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Randal E. Denny (Editor)
Olivet Nazarene University

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THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

MARCH / APRIL / MAY 1996

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

BEAUTIFUL BAPTISM

WHATEVER HAPPENED
TO AUTHORITY?

PIRATES IN
THE CHURCH?





THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

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Serve One Another

I remember seeing in some recent magazine a piece on volunteerism in America. Happily, I recall one statistic: "Of places Americans volunteer to work, rank of the church: Number One."

That doesn't surprise me, however, because serving one another springs from the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, the Bible says, "Serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13).

Dealing with the intruding telephone calls of a parsonage, I vacillated from delight to despair, perhaps in some proportion to frequency. While I was trying to learn how to adjust to that disturbing demand, I happened to visit in the study of my friend, Rev. Maurice Palmquist. He had taped to his telephone this simple reminder: **"This is an opportunity for cheerful Christian service."** That jolted me back to reality—we who were called, prepared, and ordained into ministry have been set apart especially to "serve one another in love."

If we follow Jesus at all, He will lead us into "opportunit[ies] for cheerful Christian service." That's who we are and that's what we do. The Lord has equipped us to serve one another: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

I have been a pastor for nearly 37 years. I have listened to many ministerial conversations and visited many parsonage families. Most pastors seek to serve their church, but a few seek to have the church serve them.

The spirit of legalism drives some—the "oughts" and "shoulds." Any service rendered is given out of duty or expectation, maybe even according to "job descriptions."

The spirit of license affects some—



by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

independent of their people, chafing under the pastoral role, feeling trapped by some "system." Any service is given grudgingly, tinged with rebellion.

Yet, most pastors and their precious families are driven by love—eager to serve one another, wishing somehow to be more effective, to reach farther to touch more people, to be more like Jesus in giving encouragement and help. Any service is given as to Jesus himself from a heart of surrendered love. When you love someone enough to serve him or her, you don't want to hurt or disappoint, to exploit or backbite, to devour or compete. The Holy Spirit works through us, enabling us to "serve one another in love."

During a horrible famine in India, a young Swedish visitor wrote a letter from India. The closing words described the forlorn situation from his perspective: "It is so awful that it is a denial of God."

Another letter was sent from a traveler visiting the same area of the famine. Observing the sad scene, he closed his letter: "In the midst of so much pain, your volunteers seem like the face of God." He had seen volunteers—servants of Jesus, serving the

most unfortunate out of love for the Lord. "Serve one another in love."

Pastors, if we have a servant's heart, our people will catch on and minister way beyond our own reach. One of our ladies serves away from public view by giving free hair-cuts. Another lady serves a family enfeebled by the cruel tricks of aging. Yet another knitted caps for the cold homeless of our city. One man and his wife give away thousands of Bibles around the world. One man paints houses of people who need help. Another has spent many hours caring for our church buildings. Still another teaches a class of eager, lively pupils. One lady sends cards of encouragement to the sick and shut-in. On and on the list goes and grows—seen and unseen, but all known to Jesus!

Marian was born and raised in European aristocracy. Her marriages took her to Vienna, Hollywood, Germany, and Paris as a socialite. Through meeting Dr. Albert Schweitzer, she ended up in Lambaré, in the heart of Africa, as a servant of Jesus. Born to luxury, Marian changed bandages, bathed babies, fed lepers—and found herself in Christ. Nothing had satisfied her until she met Jesus and gave everything to Him in service.

When Marian died in 1979, the *New York Times* carried her obituary, which included her statement: "Albert Schweitzer said there are two classes of people in this world—the helpers and the nonhelpers. I'm a helper."

What a great obituary! We find ourselves by losing ourselves in service for the King of Kings. Why shouldn't we serve one another? After all, we are family!

The Lord's Supper

by Alden Aikens

Professor,
Canadian Nazarene College, Calgary

(Leader)

"The Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread . . . and said,

"This is My body . . ."

Also . . . the cup, after [supper], saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (1 Cor. 11:23-25, MLB).

The Lord's Supper is a sacred event. It is a sacrament instituted by the Lord Jesus, an outward sign of inward grace.

We eat the bread, which represents His body broken for us.

We drink from the cup, the contents of which represent His blood shed for us.

These outward signs are for those who have experienced inward saving grace. It is also for those who would wish in this moment to receive and testify to inward grace. If you did not come into this service experiencing God's saving grace, you can if, in these moments, you humbly confess your need for Jesus. Invite Him into your life, taking these elements as testimony of grace received even here and now.

This event is not for those who feel worthy in themselves. It is for those who share the attitude expressed in the words of Charles Wesley:

*No good word, or work, or thought,
Bring I to gain Thy grace;
Pardon I accept, unbought, . . .*

*Friend of sinners,
Spotless Lamb,
Thy Blood was shed for me.*

(Methodist Hymn and Tune Book,
Toronto, 1894, No. 332)

(Leader)

It is fitting that we center our hearts and minds on the precious blood of Christ.

Would you please bow your head

and open your heart to give thanks to God for Jesus, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for you.

(Organ or piano playing softly and *without* announcement from "There Is a Fountain," No. 255, *Sing to the Lord*, 1993.)

(Leader)

Amen.

"[You] know that [you] were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19, KJV).

"But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13, see KJV).

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7, NKJV).

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9, KJV).

Let us pray together.

"Eternal God and gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for this blessed ordinance, this precious legacy, this grand token of Your love. Now we offer to You this bread and the fruit of the vine. We offer to You these emblems, and we ask You to sanctify to Your holy purpose this bread and this fruit of the vine so that as we receive them, our spirits shall be nourished by our crucified and risen Savior. Give to us, O Lord, the grace that shall enable us to more deeply know Jesus in the fellowship of His sufferings and in the power of His resurrection. In His holy name we pray. Amen."

You will receive the bread. Please hold until all have received. You will receive the cup. Please hold until all have received. We will eat together and drink together. As the elements are passed, let this quiet time of meditation be one in which your heart responds to what God may say to you.

(As the elements are being distributed, the organist, or pianist, plays softly [these all from *Sing to the Lord*]:)

433 "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"

131 "Alleluia" (The organist plays through once, then the leader leads the congregation in singing this [*without* announcement], probably through twice.)

135 "Lord, We Praise You"

478 "Nearer, Still Nearer"

463 "More Love to Thee"

(The selections are carefully chosen, hopefully to express what the people feel: gratitude for the often neglected subject of the precious blood of Jesus. The songs are in this order so as to avoid "heavy" key changes.)

(Leader) (after all have received elements)

"The body of our Lord Jesus, which was broken for you; eat with thanksgiving."

(after all have eaten)

"The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you; drink with reverence and gratitude."

(Leader) (after a *very* brief silence)

"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, . . . through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21, NASB).



Beautiful Baptism

Editorial note: M. L. Gladden, a steelworker on the open hearth, taught a large adult class for many years. His church stood at the center of his active life. He was the beloved father-in-law of the editor. This article came from his heart in a letter to the editor, also a Nazarene pastor.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

"Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness'" (Matt. 3:13-15).

The question of water baptism has been woefully neglected in our wonderful Church of the Nazarene. I say this respectfully, for the Church of the Nazarene is my church, and I intend for my criticism to be constructive. If Christ insisted that John should baptize Him "to fulfill all righteousness," how can we as holiness people expect to "fulfill all righteousness" but neglect baptism? And yet in the church where I am a member, there are church board members and Sunday School teachers who have never been baptized.

We have built a new church facility, yet have neglected to build a baptismery in it as "not being essential."

The scribes and priests came to Jesus Christ and asked the question, "By what authority are you doing these things?"

Jesus answered, "I will ask you one question. . . . John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?" (Mark 11:27-30).

To those who are so negligent of baptism, I would ask the same question: "Was it from heaven, or from men?" Jesus Christ ministered for three years and died on the Cross. He was buried, arose, and ascended back to heaven. Almost His last words in



by Martin LeRoy Gladden

*Deceased layman and
adviser to his pastors,
Bloomington Church of the Nazarene,
Bloomington, Calif.*

Matthew 28 were "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them" (v. 19). Mark gives almost the same recording of Jesus' teaching (16:15-16).

How can we as Christians neglect so great a teaching when Jesus Christ himself commanded it?

Let us look at the Book of Acts.

On the Day of Pentecost, as Peter preached to the representatives of all nations, they were pricked in their hearts and said, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

**The question of
water baptism
has been
woefully
neglected.**

Peter declared, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will re-

ceive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:37-38).

We would call it heresy if anyone taught or preached and left out "repentance." But baptism is placed right beside repentance. How long should we wait? Well, in this scripture it says that "about three thousand" of them were converted and were baptized and joined the Church the same day (see verses 40-41).

Paul, on the road to Damascus, was struck down and heard Jesus Christ speak to him, telling him to go into the city. The Lord then told Ananias to go and find Saul on a street called Straight. Ananias then placed his hands on Saul, who received his sight and was baptized (see 9:1-18).

Peter went down to the house of Cornelius and preached Jesus Christ to those Gentiles. Then the Holy Spirit fell on all that were there. Peter commanded that they should be baptized at once (see 10:44-48).

Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ to the Samaritans. Samaria turned to Jesus Christ, and the people were baptized (see 8:12-13). Philip then went down to the desert area called Gaza and preached to the Ethiopian. When they came to a certain water source, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized (see verses 36-38).

Paul and Silas were thrown in jail for preaching Christ. At midnight, they prayed and sang praises to God. Suddenly the jail doors were thrown open, and the jailer came immediately and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They instructed him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." The Bible says, "Immediately he and all his family were baptized" (16:23-33).

We are spoken of as "the Bride of Christ." That is the true Church, the Blood-bought. If we are the Bride of

Thoughts in a Theologian's Corner

Selecting Our Issues



J. Kenneth Grider

*Visiting Professor of Theology,
Olivet Nazarene University,
Kankakee, Ill.*

Christ, certainly every "bride" is entitled to a ceremony. What other ordinance except baptism could represent that ceremony? "...cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Eph. 5:26). What does this ceremony represent?

Listen to Rom. 6:3-4: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Baptism is a sacred enactment of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. As Jesus was crucified and buried and arose again, so we, in the most beautiful ceremony of the New Testament, die to sin, are buried with Him in the water, and arise to walk in newness of life.

Who should be baptized? All who have repented of their sins. Who should not be baptized? Those who have not repented of their sins.

People live together sometimes as man and wife without a ceremony. We call that a "common-law marriage." There is no place in the spiritual life for neglecting this part of so great a salvation!

The *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* teaches baptism, the Bible teaches baptism—so why as a church are we so neglectful?

Your dad,
M. L. Gladden



My recent church history reading has given me some insights on the need for us today to select our issues with tweezers.

Often, in the past, whole segments of the church engaged themselves with the wrong issues.

To win back Jerusalem from the Muslims not only was usually ill planned but also did not need to be undertaken at all. It was not a matter that mattered. When it succeeded for a while, one "faithful" Christian wrote sanctimoniously about how they treated the women that the Muslim men left behind in Jerusalem when they fled. He wrote that they did not do anything "evil" to them, but that "we simply pierced them through."

In most European areas, it was felt that the whole country needed to be Roman Catholic; or Protestant; or, as in the United Netherlands, Reformed Protestants—Arminianism being outlawed for a while by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. They kept going to war, strangely, to instate a given form of Christianity or keep a given form in place. That, too, was a matter that did not matter.

Another historic and present matter that does not matter, that is even counterproductive to promoting the church's gospel, is the goal of celibacy for persons in ministry. It kept Abelard and Héloïse apart. It kept Luther from what he later thought of as a privilege next in importance to salvation—until he was 42. It now occasions criminal actions on the part of many priests.

In our Arminian-Wesleyan-Holiness history, we have done pretty well in selecting as issues matters that matter. Issues appropriate to our persuasions might be different from issues of our fellow evangelicals, "the fighting fundamentalists." It might not be appropriate for us to bash gays and lesbians the way they do, or to oppose Arab rights as they tend to do.

Whatever issues we pick with our tweezers, it is important for us, in addressing them, never to breach the law of love.



How We Say the Lord's Prayer

The other day I received a letter from a church member asking me why, in using the Lord's Prayer, some churches say "trespasses," some say "debts," and some say "sins." It was nice to be asked a question for which answers can be found! So I sketched out a reply, longer, I am sure, than was requested, and I pass it on.

I shall deal also with two other questions:

Why do some churches omit (or add) the ending, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen"?

What are other differences in the text and translations?

Trespasses, Debts, and Sins

The Lord's Prayer occurs in Matt. 6:9-13 and in Luke 11:2-4. The recitation of the Lord's Prayer is usually drawn from Matthew.

Luther and other 16th-century Reformers translated the Bible into everyday languages. The question about "trespasses, debts, sins," arises only in churches using English translations and stems back to various early



by Carl Bangs

*Professor emeritus of Historical Theology,
St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City*

English Bibles and the Book of Common Prayer.

In the King James Version (1611), Matthew has "debts" and "debtors." Luke has "sins" and "every one that is indebted to us." Neither has "trespasses." Where did "trespasses" come from?

"Trespasses" was in William Tyndale's 1525 English translation of Matthew 6. When Henry VIII broke with Rome, he sanctioned the Tyndale translation of the Bible (in 1541). When Archbishop Thomas Cranmer compiled the liturgy in English, the

Book of Common Prayer, in 1549, he followed the Tyndale translation.

Thus the Church of England uses "trespasses" in its prayer book. That has remained in Anglican liturgies until the very recent past, when new translations have been adopted.

In the 16th century, however, not all English Protestants liked the Book of Common Prayer. Those Calvinists who came to be known as Puritans resisted it. They also preferred a translation of the Bible made when Bloody Mary was persecuting Protestants. Some who had fled to Geneva made their own translation, the Geneva Bible of 1560. When they returned to England, they used its wording, "debts." It became one of the ways in which they dissented from the Church of England. In subsequent centuries, the two forms existed concurrently.

"Trespasses" was used by the Church of England and the Episcopal churches that stemmed from it. "Trespasses" was used also by the Methodists, who had started out as Anglicans. From Methodism, it passed on to churches with Methodist origins. Lutheran liturgies in English usually followed the "trespasses" usage of the Book of Common Prayer.

"Debts" was used by the Calvinist churches that stemmed from the Puritan movement in Britain—Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists.

Do the Greek texts provide an answer?

The Greek text of Matt. 6:12 can be translated either way, although "debts" is the most literal English for *ὀφειλήματα*. Luke 11:4, on the other hand, uses two words: *ἁμαρτίας*, sins; and *ὀφείλοντι*, debts. Tyndale had: "And forgive us our sins for even we forgive every man that trespasses us." The King James and most subsequent translations are much like what



the *New Revised Standard Version* has: "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."

Does the question of trespasses, debts, or sins have theological significance?

In Methodist and Wesleyan churches the preference for "trespasses" stems, I believe, from familiarity with and affection for the long-standing practice of Methodism and also from resistance to the Calvinist versions used by opponents of Wesleyanism. The use of "trespasses" witnesses to the historic heritage of the Wesleyan churches.

The question disappears as new liturgies provide new translations. The Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, for example, gives two versions in parallel columns: the traditional old English with "Thy . . . Thine . . . trespasses" and modern English with "You . . . Yours . . . sins."

Doxology or Not?

In the traditional Protestant English translations, including the King James Version, Matthew's Lord's Prayer is longer than Luke's. The prayer in Matthew traditionally ends with what is called a doxology: "For thine is the kingdom," etc. Luke's form does not. Why are they different? Do the ancient Greek manuscripts provide a clue?

The "oldest and best" Greek manuscripts of both Matthew and Luke do *not* have the doxology. Only some later manuscripts have it, but in Matthew only, not in Luke. Earlier, more authentic manuscripts were not discovered until the 19th century. The early English translations, following manuscripts then available, included the doxology in Matthew.

Where, then, did the later manuscripts of Matthew get the doxology?

It is quite certain that it had been used in *quotations* of the Lord's Prayer in some second-century religious tracts, and that this expanded quotation was copied back into later Gospel of Matthew manuscripts themselves. One such second-century tract is known as the Didache.

Does the question of trespasses, debts, or sins have theological significance?

Jerome's Latin translation of Matthew (in the *Vulgate*) did not include the doxology. Roman Catholics to this day, following Jerome, "chop off" (as Protestants would say) the Lord's Prayer by omitting the doxology. The Eastern Orthodox churches have always used it, in Greek or in their modern translations. Protestants have *usually* used it, because their early Bibles followed the later expanded manuscripts of Matthew.

It should be pointed out that many modern Bible translations put the doxology in a footnote because of its shaky basis in the Greek manuscripts.

How Old the Old English?

There are some minor details to consider. The old English of the "trespasses" version has in America been modified. "Which art in heaven" has become "who art in heaven." "In earth" has become "on earth." "Forgive them that trespass" has become "forgive those who trespass."

Another diversity: The "trespasses" form as used by Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Lutherans ends the doxology with "for ever and ever." Others, using the same form, including Methodists, end it with "for ever." I have not been able to trace this variation. When John Wesley provided a service book for "The Methodists in North America" (*The Sunday Service*, printed in London in 1784), he still used "for ever and ever." At some point the Americans shortened it. American efficiency?

A Reflection

The Lord's Prayer has been central to Christian life and worship from the earliest Christian centuries. By the time of Augustine, Christian instruction was based on the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. The great theologians of Western Christianity—Roman Catholic and Protestant—have continued the practice. The 16th-century Reformers often had these three formularies painted on large "hang boards" to put on church walls in place of the images that had been removed.

There are churches now, even in the Wesleyan family, that never use any of them as guides in the voyage from earth to heaven. Can they keep their ships on course?

BEYOND BELIEF™



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Whatever Happened to Authority?

I really don't see much connection between what happens in my business and what happens in our church on Sunday morning."

"Everybody in our family is very busy. It's all we can do to get a little family time, let alone do extra things for the church."

"With all the other people who don't care, it's hard to keep giving . . . it's hard to stay motivated."

Those were just 3 of the more than 450 comments gathered in a recent survey. Along with a Nazarene pastor, I collected written responses from a cross section of our communities, both saved and unsaved. We used a method developed by Robert Flannigan of the aerospace industry. His approach, called the "Critical Incident Technique," is designed to assemble a solid sample of responses to a given question and then look for common themes that run through the written paragraphs.

We asked three questions: (1) Do you believe the Bible has lost any of its influ-



by Joseph Seaborn

Indiana Wesleyan University,
Marion, Ind.

ence over culture in the last 20 years? (2) What has happened to the relationship between the church and society over the past 20 years? (3) To what do you attribute any changes you see in the influence of the Bible and/or the church in society?

By sorting and sifting through the responses, we picked up clues for answering the question raised by the title.

1. AUTOMATIC AUTHORITY HAS GIVEN WAY TO EARNED AUTHORITY.

"Our church tries to meet the needs of the whole family. It's especially good for our children." "Our pastor came to the hospital when my father was sick. I really appreciated that."

One of the clearest signals from the study suggests that the days of a pastor, Bible in hand, possessing authority because of his office are all but extinct. His authority (and by association, the influence of the church) is earned by being there for the people when they need him or her. Instead of the biblical agenda being assumed, the church today must first land on the island of people's real-life experiences before they will even consider giving the Bible a chance.

Deep down I wish the data hadn't

said that, but the hard reality of our time is that for the majority of people in our society, the Bible, per se, has lost its grip. Jay Kesler of Family Forum has said, "For the first time in our history, we now live in a culture in which more than 50% of students in our public schools have neither a parent nor a grandparent who holds to the Christian faith."

When you couple that sad social shift with Gordon Kaufmann's frightening commentary on the Bible's reduced role in society, the handwriting is on the wall.

The Bible no longer has unique authority for Western man. It has become a great but archaic monument in our midst. It is a reminder of where we once were, but no longer are. It contains glorious literature, important historical documents, exalted ethical teachings, but for most people today it is no longer the word of God. (Francis Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority," *Interpretation* [October 1990]:353-54)

2. LINES OF LOYALTY TO GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN PULLED IN TO A SMALLER CIRCUMFERENCE.

"I feel as if our church has a stronger influence in the community than it did 20 years ago. I really enjoy our church." We were surprised to meet quite a round of optimism in the comments. But what stood out about the optimism and accompanying loyalty was that it focused rather narrowly on the local church. Many respondents spoke with unabashed pride about their local congregations, their preachers' gifts, the contemporary nature of their worship.

The literature calls it "a revival of localism." It is a phase in the social cycle that appears from time to time



and with one main cause. In his book, *Twilight of Authority*, Robert Nisbet points to a major reason for the smaller circles of our loyalty. "As society becomes increasingly complex, individuals become overtaxed and unable to integrate all the loyalties in their lives. In order to gain control of their inner world, they are forced to narrow the range of their commitments and interests" (p. 84). Nisbet argues that people still emit just as much loyalty in complex times as they did in simpler times, but they do it more selectively. They are less and less inclined to be "bulldozed" into submission, but they seek ways to voluntarily join groups that offer them meaning and relational warmth.

Could that be what we are watching in the church today? Is this what lies behind the trend toward community churches? Is this one of the driving forces behind the recent mushrooming of small-group ministries? Are people struggling with a spirit of helplessness when it comes to larger institutions?

"As society becomes increasingly complex, individuals become overtaxed and unable to integrate all the loyalties in their lives."

Is this drawing in of our lines of loyalty a natural response to the overwhelming number of appeals from so many voices? Could it be that the dwindling loyalty to denominations is not so much a repudiation of a particular system as it is a coping mechanism in a so-

ciety oversaturated with cries for allegiance in every direction we turn?

3. THE CHURCH IS OFTEN PERCEIVED AS INCAPABLE OF ANSWERING MANY OF THE QUESTIONS POSED BY OUR COMPLEX SOCIETY.

Listen to the message behind a couple of these responses. *"My pastor is a good man, but I doubt he would be at home in my office. His world and my world are just different." "I'd be embarrassed to ask some of my friends to our church. They would think some of the things we do in the service are old-fashioned."*

Many people hold the view that the church has not kept up with society. They admire the church for preaching absolutes, but they are aware deep down that much of life is not lived in the realm of absolutes. Much of it is distinctly gray; so gray, in fact, that most people, knowing that the church deals mostly in absolutes, don't even think of turning to the church for many of their answers. The church deals with issues at the 1st and 2nd levels of clarity, while many modern issues run down into the 12th and 13th levels of ambiguity.

What about a lesson, for example, that addresses what a banker should do when one of his creditors dies owing the bank \$500,000? The man's widow has only \$150,000 to take care of her for the rest of her life. Does the banker act out of simple compassion and write off the debt? Does he take a part of the \$150,000 to apply toward the debt? Does he sue her for the total amount and let the government pick up the tab for the nursing home? If he decides to write off the debt, what does he say to his own stockholders? How long has it been since you heard a lesson dealing at this level of ethical difficulty?


In Haddon Robinson's apt analogy, you'll never learn to hit .350 by watching four .100 hitters. If you want to hit .350, you need to watch a person who's batting .375. People want to attend a church where they believe that the leaders and people are hitting in their same league, facing life's tougher questions head-on, aiming at righteousness while at the same time knowing that the answers will not always be clear. The banker facing the \$500,000 issue will not likely be helped by a worship service

in which a lady stands up front by the Communion table, picks up the faded pasteboard church with the little slot in the roof, and mumbles the lines, "Dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping, hear the pennies fall; / Every one for Jesus, He will get them all." That's a Tinkertoy solution in a steel and concrete world.

Many people hold the view that the church has not kept up with society.

What to do? Let me offer two suggestions for starters.

1. When you speak up in Sunday School or share a lesson with a class, be sure not to come across as having all the answers, especially not right away. The church has been hurt by those who assumed that they had an answer to every question. When we lop off a portion of a problem and offer a quick fix as glibly as we might mouth the Lord's Prayer, we hurt our credibility with thinking people. One of the best answers we can give to a heavy question, at least if we want to raise our stock with our hearers, is to say: "I haven't the foggiest idea what to say to that issue. I'll need to think about it for a while."

