who belong to God. Thus, we live in allegiance to God and our heavenly home. We are a distinctive people: in loyalties, in values, in attitudes, and in actions. This uniqueness (not oddness or weirdness) is evidence of one's alien status. As such, Peter says it should never be surrendered.

But how do we resist assimilation? How do we turn back to living as God would have us live if we have been caught up in worldly values? Peter suggests four adjustments that we must make.

I. Make Mental Adjustments: Hope

"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled" (1:13). Prepare? Holy living is *not* automatic. God changes you as you cooperate with Him. No "zapping" occurs!

ILLUS. The 1994 Winter Olympics were intriguing because of two figure skaters from the United States: Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. Before the games, Harding was suspected of being involved in a plot to wound Kerrigan by having a hired man club her on the knee. Kerrigan was injured for several weeks, but neither she nor Harding lost the focus or stopped the heavy schedule of training. They had already worked a young lifetime to prepare themselves. They were not letting wounds or legal charges keep them down or out of the Olympics. The same kind of mental tenacity needs to exist in Christians growing up in holiness.

A. Prepare your mind. Think properly.

ILLUS. Dr. Larry Crabb points out the difference between self-discipline and self-control. Self-discipline imposes upon your inner urges a regularity you don't really feel like imposing, but you do it in the interest of a higher purpose. It is a response to duty and God's law. But self-control does what you really want to do, as opposed to denying what you want to do. Self-control is based on divinely aided inner change. When changed by the Holy Spirit, one is motivated to do God's will. Self-discipline is based on controlling bad impulses, but self-control is based on pursuing good.

The forces from which we must wrest control are: (1) worldly influences, values, and beliefs; (2) peer pressures to conform; (3) satanic pressuring; and (4) our own fallen, fleshly desires. "The empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers" (1:18). This "empty way" is so much a part of who we are that we do not easily see how dissatisfying it is to God. Yet holy people must see it.

B. Hope in grace, not works.

Our tendency is to do in the spiritual realm what we do in the natural realm—work harder, trying to be holy enough to please God. We can never be holy enough. Only perfection fully pleases God. Thus, our need for grace, which is God being merciful toward us because of our hope in Jesus.

A second adjustment to bring about holiness is to:

II. Make Lifestyle Adjustments: Obey (1:14-16)

A. Do not conform to the evil desire you had. Become a nonconformist; stand out in the crowd.

ILLUS. Chameleon lizards have the ability to adjust their skin color so as to blend with their environment. This protects them from various enemies. Christians often are tempted to take on the colors of their environment so as not to be seen as "odd." But blending with our world is a form of denying Christ. (Note 2 Cor. 6:17 from *The Message:* "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself.")

The world needs role models who live God's way without apology. They need them like ships need lighthouses, so that they can know where to turn when they get into trouble. Before Christ, you may have let desires dominate you, in part because of ignorance of how destructive and displeasing they were to God. You didn't know God's Word (1:25). Now you know better.

B. Be holy in all you do as obedient children.

Peter assumes born-again people want to obey. Your obedience may not yet be what it should, but in your heart you do want to obey. Holiness is doing moral things in the hubbub of life, while we rub shoulders, stub toes, split our fingernails, and sometimes fall on our faces. In this second adjustment, we mimic God.

The third step toward holiness of life is to:

III. Make Emotional Adjustments: Fear (vv. 17-21)

"Live . . . as strangers here in reverent fear" (v. 17).

A. Learn to fear God.

Why? Rewards will not come easily. You cannot earn points with God. Only genuine, heart-driven obedience gains His affirmation, "Well done." God has no favorites. He is impartial. He is fair! Everything we might trust in

is worthless: (1) family identity, roots, ethnic origin; (2) power and prestige; (3) wealth and influence.

B. Accept your minority status as a child of God.

We are aliens, strangers, foreigners heading home! As such, you will always be somewhat on the outside of what's happening because your heart is set on heaven. Your speech, your attitudes, your values, your lifestyle will isolate you from many in the world. It can't be helped. The majority are not willing to let go of this world. Thus, as a disciple of Jesus, you will most often be in the minority. That's all right.

C. Accept your obligation to God.

Yours was a bloody redemption. It cost Jesus' life. You cannot just wink at it and keep living the way you did before. You are obligated to God to be holy.

Our fourth step toward being holy people is to:

IV. Make Attitudinal Adjustments: Stop (2:1)

God's holiness confronts our attitudes. We are not free to do good deeds but hold arrogant attitudes.

A. Clean up your attitude.

Peter gives five pointers: (1) Stop being hateful; (2) Quit trying to fool people; (3) Start being sincere; (4) Don't be jealous; (5) Don't say cruel things about others (2:1, CEV).