2. With the authority of the Bible being so seriously eroded, God undoubtedly wants us to turn to His second-best option—living letters. People may not be reading the Word, but they sure are reading our lives. For the vast majority of the unsaved today, the life of a Christian is the only "translation" of the Bible they will ever read. If we want to see the church have greater influence and the Bible greater sway, we have one powerful option—we simply have to get out there in the middle of the world, remind ourselves that this is a battleground and not a playground, and commit ourselves to a "Holiness Reformation." May God help us live His message as loudly as we can. 

The Wesleyan Doctrine of Christian Perfection

In common with all evangelicals, Wesleyans believe that sanctification (or holiness) is the other side of the coin of justification; that, in its broadest sense, sanctification is the *total process* of moral and spiritual renewal, which begins at the moment of our conversion and, provided we go on with Christ, continues to glory.

With John Wesley, however, we believe ourselves to be under the biblical mandate to urge *every* believer to take with utmost seriousness the command of Christ, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48, NRSV).



by William M. Greathouse
General Superintendent Emeritus,
Church of the Nazarene

It is our understanding of New Testament teaching that the *free gift* of justi-

fication carries within it the *imperative* to holiness of heart and life (Rom. 6:11-14, 19; 8:12-13; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). For every Christian who is obedient to Scripture and the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit, there is promised—within this ongoing process—a second, deeper working of God's grace, purifying the heart from lurking self-idolatry and bringing "pure love to God and man" (Rom. 8:3-4; 13:8-10).

In *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, George Croft Cell argues that in Wesley's gospel "the special interest in and tremendous emphasis upon the doctrine of justification by faith was reunited, as in the New Testament, with the special interest of Catholic thought and piety in the ideal of holiness or evangelical perfection."¹

Cell argues convincingly that "homesickness for holiness" constitutes "the innermost kernel of Christianity." The essence of this holiness is Christlikeness, "no more, no less," such as caught the imagination of Francis of Assisi. It was this "lost accent of Christianity" that had fallen into the background of interest in early Protestantism. Lutheranism in its purely religious understanding of the gospel had neglected too much the moral problem, the "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16, NKJV). "Right here," Cell says, "Wesley rises to mountain heights. He restored the neglected doctrine of holiness to its merited position in the Protestant understanding of Christianity."²

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DEFINED

When asked what he meant by Christian perfection, Wesley answered: "The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength [and the loving our neighbor, every man as ourselves, as our own souls]. This implies that no wrong temper, none



contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love."³

Again, "It is nothing higher and nothing lower than this,—the pure love of God and man; the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions."⁴

Or again, "It means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. . . . How strongly [does this] imply the being saved from all sin! For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?"⁵

And what are the properties of this love? Wesley's answer is the love of 1 Cor. 13:4-7.

This love, we believe, is what the New Testament means by perfection. The word itself, however, is misleading and needs explanation.

1. Our English word comes from the Latin *perfectus* and suggests a state of absolute holiness and faultlessness, which all Christians acknowledge is reserved for glory. In *this* sense, "Nobody's perfect!"

2. The Greek word translated "perfect" (for want of a better term) has a variety of meanings, such as "complete," "mature," "blameless," depending on the context. Wesley understood *teleios* to include the following meanings: a "perfect" Christian is "complete," possessing the *full, unmixed* fruit of the Spirit. Such a Christian is an "adult" child of God, a "father" in the faith. This person has an "undivided" heart, endeavoring at all times and in all things to glorify God: perfection is in the intention of the Christian's heart. As Kierkegaard said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing—the good." The pure in heart enjoy "pure love to God and man"—i.e., love free from the admixture of sinful self-interest.⁶

The key to Wesley's doctrine of perfection, however, is found in a closer analysis of the Greek *teleios*. William Barclay writes:

It has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, metaphysical perfection. . . . A thing is perfect if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, and designed, and made. . . . *Teleios* is an adjective formed from the noun *telos*. *Telos* means an end, an aim, a goal. A thing is *teleios* if it realizes

the purpose for which it was planned; a man is perfect if he realizes the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world.⁷

Entire
sanctification,
then, is our
distinguishing
tenet.

Wesley fastened on this dynamic, functional meaning of perfection. For him, the ultimate end of life is the glory of God. On Paul's instruction to the Corinthians, that they "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31, KJV), Wesley comments:

In all things whatsoever, whether of a religious or civil nature, in all the common, as well as sacred, actions of life, keep the glory of God in view, and steadily pursue in all this one end of your being, the planting or advancing the vital knowledge and love of God, first in your own soul, then in all mankind.⁸

"As long as
love takes up
the whole
heart, what
room is there
for sin
therein?"

Pursuing this one end with a singleness of intention is all Wesley ever meant by Christian perfection. Although he was aware of the misleading connotation of the word *perfect*, the *idea* of perfection was so much a

part of the warp and woof of the Bible that he refused to discard the term. He chose rather to define it *scripturally*. In his *Christian Theology* Adam Clarke gives lucid expression to what Wesley meant by the idea: "As God requires every man to love him with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and his neighbour as himself; then he is a perfect man that does so; *he answers to the end for which God made him*."⁹

This would seem to be Paul's thought in his words to Timothy: "Now the end of the commandment is charity [*agapē*] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling" (1 Tim. 1:5-6, KJV).

Commenting on this text, Wesley writes: "It [love] is the end of every commandment of God. It is the point aimed at by the whole and every part of the Christian institution. The foundation is faith, purifying the heart; and the end love, preserving a good conscience."¹⁰

Listen once more to Wesley:

It were is well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, "Have you received this or that blessing?" If you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of [First] Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom.¹¹

SIN AND PERFECTION

Now if the end for which God created us is loving Him with an undivided heart and every other person as ourselves, Sin is the missing of that mark.¹²

The problem, however, is not that we are poor marksmen. Rather, we have chosen the wrong mark—and hit it squarely! We have turned from God, our true End, to self. So Wesley points out incisively:

And thus man was created looking directly to God, as his last end; but, falling into sin, he fell off from God, and turned into himself. Now, this infers [sic] a total apostasy and universal corruption in man; for where the last end is changed, there can be no real goodness. And this is the case of all men in their natural state: They seek not God, but themselves. . . . [T]hough some of them "run well," they are still off the way; they never aim at the right mark. Whithersoever they move, they cannot move beyond the circle of self.¹³ Sin, therefore, is essentially egocentricity. Beverly R. Gaventa summarizes Paul's explanation of the sin problem (Rom. 1:18-25) in this way: "Sin is that universal and intractable refusal of human beings to acknowledge that God is God and that they are but products of His hands."¹⁴ This is what Wesley is talking about.

An
"undivided"
heart,
endeavoring
at all times
and in all
things to
glorify God.

This worship of the creature (self and its idols) instead of God is the source of the moral and spiritual corruption that plagues our human existence. As D. R. Davies insists, the Fall has created a vacuum in human nature. "That vacuum must be filled," he says, "if not by God, then by the devil of self. All the lusts and excesses of human behavior are attempts to satisfy that 'aching void the world can never fill.' Man, as a result of his fall from Divine Grace, is cursed by an infinite craving."¹⁵

THE CALL FOR CONVERSION

Our great need, therefore, is to be

converted—turned back from self to God, our true End. As the prophet exhorts, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7, KJV). And the New Testament assures us that when God pardons and restores us to His favor, He at the same time floods our hearts with His love by the gift of His Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5).

Conversion is the beginning of sanctification (1 Cor. 6:9-11), since the love of God is now the new life principle of our behavior. Conversion is also the beginning of perfection, since "even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin" (1 John 3:4-10).¹⁶

THE INCOMPLETENESS OF CONVERSION

But as glorious as conversion is, it does not permanently resolve the sin problem, even though it may seem so for some at first. Although sin no longer reigns, sooner or later every Christian discovers a remaining self-bias that rivals Christ's rule. Jesus is now Lord, but self would like to be prime minister!

This remaining "root" of sin is (a) the presupposition of all the exhortations and prayers for entire sanctification in the Epistles (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:4-8; 5:23-24); (b) the confession of all the great creeds of the Church; and (c) eventually the humble confession of every justified believer endeavoring to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) and to "walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6).

Remaining sin has been defined variously, as:

"a hard core of idolatrous self-love" (Richard S. Taylor)

"a residue of recalcitrancy" (E. Stanley Jones)

"the delusion of self-sovereignty" (Millard Reed)

"my claim of my right to myself" (Oswald Chambers)

"We have met the enemy, and he is us!" Pogo says. This remaining proclivity to self is "the carnal mind," which is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7, KJV).

THE PROMISE OF HEART HOLINESS

Following Jesus, the apostles, and a host of teachers and saints through the

centuries, John Wesley believed Scripture promises that God's people may be delivered from this "root" of sin, in this present life, by faith in Christ.

Two Old Testament promises formed the foundation of his faith.

First, "that promise which he made first to his ancient people, and in them to the Israel of God in all ages":¹⁷

"And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6, KJV).

Second, Ezekiel's version of the new covenant:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:25-27, KJV).

"Love . . . is
the point
aimed at by
the whole and
every part of
the Christian
institution."

This is the Great Physician's promise of a divine heart transplant!

In his sermon on January 1, 1733, before Oxford University, Wesley set forth his basic position on heart holiness. Preaching on "The Circumcision of the Heart" (from Rom. 2:29), he declared this to be "that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness."¹⁸

All humans are born with the "habitual disposition" of inordinate self-love; from birth we all are "curved in on ourselves" (Luther). Ezekiel's promise is that by God's sanctifying grace, this ha-

bitual disposition of inordinate self-love may be displaced by a "habitual disposition" of "pure love to God and man."

Wesley's New Testament text for entire sanctification was 1 Thess. 5:23-24: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly . . ." (KJV). The adverb translated "wholly" is a compound word (*holoteleis*) found only here in Scripture. *Holo* means "wholly" or "entirely." *Teleis* means "perfectly." It suggests the idea: "May God himself sanctify your entire being and preserve you blameless so that you may attain to your true end of glorifying God and enjoying uninterrupted fellowship with Him."

PERFECTION QUALIFIED

To summarize our Wesleyan understanding of scriptural perfection, let us say:

1. It is evangelical, not legal perfection (Rom. 8:1-4). It is not the fulfillment of the letter, but the spirit of the law: "That the just requirement of the law [love—13:8-10] might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4, RSV). "Pure love reigning alone in the heart and life—this is the whole of Scriptural perfection."¹⁹

We have
chosen the
wrong mark—
and hit it
squarely!

2. It is relative, not absolute perfection. Only God is absolutely perfect; our "perfection" is relative to our understanding of God's will. Even the most mature Christians "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). All therefore stand constantly in need of the Atonement. All therefore pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (see Matt. 6:12, 14-15).

3. It is salvation from sin, not sinless perfection. "The best of men need Christ as their Priest . . . on account of their coming short of the law of love.

For every man living does so."²⁰ Even those "who feel all love" fall short of the perfect expression of 1 Cor. 13 by their "involuntary transgressions." "Therefore," Mr. Wesley says, "*sinless perfection* is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself."²¹

4. It is perfect love, not perfectionism (1 John 4:12, 17-19). God's love is perfected in us as it fills our hearts and excludes all contrary to love. This is God's gift to us by the Spirit (v. 13). Perfect love is not a matter of struggling and trying, but of resting and receiving. Perfectionism is at the opposite pole from this, straining to dot every *i* and cross every *t*. "The perfectionist," Dr. Edward Lawlor used to say, "takes pains and gives them to everybody else!"

5. It is present, not final perfection (Phil. 3:12-15). "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected," the apostle writes. ". . . but one thing I do, . . . I press toward the goal, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded" (Wesley's trans.). We are but "Christians in the making," E. Stanley Jones reminds us.

"There is a difference between one that is perfect and one that is perfected," Wesley notes. "The one is fitted for the race (v. 15); the other, ready to receive the prize."²² Present perfection is the perfection of faith—"to be attuned to our redeemed destiny in Christ" (P. T. Forsyth).

6. It is a perfected relationship to Christ, not a static state. My favorite quotation from Wesley makes this abundantly clear:

The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as "the light of the world." For He does not give them light, but from moment to moment; the instant He withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.

This person always confesses: "Through my union with Thee, I am full of light, of holiness, and happiness. But if I were left to myself, I should be nothing but sin, darkness,

hell."²³ Perfection is nothing of self, it is all of Christ.

"Pure love
reigning alone
in the heart
and life—this
is the whole
of Scriptural
perfection."

"Called unto holiness," praise His dear name!

This blessed secret to faith now made plain:

Not our own righteousness, but Christ within,
Living, and reigning, and saving from sin.

—Lelia N. Morris

"CHRIST IS ALL, AND IN ALL."

1. George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt Co., 1935), 359.

2. *Ibid.*

3. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 51 [brackets: 81].

4. *Ibid.*, 55.

5. John Wesley, sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *The Works of John Wesley* (reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978), 6:46, 52.

6. Wesley, "On Patience," in *Works* 6:488-90.

7. William Barclay, *Gospel of Matthew*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1957), 1:176.

8. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981).

9. Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 183.

10. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 80-81.

11. *Ibid.*, 99.

12. The Greek word for sin is "missing the mark"; to capitalize the word as here is to indicate that "Sin" is a singular entity.

13. Wesley, "The Doctrine of Original Sin," in *Works* 9:456.

14. Beverly R. Gaventa, "Dead to Sin," *Christian Century*, June 2-9, 1993, 595.

15. D. R. Davies, *Down Peacock's Feathers* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944), 70.

16. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 23.

17. Wesley, *Works* 6:489.

18. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 12.

19. *Ibid.*, 61.

20. *Ibid.*, 83.

21. *Ibid.*, 54.

22. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), 735.

23. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 82, 83.

Essentials of Effective Holiness Preaching

There are at least six essentials of effective, well-rounded holiness preaching.

1. The first is the possession of a personal testimony to God's sanctifying grace.

It is hard to lead people into depths of grace we have not sounded ourselves. It will not do to hide behind the reticence of John Wesley; there were special reasons why he evidently believed restraint was wise. But he encouraged others to testify. He believed sanctified Christians "could not . . . with a clear conscience" avoid the cost of open testimony. Such persons "ought to speak," for this "increases the . . . hunger" of those who hear such testimonies (*Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 56).

Regardless, however, of Wesley, common sense tells us that holiness preaching is given wings when the preacher can occasionally tell how God dealt with him and brought him into his spiritual Canaan.

Yet the personal testimony must be supported by personal credibility. One pastor confessed to being profoundly shaken when a church board member said to him, "Pastor, I see no correlation between what you preach Sunday mornings and how you act in church board meeting." If he had the "blessing," it was not being displayed convincingly.

In contrast a lady said to me: "Before I was married, I didn't believe in the possibility of holy living. But I have lived with a sanctified man for 20 years, and I know the teaching is true." When the man stood to preach, he had at least one auditor who believed in his message. If the wife believes in a man's sanctification, the probabilities are that the church does too.



by Richard S. Taylor

*Former editor of
The Preacher's Magazine,
retired professor,
Nazarene Theological Seminary,
Edmonds, Wash.*

2. The second essential is the acquisition of a sound biblical perspective.

No preacher will preach holiness with conviction and power unless he

comes to see clearly that holiness is the primary theme of the Bible. If he supposes that holiness is incidental, it will be incidental in his preaching. If he thinks holiness to be peripheral to more important and more central issues, holiness will be treated as a back burner option in his preaching.

Theologians have assigned different motifs as the key that unlocks the Bible's message. Some have said that the kingdom of God is the central thing; others that divine covenant is the coordinating and unifying idea. The importance of these motifs need not be denied if we see them, each in its own way, serving as the carrier of an overall theme that controls them both. That major theme, which defines the Bible's purpose and message, is the loss and recovery of man's moral and spiritual estate.



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If we adopt the kingdom of God as the unifying theme, we soon run into such pronouncements as Matt. 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." He goes on to say that they who practice lawlessness will hear the awful pronouncement, "Away from me, you evildoers!" (v. 23). It is clear that holiness is the watchword of the Kingdom. Any theology of the Kingdom that does not put holiness at its center is wide of the mark.

Similarly, we run into the same holiness parameter if we organize our theology around the idea of covenant. For the heart of the new covenant is the transcribing of the law of God upon the heart and upon the mind—and this is a precise definition of holiness. The law includes the primary commandment quoted by Jesus from Deut. 6:5, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Furthermore, even in Deuteronomy, God promises that work of grace that will make such total love possible: "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts" (30:6).

So, whether we pursue the Kingdom or the covenant, we will find holiness at the center. It is holiness that defines citizenship in the Kingdom and that defines the inner meaning of the covenant.

The centrality of holiness can be seen also if we approach from the standpoint of anthropology. God created man, male and female, in His own image. This concept implies that between man's nature and God's there was sufficient likeness to make both intercommunication and spiritual fellowship possible. In the Garden this fellowship was not only possible but experienced in inexpressible oneness and delight, God with man and man with God. But when sin entered, the moral likeness was lost, the natural likeness was defaced, and the fellowship destroyed. Man was now alienated from God judicially and anti-God dispositionally. The entire story of the Bible is the account of God's plan to make possible man's recovery—first, to the divine fellowship; and second, to the divine likeness. These twin motions of recovery constitute what the Bible means by holi-

ness—pinpointed in the biblical terms "justification" and "sanctification."

This full recovery is revealed from Genesis to Revelation to be the primary purpose in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). This was His purpose in giving the law. This was the objective in all His disciplinary action. This was the burden of the prophets, the central note of Christ's teachings, the primary objective of the blood of Jesus, and the central focus of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 15:8-9).

Holiness preaching is given wings when the preacher can occasionally tell how God dealt with him.

Much of the devastation of the Fall must await the resurrection for its remedy. But now, in this life, God's "divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

May I now summarize to this point, and raise a question? The centrality of holiness, and the necessity of a kind of holiness consisting of a cleansed heart with a holy walk following—these twin ideas constitute the biblical perspective. Is it possible to really see this, to really believe it, and not be an ardent holiness preacher?

Rather than not preach holiness, this vision of the centrality of holiness will govern the preparation of every sermon we will ever preach.

We are greatly in error when we suppose that the paganism and alien

culture of our day makes the holiness message irrelevant. One young pastor was heard to say, "The doctrine of entire sanctification is not the need of the hour—it does not fit our day." Instead of pontificating on the "need of the hour," he should have asked if the doctrine is true. If it is not true, it is not the need of any age and never has been. But if it is true, then it cannot possibly be irrelevant to any age—including ours.

A biblical perspective, then, is the second essential of holiness preaching.

3. The third essential of holiness preaching is doctrinal clarity.

I refer to the distinguishing marks of the doctrine of holiness as seen by Wesleyans as being biblical. These distinguishing marks are that holiness is a state of entire devotion to God, requiring for its very possibility the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, by which the heart is cleansed of the carnal mind, and love is established as the master motive of life; further, that this unity of the self in its devotion to God is not accomplished in regeneration but can only be experienced at some point as a distinct, yes, *second*, work of grace; and that to preach Christ as an adequate Savior is to preach *this* as well as justification, as a provision of the Atonement; furthermore, we believe that true holiness begins in the new birth in the sense that repentance is a conscious commitment to a holy life, and that regeneration is the impartation of a kind of spiritual life that has in it a new affinity with and desire for holiness.

We affirm that believers are for some time in a double-minded state, but that the Spirit's ministry in their hearts is to reveal to them this double-mindedness and lead them to its remedy. We believe further that this deeper work of heart cleansing is to be received by faith, not by works or growth; but that the faith that appropriates is only possible when it is the outgrowth of a complete consecration and total surrender to the perfect will of God.

And we hold, furthermore, that following this purging and complete alignment of the self with God, growth will occur much more rapidly, and good works will flow much more fervently and consistently. It is only

when Christians have been purified by Christ to be "a people that are his very own" that they will genuinely and spontaneously be "eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14).

Is this what we believe? Then comes the big question: *Do our people know this is what we believe?* Is this what comes across in our preaching?

One lady said to my wife about her prominent and popular pastor, "If I had not been grounded in holiness doctrine in my youth, I would never learn from this man what our church is supposed to believe about holiness." Could that have been a member of *our* church?

One of our retired preachers in Australia met a friend on the street who said to him, "You ought to go hear Rev. X this Wednesday night; his subject this week is sanctification." To his astonishment the pastor wrote three lines on the chalkboard: "First, *Initial Sanctification*. This is when we are converted and God cleanses our lives from the practice of known sin. Second, *Entire Sanctification*. This is when God through the Holy Spirit takes care of the problem of inherited sinfulness. Third, *Progressive Sanctification*. This is walking in the light and growing in grace." No, that was not a Wesleyan-oriented pastor in a Wesleyan-oriented church. It was a Baptist pastor in a Baptist church! A few days later I had occasion to talk to some

Personal testimony must be supported by personal credibility.

pastors of my denomination in Australia. I said to them, "When was the last time you laid it out to your people like that?" One of them apparently decided to do it, and preached so clearly on the following Sunday morning that a lady came to the altar and was definitely sanctified wholly. That night in the public service she was so elated that she testified twice!

There are pastors within Wesleyan churches who would say, "If I preached that way, a lot of my people would leave me." So—is that a good reason for not being doctrinally clear? I read in the Scripture that in the last days people will "turn away their ears from the truth" and "heap to themselves teachers" who would "tickle their ears" (2 Tim. 4:4, 3, KJV, MLB)! If holiness preaching will drive people away, then we are simply being involved in the fulfillment of prophecy; and to hasten the fulfillment of prophecy by tickling those ears, by a softened and modified message, is in effect to betray the Lord and bargain away our personal integrity.

Holiness defines citizenship in the Kingdom.

Of course, if we preach combatively, our poor tact and lack of judgment may drive people away. But we do not gain any advantage if we go to the other extreme and so disguise the truth that no one is offended simply because they do not recognize what the truth is. Truth is powerful; it will draw some and repel others. Our job is to make the truth absolutely clear. The response of the people is then their responsibility, and we remain, like Paul, "innocent of the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26).

We cannot refine the offense of holiness out of the doctrine and have the doctrine left. No one could present holiness more adroitly and attractively than the late Paul Rees. Yet he told me that there were some places where he was, as he said, *persona non grata* because of his beliefs. His desire to accommodate his audience had its clearly defined limits!

4. *The fourth essential of holiness preaching is biblical competence.*

Our forefathers tended to see holiness where it wasn't. Our peril is in failing to see holiness where it is.

Among other things, biblical com-

petence demands the use and exposition of biblical terms. This is where most of us are failing. We not only are failing to explicate terms but also are actually avoiding certain terms, such as sanctification.

This vision of the centrality of holiness will govern the preparation of every sermon we will ever preach.

After preaching on Acts 26:18, and insisting that justification and sanctification were the two hemispheres of a whole salvation, a lady came to me and said, "We never hear about sanctification in our church." Could that have been someone from *our* church?

These are biblical terms. Laymen these days are studying the Scriptures avidly, almost as never before. They will ask questions about perfection, sanctification, holiness, and purity. If their pastor is not adept and faithful in handling these terms, they will pick up false concepts from alien sources.

Another aspect of biblical competence is the ability to make clear basic biblical concepts—concepts that are at once biblical and theological but go beyond a single word. I think, for example, of the concept of heart purity. Recently I heard a sermon on the Beatitudes. The preacher did a masterful job with the eight, except that when he came to the sixth, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8), he disposed of that hurriedly, almost nervously, with a passing reference to integrity of heart. Does not the concept merit a more substantial treatment than this?

The profound importance of this is seen when we remember that the One who pronounced this blessing al-

so said in Mark 7:21-22, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly." In so saying, He was simply confirming Jeremiah, who declared, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9, NKJV). Now the question is, what is the relation of the "pure heart" in Matt. 5:8 to *this*? If my heart is not naturally pure, it must be made pure. If seeing the Lord depends on this, it had *better* be made pure. The great question of all theology, therefore, is, "How can this impure heart of mine become pure?" I submit that this is the most important question humanity can ever ask, and the most important question preachers will ever answer. There is no greater test of our biblical competence than this!