ILLUS. Pastor D. James Kennedy made famous the story of Alexander the Great, who was dealing with some of his cowardly soldiers. They had run from the enemy. One of the cowards was named Alexander, the same as he. This brought a rage from him. He could not stand to have anyone with his name being cowardly. Lifting the young man by his robe, he shouted: "Young man, either change your conduct or change your name." Jesus says: "You call yourself Christian? Either change your name or change your attitudes."

B. Make a deliberate effort to change.

Attitudes are often the last stronghold of Satan. As ingrained habits, they demand honesty from others and self to uncover them. Verses 23-25 imply that the Word of God can bring this attitudinal change.

CONCLUSION:

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2).

ILLUS. Producers often have representatives in grocery stores who offer free food samples. They use good psychology. They know that if you like the taste, you are more likely to buy it. They hook you.

Peter is saying, "You have already examined and seen know how good the Lord is" (v. 3, NCV). You have a "taste" of what the Lord can do for you. Based on what you've tasted, be like a hungry newborn with a God-designed passion to grow.

A. "Crave."

Don't satisfy your hunger for truth, don't quench your thirst for knowledge on spiritual sugar and chocolate. Don't fill up on Christian literature and good psychology before you get your main course of meat and milk from the Bible.

B. "Pure spiritual milk."

Get teaching that is unpolluted by humanistic concepts. Human teachers can elaborate and apply but must not replace God's ideas with man's. Keep biblical to the core. Things that are revealed and inspired by the Spirit are what you need first.

C. "Grow up in your salvation."

Staying as a baby Christian is against God's "spiritual DNA" plan. Seek whatever help you need from the church to grow up. Peter reminds us (1:22) that we have sincere love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This being the case, let's lean on one another daily for help in growing up to be like Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Praise and Worship in Song	"I Will Enter His Gates"
	"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
	"Praise the Name of Jesus"
	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
Congregational Greeting	Recognize Visitors
Family Information	Announcements
We Continue in Worship	"You Shall Be Holy"
	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
	"Holy Ground"
Opening Prayer	
Choir	"In His Presence"
Open Altar	"Surely the Presence of the Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory	
Message	"GOD'S DREAM OF A HOLY PEOPLE"
Congregational Song	"You Shall Be Holy"
Benediction	
Postlude	

Creative Worship Ideas

Benediction

Help us today, Lord, to discover Your good, perfect, and acceptable will and to focus all of our desire and energy upon doing it.

Illustration

Dialogue with your people about their ethnic heritage. 98% of North Americans, for example, have come from other countries. Have people stand and tell their country of origin and how long their family has been in your country. The point you wish to make is that Christians are to retain an alien's attitude: holding things loosely, remembering that they are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

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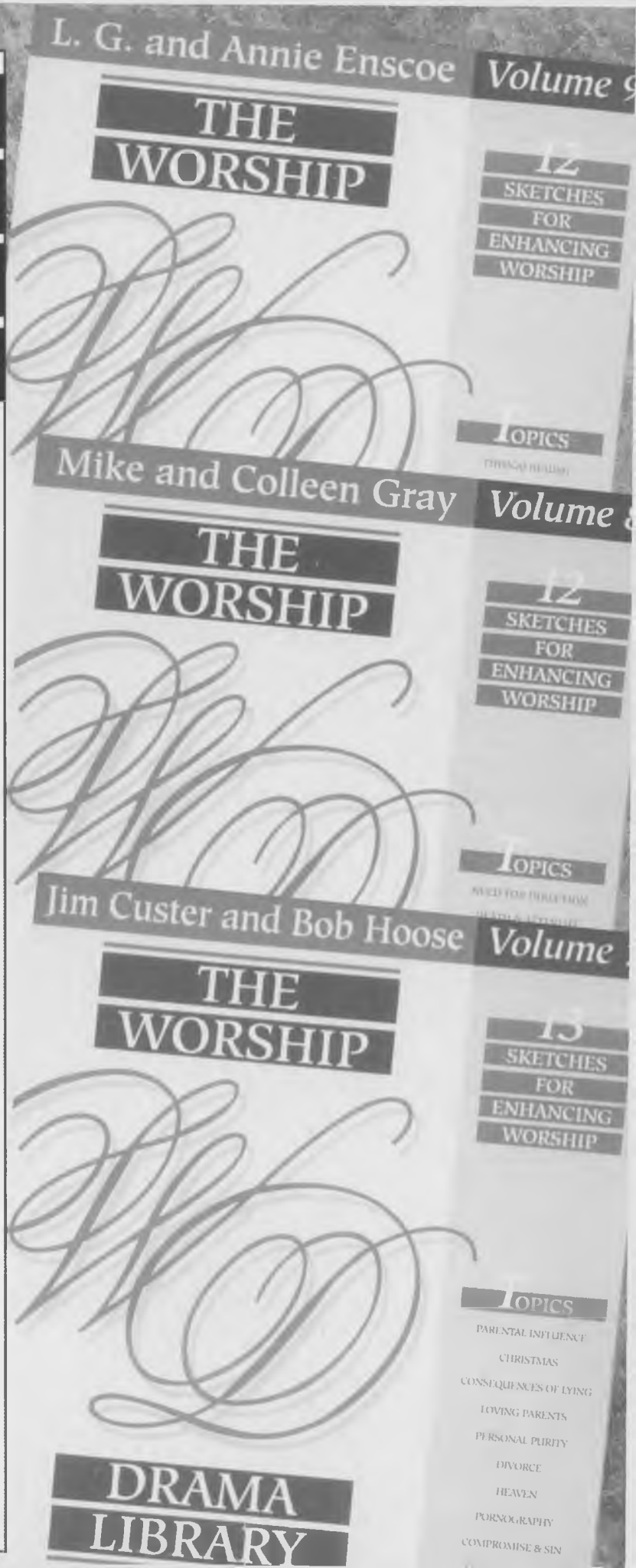

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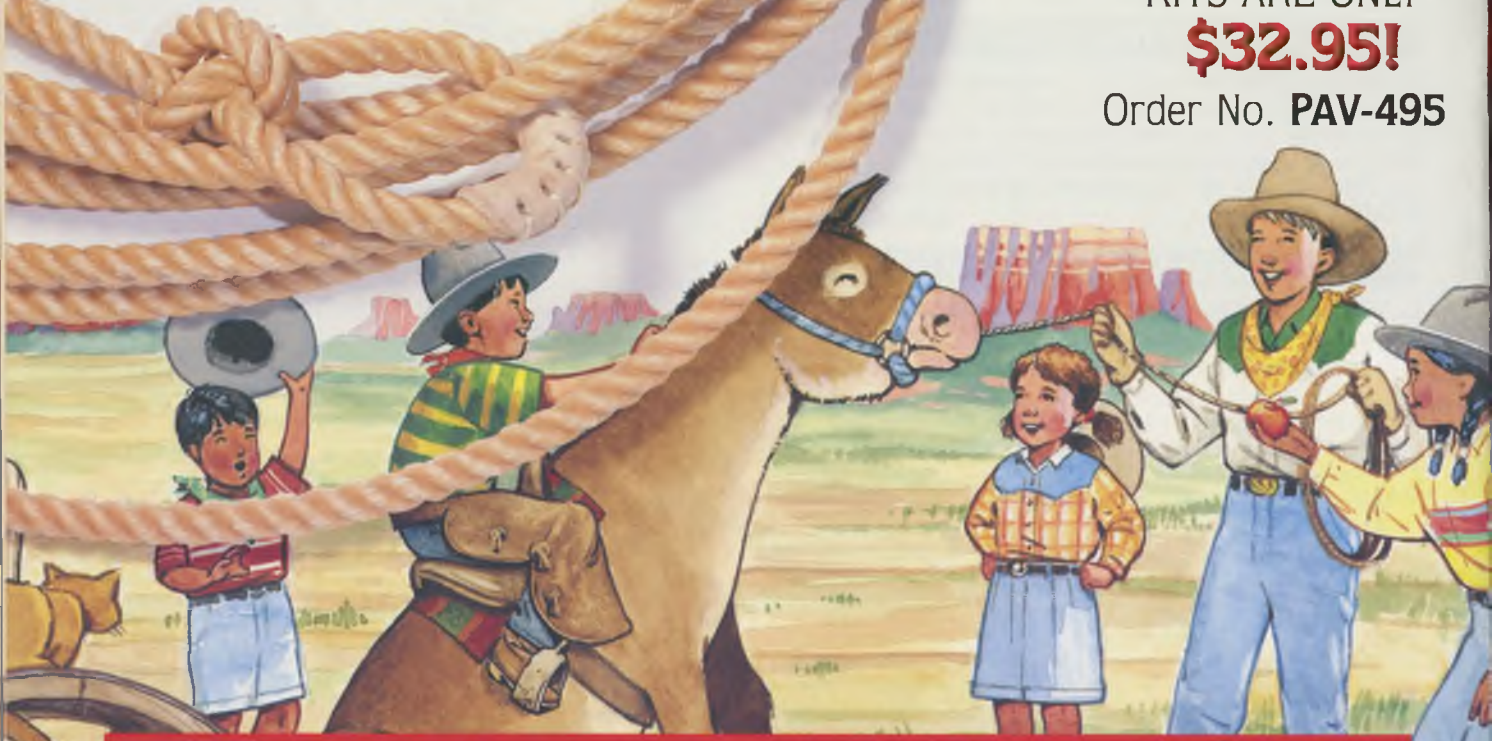

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