5. *The fifth essential of holiness preaching is the ability to make some crucial distinctions.*

As, for instance, the distinction between purity and maturity, carnality and humanity, ignorance and blame-worthiness, sins and mistakes, temperamental variations, and such matters, which complicate the science of soul care, but which can make the difference between sound nurture and devastating misjudgment.

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Even simple issues can become occasions for confusion and distress, such as cultural differences and development. In our Bible school in Australia we had as a student-cook an earnest young woman who came weeping one day, exclaiming, "Am I really sanctified? Miss Mary [our spinster and very elderly kitchen supervisor] told me I was not sanctified if I

didn't put the forks in the drawer in neat stacks!" We assured her that while putting them in neat stacks might be a needed discipline, her failure to do so did not invalidate her sanctified experience.

Naturally this calls for not only great wisdom but also great compassion. This will help us in guiding our people through their struggles and failures without their casting away their confidence or surrendering their belief in the sanctifying grace of God.

It has often been said that entire sanctification is the establishing grace. This is essentially true, but Paul's prayer for our entire sanctifica-

Truth will draw
some and
repel others.

tion is still followed by his equally fervent prayer that after our sanctification we be preserved blameless, so that when the Lord comes we be found in a blameless state (1 Thess. 5:23). While entire sanctification is the establishing grace in a sense, it is nevertheless true that some people have trouble getting established in this establishing grace!

Therefore much preaching is necessary to aid even the sanctified with the problems of temptation, negative feelings, life's frustrations, and even setbacks and failures. The possibilities of grace must ever be kept before our people. The power of an overcoming, Spirit-filled life must ever be held out as the norm. At the same time great tenderness and understanding is required to help people who stagger a little beneath the norm to hold steady in faith and obedience and simply learn a little better how to appropriate the inner resources of the Holy Spirit.

Before leaving this essential, a warning needs to be sounded. We are dealing with dynamics that, while psychological, are even more fundamentally spiritual. In the biblical frame of reference, modern secular therapies may at times be more of a hindrance than a help. Those systems

may use faith techniques and concede the therapeutic value of religion without grasping the ontological reality of the divine dimension. We are admittedly dealing with the mind, but we insist that it is a mind that needs the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Trying to evaluate our people's spiritual state in terms of the concepts of these secular systems can lead to false evaluations and merely humanistic cures. As Paul says, these are matters that "are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor.

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2:14). A pastor who knows the Bible and is filled with the Spirit is a far safer spiritual guide than a person with a Ph.D. in counseling who is not filled with the Spirit and whose methods are not Bible-shaped.

6. *The sixth essential of holiness preaching is convincing urgency.*

The preacher needs to be obsessed with the conviction that only heart holiness will make possible a life of spiritual victory and consistent growth. Therefore he will keep the issue of holiness before his people.

One of the most debilitating scourges among us is all this talk about "our tradition," as if it is just one among many, all of them equally optional. The result is a bland nonchalance and tolerance even when the subject of holiness is attempted. We need to throw away this pose of lofty intellectualism and neutrality. Biblical holiness preaching is truth on fire, poured from a passionate heart of a pastor who knows that his people desperately need to be sanctified, and who yearns for their full salvation and their establishment therein. Some of them will find the blessing. And in this the competent holiness preacher will find his reward. ✠

The Young in Heart— Let's Put Them to Work!

by Muriel Larson

Freelance writer, Greenville, S.C.

We had moved to a new community, and we were looking for a church. One of my main concerns was my widowed mother. She had good friends in her church school class of older women. Now as we sought another church, I prayed, "O God, lead us to a church with a big class of loving older ladies, for Mom's sake." Eventually, I applied for the organist position at a local church, and I was accepted. I praised God for answered prayer: The church had a class of more than 35 loving older ladies!

Put this growing service pool to work!

This class is one of the two largest classes in our church. When I look at the congregation, I note that many of those present are senior citizens—or, as they like to be known, the Young in Heart. Yes, not only is our nation graying, but so is the church. Are we adapting our methods to use this trend to our advantage?

A large part of the church's support comes from this group. Most of the delicious pastries at meetings and suppers are baked by them. Instead of putting these older folk on the sidelines, how can we use their talents and experience to build the church?

First, list the ways in which they might be able to serve. Distribute the list, and ask people to check those tasks for which they have talent, experience, or interest, and in which

they would like to serve. Discuss the replies and pray about them with church leaders. Then put this growing service pool to work! Here are some ideas. Start your list with these. You will think of many more.

Teachers, Musicians

You've heard it said that when people hit their mid-60s, they ought to step aside and make room for younger workers. It's true that we should encourage younger church members to accept jobs in the church school. But many older folk have accumulated a wealth of experience that should not be wasted.

My parents were both active in teaching church school. Mother played the piano and Dad the violin, and they used these talents also. Mother has described the preparations she made to teach her classes, the interesting methods she used, the ideas she had for improving attendance and memory work. When they moved to a larger church during their 60s, they stepped aside and no longer offered their skills in teaching. What a loss to the church!

Many older people have learned in the school of hard knocks how to draw near to God to find peace and joy. Titus 2:3-5 says, "The older women . . . are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind" (RSV). Older men can likewise give encouragement to young men.

Some church schools have coteachers for each class. One of these could be an older person and one younger, each bringing different skills and blessings to the class. Some church schools can't find pianists for the various departments. Your survey of the

Young in Heart group may find all the pianists you need!

Greeters

Once there were two elderly men who had served God in the church for many years. "Surely there must be something we can still do for God!" one said.

"Hey, I've got it!" the other exclaimed. "Let's stand at the front door of the church and greet folks as they come in and go out!"

"Good idea!" they agreed; and from then on they did their self-appointed job diligently. They knew people by name and could recognize newcomers and make them feel welcome. The children got to know them. People began to say, "What a friendly church!" And with satisfaction, the two men saw the attendance steadily



Skjold Photographs

increase. They had created an important job for themselves.

Older folk are often the best greeters. Their smiles make others feel loved. These hospitable people can be greeters in both the church school and the church. They can be stationed at various entrances to greet and guide newcomers to classes, and to make the regulars feel welcomed or missed.

Visitation Teams

The church that wants to grow should have a regular visitation program. In today's world, many young husbands and wives are both working and are on a merry-go-round existence that leaves no time to go visiting for the church. But many older people have time on their hands, especially if they are newly widowed. Why not organize some of your Young in Hearts to do regular visitation for the church school, following up on newcomers and absentees. In our church, many people have been brought to Christ and the church through this kind of program. The children begin coming to church school. Then follow-up visitors go to the homes and share the gospel with the parents. Whole families have joined our church school and church through this kind of outreach.

Some older women have never learned to drive. Nondrivers can be paired with drivers, an older experienced visitor with a younger novice. You'll be using your people with the greatest efficiency! Retired husband-and-wife teams also are good visitors. Luke 10:1-2 says, "After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them . . . two by two. . . . And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few'" (RSV).

Telephoning and Counseling

The Bible says, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11, RSV). Many of our older people have known the comfort and help of God and can pass it on.

"I feel so lonely sometimes," my mother said sadly one evening. "I miss Dad, and my neighbors keep to


themselves or are gone somewhere." Because of my work, I could only visit her on certain evenings. But I prayed for her and also suggested that she call some widows she knew. Still she was lonely.

Then her church school teacher developed a sisters idea! This struck me as especially good because most of these women were widows and lived alone. The names of the class members were put in a plate, and each woman drew a name. This was to be her sister, someone she would call and send cards to on special occasions. Each woman thus had two sisters: one whose name she had drawn, and one who had drawn her name. Now Mother had two sisters to chat with on the phone when she felt blue or lonely. Listening to, encouraging, and praying with these sisters lifted her heart. Now she sends get-well cards and sympathy cards not only to those two but also to others in her class. When someone is absent or ill, she calls that person.



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Older people often can become congenial telephone agents for the church and church school, not only for absentees, newcomers, and shut-ins, but for other projects as well.

In 1 Cor. 12, Paul speaks of the Church as Christ's Body and tells of the importance of the abilities and gifts of every church member as part of that Body. He says, "God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be" (v. 18, TEV). Let's put all those members to work! 

Mom's Rocking Chair

by Jay Dargan


*Director of Development,
Asbury Theological Seminary,
Wilmore, Ky.*

There's an old rocking chair that sits
idle and still
Where Mother would sit by the
hour;
With her Bible in her hand, she
would sing of that land,
Where she'd go "when the sun
goeth down."

Oh, I can still hear her yet, as that old
chair would creak;
She would say, "Kids, come gather
round."
And we'd all gather near, so again we
would hear,
Of that place where no sun would
go down.

In my mind's eye I see her, with that
old shawl wrapped round
Her frail body, which fit in that
chair.
And though her eyesight was poor,
we would stand in the door,
And she'd know us and would call
our name clear.

Mom's chair is now empty, for she's
left this old world
For that land that she sang much
about.
And I know when I stand in her door-
way in heaven,
She'll see me, and I know that
she'll shout!

She'll shout, "HALLELUJAH! SON,
WELCOME HOME!
You're the last one to come, but
you're here!
All the family's now in; not one lost
to sin!
Bless His name! Let's give glory to
Him!" 

Pirates in the Church?

by Carmen Wassam

*Editor/Promotions coordinator, Music Department,
Assemblies of God Headquarters, Springfield, Mo.*

The call was typical of those we receive during a routine day—a music minister calling with what she believed to be a reasonable request: “I have a copy of your new ‘Decade of Harvest’ anthem, and I would like to make 50 copies for my choir.” She wanted to photocopy to avoid purchasing original copies.

The music minister’s request to make 50 copies of the anthem was denied. United States copyright law prohibits copying to avoid purchase.

It is important for church staff and members to have a basic understanding of copyright law. Considering a few other commonly asked questions can help illustrate how copyright law affects churches.

What exactly does copyright mean, and why are the laws necessary?

Simply stated, copyright means that no one other than the copyright owner has the right to copy his artistic works without permission. The United States Constitution gives Congress the authority “to promote the progress of . . . the useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors . . . the exclusive right to their respective writings.” It is by this authority that copyright law has been developed. The law protects authors’ investment in their work and, as a result, gives them the incentive to

produce new works. This benefits both those who create and those who enjoy the creation.

Why should we pay for worship music? If those in the Christian music industry viewed their jobs as ministry, they wouldn’t expect financial returns from their work.

This is a common argument. Just as we are paid to do our jobs, composers and publishers deserve fair compensation for their work. The United States Supreme Court supported this: “Sacrificial days devoted to such creative activities deserve rewards, commensurate with the services rendered.”

How does the copyright law apply to my church, and why should I be concerned?

First and foremost, churches should be concerned with copyright law because it is the law. To disregard copyright law amounts to stealing—to piracy.

Second, compliance with copyright law protects churches from substantial penalties. Due to widespread infringement among churches, the government has cracked down, and a notable number of court decisions have been made against offenders. Besides the embarrassment of being caught, intentional infringement may carry statutory damages of up to \$100,000 per vio-

lation. Anyone who has unauthorized copies of printed or recorded materials on file has a legal and ethical obligation to destroy and replace them with legally obtained copies.

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Third, obeying the law encourages Christian writers and publishers to continue producing new music. When churches obey copyright law, composers receive their royalties and are not victims of piracy. When revenues are not lost, the cost of legal editions remains lower.

Is it OK for me to make just one copy of the solo I want to sing for my pianist?

Not until you have asked the copyright owner’s permission. Duplicating a copyrighted work for an accompanist, printing “words only” of a copyrighted song in a church bulletin, printing songbooks or song sheets containing copyrighted songs, making a transparency or slide for use by projector, making copies of copyrighted choral music, making audio or video recordings of a service in which copyrighted music is performed, making a new arrangement of a copyrighted work—all are illegal unless proper permission from the copyright owner is secured before the music is duplicated.

What steps can I take to keep from violating copyright law?



Picture Windows for Preaching

Public domain. When the copyright protection has expired, songs are in the public domain. This means that the public is free to duplicate, record, perform, or use these songs in any way they please without permission from anyone.

Blanket license. A blanket license authorizes churches to make copies of music for congregational use. A license from Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc., for example, allows churches to print songs in bulletins and songbooks, produce slides and transparencies, make customized arrangements, and record worship services for tape ministry (as long as tapes are sold only on a cost-recovery basis). Churches that obtain a license from CCLI for a modest fee based on church size have authorization to use songs owned by more than 400 Christian publishers.

Opaque images. It is illegal to make your own transparency without permission, but it is permissible to display a purchased transparency or a hard copy of the song using an opaque projector. This is because you are displaying the image of a lawfully obtained copy.

Direct contact. Copyright owners will often grant permission for churches to copy songs for certain uses free of charge or for a nominal fee. The Music Publishers Association offers this advice: "If you want to include copyrighted lyrics in a song sheet, arrange a copyrighted song for four baritones and kazoo, or make any special use of copyrighted music which the publisher cannot supply in regular published form, the magic word is *ask*. You may or may not receive permission; but when you use someone else's property, you must have the property owner's consent." Most publishers are happy to cooperate.

Many infringers are "innocent thieves"—unknowingly breaking copyright laws. It is important to become educated in the basics of copyright law as it applies to music and other materials we use in our churches. By complying with the law, we will protect authors, publishers, retailers, and ourselves. And most important, we will please God. ✠

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Picture Windows for Preaching



Compiled by Derl G. Keefer

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

STEWARDSHIP

A farmer told his pastor that if God would give him great wealth, he would give 50 percent back to Him.

The minister asked, "If God gave you two thousand acres of oil wells, would you give the receipts from one thousand acres to the Lord?"

"Sure," responded the farmer. "Anybody could live off a thousand acres of oil!"

The preacher then asked, "If you had two hogs, would you give one to the Lord?"

At that, the farmer complained, "That's not fair. You know I have two pigs!"

Lunn Anderson wrote, "We don't suddenly, someday, have an abundance of time and money to give. We begin with little pieces. We are in training now, learning bit by bit to manage money, power, time, relationships, and temptation. Then maybe someday we will find ourselves competent to manage life on a grander scale."

Lunn Anderson, *Time with God* (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1991), 295.

SELF-CONTROL

Ron Boehme states that he remembers coming home from school and often facing a true test of self-control. The scent of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies would hit him in the nostrils.

Racing into the kitchen, he would see a plate of them sitting on the counter, but his mom would be at the sink cleaning up the dirty pans.

"Don't even think about touching those cookies," she would warn.

Boehme said, "It was like a shot to the stomach when she told me that."

It would take all that he could muster to keep his grubby little hands off those cookies.

"Sometimes, when she left the room, I'd *borrow* a cookie," he confessed. "When I got caught, my parents showed me another form of control called 'shelf control,' in which they applied a hairbrush to my bottom shelf!"

He brought the point to bear when he wrote: "My concept of self-control was backward. I thought self-control was 'resisting temptation or evil.' Later in life, I discovered that this is not the proper emphasis. Self-control is not primarily resisting wrong. It is possessing right with such conviction that resisting wrong is the natural result. . . . When we're committed to holy living, the resistance to temptation becomes an automatic response to a choice already made. That's why goodness in the heart must precede self-control."

Ron Boehme, *If God Has a Plan for My Life, Why Can't I Find It?* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1992), 64-65. ✠

Live . . . by What You Preach

There is not a pastor, alive or dead, who has not come up against the rough spots. They "come with the territory," the veterans will tell you. Life, and pastoring, during the hard-spot moments can be anything but fun. It can hurt. Such moments can be long nights of the soul. Are there any remedies?

The best remedies may be what you preach to your people every Sunday. What you preach is, evidently, what you believe. If it is good enough for your people, it is good enough for you. What are some things you preach to your people? Probably it goes something like this: "Just trust this to the Lord." Or, "Hang in there." Maybe it is, "Have you prayed about it?" Then there is the solid one: "God cares and will help you."

We have all used some of these, at one time, or a variation of them. But when you think about the rough spots, probably what you and I need to do is to draw from our own preaching. What we preach to others is good for us.

Let's pursue these statements and see what they are for us. "Just trust this to the Lord." We do have to do that, even in the rough spots. That with which we deal, without bringing the Lord into our process, usually complicates the matter. It seems so simple—but it is often a struggle. However, the prescription is good. Be encouraged, Pastor—that which we trust to the Lord is in good hands.

Sometimes the rough spots are caused by things over which we have no control. The fret and doing make no difference. Our greatest response to such is simply to give it to the Lord and entrust our healing to Him. This is not a cop-out, like the solution Jackie Gleason gave for the New York City traffic problem. He said, "Make all the streets one way going north,



by C. Neil Strait

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

and let Albany worry about the problem." Giving our problems to the Lord is our relinquishing the dilemma and the despair into His hands, trusting His care and His healing.

Another bit of preaching we do is summed up in the phrase, "Hang in there." It is encouragement for laypeople, and it is good advice for the preacher. At times the options are limited, and "hanging in there" is about all there is. But it beats running, is better than overreaction, and there are not a few who will tell you that's how they won the battle. They simply stayed by the goods, stayed the course, and a better tomorrow came. Pastor, be encouraged—God is with you in the "hang in there" moments. Believe it, because you preach it!

Another goody we preach often is a question—"Have you prayed about it?" The surprise is that too few have. More need to. Maybe the pastor needs to open a new chapter of prayer when the rough spots come. The reason it is good advice is that during the rough spots it is so easy to become critical, defeated, and drained. Communion with God will keep us aware of His grace and guidance for the passage. Rufus Jones used to say that "prayer keeps a window open on the God-ward side." We need that, always, but especially so during the hard times.

Pastor, be encouraged—God hears your prayers too. He waits to have communion with you and to be partner with you in whatever is going on in your life. Yes, the question you ask your laypeople is good—"Have you prayed about it?" The next time the rough spot comes, remember: what you preach is good enough to live—and struggle—by.

Maybe the one our people like to hear the most is "God cares and will help you." He does, and He will! One of my favorite verses is 1 Pet. 5:7, Phillips translation: "You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern." The caring God we commend to our people is also a caring God to us—we are included in this.

Gladys Aylward, missionary to China a half century ago, was forced to flee her missionary work when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. In fleeing certain death, she led nearly a hundred orphans over the mountains to Free China. It was a frightening journey, and despair was heavy. One morning, after a sleepless night, fearing they would never reach safety, she shared her hopelessness with the orphans. A 13-year-old girl reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

"But I am not Moses," Gladys Aylward replied. "Of course you aren't," the girl responded, "but Jehovah is still God!" (Jonathan G. Yandell, "Trust," *Leadership*, Winter 1995, 39.)

Pastor, be encouraged—God is still God. Let Him be large in your life, knowing that "you are his personal concern." The God whom you commend to others wants to be God of your pain and suffering, your dark nights of the soul, and your despairing days. He wants to shepherd the one whom He has called. So, live what you preach!

When Winners Feel Like Quitting

Developing Determination

You've heard it said, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." That may be true, but there are times when winners feel like quitting. What do they do then? You've heard it said, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That may be true, but there are times when the going gets tough that the tough want to crawl back in bed and hide from the cruel world. What do they do then?

Michael Jordan is known as one of the best basketball players of all time. It hasn't always been that way. During Jordan's sophomore year (1978-79) at Laney High School in Wilmington, N.C., he didn't make the varsity team. Leroy Smith, who never made it to the National Basketball Association, defeated Michael Jordan for the only sophomore spot on the varsity squad. Jordan settled for junior varsity. "He didn't sulk or threaten to quit. He just started working harder and improving his game," said his high school coach, Fred Lynch. "If anything, it made him more determined," noted Lynch. Of course we shouldn't fault Lynch. Leroy stood 6 feet 7 inches tall, and Michael was only 5 feet 10 inches!

Becoming a winner entails the strength to stay at a task even when you feel like giving up. It is the willpower to keep on keeping on when you would rather resign. Call it whatever you would like—determination, endurance, persistence, tenacity—it is an undeniable mark of a champion.

All too often people are defeated, not because of a lack of ability, but because they quit too soon. Many



William Richard Ezell

*Senior pastor,
Naperville Baptist Church, Naperville, Ill.*

people lose heart and throw in the towel before the game is finished.

What are some secrets that will

keep us from quitting, even though we may feel like giving up?

First, realize that problems are real.

Problems remain as a fact of life; we must expect them. Life is not a joyride. It is not like riding Disneyland's "Pirates of the Caribbean," where we float through the water on little boats, watching from a distance the cannon fire and the splashing water. Life is real with real pain, real problems, and real frustrations. People get sick; they experience disappointment; they shed tears; and they are touched by death. So what do we do?

We find the purpose in the problem. Problems come in every shape and size and from every conceivable direction, but they have one thing in common: for Christians problems are not without purpose. The problems of life serve a purpose; they can accomplish something good in our lives. As William Barclay put it, "These trials are sent not to make us fall but to help us soar; they are sent not to defeat us but that we may defeat them; they are sent not to make us weaker but to make us stronger."

Problems are a testing. They don't arise to destroy us but to develop us. Often problems arise for the purpose of producing endurance and strength in our lives. Within every problem resides the opportunity for growth and development in your physical, emotional, and spiritual life.

For example, kites fly highest against a stiff wind. Roses need to be pruned for their full beauty to blossom forth. The goldsmith relies on fire to purify the gold. The sculptor



needs to gouge and cut the wood or the stone in order for his masterpiece to shine through. Flower petals must be crushed for their fragrance to emerge. Violin strings must be stretched taut for the music to be played.

A blacksmith had a great faith in God despite a lot of sickness in his life. An unbeliever asked him one day how he could go on trusting in a God who let him suffer. "When I make a tool," the blacksmith answered, "I take a piece of iron and put it into the fire. Then I strike it on the anvil to see if it will take temper. If it does, I can make a useful article out of it. If not, I toss it on the scrap heap and sell it two pounds to the penny. Maybe God tests us like this. When suffering has come my way, I know that I've come out the better for it, so much so that I can honestly say, 'Put me in the fire, Lord, if that's what it takes. Just don't throw me on the scrap heap.'"

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All too often people are defeated be- cause they quit too soon.

When you are faced with the real problems of life, don't ask, "Why is this happening to me?" Problems happen to us all. Instead ask, "Lord, what can I learn from this difficulty?"

Second, release the power of God.

We have a secret weapon in facing the difficulties and pressures of life. We are like clay pots—fragile and easily broken—but we have a stabilizing force within us to prevent us from cracking under the pressures and attacks of life. God desires to help the clay vessels made in His image to mature in the furnace of trials without cracking.

This God-given power is an inner strength given in direct proportion to the need in our life at the moment. My oldest sister, Ann, lost her husband in a fatal plane crash when he

was 45. It was a tragic experience. Ann is a strong person, yet in many ways she was completely dependent on her husband. I asked her later how she got through this horrifying ordeal. She said, "Rick, you know, if someone had told me this was going to happen before it happened, I would have told them I could not survive such pain and suffering. But through this experience I have felt the quiet, calm, and comforting presence of God. He has given me the strength I have needed to face each day."

That "quiet, calm, and comforting presence of God" is the power of God being released in direct proportion to the need of the moment. So, how do we release this power in our lives?

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Problems are not without purpose.

Simply by acknowledging our need for it. A false philosophy has been circulating for years. It states, "God helps those who help themselves." That is not true. God helps those who realize they need help. Notice what God said to Paul: "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

When we acknowledge our weaknesses, we release the power of God in our lives. One of the great paradoxical truths in the Bible is that Christ's power is perfected in our weakness. When we die, He lives. When we lose, He wins. When we're weak, He is strong. When we are dependent, He is powerful. That is the power in the clay pots. That is the strength God provides within us.

Third, respond to other people's needs.

This thought goes against our very nature. Most often when we are con-

fronted with trouble, the more selfish we become, the more we become wrapped up in our own selfish interests and concerns. However, enduring strength comes not by becoming selfish, but by becoming selfless.

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The way to find endurance is by losing ourselves in some great cause.

We see this attitude evidenced by parents. Some parents, if not all, will give up their comforts and pleasures in order to make life better for their children. Also, we witness this demonstration in men and women who fight in the military. They will endure the pain and hardship of war, even death, because they are fighting for their country's freedom. The consciousness of a great cause brings its own strength and endurance with it.

So, how do we respond to other people's needs? By giving ourselves away. The way to find endurance is by losing ourselves in some great cause. Take, for example, the apostle Paul. His cause was the building of God's kingdom. The more people who came to Jesus, the more churches he started, only fueled the fire that was burning within him. He said, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Paul could go through what he did because he knew that it was not for nothing; he knew that it was to bring others to Christ.

Endurance is motivated by compassion. It is the will to serve, not the will to power. One can discover strength and endurance in facing the pressures of life by giving oneself away for the benefit of others.

Sadhu Sundar Singh was a well-known Indian Christian. One day he and a friend were traveling up a steep mountain on their way to a monastery. An icy blizzard threatened their lives. Suddenly they heard a cry

for help. Several feet to the side of the path was the form of someone lying half-hidden in the snow. "We must help!" Sadhu exclaimed.

"We cannot help," said the other man. "Fate has decreed that he must die. We have no time to spare, or we also will die!"

"If I must die, I will die saving someone!" Sadhu exclaimed. So the man went on, while Sadhu stayed to help his fallen brother.

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Your focus determines the extent of your determination.

The figure in the snow was a man with a broken leg. Sadhu made a sling out of his blanket and dragged the half-frozen man through the ice and slush. Then, off in the distance, he saw a faint light. As they drew closer, he saw that it was a monastery. Now he was sure he could make it! Suddenly he stumbled and fell over something hidden beneath the fresh snow. He brushed off the white powder and saw the frozen body of his friend. In his selfish haste to save his own life, the man lost his life. Sadhu's life was spared because he was willing to give his life helping someone in need.

Endurance comes to those who give their lives away to help others in a great cause.

Fourth, regain a new perspective.

Endurance comes by discovering a new way of looking at the situation. Staying power comes by changing the way you look at your difficulties. A key to persistence is perspective. The problem with frustrations and delays is that we lose sight of the final goal.

When we attach ourselves to our reason for living—the Lord Jesus Christ—we are able to keep on keeping on. So, how do we regain a new perspective?


We accomplish a new perspective by focusing on eternity. Paul said, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So 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. 4:17-18). Our eyes are focused on one of four places at all times: circumstances, others, ourselves, or the Lord. On what do you focus? Your focus determines the extent of your determination.

Many years ago a retiring missionary couple was traveling back to the United States on an ocean liner. They had faithfully served all of their adult lives in a foreign country, giving up most of the comforts of life in order to spread the gospel. As their boat arrived into harbor, a cheering crowd could be heard.

"Could it be a welcoming home celebration for me?" thought the husband. As they got closer, they realized that the reception was for a dignitary also on board the ship.

Walking down the gangplank, the husband whispered to his wife, "I can't believe that no one is here to greet us. I have given the best years of my life, and no one cares. While this diplomat is receiving accolades, I am receiving nothing. It is just not fair!"

The man's wife whispered back, "But, honey, you are not home yet!"

When you and I live in light of eternity, recognizing that God keeps books on us all, we can keep on keeping on, knowing that one day we will receive the greatest and grandest homecomings of all. I challenge you to keep on at your task. The game is not over. You can be a winner in spite of overwhelming odds. Just don't give up too soon. 

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The Pastor Overcomes Failure

Editor's note:

This helpful article appeared in *The Preacher's Magazine* (March 1976) 20 years ago. A new generation of pastors has come along, but the problem of failure still takes its toll on the ministry. Read this and learn how to overcome failure.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart" (2 Cor. 4:1, RSV).

Nervously he fingered his coffee cup as he poured out a tale of bitterness. Acid words spat out an all-too-familiar story of pastoral crucifixion. I could not keep from recalling a similar cup of coffee we had shared only a few years previously where tears of joy flowed unashamedly down his cheeks as he spoke of his church. But on this day, there were no tears—only the steely gray look of a deeply hurt man.

After a successful pastoral career spanning more than a decade, unblemished by even one negative pastoral vote, he moved into a situation where the house fell in on him. He sought for help, but none came. Everyone left him alone—to die. And die he did. I could scarcely stand the stench of his inner corruption as it assaulted me across the table. He who only months before stood tall and respected as God's man was now a pitiful and broken hulk of a human being. He couldn't even muster enough heart to seek out a secular occupation in keeping with his impressive physical bearing, his sharp mind, and his more-than-adequate education. He now filled out his days pushing a broom as a custodian.

Brethren, this is tragic! That twin impostor of "success" and "failure" had claimed another victim. Somehow my friend missed the whole point of what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35, RSV).



by C. S. Cowles

Professor,
Northwest Nazarene College,
Nampa, Idaho

Like so many of us, he had undoubtedly preached on this text numerous times, turning that cross into a kind of spiritual Madonna to be worn on a string around the heart. Apparently he never understood or anticipated that that cross might be painfully real. Nor did he reckon with the possibility that he might actually be called upon to give up his pastoral life—against his will—in a particular situation. Consequently, the experience that should have led him to a rediscovery of his life via the way of the cross instead killed him. Legion are the number of those who, like my friend, descend into hell—and stay there.

This is not the kind of death we are to die! It is true that our Master "was crucified in weakness, but [he] lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we shall live with him by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4, RSV).

It is the plan and purpose of God to lead us through Calvary to the victory side of the tomb: resurrection by the power of God and the creation of ever new and emerging life. There are some concepts we can embrace, on the practical side, which will help us to gain perspective and recover our

poise when assaulted by the self-condemnation of failure.

First, it is good for us to face our limitations.

All power in heaven and on earth has not been given unto us yet, and probably never will be. We do "have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7, RSV). The Word does continue to become flesh in us. Hence, our ministry is always bound up in, and subject to, our essential humanity.

We cannot minister to everyone, nor will we be accepted in every situation. This limitation is clear in our Master's life. He practiced what He preached: "Wherever they do not receive you . . . leave" (Luke 9:5, RSV). That did not mean that Jesus wilted before every gnat-stroking Pharisee who opposed Him, nor did He shrink from facing His enemies when God's will clearly led Him to Jerusalem.

The main direction of Jesus' ministry, however, was pointed toward those needy men and women who were open to Him. He felt no compulsion to force himself upon a people who clearly rejected His ministry. It is some comfort to those of us who have felt the pain of such rejection to know that it hurt Jesus too. He added the footnote that when the disciples left a town against their will, they should shake the dust of that place off their feet as a testimony against it. Even if they felt like saying, "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! . . . Capernaum, you'll end up in hell" (Luke 10:13, 15, CSC paraphrase), they should still leave.

We cannot minister forever in any given assignment. We are pilgrims and strangers—ecclesiastical systems of government help us to be reminded of that. It is therefore unwise to become overly emotionally involved

with any given situation, lest, when it dies for us, we die too. I have a pastor friend who, upon accepting a new church, walks up and down its aisles and tries to envision his last Sunday there. He even goes to the pulpit and makes his resignation speech. He tells me that this helps him realize that he is first and forever the servant of Jesus Christ, and only second, and for a time, the pastor of that church.

There are biological limits, too, which we must face. When my teenage children inquire of me how it used to be in the "olden days," I have to face the fact that I am maturing. I simply cannot, and ought not to, try to maintain the heady pace of my earliest years. True, we may have neither the physical stamina nor the emotional capacity to make as many soul-winning and pastoral calls as we once did. But, by the same token, we probably are not getting as tangled up in the personal affairs of people as we did in our youthful days of omniscience and omnipresence.

Why not flow with the natural biological stream of maturation and let it lead us into fresh dimensions and new depths of self-fulfilling ministry previously hidden from our view? There is no reason to feel, as we come to middle years, that we are all washed up because we cannot compile the same track record we once did, or as someone else does. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on . . ." (Phil. 3:13-14, RSV).

Second, we need to work out a strategy for survival.

Not every cross is worth dying upon. There is no divine imperative upon us to lay down our lives for the sake of the wolves. It was not cowardice that motivated Jesus to quietly slip out of

those crowds that would have pitched Him over the walls or stoned him to death; His time had not yet come. Unlike martyrs in other more heroic ages, we must live on after the crisis has passed. Not even God can do much with a defeated, disillusioned, and broken servant. Albert Camus, in his book *The Plague*, speaks of this occupational hazard that particularly afflicts those who give themselves to fighting "plagues": "They lay the real danger; for the energy they devoted to fighting the disease made them all the more liable to it. In short, they were gambling on their luck, and luck is not to be coerced."

When the pressure is on, learn the lesson of our human body: It reduces activity and seeks rest. Our tendency is to pour it on, work twice as hard, as if a good showing will stop the mouths of lions. It won't work. Our double exposure and frantic strivings only give them twice as much to attack. Furthermore, we drain our already strained resources and are in danger of losing that resilience and good humor that is imperative if we are to survive. To summon up special energies for pastoral calling or promotional activities is not only useless but foolhardy. It is much wiser to gear down the pastoral routine to a minimum basis, spending much time doing those activities by which mind and body are refreshed.

While it is not possible to work out an exact chronology of Jesus' earthly ministry, it is apparent that there was a sharp diminishing of public ministry immediately prior to the Cross. It seems that He withdrew from the crowds and sought solace with His disciples and friends—perhaps in anticipation of the unusual strain that would be placed upon Him through the ordeal of the Cross.

Third, fight back!

There is a proper time and place for the embattled servant to hold his peace and refuse to defend himself (John 19:9). But not even Jesus maintained His silence forever (v. 11). In fact, His normal style was to answer His accusers, confounding them when He could. Sometimes He even spoke sharply to those who opposed Him and were destroying souls (Matt. 23).

In an exaggerated effort to manifest an uncontentious spirit of sweetness, we sometimes let crude people walk all over us. This has serious consequences in several directions: (1) it may perpetuate a falsehood; (2) it may cause people to assume that we are guilty as charged; (3) it may cause irreparable harm to our own self-image. It is not a question of defending ourselves, but of preserving the integrity of the gospel and our ministry in its behalf.

There was a time when the Forestry Service judged success by how few fires ravaged the High Sierra, and how quickly they could be extinguished. But they have since learned that fires are "as much a part of the natural ecology as the sun and rain." Periodic fires clear the forest of brush and flammable ground cover, which, if it builds up, could indeed destroy the giant Sequoias that inhabit the region. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the giant Sequoias and Jeffreys can best seed themselves in ground that has been cleansed by fire. There is one tree, the knobcone pine, that cannot sprout at all until the heat of a fire cooks open the cones to let the seeds drop out.

Thank the Lord for the fire and the flood, and the Paraclete who is our Comforter until Jesus comes again.

The Uncommon, Common Salvation

Jude 3 speaks of the “common salvation” (KJV), indicating that God has prepared His saving grace for all His creation. Its distinctiveness makes it transcend all other theologies designed to extricate man from his sin and degradation and to give meaning and purpose to his life.

In this regard, it is “uncommon,” for it meets the needs of all, regardless of race, intelligence, or any other circumstance. John 3:16 thunders, “Whoever believes” shall be saved! The intelligent, well-trained preacher of the gospel knows this truth. He is eager to communicate it to the average “common Joe” in order that he may receive the truth and be saved.

The question comes: “Why aren’t more people being saved? Why aren’t more believers being sanctified wholly in our congregations?”

Without doubt, we have some of the best-trained ministers in our pulpits to be found anywhere. They know the doctrines of the church and believe them. But how do they communicate them?



by Raymond C. Kratzer

*Retired elder,
Church of the Nazarene,
former pastor and district superintendent,
Yakima, Wash.*

Dr. James B. Chapman once said to ministers: “Never underestimate the ignorance of your congregation concerning spiritual truths.”

Dr. W. B. Godbey, famous Greek scholar and holiness preacher a century ago, said: “The preacher wears himself out and is astonished to see his congregation as inflexible as icebergs. But the problem is solved in the fact that they do not understand it. You would be astonished at the

gross ignorance, not simply of worldlings, but of church members, even of the most simple fundamental truths of the Bible.”

Too often, a pastor fresh from school and with a thrill in his soul, a burden on his heart, and with a desire to see many folk finding Christ, discovers little results. He knows that more prayer offered, improved programming implemented, and growth analysis devised (maybe on his computer) will help in making progress. But often a stalemate results.

Could it be he has been unaware of the commonness of people? Oh, he may have some schoolteachers in his audience, and even keep businessmen and other professionals. But these, along with the “average Joe,” are still among the “common” when it comes to spiritual truths.

Jesus, the great example of preaching for results, always used very ordinary illustrations. And the intelligentsia, the lawyers, the teachers, and affluent, as well as the ordinary folk alike, were astonished by His ministry.

There seems to be among many ministers the idea that most people in their congregations are aware of Bible truths and of doctrinal verities. They may say with a flourish, as they launch into their sermon: “Now you folk are well acquainted with this episode from the Old Testament, so we will not retell it, but we shall emphasize this particular truth.” Many in his congregation have never read that important biblical account and are “at sea” about that to which he refers.

Dr. Richard Taylor, in his book *Preaching Holiness Today*, says: “These [complacent preachers] take for granted that because the church is committed doctrinally, all minds are at rest, and therefore repeated emphasis is not necessary. This is fatal. The basic things need to be said again and again.”



The guiding motivation in good salesmanship is to "say it often. Make it burn!" That's why the advertisements are trumpeted again and again! And their products are purchased.

Dr. Taylor further states: "Every pastor is facing a constantly changing audience. Then there are new people who do not have behind them many years of holiness preaching, as do the pastor and a few of his mature saints."

Without doubt, some pastors seem to fear their preaching might seem passe to the members of his church if he plays often upon the string of the "common salvation," as if he is only an immature preacher. He may not know it, but the mature saints of his congregation love to hear the old truths over and over again.

They long for the old-fashioned gospel. Yes, they appreciate new and refreshing aspects of the "uncommon salvation" to illustrate its "Common Denominator." For example, in our food regimen, we never get tired of fried chicken, potatoes and gravy, and apple pie. Likewise, the basic, simple truths of our gospel menu add greatly to the fluff and fancy dishes of religious dogma.

Once in a while you may be criticized for a seeming overemphasis upon the time-tested truths of salvation. For example, one preacher was accosted by a man from his congregation who said: "Why do you preach so often on being born again?"

His reply: "Because you MUST be born again!"

We should be concerned about the children and youth of our churches who are not indoctrinated with the importance of two works of grace as the minimum for a victorious life here and their requirements for heaven. They need the truths of the new birth and of entire sanctification spelled out often.

Specific language during an altar call should be the order of the day. Seekers ought to be questioned as they kneel at the altar by trained workers: "Are you here to be saved, or to be sanctified? Have you been saved? Do you know what it means to be sanctified?" A simple, well-thought-out explanation may help when coupled with an earnest prayer by the altar worker.

Of course, many seekers come to the altar to ask forgiveness for spiritual laxity or some other need. What a blessing it is to have an altar where a fresh touch from God may be experi-

enced! But let us always be aware when a definite need for conversion or entire sanctification is apparent, and endeavor to resolve it through counsel, prayer, and perhaps a chorus sung by the group. "I Surrender All" and "I Know the Lord Will Make a Way for Me" are good selections.

I long to hear enthusiastic testimonies about the time God came in saving and sanctifying power, and of its reality now. We believe in crisis experiences, and their witness has power in luring the unsaved into the fold.

**Let us always
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It would be heartwarming occasionally to have a "When and Where" testimony service. Ask folk to stand and briefly relate the time they were saved, and when, after conversion, they consecrated all to God and were filled with the Holy Spirit in sanctifying power.

A pastor is often tempted to prepare his sermons to impact some recalcitrant church member who irritates him. It is easy to fall into this rut, since we always have a number of impassive, unproductive people around. But while we get zeroed in on them, the visitor or the young person is desensitized to the moving of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Why not let the Holy Spirit deal with the problem folk, while we concentrate on the new people and the young. Likewise, many of our people need encouragement, having come from a week of problems and difficulties. They need a lift from the pastor's message.

Another deadly, or perhaps thoughtless, effort is to highlight the weaknesses of one's congregation or the apparent problems of our beloved de-

nomination. This is like hanging out our dirty laundry for all to see.

I recall one time a pastor blistered his people for their unspirituality, their lack of cooperation, and many other perceived weaknesses, until the whole group was stunned. Eventually, thankfully, he concluded his tirade, and the congregation was dismissed.

I went to a visitor to tell him how glad we were to have him come to our church. He responded: "Boy, did your pastor really give you the works tonight!" He hasn't returned since.

A pastor is to be a shepherd of the flock, patiently building confidence, feeding them, encouraging them, and assisting them in adding others to the fellowship. His ministry should be bathed in the love of God filling his soul. "Love is very patient, very kind. Love . . . is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; . . . always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient" (1 Cor. 13:4-5, 7, Moffatt).

This common salvation has an uncommon way of ameliorating circumstances when it is well immersed in divine love and touched by the Holy Spirit.

Again the minister must exude faith and confidence in God's Word and the efficacy of Jesus to meet our every need. He must mirror this assurance by his positive testimony, which leaves no doubt to his hearers that he is a genuine child of God—saved and sanctified wholly.

To trumpet the doubts and unbeliefs apparent today in the Christian world is unproductive. Too many borderline Christians or unbelievers in the sound of a preacher's voice, in this regard, think that the Christian faith is on a shaky foundation. IT IS NOT! We must announce: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it!" Our faith is not up for dismemberment. Our church doctrines are not subject to fusion with the errors of much of Christendom. They coincide with "Thus saith the Lord."

As always, our preachers must be down-to-earth, enthusiastic, exuding optimism, and holding out the lifeline of a saving gospel to all in their world of influence. Our "common salvation" will eventuate in uncommon results that will be a consternation to the devil, an uplift to the hearers, and a praise to the God whom we love and serve. Amen!

Every Pastor Is a Counselor

When the church official lays hands on an ordinand, a charge goes with the ordination: "Take thou authority to proclaim the gospel, to administer the sacraments, and to 'shepherd the flock of God.'" This is a considerably narrower charge than Christ gave His first ministers: "Preach . . . Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (Matt. 10:7-8).

The act of ordination creates a basic tension for the minister, especially for the evangelical minister. That tension comes because we are required to serve as both prophet and priest before the Lord.

The prophet *proclaims* the judgment and decisions of God, as well as the gospel of the Kingdom. Notable prophets and their assignments were documented in the Bible. While we may quake to compare ourselves to them, we stand in their lineage. Consider Moses, the first prophet (Exod. 3:9-10); Nathan (2 Sam. 12:7-12); and Amos (Amos 7:14-16). The last biblical prophet, John the Revelator, advanced the ministry of prophecy in written form (Rev. 1:10-11).

The prophetic charge shows up in the architecture of our churches, where we have a central pulpit and an altar rail (formerly mourners' bench)—with little place for the altar as in liturgical churches. Even when the Communion table remains central in the church, it is used to put things on, like flower arrangements, decorations, and sometimes a cross and candles. Clearly, the pulpit usually serves as the focal point of our architecture.

The priest "places sacramental acts at the center of ministry, stressing the mediation of divine grace through appointed means and the representation of the people before God in intercessory prayer."¹



Kenneth Clements

Ordained minister, Church of the Nazarene; served as U.S. Army chaplain for 24 years; licensed marital and family therapist, Nashville

We have tended to be weak in the area of "priesthood," where we provide a cure, or care, of souls. This pastoral responsibility has been described well by Dr. J. Glenn Gould:

The cure of souls means the care of souls, though at times it means cure in the sense of healing. It suggests that the true pastor is in a sense the physician of souls, diagnosing the afflictions of the soul, prescribing remedies, engaging in minor spiritual surgery, and seeking to promote healing and health throughout the entire body of Christ.²

In our intercessory prayer, in our pastoral prayer, and in our counseling, we fulfill the role of priest. Here we tell people the "law of the Lord," and we lead the people in telling the Lord about their repentance, helping them claim His forgiveness when they have repented. We give God a hu-

man face, and we give the people a way back to God.

When tempted to feel inadequate as a counselor and ready to refer prematurely to a "mental health professional," think about the tremendous value of the position of the divine intermediary, with whom we are identified. For example, Dr. William Crane says:

I am concerned lest busy pastors of our time become so involved in the technicalities and theories of counseling which come to us through other helping professions, that they overlook or never become aware of the Source from which all such helpfulness comes—God Himself. The pastor must not forget the agent through whom God brings about this depth training in the individual's heart and thus better prepares him to counsel others. It is important and



urgent to glorify God above men, however wise and helpful in their writings or their service the men may be. I dare to believe that only as we truly glorify God in our pastoral counseling ministry can we enjoy Him and enjoy also a degree of effectiveness and success. So let us focus more directly at this point upon the relationship of the counselor to the Holy Spirit in the developing of that degree of mature personality which will best enable him to function as a servant of God and of his fellow men.³

Some essential elements in counseling are necessary for pastors who counsel. I want to compare the universal principles of counseling held by professional mental health counselors to those who provide pastoral care and counseling. Also, I want to use terms from religion and the practice of ministry to indicate their applicability in both secular and religious settings.

ONE PRINCIPLE IS THAT OF INVITATION, OR ACCEPTANCE

Modern psychologists and counselor trainers use terms like *empathic relationship*, *unconditional positive regard*, and *acceptance* to say that the counselor should be ready to accept and work with whoever comes for counseling.



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and we give the
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Pastors go beyond this in the tradition of Jesus, as His representative, His priest. Some scriptures illustrate this:

1. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

2. "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38).

3. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

A SECOND PRINCIPLE OF COUNSELING IS CONFESSION, OR CATHARSIS

The literature on counseling and therapy is replete with the message that, for spiritual healing to occur, there is a need for *catharsis* or full confession of guilt, hurt, anger, confusion, and lostness. Again, we have the role of calling for confession, as both pastor and counselor. This stands at the heart of the call to a new way of life:

1. "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matt. 3:1-2).

2. "From [the time of His baptism] Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matt. 4:17).

3. "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:2-3).

4. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

A THIRD PRINCIPLE OF COUNSELING IS CONFRONTATION, OR REALITY TESTING

This consists of bringing the client to face the facts of his or her life and the person's impact on others, as well as on oneself. Again, this is one of the solid principles of Scripture:

1. "Samuel said, 'Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy? . . . The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. Because you did not

obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be [dead]. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines'" (1 Sam. 28:16-19).



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2. I have already given the example of Nathan's confrontation of King David regarding his sinful and destructive behaviors.

3. Jesus himself used the principle of confrontation in this context: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

Pastors must always remember that they are not the judges of anyone. One of our strongest guidelines says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Though we are not the judges, we are in the position to confront counselees with the harmful effects of their behavior on themselves and others. Even when God forgives sins, He does not remove all the consequences of those sins upon the individual or his or her victims. Failure to bring a troubled person to confront the consequences of his or her behavior does not help that one fully deal with the changes the person needs to make.

THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE OF COUNSELING IS FAITH, OR CONFIDENCE

In order for a person or family to

start the changes needed for a better life, it is necessary to have confidence that change is possible and "possible for me." There are at least two elements in this awareness: self-esteem and faith. These are developed in the fortunate child between conception and 18 months of age and are solidly formed by the age of five years. They result from interaction with parents who esteem the child and who have a basic faith in other people and in God. The skill of aiding persons to embrace these elements is an essential requirement of the pastor as counselor.

Self-esteem is crucial for good mental health. It is the bedrock assurance a person must have to believe, "I am lovable and capable." This self-esteem is the solid belief that life is a good thing, the world is a good place to be, and I am able to manage my life in this world with the help of family, friends, and God.

Whereas self-esteem is a basic confidence in one's own self and ability to manage, faith is a basic confidence in the goodness and support of other people and God. This basic confidence grows out of the constant observance of parental behavior as they trust the invisible support of the Holy Spirit in their lives.



Again, we have
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These elements of confidence are lacking in many who come to the pastor for counseling. The most common reasons for these deficiencies are:

1. A lack of unconditional love and total valuing of the individual within the home where he was born and grew up.

2. A lack of practical faith in the lives of the parents. The child has seen the parents confront the chal-

lenges and dilemmas of living and use their own resources to cope.

3. Physical and/or sexual abuse by the parents, usually the father. In my experience, one of the biggest challenges to enjoying good spiritual health is the ability to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," without envisioning a cruel or sexually abusive father figure. For some, there is the absence of an actual figure corresponding to "father" because the father is absent from the home.

The pastor/counselor must have healthy self-esteem, self-confidence, and the absolute certainty that God loves and desires fellowship with everyone in order to convey it to persons coming without them. With these tools, the pastor can share esteem and faith enough for the other to begin to receive his or her own. From where does it come? "It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). It will come to persons desiring it as we are able to bring them near to the throne of grace.

THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE OF COUNSELING IS RESTITUTION, OR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Some schools of counselor training hold as their goal that the client should gain "insight" into the problems. The belief is that insight will spark change in the person. Some pastoral counselors may share this concept.

Neither Jesus nor John the Baptist nor any of the apostles seemed to hold this point of view. When people came to John for baptism, he told them to "bring forth evidence of changed lives" (cf. Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8).

When Jesus anointed the eyes of the blind man (John 9:7), He told him to "go . . . wash in the Pool of Siloam." In Matthew 9, a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus by his friends. Jesus first told him that his sins were forgiven. Neither he nor the people around were impressed. Then Jesus said, "Get up, take your mat and go home" (v. 6). Change occurred immediately.

Finally, in Acts 3, we read that Peter and John came upon a crippled beggar at the entrance to the Temple. They gave him the name of Jesus, but they also instructed him to "rise up and walk" (v. 6, KJV). After that, "his

feet and ankle bones received strength" (v. 7, KJV).

We have not done enough when we help people have insight into their problems. We also need to find the strength to help them make some life-changing moves for themselves. "Your sins are forgiven" may sound like very little practical help to the person, and no help at all to those around who may have been injured by that person. On the other hand, starting a new way of living brings about change for the client and for everyone around him or her.



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Perhaps this is where a Discipleship Group is essential. As the person comes to Jesus out of the bondage of sin, he or she needs strong support and encouragement to "live out the new life." This sort of self-help group can be the pastor's "nursery" for newborn or newfound Christians. Those working with 12-Step Groups have demonstrated the usefulness of this approach.

THE SIXTH PRINCIPLE OF COUNSELING IS RECONCILIATION, OR POSITIVIZATION

When one has confessed, repented, received faith, and made restitution, we ought to give full recognition to that person as a full-fledged member of the Body of Christ. An appropriate level of humility is recommended in Gal. 6:1:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

For those pastors who wish to gain more practical insights and skills in the art of counseling, I recommend that they study the works of Rabbi Ed. Friedman and J. C. Wynn.

Though not a counseling principle,

a necessary knowledge is that of full professional networking. Each pastor faces the question of when to refer a person to some other counselor because of deep-seated emotional or mental problems that require expertise not possessed by the pastor. The literature on malpractice, and the fairly recent growth of malpractice insurance possibilities for pastors, helps to sensitize all of us to anxiety when faced with a parishioner in emotional or mental crisis. What is one to do?



One of the biggest challenges to enjoying good spiritual health is the ability to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," without envisioning a cruel or sexually abusive father figure.

As a minimum, each pastor needs to have some relationship with a professional person in mental health who honors the Christian faith. While many professional mental health people have a disregard for the skill of ordinary pastors, all of them have a very high regard for the special relation-

ship that exists between a pastor and a parishioner. Almost without exception, they will be envious of that sort of relationship. A mental health professional who also honors the Christian faith will be willing to hear about the situation from the pastor. He will help the pastor to wisely counsel the person or to effectively refer to someone else if that seems needed.

The best arrangement is to have an affiliation with a Christian counselor or counseling agency. In this way, the pastor can refer extended counseling about emotional/mental situations to the counseling specialist, while attending to the specifically spiritual and church-body related matters. This option is certainly not available to all pastors because of the lack of resources in some areas. In nearly every place, someone has had specialized training and education in mental health. The rules of "privilege" allow a pastor to gain consultation on counseling matters. It is also easy enough to get consultation by talking about a situation in a manner that is hypothetical, thus not revealing anything about who may be involved or the exact situation.


The most critical area of concern is the ability to diagnose, or to know when a person is in danger, or when a specific set of symptoms or behaviors indicate the necessity for referral to someone else for complete evaluation and/or treatment. One such concern is suicide. There are good books about counseling the suicidal person available to every pastor. It is relatively easy to judge the likelihood of immediate suicide. In the event one judges that suicide (or homicide) is imminent, nothing is as important as getting that person into medical treatment as soon as possible. Few other situations are so fast developing or so threatening that a pastor would not have time to gain consultation with someone trained or experienced about how to manage the specific situation.

One final word of advice is in order about counseling, consultation, and/or gaining counseling for yourself or family members. Do not ex-

pect your ecclesiastical superior to be able to provide these. You need to do consultations about management, policy, polity, and church programming with the district superintendent or other church leader. It is a conflict of



Each pastor needs to have some relationship with a professional person in mental health who honors the Christian faith.

roles to ask your superior to respond unemotionally and impartially to items of great emotional or personal threat that may impact on the organization of the church. The superior's own ability to gain accomplishment of goals and execution of the program for which he or she is responsible very often conflict with the needs of individual pastors or family members for unconditional acceptance and enablement required in counseling. Look somewhere else for your own counseling resource in matters of personal and professional counseling regarding emotional and mental health needs. 

1. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harper and Row, 1983).

2. J. Glenn Gould, *Healing the Hurt of Man: A Study of John Wesley's "Cure of Souls"* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971).

3. William C. Crane, *Where God Comes In: The Divine Plus in Counseling* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1970).

Organizing and Growing a Library

Christian leaders need a personal library. From it lessons and talks are written, and personal growth is encouraged. You can find what you need in your local library sometimes, but Christian leaders have a specialized need requiring a specialized library.

Which Books?

Begin with a few basics. You'll want a good dictionary, English grammar, thesaurus, almanac, and a collection of quotes and illustrations. Most



by **Lonni Collins Pratt**

*Freelance writer,
Lapeer, Mich.*

Christians also include two or three translations of the Bible, Bible dictionary, concordance, and handbook.

Other basics from the reference portion of my own library include Bible commentaries and studies, books on church history, encyclopedias, word studies, and lexicons.

Once you've accumulated the basics, begin acquiring books on topics you find interesting and think will be helpful in your ministry. This might take a little planning. Ask yourself: What subjects spark your interest the

most? What do you feel passionately about? What shape do you think your ministry is taking?

Keep a "wish list" of books to acquire. To help you decide which books suit your personal needs, try developing a list of categories. Here's the one I use; feel free to copy it.

Writing
Fiction
Allegory
Health
Self-help
Church
Women's issues
Spiritual disciplines
Religious reference books
Contemporary issues
Current events
Devotionals
Biblical studies
Family/Singles
Environment/Nature
Prophecy
Biography
Doctrine
Travel/Geography
Christian living
Classics

These categories are purposely broad. My library now includes about 1,400 volumes and countless vertical files. As it grew, I created subheads for these categories, according to my evolving interests and work.

For example, "Spiritual disciplines" now includes: prayer, spiritual direction, solitude, retreat planning, silence, study, and meditation. You've no doubt noticed that a projected topical list can double as a filing system for notes, sermons, clippings, etc.

Organize, but Keep It Simple

Don't create a time-robbing monster. It's the rare person who needs anything as complex as most large libraries use.



FIELD EXAMPLE

Category: Category Number:

Title:

Author:

Reference Number:

Vertical File:

Software:

Other:

Notes:

Location: Subject:

Whatever you do, be sure it's alphabetical. You can keep track on index cards, a loose-leaf notebook, or computer. The computer gets my vote. A very simple filing software such as *PFS:File* works for me. Don't mess with anything the size of Paradox or similar databases.

With *PFS:File* I simply create a field (see example) and save it. You could also use index cards and then file by hand. Into the field (or on an index card) I enter the same information about every book or vertical file I create. The computer does the work of sorting and filing.

I assign each item a reference number chronologically, according to the category. It's easy. Let's say I've just bought a book on prayer. When I enter it, my computer tells me I'm entering record number 1,488. That means I have 1,487 items already in my library. The category is prayer, and that's category number 24 (there's no special reason for this; it's just the 24th category I created). The reference number becomes 1488-24.

Not only do I know exactly how many items I own, I can tell quickly approximately how old any book might be (at least, how long I've owned it). When I want to locate a book in my system, I just type in the reference number, and it appears on the screen.

You can write this number on the inside book jacket. I don't. I have no trouble finding books because I as-

sign shelves and sections. My office is lined with bookshelves. The commentaries all go together, so do books on prayer, biographies, illustrations, fiction, etc.

I stamp my books with my name and address, in several places. It keeps materials from straying too far. Many friends enjoy borrowing books and have said the stamp reminds them who the book belongs to.

Read and Collect Widely

Don't be afraid to overcollect books. It isn't illegal to give books away. I receive many more books than I can use because I frequently write book reviews. So about three or four times a year, I purge my library of 50-100 books and take them to a church library or give them to friends.

I'm still reading very widely, while my personal library grows more focused. It better reflects my needs than it did a year or two ago. That's an advantage of getting rid of books I won't use.

Also include in your library: magazines, Sunday School curriculum, and vertical files. I have a few videos, audiotapes, phone directories, CD-ROM, software, catalogs, a photo library, and booklets. Indexing these items means I can always find what I need.

I don't record every single magazine or catalog. I subscribe to about 50 magazines, newsletters, and newspapers. These are stored in magazine files on top of tall bookshelves and on wide window ledges.

I keep a master list of subscriptions in my library file and label the cardboard files accordingly (I clip these and throw them out every year, keeping two years on file).

So my library records will tell you I have *First Things*, and I have color transparencies. But to find a certain color transparency or certain issue of *First Things*, I look through the labeled box. I can put my hands on what I need in two or three minutes.

Growing a Library

Books aren't cheap. You have other expenses to consider. Plan your book buying, and you'll always feel as if you're making progress.

Set aside a small amount of money every month just to buy books. Even \$15.00 or \$20.00 adds up quickly.

Some people have found it helpful to set aside a percentage of their income.

Look for chances to get books free or dirt cheap. Old book sales are especially worth your time. Ask your local library what they throw away and if you can look over their discards every so often. Watch for offers on professional discounts that apply to you.



Christian
leaders have
a specialized
need requiring
a specialized
library.

I added about 50 out-of-print classics to my library when a pastor retired recently, and the monastery I visit for retreats cleaned their library of doubles. Keep your ears open for such opportunities.

Many government publications are free, as are travel guides and some business materials. Buy books from discount houses, and watch for sales at local bookstores.

Keeping Current

Don't let the process of accumulating and organizing a library become overwhelming. Set aside time to organize it every week. Use this time to clip, enter new books, file magazines, etc. An hour on Friday afternoon, when things are usually slow, works for me.

Collect resources other than printed ones. Technology has made it possible to get volumes on CD-ROM and diskette. There are audio-pages and videos that might be worthwhile for you. Even a small library can develop into a multimedia resource center.

From the beginning, your library should reflect what is unique to your vocational call. This is even more true when space doesn't permit you to accumulate just anything with pages. By working at it, you'll develop a priceless tool for ministry.

Tax-Sheltered Annuities

A Great Way to Save Tax Dollars While Saving for Retirement

by Julie Bloss, J.D., CEBS

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Tax-sheltered annuities are a great way for ministers and paid church staff to save tax dollars now while saving for retirement later. You may have heard tax-sheltered annuities called "TSAs" or "403(b) plans." Those are all names for the same kind of retirement program. As a church treasurer, you can help educate your ministers and church staff about this valuable opportunity they may be missing. In fact, you may be writing checks for your employees to participate in a TSA, and you may not even know it.

BACKGROUND

TSAs are not as well known as their cousins, 401(k) plans and Individual Retirement Accounts ("IRAs"). Articles about retirement planning frequently tell people to maximize their contributions to 401(k) plans. That's good advice for people who work for corporations that offer 401(k) plans to their employees. But the law does not allow churches to sponsor 401(k) plans. Unfortunately, many church employees do not realize that they can participate in 403(b) plans or TSAs that offer many of the same advantages 401(k) plans offer in the corporate world. TSAs haven't gotten the

same amount of press as 401(k)s because TSAs are only available to employees of nonprofit organizations like churches.

**"Tax shelter"
often conjures
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schemes.**

Where do these numbers and initials come from? From the Internal Revenue Code ("IRC" or "the Code"). That's where we find tax laws passed by Congress. Rules for 401(k) plans are found in section 401(k) of the

IRC. TSA rules are found in Code section 403(b). Therefore they are called "403(b) plans."

Many people know about IRAs. They know that the law limits IRA contributions and deductions. But many people do not understand that other types of retirement plans, like TSAs and 401(k)s, also have very specific rules about contributions. Congress intends for retirement plans to be for retirement. That's why there are rules about how much taxpayers can contribute and how much they can take out. There's usually a tax benefit to people from participating in these plans, but that benefit is limited by law. TSA rules are a lot more complicated than IRA rules. But don't let those rules scare off your employees from saving tax dollars while they fund their retirement.

Don't be turned off by the name tax-sheltered annuity. "Tax shelter" often conjures up images of shady tax evasion schemes. But a tax-sheltered



annuity is a legal and beneficial way for ministers and church employees to save for retirement. Also, don't confuse a TSA with other types of annuities. An annuity is a series of periodic payments. There are several types of annuities. For example, someone could pay an insurance company a lump sum in exchange for the company's promise to make a series of payments later. An annuity is not always a tax-sheltered annuity.

Employees do need to carefully evaluate their finances before they make this commitment.

Why should church treasurers bother with TSAs when their ministers and paid staff can have IRAs? First, TSAs usually offer greater tax savings than IRAs. Second, taxpayers can usually put more money in a TSA than an IRA because the legal contribution limits are higher for TSAs. To understand the benefits of a TSA, you need to understand how contributions are made to them. Contributions can be made directly by the church. They can also be made by the employee on either an after-tax basis or on a tax-sheltered basis through a salary reduction agreement.

EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS

A church can contribute directly to a TSA for its employees. For example, the church could decide to contribute an amount equal to 10 percent of the employees' compensation. Employees do not pay any taxes on these contributions the year they are contributed. Instead, the earnings grow on a tax-sheltered or tax-deferred basis. That means that the employee is not paying taxes on the account as it grows. With a regular savings account, of course, the employee would be paying taxes on the

interest every year. When the employee eventually receives the contributions and earnings from a TSA, usually at retirement, the employee pays taxes then. Many people are in a lower tax bracket when they retire.

TAX-PAID CONTRIBUTIONS

Employees can also make their own tax-paid or after-tax contributions to a TSA. They could write a check to a TSA each month after they receive their paychecks. Because they are paying taxes on these contributions before putting them in the TSA, they aren't getting a tax break on their contributions. On the other hand, they will enjoy having the earnings in their TSA accumulate on a tax-deferred or tax-sheltered basis. Unlike a savings account, they won't pay taxes on these earnings each year. But they will pay taxes on the earnings when they receive the funds from the account, usually at retirement. Some people make tax-paid contributions to TSAs because they think that taxes will rise in the future. They therefore prefer to pay taxes on their contributions today to avoid higher tax rates in future years. Other people make tax-paid contributions because they really don't understand the best way to save taxes with a TSA.

TAX-SHELTERED CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH SALARY REDUCTION

The best way to save taxes with a TSA is through salary reduction. A minister or paid church employee can do this by signing a written salary reduction agreement with the church. This agreement says that the employee gives up the right to receive some salary, and the church agrees to pay that amount directly to the employee's TSA. In other words, the employee never actually receives the salary—it goes directly from the employer to the employee's TSA. Salary-reduced contributions enjoy tax-sheltered or tax-deferred earnings. The employee pays taxes on these contributions and earnings when they are received, usually at retirement when the employee is in a lower tax bracket.

Church treasurers need to understand some basic rules about salary reduction agreements. First, they must be signed before the employee earns the money. An employee can-

not wait until the end of the year and decide to contribute \$2,000 to a TSA. The agreement must be signed before the employee earns the funds. Second, the IRS allows a taxpayer to sign only one salary reduction agreement every year. If an employee specifies a certain amount, say \$1,000, the employee cannot change it later in the year. That's why it is better for the employee to specify a percentage of salary. If the employee designates 5 percent, for example, 5 percent can be contributed even if the employee gets a raise in the middle of the year.

Some employees are afraid to sign salary reduction agreements because they are afraid they will need the money. Employees do need to carefully evaluate their finances before they make this commitment. But if they get into financial problems, IRS rules allow them to stop making contributions any time by terminating their agreement. If this happens, however, they cannot sign a new agreement until next year. Remember, employees can terminate salary reduction agreements in the middle of the year, but they cannot change them.

An exclusion is always better than a deduction.

Tax-sheltered contributions to a TSA through a salary reduction agreement are not reported as income on a W-2 form. That means these contributions are completely excluded from income, just as a housing allowance is excluded from a minister's income. At best, contributions to IRAs are merely deductible from income, not excludable. In other words, the taxpayer first has to report the income and then deduct it. From a tax standpoint, an exclusion is always better than a deduction. That's why people save more by making tax-sheltered contributions to a TSA through a salary reduction agreement than they do by making tax-deductible contributions to an IRA. Of course, many taxpayers are not eligible to make tax-

deductible contributions to an IRA. And as we'll see in a future article, TSA contribution limits are usually higher than IRA contribution limits.

CHURCH PENSION BOARDS

Many church pension boards offer TSAs to ministers and employees in their denominations. That's the kind of retirement program offered to Southern Baptist ministers through the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Ministers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participate in another kind of retirement program through the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church, but they have the option of saving additional dollars for retirement through a TSA called the Retirement Savings Program. If your church participates in a retirement program through a church pension board, your employees may already be participating in a TSA. Contact your church pension board for more information. Insurance companies also offer TSAs. Unlike insurance companies, church pension boards can designate payments from TSAs as a housing allowance for eligible ministers.

OTHER TSA RULES

Regardless of whether a TSA is offered by a church pension board or an insurance company, it must follow various IRS rules. The terms of each TSA are found in a plan document that is like a contract. When ministers or church employees sign up for a TSA, they agree to be bound by the plan. The plan document may be very long and complicated. It has to be to include all of the terms required by law.

The plan says when employees can receive distributions. Most plans say that benefits are payable when the member becomes disabled or retires. If the member dies before receiving benefits, death benefits are usually paid to the member's surviving spouse or other designated beneficiary.

What may seem like hardship to a member may not be hardship to the plan.

TSAs are not like checking accounts or savings accounts—members do not have free access to their funds. Sometimes TSA contributions can be withdrawn before termination of employment or retirement, but usually withdrawals are restricted before age 59½ except in cases of “hardship.” What may seem like hardship to a member may not be hardship to the plan. Remember that the plan has to operate under IRS rules.


When members can withdraw their contributions before age 59½, they not only have to pay taxes on the distributions but also may have to pay a 10 percent penalty (unless the withdrawal is because of death, disability, or retirement). Sometimes the penalty can be avoided by transferring or “rolling over” the distribution to an el-

igible IRA or TSA. Transfer and rollover rules can be complicated, so members should not assume that they can freely and easily transfer their money around.

Just as IRS rules limit how much can go into retirement accounts, they also control when the money goes out. Remember that retirement plans are supposed to be for retirement, not for building up assets on a tax-sheltered basis to transfer after a member's death. That's why the law generally requires members of TSAs to start taking distributions after age 70½. IRS rules require additional taxes on some distributions that are too big. It's like Goldilocks and the Three Bears—distributions cannot be too big or too small, they must be just right.

The law limits how much a taxpayer can contribute to a TSA each year. These complicated rules will be the subject of a future article. Many ministers are not in a financial position to contribute the maximum legal amount to their TSAs. But some ministers may be violating the legal limits because they do not understand them.

SUMMARY

In summary, TSAs offer an excellent way for ministers and paid church staff to save tax dollars today while saving for retirement. TSAs aren't as well known as their cousins, IRAs and 401(k)s, but church treasurers can help change that. If you are paid for your services as a church treasurer, you could personally benefit from a TSA. But even if you are a volunteer treasurer, you can show your ministers and paid church staff how a TSA can work for them. 



Pontius' Puddle



Tools for Strengthening Ministry

There is a striking parallel between modern leadership literature and ancient biblical writings. In his 1978 classic on *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row), James MacGregor Burns appeals for a leadership that is more than power-wielding. Great leaders, he says, "emerge from and always return to the genuine and persistent needs of their followers. They arouse people's hopes and aspirations, identifying and stimulating 'higher needs,' liberating human energies, inspiring people to action" (18-23).

This high view of leadership has in it what David Lillienthal once described as "an almost poetic [prophetic?] and religious function." It is leadership derived from and governed by moral principle, with power directed toward raising people to the highest levels of personal motive and responsibility. It is tested and validated by actual results expressed as change that shapes the day-to-day lives of followers, in accordance with some high purpose.

There is a fundamental paradigm shift in this formula from earlier notions of leadership. It consists in this: THE POWER AND MANDATE TO LEAD DERIVES FROM THOSE WHO ARE SERVED. The locus of leadership shifts from the person of the leader to the leader and the led together, where leadership power is shared, and collaboration becomes the norm. The measure of effectiveness is the extent to which individual and group needs are met. Leadership thus conceived frees us from the stress-producing feeling of having to control, from enslavement to statistical measures, from having to live defensively against change and people.

This paradigm finds preeminent ex-



by David Grosse

*Director, Excellence in
Ministry Project,
Kansas City*

pression in the "servant passages" of Isaiah, and in the model of Jesus himself, who, taking a towel, "began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel" (John 13:5, KJV). The vocation of today's church leaders is a call to servant leadership. If you would demonstrate a responsible use of leadership power, show us your deeds of human servanthood. Validate your position of true leadership by the ultimate test of real change that meets people's enduring human and spiritual needs. In short, don't parade your statistics, flaunt your position, or strut your degrees in a display of personal success. Offer up your trophies of changed lives, of liberated captives, of noble goals and nobler deeds. Follow the lead of the servant-leader of the Salvation Army, William Booth, of whom it was said he was "king among men so long as men count service the badge of royalty!"

Many of the books that follow, whether from religious or secular publishers, develop one aspect or another of the model of servant leadership. All contain some useful materials that commend them; however, no blanket endorsement of any is either

expressed or implied. As always, caveat emptor! Books may be ordered from your Publishing House, using the ISBNs as listed.

Leadership/Management/Administration

Warren Bennis, *Why Leaders Can't Lead* (Jossey-Bass, 1989). PA155-542-2829, \$20.00.

The dean of organizational leadership exposes the "hidden forces" that conspire against effective leadership, offering specific ways to identify, attack, and overcome these forces. Practical insights on how to deal with troublesome issues.

Harris W. Lee, *Effective Church Leadership* (Augsburg, 1989). Pb. PA080-662-423X, \$14.99.

Effectively integrates biblical and secular sources to provide a practical sourcebook on topics such as leadership qualities, responsibilities, and tasks; power issues; spirituality. Excellent bibliography for further study. The chapter on "Visioning and Planning" is worth the price.

John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Abingdon, 1995). Pb. PA068-701-1426, \$14.95.

A Louisville Theological Seminary professor and successful pastor applies his tested collaborative leadership style to the practice of preaching. Where most preachers use a sovereign, leader-centered style, which often becomes manipulative and ineffective, he suggests tapping into the spiritual resources of the laity to breath new life into the congregation.

Paul Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership: A Guide Through Legal, Finan-*

cial, and Ethical Issues Facing Congregations Today (ChurchCare, 1993). Pb. PA188-320-0067, \$12.95.

A Book of the Year selection by *Your Church Magazine*, this easy-to-use desk resource can be the pastor's or lay leader's best friend when trouble looms. Three indexes and an extensive bibliography, complete with phone numbers and addresses, makes this an invaluable aid for the busy church leader needing quick and useful information.

Loren Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Alban Institute, 1986). Pb. PA156-699-0173, \$8.95.

Results of an 18-year study on pastoral transitions. How clergy and laity each experience leadership change, its impact on both, and what is needed if change is to produce healthy relationships and congregations for the future.

Randy Frazee, with Lyle E. Shaller, *The Comeback Congregation* (Abingdon Press, 1995). PA068-700-6201, \$15.95.

The remarkable story of a once-healthy congregation in deep trouble, then finding new life in part through innovative and adaptive leadership. The author describes specific strategies and tools to show church leaders what it takes to reverse decline and lead their own congregations to renewal.

Kenneth Mitchell, *Multiple Staff Ministries* (Westminster Press, 1988). Pb. PA066-425-0270, \$13.99.

Roles, rules, and rituals that combine to create collaborative and effective ministry teams. Cites cases of successful team ministries, problems they overcame, relationships they developed. Considers women and clergy couples on ministry teams.

Edward White, *Saying Good-bye* (Alban Institute, 1990). Pb. PA156-699-0378, \$12.25.

Diary excerpts and articles explore ways pastoral transitions can become

positive experiences. "What should be a time of joy and anticipation only tinged with sadness is all too often focused on the sadness," says the author. Preparing oneself and the congregation in appropriate ways can make the experience a time of growth for both. Adaptable guidance from the "mainline" perspective.

Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry: Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregation* (Alban Institute, 1993). Pb. PA156-699-0548, \$10.95.

Explores new ways to evaluate congregational ministry, not just the pastor's ministry. Grounded in a context of theology and mission in which the laity are viewed as ministers. Suggests how "whole church" assessments may result in stronger pastoral ministry and congregational involvement in church mission.

Burt Nanus, *Visionary Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 1992). PA155-542-4600, \$28.50.

A landmark book defining the "vision thing" in the context of other leadership tasks. Drawing important material from the great visionary leaders, Nanus shows how a distinctive vision attracts commitment, inspires people, revitalizes organizational life, and mobilizes the resources needed to turn vision into reality. Keen insights and adaptable strategies for church leaders in here!

Ken Hemphill, *The Antioch Effect* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994). PA080-543-0164, \$17.99.

Sidestepping a generation of outreach and market-driven formulas, the author rediscovers the source of sustained church growth in a spiritual commitment to God. "Church growth is not something we do," says Hemphill, "it is the by-product of a right relationship with Jesus, the Lord of the Church." Eight qualities that identify the growing, healthy congregation are developed, including (in chapter 4) that of servant leadership.

Death Is Not a Period

by Howard Coop

On a bright sunny March afternoon with a strong hint of spring in the air, I made a pastoral call in the home of an elderly woman, a shut-in member of my church with whom it was always a joy to visit. A few days earlier she had undergone surgery to remove a malignant tumor. When I arrived, she was dressed and waiting to be taken to the hospital for radiation therapy. Under the circumstances, there was only enough time for a few encouraging words, a Scripture reading from the well-worn Bible she always kept on the coffee table, and a prayer.

As I was leaving, she stopped me at the door and said, "I am not asking God to heal me; I am ready to go. When I come to that time, I am not going to die; I am going to live."

Moved by her sincere faith and her exuberant words, I went to my car and wrote in my notebook, "Death is not a period ending life; it is a semicolon separating two distinct parts of it." This is so because Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26, RSV). His living presence, made possible by His resurrection, is the guarantee and seal of it.

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The Army of the Anonymous

by Donald W. McCullough

Freelance writer, Solana Beach, Calif.

My father recently retired after 36 years as pastor of Bethany Community Church in Seattle. Most readers of this column will have never heard of him: he wrote no books or articles, he had no television ministry, he offered no seminars on effective church leadership, and he rarely spoke in other congregations.

What John McCullough did was faithfully care for those entrusted to him. His shepherding evolved through the years as the flock steadily grew from a small cluster of Norwegian fishing families into a moderately large congregation. He went from being a "one-man show" (his duties included being custodian, bus driver, and secretary) to being responsible for a staff of associate pastors and assorted professionals. An extraordinary outreach to college and university students gave the church a youthful, energetic spirit.

What remained constant through the years were Dad's strong preaching and sensitive pastoring. He loved the pulpit, surrendering himself to its agonies and ecstasies, faithfully speaking God's Word into the messy business of everyday life. Even more, he loved the people, praying and laughing and crying with them; my adolescence was embarrassed by his frequent public tears, but my middle age now sees them as watery witnesses to a compassionate heart.

He had his detractors, as any pastor does. Every "evangelical" wind blew in criticism and blew out the discontented: there were those who wanted him to be more charismatic, or more prophetic about the end times, or

more oriented toward Body Life, or more of a possibility thinker, or more aggressive against demons, or more seeker-sensitive. This sometimes hurt his feelings; and he was a little confused when those who had left would call, years later, in need of a pastor to help them through a crisis. But he kept his head down and his pace steady, staying true to his gifts and sphere of responsibility.

After nearly 20 years of my own ministry, this faithfulness impresses me. A pastor's work happens in the routines. Sunday comes around with relentless regularity, whether the preacher feels inspired or not. Board meetings, counseling sessions, hospital visits, weddings, and funerals—there's a predictability to it all. Even crises are rarely unique: problems people create for themselves are generally variations on themes of money, sex, or power; those that happen to them, some form of loss. Human suffering tends toward the generic. So a pastor, like a farmer, does it again and again. When you are contending with drought or knee-deep in manure, it's not glamorous; but someone needs to do it. Anyone who stays at it with faithfulness—not to mention creativity and joy—wins my respect.

Evangelicals love their stars, lifting high on pedestals best-selling authors, conference speakers, television evangelists, and megachurch CEOs. But we would do well to remember that the Church, for the most part, is nourished by unknown pastors who stay at it, day by day, in ordinary congregations of sinners who, by grace and prodding, are being slowly cajoled into sainthood.

The work calls for a stout heart to keep caring and a strong stomach to keep cleaning up after those who are still far from Christlike. This is why my father and those like him should be celebrated. At the heavenly awards banquet, some who have enjoyed public recognition will no doubt be seated at the edges of the party, while the unheralded servants—the Army of the Anonymous, as Dad calls them—will be invited to places of honor.

As we stood together on the Acropolis in Athens, my father pointed to the Erechtheion, a beautiful structure near the Parthenon. The roof of the south portico rests on six statues. He said, "Look, Don, the whole thing is held up by some nameless, unknown figures. A lot like the church, isn't it?" Indeed.

A personal word: Dad, you remember how Frederick Buechner says his conversion began when he heard George Buttrick preach about Jesus Christ, who refused the crown Satan offered Him in the wilderness but who is King nonetheless because He is crowned in the hearts of people who believe in Him. That inward coronation takes place, Buttrick said, "among confession, and tears, and great laughter."

Dad, you have not been crowned with power and worldly fame, but you have already been crowned in the hearts of many who, through your gospel labors, have made the good confession and with whom you have shared tears and great laughter.



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Jews and Greeks— Reason and Faith

Each person comes to faith in his or her own way. God has made us all different—special and unique. Effective evangelism must address the special concerns of individuals as well as universal truths of human experience and God's redemption. Every person needs God. However, one's understanding of that need and his journey to faith will be shaped by one's personality and experience.

Consider the specific role of reason in the discovery of Christian faith. Paul offers us a helpful distinction in 1 Corinthians:

Jews demanded miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jew and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:22-24).

Along with powerful theological truth, Paul shares some significant insight into people's journeys to faith. Jews look for signs of miraculous power to be persuaded to faith. Greeks want to be convinced intellectually. Most people are "Jews." The compelling attraction of the Christian faith is the promise of transforming power. We are drawn by the hope of saving our marriage, finding peace or joy, or healing our bodies or minds. The power of the gospel to change our lives moves us toward faith.

Some, however, are "Greeks." For these people reason and rational understanding are key issues in coming to faith. They struggle with intellectual issues and problems that do not usually concern "Jews." For a pastor or personal evangelist who does not share this orientation, it may seem that such a person is quibbling over unimportant issues. However, a "Greek" may be honestly wrestling



by Carl M. Leth

*Senior pastor,
North Raleigh
Church of the Nazarene,
Raleigh, N.C.*

with the call to personal faith from a rational perspective. This is not to say that "Greeks" are oblivious to the appeal of God's power to change their lives. But intellectual issues may be critical, even decisive, in their journey to faith. We need to understand how to be effective helpers to these people as we attempt to lead them to Christ.

Can We Prove That Christianity Is True?

The "Greek" would like for us to prove the truth of Christianity. It is the "wisdom" he seeks. So the first principle that should guide us is a limiting one. We cannot prove Christianity. God never intended that we should. That's why we are called to **faith**.

By definition, faith is a trust in something not seen. The "foolishness" of the gospel means that it is finally beyond the capacity of human reason to comprehend. If we could demonstrate the truth of Christianity scientifically, belief would be intellectual assent and not faith. It is the limitation of reason that we need first to understand. Reason can help us reach the edge of faith but cannot take us farther. To the "Greek," we can say that we will walk the path of reason part of the way, but it cannot bring us to our final destination.

Can Reason Be an Ally of Faith?

Though reason cannot replace faith with rational proof, it can be a helpful ally in coming to faith. The goal, however, is not to prove the truth of the Christian faith. It is to demonstrate that Christian faith is a **reasonable** choice. It is a difficult, though neces-



sary, demand that a rational seeker step **beyond** the limits of reason in coming to faith. It is more difficult, and unnecessary, to demand that they choose **against** reason in coming to faith. Personal commitment to faith in Christ is **not** an **irrational** act. C. S. Lewis, to name my personal favorite, and other able apologists have demonstrated the reasonable character of Christianity. It makes sense. It offers a consistent and coherent frame of reference for understanding human experience.



Personal commitment to faith in Christ is not an irrational act.

For instance, the Christian belief that God has directed the created order is as reasonable as the claim that creation is a magnificent coincidence. It requires a shorter "leap" to suggest that some kind of higher power is behind what we see. Even a secular person is moved to wonder by nature's complexity and beauty. Most secular people find it easier to assume that something has ordered this "theater of glory." Like Paul before the altar of the unknown god, Christianity names the God of creation. We can't prove it, but the Christian faith offers an eminently reasonable explanation of our experience in creation.

In fact, while argument from reason cannot prove the truth of Christian faith, it can show that Christianity is **more** reasonable than other alternatives. This should not surprise us. The test of a life philosophy is that it adequately explains life and gives it meaning. Since God has created and ordered life and since all meaning derives from Him, we have insight through Him into the otherwise unknowable. We need not fear that any present or future insights into reality will contradict our faith. We cannot prove it, but through revelation we know it. Let our faith face the test of

intellectual challenge. Even on rational grounds alone the Christian faith can more than hold its own.

Beyond Reason to Faith

At some point every "Greek" will reach the limit of reason on the personal journey to faith. Reason may persuade us that the Christian faith is a reasonable, even superior, alternative. From there, however, personal faith is a step of ultimate trust as an act of the will. We must choose to entrust our eternal destiny to God, who is unseen. Jesus offers us a graphic model of this kind of radical trust. On the Cross He cries out to God, the Father, who seems absent. Nevertheless, Jesus shortly entrusts himself ultimately to this "absent" and unseen Father: "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). He declares, releasing His life in radical trust in the Father.

The step or leap of faith is an unavoidable part of becoming a Christian. Here the "Greek" must move beyond reason and rational argument. If he cannot, or will not, he must go his way "sad" like the rich young prince. Unwilling to release his "riches"—his reason—he is left in spiritual poverty. Perhaps even here reason can help us. If Christianity is true, reason might argue that the stakes are high enough to warrant the risk of faith. Ultimately, of course, each person must make the decision of faith on his own—choosing to trust God above and beyond all other allegiances.

The pastor or personal evangelist needs to remember that this decision of faith is the primary arena for his or her work. The "Greek" who is seeking Christ does not primarily need an intellectual mentor. The evangelist does not need to be able to match intellectual swords with the seeker. The evangelist *should* be familiar with resources that can help the "Greek" seeker struggling with intellectual issues. We can, however, be honest about our personal limitations. Remember, we will not, and cannot, reason anyone to Christ. What we can, and should, do is walk alongside the seeker, especially at the step of faith. It will not be your intellectual ability that grants you authority here. It will be your personal credentials as a person of faith, who has successfully traveled this risky journey, that will

give you the authority you will need. It is a poor exchange when we try to be intellectual mentors as a means of faith. The "Greek" will be much better served by an evangelist that will say: "I do not know the answers to all



Personal faith is a step of ultimate trust as an act of the will.

your questions. But when you have gone as far as reason will take you, I can help you make the final step to faith in Christ."

Faith Seeking Understanding

Beyond the step of personal faith, the "Greek" will find that reason is a welcome and helpful resource for a disciple of Jesus Christ. The classical rational presentations of the Christian faith are not meant to bring us to faith but to help us understand our faith. "Thinking Christians" is not a contradiction in terms. The very best of our intellectual abilities can be employed in the service of understanding what it means to be a Christian. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ does not mean that we turn our brains off. On the contrary, it may mean that we can really turn them on in ways that we never knew possible before. The life of Christian discipleship can, and should, be intellectually stimulating.

The Wisdom of God

Each person comes to Christ in his own way. Some will come as "Greeks," intellectual seekers after God. Our task as pastors and evangelists is to help these seekers understand the true "wisdom of God." Reason can help us both before and after the decision of faith. We need to use it to the best of our abilities. We also need to remember that each person (including "Greeks") finally must take a step of radical trust, placing his or her faith—beyond all reason—in Jesus Christ

Why Are You a Correctional Chaplain?

Paul wrote: "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND'" (Rom. 15:20-21, NASB). Paul exposed himself to all kinds of dangers and hardships in order to joyfully preach the gospel of Christ to those who had not heard and who were in Satan's deadly grasp.

When David Livingstone volunteered as a missionary with the London Missionary Society, they asked him where he would like to go. "Anywhere," he said, "so long as it is forward." When he reached Africa, he was haunted by the smoke of a thousand villages that he saw in the distance.

Chaplaincy ministry takes you into the world where people have not heard about Jesus and who experience the desolation of suffering. The church cannot ignore these for whom Christ has died or be so shallow as to send them off with some meaningless little prayer. The highest, deepest, widest, most Christlike emotion that could ever fill a human heart is to take the gospel to those who have not heard. Jesus Christ never said that the lost were to come to the church meetinghouse, but that the church should go to them with the liberating message of the gospel, which "is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16, NASB).

I came to correctional chaplaincy with fear and reluctance, but God has obviously opened a great door of ministry. The people I work with, beyond the staff, have murdered, raped, and maimed. I deal with various shades of Islam, satanism, Wicca, Native American shamanism, Rastafarianism, etc. Hate, anger, and racism abound. Most of the men I deal with came into this



William R. Hunter, Jr.

*Correctional chaplain,
Wabash Valley Correctional Institution,
Carlisle, Ind.*

world as innocent babies but landed in families where they were abused, used, and often thrown away. Jesus Christ sheds His tears of compassion through us as we listen to the horrors these men have experienced from their earliest days. It does not excuse their behavior, but one can under-



stand why they have such significant levels of anger, hate, and fear.

We have watched God work miracles. In the last eight months, attendance in our chapel programming has increased from less than 100 men a month to more than 1,000 per month. Let me tell you of some of the miracles God is doing here. We started a Wednesday evening Bible study. Attendance is by the chaplain's invitation only. We focus on men who seem serious about changing their lives. Nearly every week one to several men are born again. Sometimes a guard who might be sitting in comes to Jesus Christ also.

Vic was an enforcer in another prison. He worked for two drug pushers. If someone did not pay up, Vic came to see them. Vic is about 6 feet 7 inches tall. He has a heavily muscled frame with arms so large he has to split the sleeves of his T-shirts to make them fit. He has spent one-half of his life in prison. If you see him with his shirt off, you see scars up to a foot long where he has been cut with some kind of blade while working as an enforcer.

In Luke 24:6, the women who came to the tomb of Jesus were told, "He has come back to life again!" (TLB). Vic knows Jesus is alive. As he testifies about coming to Christ and what Jesus has done for him, Vic has tears dripping from his black cheeks and chin. He now assists in leading our Wednesday Bible study.

Vic often brings this chaplain to tears as he says, "Chaplain, I love you. You're the first Chaplain in 19 years who cared." Vic is a walking miracle. He knows where Jesus is. Jesus lives in the heart of Vic.

Then there's Frank, a satanist with gruesome tattoos over much of his body. Vic recommended we have Frank come into the Bible study. On

his first time with us, Frank invited Christ into his heart and life. The conversion process was very dramatic and emotionally charged as Satan waged war to keep the soul of what has become a humble man under Christ's care. When the battle was over, a sense of peace seemed to invade our chapel as men were weeping at the release of another soul.

A few weeks later, Frank seemed subdued as we worked through our Bible study. We stopped and asked him if there was anything wrong. He said that he was "raised to hate people who were not white." About half of our group is black, Vietnamese, and Cuban. He said he knew it is wrong to hate people of other races, but Satan was working him over in this area.

We gathered around Frank and anointed him, asking God to heal Frank of race hatred. God answered prayer that evening. Frank now enjoys the fellowship of the rest of our group, no matter what color. Frank knows where Jesus is.

Ted is one of the most compassionate men we have known. After eight years in a maximum security prison with men who have raped and murdered, the person who accused him has recanted. As the system works to correct this error, Ted had to work on some deeply ingrained bitterness. Once again, Christ proved himself an able Healer as He melted Ted's bitterness away. Ted also helps lead our Bible study. He has matured quickly in Christ.

We have supplied Ted with a *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* and have had many discussions of doctrine and theology. We are getting ready to take Ted into membership in the Church of the Nazarene.

He is also getting ready to attend Nazarene Bible College to study for the ministry. Once a judicial system corrects itself, a seemingly gentle man will prepare for a life of ministry to those wounded by Satan. Ted knows where Jesus is.

After 16½ years of pastoral ministry I entered counseling full-time. I now work as a correctional chaplain and enjoy the preaching event in our prison chapel. I preach to people eager for hope, truth, help, and healing. Their faces communicate an intense interest in what I have to say. And then, I am emotionally moved as I share Communion with these men at

the close of a service. The only Communion experience more moving than with the men I serve came when I knelt at an altar with about 50 homeless people and heard their humble prayers of faith.

The people of the holiness churches could help their chaplains. We have almost as many chaplains as we do missionaries. The most needful help is prayer. We work with people who have been mauled by Satan. He fights to keep them. Our greatest need is for intercessors.

Second, our pastors and laymen need to put together preaching/music teams and to come and help chaplains minister to the lost with whom they work. The appreciation these men feel can be viewed on their faces as they get involved in ministry. There is no congregation of blank facial expressions here.

The state provides no funding for materials, so we go begging. Here at Wabash Valley Correctional Institution, we could use about 50 *Herald of Holiness* magazines or other holiness periodicals each month. Plus I could use a large supply of *The Cycle of Victorious Living* by Earl Lee and a large supply of *Basic Bible Studies* by Chic Shaver.

Other materials such as David Seamands's books *Healing of Memories* and *Healing for Damaged Emotions* would be helpful.

An occasional grant of \$500 would be a dream come true. Then, if a congregation would videotape its services, produce a good product, and would send them to us weekly, we could supply the inmates with some good Wesleyan programming.

Our men live in an extremely Spartan institution with very few items in their cells. But they do have access to television and need good programming beyond the usual godless dribble we normally get.

We could use a good used Communion set with enough trays for about 100 disposable cups.

Our most desperate need is for intercessors to rise up and support us. According to Curt Bowers, we serve on the "forward edge of the battle area" against Satan. The enemy roars loudly and fights mightily. But God can bring him to his knees as we pray his prisoners into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13, NASB).

Why be a correctional chaplain? The work is challenging; you often come face-to-face with Satan in battle, and the fulfillment satisfies to the marrow of the bone. The depth of true fellowship with those we've seen come to Christ is deeper than anything I've experienced in those years of pastoral ministry. I believe the chaplaincy to be on God's cutting edge, at the front lines of His cause. This is exciting work!



I assure you, Mrs. Johnson,
the sermon illustration was not about you.

Help! I'm an Associate Pastor

An associate pastor took me out for lunch to ask advice. As we indulged in our meal, he revealed the horrors that he was enduring. He left the church a few months later. Another friend served as an associate for five years at one church. His ministry was much the same as the first. Similar ministries, yet different outcomes.

Throughout the Scriptures, we see individuals who go through difficult times. Some pass the test, while others fail. King David felt secure in his kingdom, but when the temptation to have another man's wife came along, David gave no resistance. Joseph seemed also secure in Potiphar's household. When Potiphar's wife was available for forbidden pleasure, Joseph maintained his integrity. The difference is in the individual, not the situation.

Many associate ministers have difficulty working with their senior pastors. They struggle and complain, month after month. Some decide to leave after serving only a year to a year and a half. There are other alternate steps to take, however, before making a desperate exit to avoid further conflict.

ASK

Prayer is difficult when it involves someone who may have hurt us. That is why Jesus called us to pray for our enemies. Though leaders are not enemies to their assistants, some perceive that they are. Unfortunately, perceived truth is harder to deal with than real truth.

As associates ask God to work, He moves in the hearts of both parties. The Lord has power to change attitudes. Also, God will anoint and strengthen the senior pastor in response to your prayer. When God strengthens the senior pastor's min-



by Michael W. Huey

*Licensed minister,
Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo.*



istry, the associate's ministry is also helped.

BEGIN

One of the best ways to support a leader is to show initiative. When you know what the pastor's intent is, begin action as soon as you have a plan. Too often senior pastors get frustrated because they feel they have to constantly tell their assistants what to do.

A mistake that I cannot correct occurred when my senior pastor had to leave town for a funeral about two hours' drive away. He had booked himself to speak to the men's breakfast, and the funeral obviously interrupted his plan. The director for the breakfast asked me the ominous question, "Who is going to speak?" I had only served at this church for one month.

I should have stepped up to the plate and displayed initiative. Instead, I called my boss and asked what he wanted. I should have realized what he needed and called to say I was speaking for him. Begin action. Don't wait for detailed orders.

COMMEND

For some reason, many associates think they are the ones who should receive appreciation. While associates do need appreciation, this attitude reveals a self-oriented ministry. Write notes, give cards, and remember birthdays and holidays. After a good sermon, commend your pastor. If your offices are computerized, send a complimentary E-mail once in a while.

I took every chance at the pulpit to commend our pastor to the congregation. Let the congregation feel confident in their leader, and your leader will feel confident in you.

When my pastor celebrated his

10th year at the church, I wrote a warm, loving, and genuine letter of appreciation. He knew I was on his side—that I was serving him. Unfortunately, adherents and members may complain about their minister too often; their assistants should not add to the list. Expressions of appreciation frequently open a door to discussion.

DISCUSS

Communication is not just a duty of the senior pastor to the associate; the reverse is also true. As a platoon leader in the army, my instructors taught me responsibility for everything accomplished or unsuccessful under my command. There was no way for me to know what was done unless my sergeants conversed with me.

Leaders are also responsible for the ministry of their assistants. Pastors want all ministry in the church to succeed. Many associates could learn from the past failures of their bosses by setting aside regular times to talk.

If you feel that your pastor has not communicated well in the past, set up an appointment. Discuss what you feel. Demonstrate your need to ask questions, to give comments, or to have someone to go to for advice.

When you see something wrong or questionable, discuss it.

I took our youth group and sponsors on a retreat along with my pregnant wife and my senior pastor. The youth group had to be at the convention center in a half hour, and my wife was not feeling well. She stayed behind and asked to be picked up later if she felt better.

A couple hours later, I found that my wife was ready and desired to join us. At the convention center, my pastor volunteered to go back and get her for me, since I needed to be with the youth. I took the opportunity to discuss the matter in private.

After our discussion, he realized what it would look like to have a minister leaving a hotel with someone else's wife. I could tell he had never considered the ramifications before. From that point on, he made sure the pastoral staff would never be alone with a member of the opposite sex. Since I took the opportunity to discuss my feelings and opinion, I possi-

bly saved my pastor's ministry and my own.

EASE

The purpose for hiring an associate is to ease the workload of the senior pastor. This does not mean to simply fulfill your job description. The word "minister" means "to serve."

When we see something within our ability that will minister to our senior pastor, we are to do it. A pastor is more sensitive to an associate's needs after observing the associate give extra effort.

As a youth pastor, I was excited about what God was doing in the youth program, but my pastor seemed neither exuberant nor disappointed about it. I wondered if he cared.

My job description excluded hospital visits of the elderly, but I noticed he was getting bogged down with them. I decided to help for a couple days. From that point on, he was convinced that our youth ministry was the best thing in town.

Associates are called to put the senior pastor's ministry above their own. The senior pastor is the one through whom God gives and delegates ministries in the church. This is especially true with paid staff. Without that senior pastor, associates have no ministry. If the pastor resigns, usually the staff resigns also. Therefore, associates must protect and build the ministry of their boss.

There is a time to stay and a time to go—with a confirmation in the hearts of both pastors that the time of transition has come. God showed Moses that Joshua was to take leadership. He told Elijah that Elisha would carry on the mantle.

When I began feeling that the time was approaching, little did I know that my senior pastor was feeling the same prompting of the Spirit. I called several ministers who served successfully in associate positions and had moved on. One served as an associate for over a decade. When the Lord gave him a release from the church, he became a successful senior pastor of a large church.

While there is a time to go, many associates could greatly enhance their ministry if they would stay and watch what God can do through a ministry that supports rather than opposes the senior pastor.

All I Needed to Know About Life I Learned from My Bible

by Donna MacLean

Freelance writer, Marysville, Wash.

Miracles happen.
Somebody loves me.
I am not alone.
The majority isn't
always right.
Wonderful things
happen in dungeons.
Death is only skin deep.
Poverty is temporary
and so is wealth.
He who dies with
the most toys
loses the most toys.
You can always
go home again.
Things may look
a lot better
in three days.

Is Social Drinking the Business of the Church?

Francis Willard said: "The liquor traffic would destroy the church if it could; the church could destroy the liquor traffic if it would."

Today society camouflages, ignores, evades, and denies both the nature and the seriousness of the problems caused by alcohol. Facts are obscured by prejudice and ancient myths. Advocates of total abstinence feel the sting of ridicule. Those favoring beverage alcohol tend to deny the extent of the problem of abuse, to be critical of those who objectively analyze the problems, and to heap scorn upon those who suggest that the drinking act should be inhibited either by legislation or public opinion.

One of the most pervasive myths over the past few years has been the idea that alcoholics and social drinkers are two entirely distinct breeds with nothing in common. According to this idea, two fundamental types use alcohol—those who become alcoholics and those who do not. For those who do not, drinking does not cause severe problems. As a result, although the original premise has not been realistically investigated, alcoholics have been widely blamed for society's alcohol problems. The prevalent idea that alcoholism is a disease has provided the foundation for the development of this concept.

If alcoholism is really a disease, it is the only disease on record whose existence we insist on perpetuating, whose causative necessary agent we produce under license and distribute more effectively than food, whose agent we hold necessary to reasonable social functions. It is the only disease for which we absolve the distributors of the necessary agent from any responsibility in cure and rehabilitation, the only disease where we don't question the producers' and distribu-



by **Morris Chalfant**
Evangelist, Bourbonnais, Ill.

tors' advertising budgets and costs when the budget requests of the health agencies go in to combat the effects of their advertising.

Our society is sick, not only because it makes such wide use of a dangerous and destructive drug called alcohol, but also because we condone and glamorize its use. We commercialize and promote this drug! There is a double sickness: first, of alcoholism; and then the social, moral, and spiritual sickness of tolerance of this abominable social curse. We've lost our sense of values and moral rightness.

Alcohol is America's number one hard drug by any conceivable standard: its capacity to do irreparable physical damage, the economic impact, its addiction qualities, the number of people involved, the relation to crime, the quan-

tities consumed, the number of deaths and injuries, and the threat to young people.

As a clergyman for over 50 years, I have observed how alcohol has destroyed the happiness and the lives of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. I have seen that it robs homes of peace; it puts a barrier between husband and wife; and it kills all true parental tenderness, throwing the children back into the world for the moral training a father and mother are alone fitted by nature to give. It is at the bottom of most crime—domestic infelicity, poverty, seductions, murders; it is allied to all that is evil and destructive of the high aims of civilization.

Alcohol is a major factor in separation and divorce. It is the devil's chief agent in home destruction.

The Word of God, our one true



Source of wisdom, has this to say about drunkenness: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1, KJV). "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also" (Hab. 2:15, KJV). "Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:10, KJV).

If we are not careful, we may excuse this terrible thing by looking at it lightly and saying, "It is none of our

There is a double sickness: first, of alcoholism; and then the social, moral, and spiritual sickness of tolerance of this abominable social curse.

business what the other fellow does." In one sense, that is true. On the other hand, it becomes my business, and concerns me greatly, when I see alcoholic drinks ruin, wreck, and destroy the homes of my neighbors. It is my concern when men made crazy by alcohol come racing down the highway in a powerful machine that is capable of killing and maiming any number of people if it is not properly controlled.

It is my business when I see young men and women behave like beasts made mad and in a minute of madness commit sin that they and society will pay for eternally. It is my business when my property is destroyed and my income heavily taxed as the result of the destructive power of this tool of Satan. No citizen dare attempt to wash his hands of this problem by saying, "It is none of my business."

The church can't keep its mouth shut on this any more than it can on war, poverty, unfair labor practices, crime, or any other social evil. The church cannot remain on the fence on this matter. It must decide whether it is for this traffic or against it.

It is time we asked those 100 million U.S. citizens who are at least nominally Christian a few questions:

Is it right to build churches to save mankind, and at the same time license a business that destroys mankind?

Is it right to license a man to sell that which will make a person drunk, and then punish the person being drunk?

Is it right to license a man to make paupers, and then to tax sober men to take care of them?

Is it right to license a tavern to teach vice, and then to tax people for schools to teach virtue?

Is it right to derive a revenue of a traffic that no decent person will defend?

Is it right to teach your boy to be honest, and then vote to license a thing that robs the widows and orphans of their bread?


(Author Unknown)

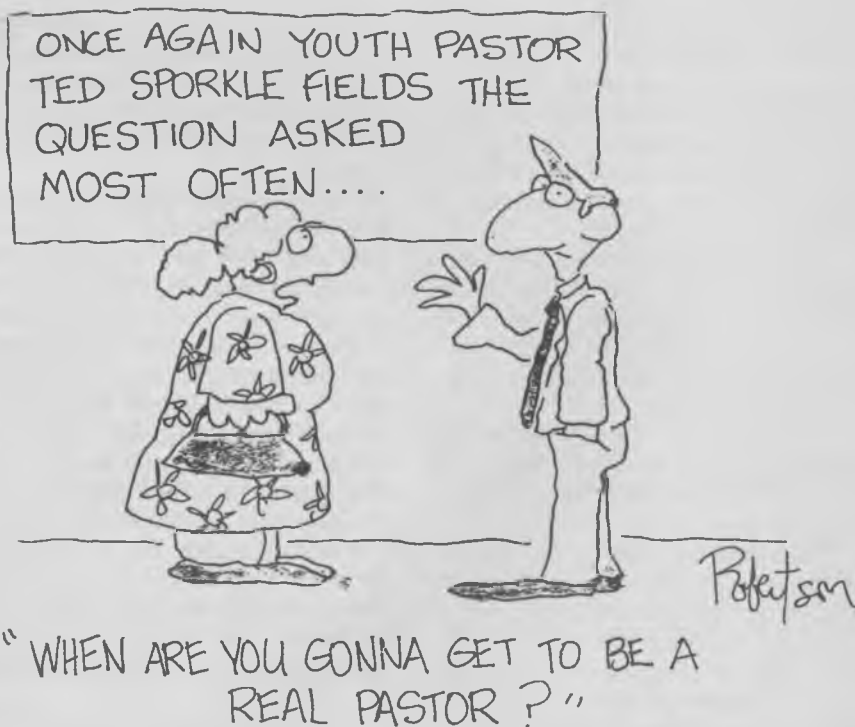
A letter in the newspaper was written by an unhappy woman who complained that her husband thought it

funny to make her pet cat drunk by putting gin in its milk. The woman complained that the cat would dance like mad, stagger around in circles, and finally fall into a heap in the corner and sleep it off. Besides this, the cat was losing hair because of its drinking. Readers denounced the husband and

The church cannot remain on the fence on this matter.

suggested various degrees of punishment for a man who would be so cruel to animals. Give an animal liquor, and you are cruel. Give a man liquor, and you are considered mature. Let an animal get drunk, act foolish, and fall over in a stupor, and people scream their heads off. Let a man do the same thing, and we ignore it. It's inhumane to give liquor to an animal, but it is respectable to give it to sons, daughters, business associates, and friends.

What does this tell you about our society? Yes, this is the business of the church. 



Another Bunch of Unsung Heroes

My first experience with an unsung hero came when I became an adult. I watched my son waiting for the church bus.

As the elderly gentleman turned the church bus onto my street, I thought of many times that my own father went to church early, knowing children would be on street corners waiting for his arrival.

Every Saturday my dad—come rain, sleet, shine, or hail—would go to church, work on the buses, and then drive each one to the gas station. He never complained.

On some occasions, the church would hold a bus party when one person couldn't fix all the problems. Some of the church members would volunteer "elbow grease" in exchange for fellowship.

These became momentous occasions for me. I remember getting shocked by 220 volts from a sanding machine with which they were stripping paint off a bus while working in the hot sun. Another time, my father and one of my brothers on a typical January day in Missouri fixed a blown head gasket in the church parking lot. Believe me, it was cold!

All the participants who worked on these buses did so out of their strong belief that children are people, too, and should be afforded every opportunity to participate in one of life's important delights.

No one ever mentioned pay for this volunteer time. Everyone knew the rewards that will be reaped will surpass anything money can buy.

These unsung heroes come from all walks of life. I know a millionaire who drove the church bus for over 10 years, never once missing a Sunday. This man, an engineering draftsman for the biggest airplane manufacturer in St. Louis, was never too busy to



by John W. Lewis

Freelance writer, Olean, Mo.

drive the church bus. A quiet man, he was the most popular among the children because he never said anything. In all the years that he drove the bus, the excited children never got to him, probably due to the invisible earplugs that he wore.

When my family lived in southern Florida, one man every Saturday would visit our house, inquiring if our daughter would be attending on Sunday. Even when we told him no, he would stop and honk his horn on Sunday, just in case we changed our minds.

I had to work first shift, and my wife worked third shift, so she would walk our little girl to church. One Sunday my wife didn't feel well, so she went back home and fell asleep on the couch. Since no one arrived at the church to pick up our daughter, this man and his family took our girl to lunch, after calling me at work and telling me that my wife was sick. His family would enjoy watching my daughter until I could come get her.

While serving the military in Hawaii, I met a church bus driver who picked up one lady and carried her bodily into the bus. Her wheelchair wouldn't fit through the door of the bus.

All across the world, in every

church there may be at least one unsung hero always standing in the background, trying to go unnoticed.


You can spot these people easily if you know what to look for. They love children, and they enjoy going the extra mile to encourage a child to smile.

These unselfish people, giving their valuable time and effort to provide transportation for God's children, will be blessed by the Lord. Volunteers, if you get discouraged, just remember that you are responsible for planting the good seed of the gospel that will follow these children forever.

Before my parents became active in the church, I had a special bus driver, who ultimately influenced my dad to give up alcohol. Not only did he plant the seed of Jesus in our family, but also he nurtured it to a tree bearing much fruit.

I am a parent now. My children look forward to riding on the bus every Sunday. Because of my work schedule, I can't always take my children to church. If it weren't for the nice man who honks the horn in front of our house every Sunday and Wednesday, I'm not sure my children would be so eager to attend church.

I will always remember riding in the front seat of the church bus, the envy of my peers, because my dad was the bus driver. He was one of the nicest men to ever honk a horn in front of a house.

I think of the children that our church reached because my dad and others like him refused to give up on children. These volunteers have had to get up a couple hours earlier on Sunday mornings. God bless the church bus drivers! If you have people like this in your church, take a special moment and express to them how much you appreciate their good work. Truly they are unsung heroes. 

The Days Are Getting Better and Better

Everett, had another birthday?"
"Sure did! I am now 93!"
Everett had sat by his wife just weeks before as she left us for heaven. That was in the cold of winter. But now a neighbor had brought him a potted plant, blossoming. Spring was not far away.

Everett had spring in his heart when my wife and I would visit him in his senior citizen apartment. It was "his way." What an encouragement to call on this gentleman.

"I see that you are getting your bike ready to hit the road?"

There sat his large, three-wheeled bike in the middle of his living room. He had been polishing it up for sunny days just ahead.

"I can't get it out yet; the snow is too deep. But it won't be long," he chuckled, anticipating his jaunts about the senior citizen complex.

Everett could not hear that well. That is, he could not hear humans that well. However, he heard the voice of God quite clearly. That is why he was such an inspiration to me when chatting with him about the Bible. Such insights!

As I drove away from his residence, I thought of the spiritual secrets that kept him fit in soul and mind:

1. He had a holy heart. Everett was solely God's. There was no question as to where his ultimate allegiance lay. He was God's child by grace; and he had no intentions of turning back.

At times we would talk about the sin of the world. Everett kept up on the news. Then he would relate happenings to prophecy. He would apply the Word from his morning devotions to the morning papers. His mind was



by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Pastor, Windham, Maine

exceptionally alert.

In all his reasoning, his cutting edge was holiness before the Almighty God. God was a deity of mercy and love; but Everett also knew that mankind would stand accountable for freewill actions.

2. He was a Bible lover. There was a huge Bible that dressed the center of his table. It was handy so that he could slip into its pages quite frequently. Its covers were well-worn. Notations were sketched into the margins.

"I was reading in Isaiah this morning," he would start. And then I would sit back to take in a fresh truth from a Christian who knew how to ponder the mind of God.

He did not ramble. He did not wander from reason. He was deep in conclusion reaching, just as sharp as any young fellow researching the Scriptures.

3. He was responsible in his giving. Just this morning, upon leaving his dwelling, he said, "Would you mind getting my offering from atop the dresser?" Then he pointed down the hallway to his room. I followed his directions, retrieved the moneys

for the Lord, and promised that they would be placed in the church's offering plate at the next service.

During the exceptionally stormy Maine winter he had had, Everett found it difficult to get out to worship. Nevertheless, he made a sanctuary of prayer in his home on the holy day. And he remembered to be faithful in his giving to the work eternal.

"I love to give to God," he said as I left him.

4. He was an optimist. I would see scattered about his room all sorts of literature dealing with the peace and joy of the Lord. He would brighten up anyone's day with his beaming face.

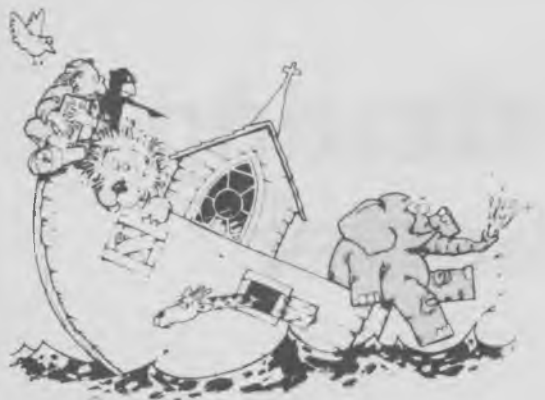
When he could not catch a word, he would lean in the speaker's direction, a twinkle in his eye and a broad smile on his face. Then with the sentence repeated, he would respond with his familiar chuckle and winsome happy way.

Some people—young and old—are quite the toil when paying pastoral calls. But not Everett. He always made my day.

He and his wife had been parents to scores of foster children. Down through the years, friend upon friend had eaten meal upon meal at their farmhouse kitchen table.

Now those children had all grown up. But their photos were placed neatly throughout the apartment. Birthday cards were piled high, their signatures upon them. Memories. Fulfillment. A life of giving.

At 93 it all still held together. In a world that was falling apart, it was a marvel to visit one who still lived joyously within a sphere kept tidy by the grace of God.



Not Exactly: A Serious Word for a Change

Smerdley says he's really up a tree. "Remember those rent-a-car ads where the guy was supposed to rent Hertz for his boss, and he rented 'Not Exactly' because it sounded like a good deal? Well, I've got a 'Not Exactly' for an associate, and I've got more messes around the church than a windshield on a warm night in the country."

The Conference Poobah had urged Smerd to bring the guy in for an interview and had made him sound like the neatest possible partner since Silas: "Not exactly, of course, but very much like Silas." Smerd asked if the guy could preach. "Not exactly, of course, but much like Ogilvie," said Conf. Poob. Smerd inquired into his "people skills." "Marvelous communicator. Makes everyone feel important. Not exactly a Robert Schuller, but close," said C. P. Smerd asked if the guy could work well in a quasi-team relationship. "Adaptable as Saran Wrap. Not exactly a Fits-all-sizes, but almost," C. P. cooed.

Smerd asked about his education—been to college and seminary, into continuing education? Well educated? "Not exactly," said C. P. "He dropped out of college after two years. Felt that studying world civilizations, English literature, and political science couldn't really get him ready for the real world. And he felt that the introduction to religion course was doing a lot of scratching where people weren't itching. But he went back and finished on one of those new programs that give credit for life experience. No seminary. Too stodgy

and unrelated to life in the real world. But he's a faithful attendee at Bible studies and Bible conferences. And he's been very successful in business, and he is mature. He really knows people. And he's a good Bible student. He has done quite a little supply preaching, and folks like to hear him."

"Well," Smerdley told us, "I now know exactly what C. P.'s 'Not Exactly' amounts to. In the first place, when I tried to talk to him about my troubles with this guy, he finally told me, 'I had never met the guy until that evening at your church. I was going on what some others volunteered. They called me and said he was a worthy prospect who should be given a good post.'"

"Did you ask them why they were not seeking a place for him under their own wing, as it were?" Smerd said he said.

"Of course not. You must learn to trust your colleagues—that they have perfectly good reasons for doing what they are doing. Of course, we misjudge some. Very occasionally."

"Do your informers know my congregation?" Smerd said he said.

"Not exactly. But I have talked to them about it from time to time. So they know you and your folks rather well."

"I wanted to say that I didn't think that he understood us, let alone anyone he would tell about us. But I needed to deal with the more pressing point. So I said," said Smerd, "Well, the guy is not exactly like Silas. I suppose I wouldn't reject his

company if I were thrown in jail, and he loves to travel, especially to get away from any conflict or difficulty. And his preaching is not exactly like Ogilvie's. As you know, he has a deep voice, is good-looking, and tells a good story; but he doesn't know a text from a toast. And what he calls "life application" is pompous triviality. You're right, he's not exactly like Schuller. He makes everyone feel important by helping them remind themselves that at least God loves them. And you're right; he is flexible and adaptable. He has no principles at all."

"So," said Smerd, "C. P. and I got down to the nitty-gritty. 'You can't fire him,' said C. P.; 'at least not this soon after hiring him.'"

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, it makes leadership look bad, and it could dry up my sources," he said.

"So now I ventured," said Smerd: "But leadership did make serious mistakes here. [I was trying to keep it impersonal.] And your sources have proven unreliable anyway."

"Look—for me, as leader, to admit error is to weaken the structure of things; and as for the sources, they are all friends of mine. If I criticize them, I lose their support; and my office, my authority, is weakened as I try to serve you," said C. P."

With that, Smerd fell silent; and the rest of us lost our appetites. We had reached the bottom line: servanthood depends upon power. But somehow we wanted to cry out: "Not exactly."

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Jim Usery

March/April/May 1996

Prepared by Jim Usery

INTRODUCTION

These sermons offer a selection of both expository and narrative messages created especially for the Easter season, with emphasis on the eight weeks beginning on Easter Sunday and concluding on Pentecost Sunday. These sermon outlines will assist you in your own preparation for preaching during this quarter and hopefully will inspire you to do your very best as God's minister in telling and retelling His story.

This series of sermons has been designed to supplement and support any outreach efforts you may want to plan during this important season on our church calendar. We encourage you to consider making this Easter/Pentecost period a time to focus the energies of your people on reaching the unreached people of our communities. The unmistakable call of Easter and Pentecost is to boldly proclaim the message of hope and life to those who have not heard the Good News.

May God richly bless you in the preparation and deliverance of these messages as you bring words of encouragement and challenge to the congregation you have the privilege of ministering to each week.

THE GREAT CO-MISSION

by Jim Usery

Matt. 28:16-20

March 3, 1996

INTRO:

The Bible teaches that all true believers are evangelists. As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are all called to share our faith. Some indeed are called to the unique ministry of the professional evangelist. But, as Matt. 28:16-20 proclaims, each of us, as a disciple of Christ, is the recipient of the Lord's call to witness to His power.

The evangelistic enterprise is based upon the character of God and His love for a lost world. It is built upon the fact that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). So, our calling to share our faith is really based on the character of God himself. In fact, if God were any other kind of God, there would be no Christian mission. The Christian mission, like the gospel, originated in the heart of God. Because of that, it is His work, not ours, as He seeks to work His mission through us.

God's commission to us is also based on the command of Christ. Because it is addressed to His disciples, it is addressed to us.

In its dealing with the Great Commission, it seems that the Church throughout history has isolated and focused its attention upon the one word "go"—found here in Matt. 28:19. The Church has built Christ's entire missionary and evangelistic command on that one word. But a closer look at the teachings of Jesus reveals the fact that He used, not one word, but three words to express the unique relationship between himself and His disciples. All three words serve as a part of the Great Commission. Because we do not go alone, it is indeed the Great Commission.

I. The First Word Is "Come" (Matt. 11:28)

A. Coming to Jesus is the starting point in becoming a Christian who shares his faith in Christ. This is the word of invitation to us from the Lord. Jesus used this simple word of invitation to address the multitudes, the publicans, the harlots, the lepers—in short, the sinners, us.

One of the most beautiful verses in the Bible is Jesus' invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). This implies action on our part. This means that effort is required in the spiritual life.

B. "Come" implies spiritual effort. In our spiritual lives, there must be thought, meditation, earnest prayer, and study of God's Word—in short, diligent use of all the means of grace that God has given us. We must rouse up our souls. The prodigal son would never have recovered his lost home if he had remained in the far country. Instead, he said, "I will set out and go" (Luke 15:18).

C. To whom do we come? Matthew is not saying,

"Come unto Matthew." Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, and all the other disciples do not say, "Come unto us." We hear the word "come" from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Indeed, Christianity is not a philosophy, or a code of morals, or a theology designed to save souls. Christianity is a Person—Jesus.

Men and women in all walks of life have responded to the gracious invitation of Christ to "come." Jesus invites you right now to come to Him, to get up, and to move from the place where you are to the place where He wants you to be. For the disciple who shares his faith, he must first come to Christ. The word "come" from the resurrected Christ is an invitation to an encounter that empowers.

II. The Second Word Is "Follow" (Matt. 16:24)

A. This is the second step in learning to share our faith naturally. We are called to follow Jesus and to learn what it means to be a disciple, a follower of the Way.

B. Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Salvation is a free gift of God in Christ. It does not depend upon anything you or I can do. But discipleship is another matter! Discipleship is neither cheap nor easy. Discipleship is costly and, at times, difficult. Why? Because discipleship demands a person's all. It comes from the same root word as "discipline."

C. Jesus does not coerce discipleship. A person must want and will to follow Him. The person sharing his or her faith naturally is one actively following Christ.

D. When we follow Christ, we do not lead the way. Jesus is the Way. He commands us to follow. His command is that we "come after" Him. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Sometimes we become impatient in our walk with Jesus and attempt to get ahead of Him. But He commands us to patiently follow. He will lead. Are you following Christ's leading in your life? Let Him lead. He has promised to do that.

E. We find comfort in the word "follow." We are not called to a task untried; for Christ has gone before us to the place where He would have us to be. That is always with Him. Following our resurrected Lord daily is the only ingredient necessary for empowerment.

III. The Third Word Is "Go"

A. The Bible is full of instances where God commanded His people to "go."

1. God told Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exod. 14:15, KJV).
2. Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8).
3. Jesus said to the man sick with the palsy, "I tell

you, get up, take your mat and go home" (Mark 2:11).

4. Jesus said to the twelve apostles, "Go . . . to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10:6).

5. Jesus said to the man named Legion, who had been possessed with many unclean spirits, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

6. Jesus said:

a. "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21).

b. "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full" (v. 23).

7. The angel of the Lord told the women at Christ's empty tomb, "Go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen from the dead" (Matt. 28:7).

8. The angel of the Lord told the apostles, after setting them free from prison, "Go, stand in the temple courts . . . and tell the people the full message of this new life" (Acts 5:20).

9. Jesus told Paul on the road to Damascus, "Get up and go" (Acts 9:6).

ILLUS. In classical times, when Cicero the rhetorician finished speaking, the people said, "How well he spoke." But when Demosthenes had finished speaking, the people said, "Let us march!" When one hears the voice of the risen Christ, His voice invites and inspires us to "go" with Him wherever He leads. It is always an encounter that empowers for service.

ILLUS. John F. Kennedy said in his campaign for the presidency, "There are the comfortable, and there are the concerned; there are those who believe we should rest and lie at anchor and drift, and there are those who want to move forward." When one hears the voice of the risen Lord, it is a voice that invites and inspires one to move forward with Him, empowered for service.

CONCLUSION:

A. The mission of Christ is a "Go-mission."

B. But because He inspires us to move forward with

Him, it is also a "Co-mission." We do not go alone. Christ is with us, leading the way. He promised, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

ILLUS. John Wesley wanted nine simple words on his gravestone: "The best of all is, God is with us."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE GATHER IN HIS NAME

Welcome and Invitation

Praise Choruses

"Whatever It Takes"

"His Hand in Mine"

WE WORSHIP HIM IN SONG

Hymn

"Arise, My Soul, Arise"

Choral Music

"Holy, Holy, Holy,

Lord God Almighty"

WE PARTICIPATE IN HIS MISSION

Announcements

Offering

Offertory

WE HEAR HIS WORD

Scripture Lesson

Matt. 28:16-20

Special Song

"Take My Life, and Let It Be"

Sermon

"THE GREAT CO-MISSION"

WE DEPART TO SERVE HIM

Closing Chorus

"Where He Leads I'll Follow"

Benediction

Heb. 13:20-21

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

"Our Father, as we have gathered in Your presence today, remind us throughout each aspect of this service of Your care and guidance in our lives. May the familiar words of Your Son, Jesus, strike us anew this morning as we meditate on what it means to come to You, to follow You, and to go with You wherever You may send us. We thank You for the place where we are this morning. We look to You now for Your liberating and guiding words to our hearts and minds. May we receive all that You have for us with open hands, so that we may give with open hands. Amen."

GOING NOT KNOWING: POSSESSING THE PLACE OF GOD'S PROMISE

by Jim Usery

Gen. 12:1-5; Heb. 11:8-16, 39

March 10, 1996

INTRO:

Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, remarked that if God had all the answers in His right hand, and the struggle to reach those answers in His left, he, Luther, would choose God's left hand. That was his unique way of describing the Christian life as a journey or pilgrimage. In these days we continue on our journey, as pilgrims, toward Pentecost. One of the Bible's major means of talking about the life of pilgrimage is by way of the major biblical theme of "land." Land is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith, referring to the place of God's promise for each of us in His kingdom.

We all have a deep and moving desire to be in the place of God's promise. We all have a yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place. As the Cross points toward Easter, Jesus' resurrection points toward Pentecost. So we continue our pilgrimage toward Pentecost, examining what it means to travel by faith toward the place of God's promise. The Christian life is a pilgrimage toward the Promised Land because God has called us all to possess the place of His promise.

Land is the fourth most frequent noun in the Old Testament, occurring 2,504 times. The "Promised Land" stands as a prominent theme in the Bible. Land refers to actual earthly turf, to dirt. It is also used in the Bible referring to the kingdom of God. Land refers to the place of God's promise in our lives. Land is a symbol for salvation and life and is possessed as a pilgrim.

I. We Journey on a Pilgrimage (Gen. 12:1)

A. Closely related to this magnificent biblical symbol of "land" is the fascinating symbol of "pilgrimage." Throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, this theme of pilgrimage is seen, describing the Christian life as a journey, a sojourn with God. He is always calling us to follow Him into the "land" that He has given us to possess, the place of His promise.

B. The majestic theme of pilgrimage is prominent in the stories of the patriarchs who followed God's call to possess the place of His promise (Gen. 12—50).

1. The paramount story is that of Abraham and his family, not having land but being on the way toward it. They lived in confident expectation of it. God's promise of land to us implies pilgrimage.

2. The story of Abraham introduces the metaphor of *journey* as a way of characterizing our life of faith. It continues in the stories of Isaac and Jacob, who are *sojourners* on the way to a land whose name they do not know. Abraham travels en route in response to the call of a God who tells him very little about himself and asks of Abraham blind trust.

The patriarchal stories in Genesis present in a stark way the radical demand of God that the way of faith requires leaving a land and accepting landlessness as a posture of faith:

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you'" (12:1).

"I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it" (15:7).

C. The sojourn is freely chosen, not imposed. The choice to sojourn with God is always a choice made by those who could have chosen not to leave. The choice means to throw oneself totally on God in order to be led to a better place, characterized by promises not known either in Ur or in one's father's house.

D. These are the people of sojourn. "Sojourner," a technical word usually described as "resident alien," means to be in a place, perhaps for an extended time, to live there and put down some roots, but always to be an outsider, never belonging.

E. "Sojourn" is occasionally called "pilgrimage" (Gen. 47:9; Exod. 6:4, KJV). We know nothing about the place Abraham left (i.e., Ur), but it appears in the story to be a place of hopelessness. It was there that "Sarai was barren" (Gen. 11:30)! So Abraham sojourns.

F. Pilgrimage into a new life lived in obedience before the Lord requires repentance. It requires us to leave and go somewhere we are not, to become someone whom we have not been. Pilgrimage requires a wrenching departure. It calls for an abandonment of what is, for that which is not, but which is promised by the One who will do what He says.

G. The picture of faith as a journey or sojourn is a radical one. It challenges the dominant ideologies of our culture and time, which yearn for settlement, security, and placement.

H. The life Abraham's family is called by God to live is matched by the way of God himself. God is not One who settles and dwells, but He is a God who sojourns and moves about (see 2 Sam. 7:4-6).

I. Sarah was barren! They had no way to the future. No heir would receive all the riches that God had promised Abraham. Nothing! Their future closed off. Everything is as good as over and done. But God spoke of newness. He is the Lord of all things new. His people are pilgrims who believe He will do what He says. So, the family of Abraham began the pilgrimage of promise. God spoke, and Abraham went.

II. The Pilgrimage Involves Going Not Knowing (Heb. 11:8)

A. Pilgrimage is most always a "going not knowing." The apostle Paul made such a statement as he was saying good-bye to a group of friends standing with him on an Asian beach. Several of the men wept freely, realizing they would never see the missionary again. The aging apostle looked from man to man, holding each one's eyes for a brief moment. Then, looking out to sea with his weathered hand pointing south to the stormy skies above the Mediterranean, he voiced these words: "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there" (Acts 20:22).

B. That's really what the Christian life is all about: going even without knowing. As followers of our Lord, we believe He leads us in a certain direction. His leading may not be logical or explainable to us, but it is unmistakably clear, at least to *us*. So, out of sheer obedience, we go. We pack our bags, pull up stakes, bid our friends farewell, and launch out. We face a future as uncertain as our leading is sure.

C. Abraham launched out in obedience; he "obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). Though he was almost 75 years old, he loaded up a camel caravan with his wife and family and headed for—*somewhere*.

II.IUS. Imagine the following dialogue between Abraham and the people of his hometown.

"Abraham, what are you doing?" asked a neighbor.

"I'm packing."

"Packing?"

"That's right. We're moving."

"Why? Why in the world would you want to leave Ur?"

"God has made it clear that I should go."

"God? You've been talking to Him again?"

"Right. He told me to leave. I *must* go."

"Well, where are you going?"

"I don't know. He didn't tell me that."

"Wait a minute. Let me get this straight. You *know* you ought to go, but you don't know much beyond that?"

"That says it pretty well."

"That *does* say it pretty well."

D. But "going not knowing" can be a fearful enterprise. Who hasn't experienced fear when obeying what you clearly know to be God's will for you? Who hasn't feared after stepping off the end of the dock, into the deep end, to stride precariously on faith footing? Beginning a journey that is unpredictable, risky, untried, yet prompted by

none other than the Lord himself will always be terrifying.

III. The Christian Life Is a Pilgrimage (Heb. 11:13)

The Christian life is a pilgrimage, not an arrival. It's not some sort of experience that ends with "Whew, I made it! I can unpack my bags now. Journey's end!" It is not like stepping off an excruciatingly long bus trip from Seattle to Cleveland!

No. The Christian life has never been an arrival. The call to live the Christian life is a call to pilgrimage. It's a call to travel. It's always a life lived "en route."

CONCLUSION:

Sometimes it helps to remember what God calls us to be during our brief stint on Planet Earth: strangers and pilgrims, people on the move, living in tents, free and unencumbered, loose and available, ready to roll, willing to follow whenever and wherever He leads!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

LET US WORSHIP!

THE CHOIR REMINDS US

THE PASTOR PRAYS

WE LIFT OUR VOICES IN PRAISE AND SING

Hymn

"To God Be the Glory"

WE WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING TITHES AND OFFERINGS

Sanctuary Choir

"Let All the People Praise Thee"

Hymn

"Joy Unspeakable"

FAMILY ALTAR TIME

Solo

Message

"GOING NOT KNOWING: POSSESSING
THE PLACE OF GOD'S PROMISE"

Closing Chorus

"Grace to You"

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Pursue the promise.

Persist on the path.

Possess the place.

Creative Worship Ideas

Invite several of your people to share their testimony about obeying the Lord's call upon their life, which issued for them in a "going not knowing."

Call to Worship

Recite Ps. 100.

Benediction

Recite Ps. 23.

THE LIFE OF THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

by Jim Usery

John 10:1-18

March 17, 1996

INTRO:

It takes only one person to make a difference—and you're the one! The apostle John wrote of the one in the center of influence who makes a difference when he wrote of the Shepherd and His flock.

Is your life in Christ making a difference where you live? Does the presence and power of Christ make a difference in your life? Are you making a difference for Christ in others? As people created in the image of God, we are called to model after Jesus the Good Shepherd the vocation of shepherd. We are miraculously invited to model humanness after Jesus, "The Good Shepherd." Here in John 10:1-18 are four qualities that describe the life of the one who makes a difference, the one created in the image of God. It takes only one to make a difference—and you're the one!

I. Making a Difference Requires Incarnational Living (John 10:2)

A. The one who is living in the center of influence for God, so as to make a difference, is the person living incarnationally. What does that mean? It means as God became flesh in Jesus (the Incarnation), we wrap our lives of flesh and blood around the truth that is Christ.

B. The fundamental question of life is not, "What do I want?" or "What am I to do?" but "Who am I?" It is to *be*, not just to *do*, that distinguishes the one who chooses to live his or her life for Christ, so as to make a difference. Being available to others in love is incarnational living. It is to incarnate the love of God in Christ wherever God has planted you. This is really the only way we begin to make a difference in people's lives.

II. Making a Difference Requires Relational Living (John 10:2-5)

A. The one who makes a difference also lives his or her life in relation with others. Like the Good Shepherd, we call the other sheep in God's family by name; we know one another. Our voice to one another is not "a stranger's voice" (v. 5) but is recognized and trusted. This is because, for every relationship, the foundation is trust. We can trust Christ, the One who makes a difference, and through His empowerment we can be the one who makes a difference in relation with others.

B. The basis of trust is integrity, which is in incredibly short supply. Because we were created in the image of God, who raised His Son from the dead, we can encounter the risen Christ, who empowers us for service in His kingdom. We are free to live with integrity for one another.

III. Making a Difference Requires Intentional Living (John 10:7-18)

Just as the Good Shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 13), so we, too, live intentionally, expressing real care for others on purpose. As shepherds living our lives in the center of influence, we are to model the intentional care of the Good Shepherd for His sheep. We can do this by an awareness of the needs of all of us sheep. We all have needs. Sheep need to be free from four things:

A. Sheep need freedom from predators. As one who makes a difference, how can you and I help facilitate safe pasture that is free from the fear of predators? This is one of the things a shepherd does.

We all live in a wilderness of uncertainty. But there is an oasis of certainty that we can create—and that is by the commitments we make to one another in love. May our lives be defined by the certainty of our commitment to Christ and to one another.

ILLUS. The *Los Angeles Times* newspaper has the motto: "We're there for you every morning." That is a good motto for the Christian who in the power of Christ can model His own commitment to us: to be there for one another every morning.

Commitment, however, makes the palms of people sweat; it closes off some options. Our commitment to care for one another is the safe green pasture we are called to create in the power of Christ.

B. Sheep need freedom from famine. Sheep need to be free from famine. They must be fed. Fellowship makes a difference in Christians. We can create environments free from a famine of fellowship. We can "come in and go out, and find pasture" (v. 9) in the fellowship of other believers. Richly enjoying the presence of brothers and sisters in Christ creates significant memories that can ward off famine. Think for a moment about the memories made in this body of believers that have helped to ward off famine in your life.

C. Sheep need freedom from competition. As the shepherd wards off famine that would destroy the sheep, he also wards off dangerous competition between the sheep that would destroy the flock. In like manner, we need to create environments in our fellowship that are free from hurtful friction and competition, free from the tension within the flock as to who is number one. This vocational partnership with God points to several key truths here.

1. Since we are to model our lives after the Good Shepherd, we are called to an excellence in Christ that is not based upon competition with others. We

are called to realize excellence as a result of the Good Shepherd addressing us, but not with the motive of outstripping others. God calls us, with our unique range of gifts and limits, to a vocational adventure that is distinct from that of anyone else. We do not need to establish it in competition with others.

2. Vocational partnership with God frees us from the anxiety about whether someone else will fulfill our particular destiny before we get there, or whether someone else will beat us to that singular achievement that would have justified our lives. It is liberating to know there is no shortage of significant ways to be a part of God's action.

3. We are freed to rejoice in the gifts and graces of others. We are augmented by others' talents, rather than being diminished or threatened by them.

4. Freed from competitive jealousy and envy, and able to celebrate the gifts of others, we are freed from the sense of having to be all things to all people. In short, we are at liberty to fail and find our limits. It is wonderful to discover that in partnership with Christ, our responsibility, though vast, is finally limited—because God is sovereign.

5. Called to partnership with the Good Shepherd, we are freed from the tyranny of time. If I must accomplish the ideal of my existence in finite time in order to justify having lived, then time becomes my enemy. The image of God is His reflection in us that is eternal.

D. Sheep need freedom from pestilence. As people who make a difference, we need to keep ourselves free from pestilence. Sheep have a tendency to get sick with the illness caused by little flies that lodge themselves in the nostrils of the sheep. Likewise, there are at least four little flies that cause sickness in us.

1. There is the little fly of selfishness and self-centeredness. This is the unwillingness to yield my agenda to anyone else's.

2. There is the bothersome fly of bitterness, which is so destructive of relationships.

3. There is the little fly of thoughtlessness, the excuse making that wrecks relationships, that says, for example, "I intended to call or write, but I just forgot." Love is expressed in the moments of remembering, not forgetting.

4. There is the pesky little fly of unforgiveness. This includes both the refusal to *offer* forgiveness and/or *receive* forgiveness. Forgiveness is the miracle of a new beginning. The incredible tragedy in unforgiveness is that no one makes the first move. Whenever one sees the miracle of a new beginning, you can always know that someone made the first move.

IV. Making a Difference Requires Sacrificial Living (John 10:11-13, 17-18)

Called to partnership with the Good Shepherd, the

person who makes a difference for Christ decides to do some things and see them through. He decides to sacrifice his life for Christ.

Jesus talked about the Good Shepherd as contrasted with the hired hand (vv. 11-13). Hired hands and good shepherds most of the time do the same thing. That is, they care. But, in the moment of crisis, the hired hand quits. He checks out. With a shrug of the shoulder, he says to the sheep, "I'm out of here."

The good shepherd isn't into the benefits of the role, like the hired hand is, but is willing to lay down his life.

Called to partnership with the Good Shepherd, we are free to be good shepherds who love sacrificially. Sacrificial love is characterized by:

A. Transparency. We have to be willing to know and be known, even in the face of rejection.

B. Vulnerability. We have to realize that the more we invest in relationships, the greater is the hurt when the relationships end. Unfortunately, it seems, for all of us who are fearful of rejection, in order to avoid the pain of saying good-bye, we no longer say hello.

CONCLUSION:

A Christian knows who he or she is. If anything is a gift of God, this is it—knowing who you are. We are called to vocational partnership with the Good Shepherd, to be good shepherds in the flock where we have been placed by God. Called by the One who makes a difference, we can be the ones who make a difference in the lives of the other sheep around us. Remember: It takes only one to make a difference—and you're the one!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE ENTER HIS SANCTUARY

Be Still and Meditate on Why You Are Here

Invocation

WE ENTER INTO PRAISE AND ADORATION: Praise Choruses

WE LISTEN TO HIS WORD IN MUSIC

Hymns from the Sanctuary Choir

Special Song

WE LISTEN TO AND SPEAK WITH OUR LORD

Pastoral Prayer

Open Altar Time

WE GIVE THANKS BY GIVING: Offering and Offertory

WE LISTEN TO HIS WORD FOR US THIS DAY

Sermon

"THE LIFE OF THE ONE WHO
MAKES A DIFFERENCE"

WE DEPART IN SONG: "A Charge to Keep I Have"

Benediction

Phil. 2:1, 4-6

WHEN THE GOLD ELUDES YOU

by Jim Usery

2 Cor. 12:7-10

March 24, 1996

INTRO:

In just a few weeks will be the Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Athletes from all over the world will descend on that Southern city to compete for bronze, silver, and coveted gold medals. Although I do not know who will go home with the medals, I do know this: there will be winners and losers. Athletes, after years of vigorous and rigorous training and self-sacrifice, will discover that they are going home empty-handed because of one brief slip on the sprinters' track or one moment of lost balance on a beam. In many cases just half a second will mean that somebody will go home without any medal at all. In fact, most of the athletes who show up will go home empty-handed. No gold. No silver. Not even a bronze. Some of them will be too old to come back next time.

For some of them, it will appear that the gold will be gone for good. In reality, they should feel rewarded that they are able even to compete in the games. They've all been winners somewhere along the line just to be able to get to the Olympics. But because the gold will have eluded their grasp, some of those gifted athletes will go home, perhaps feeling like failures.

Have you ever felt like a failure? As though you have missed the goal and the gold for your life? Have you ever felt as though you don't measure up to others? We have all had moments in which we felt like a failure. We have to learn how to deal with those moments. That's what the apostle Paul tries to do for us today.

I. Paul Tells of a High Moment of Victory (2 Cor. 12:1-6)

A. Paul relates a spiritual high moment of his life. He had a vision of heaven. Imagine!

B. Perhaps Paul even had a vision of God himself!

C. The only thing better than a vision of God would be union with God. Paul had that too. Think about it. Union with God!

II. Paul Tells of a Low Moment of Failure (2 Cor. 12:7-9)

A. Paul tells of a messenger of Satan that came into his life, a thorn in the flesh, he called it. He says that God used whatever this was. He allowed it to be an equalizer for Paul's life to remind him that life isn't all about winning or losing—it's both. High moments are probably going to be followed by some low moments. Get ready, so you aren't blown away when it happens. Always remember that it isn't the strength of your flesh that's going to get you through the winning or the losing. It is going to be the power of God himself in your life that is your hope, your resource, and your ability to make it through.

ILLUS. Augustine said, "Beware of despairing about your-

self; you are commanded to put your trust in God, and not in yourself."

B. Paul experienced tremendous accomplishments. He also experienced a lot of opposition and defeat. At times he definitely felt as if the gold of life had eluded his grasp. He says that God allowed these things to come into his life to remind him of the Source of his power.

C. Paul said, "I asked God to take this thorn away from me." In fact, he said he asked very specifically three times for God to remove the thorn.

Yet God said: "I have something more important for you to discover. I want you to discover that no matter how tough your life becomes, Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you'" (2 Cor. 12:9).

D. In the face of all the beatings, rejections, imprisonments, and the shipwreck that Paul experienced, God said to Paul, "My power is made perfect in [your] weakness" (v. 9). Our lowest point, our weakest place, our point of torment, our failure, actually provides a platform for God to demonstrate His great power.

ILLUS. It's like the platform in the sanctuary of the church where I worship. It is a place of focus. Paul, likewise, tells us that we have a platform in our life. It's a focal point where people can more easily see what's going on. It's the place where we demonstrate our weakness. We display it on that platform. Then God comes to that platform that we have provided through our weakness, our failure, our lowest point, and says to us, "That's the place I am going to use to demonstrate how great My power is." So, we surrender our thorn in the flesh, our sense of failure, our weakest area to God, and expect Him to bring us through with a sense of victory in spite of everything. It is an encounter that empowers.

III. Paul Tells of Consistent Moments of Christ's Power in His Life (2 Cor. 12:9)

A. How is Paul made strong in his weakness? "Christ's power" rests on him.

B. How did this strength from weakness happen to Paul? It happened when Paul totally identified with Christ and gave himself to Him. In fact, he said, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). He accepted Christ fully, which meant that he identified with what the world thought was Christ's failure.

ILLUS. Many people consider Jesus a failure and the Cross as a symbol of failure. Can you imagine if we had had the media potential in that day that we have now? What kind of circus the media would have had with the death of Jesus! I can see now the Saturday headline in the *Jerusalem Post-Dispatch*: "Area Jew Exposed as Fraud." The story might read like this: "As many speculated, the highly regarded teacher known as Jesus of Nazareth failed

to keep his promise of rising from the dead after Roman authorities crucified him on Friday. The Jerusalem coroner reported his death as typical of those who die from crucifixion."

But the story wasn't over. On Sunday, God the Father, with a flick of His finger, sent an earthquake through a graveyard, stones began to move, gravestones began to roll away, and an open tomb revealed an empty tomb. This so-called area Jew was not there. He had been resurrected.

Many considered Jesus a failure. But not the One who really counted. God the Father saw His Son, even in those difficult days, as a great success because He was doing the Father's will. That's the way He looks at you and me. There is no success outside the will of God. There is no failure within the will of God.

CONCLUSION:

How do you feel about yourself this morning? Do you feel uplifted by God's power? Or do you feel as if you're a victim of circumstances, constantly comparing yourself to others whom you feel are better than you are? One day I came to the very freeing and exhilarating conclusion that a lot of people can do a lot of things better than I, but I'm still all right. This is the real me, thorn and all. I matter. I count. I have stature with God. God has made me all right. His salvation has washed me clean. God loves me.

In spite of my failures, God loves me. In my worst moments, His grace is sufficient. I have His power working in my weakness. When I can't, God can! My weaknesses simply provide a platform on which God displays His incredible resources and power.

I have more good news! One of these days we aren't going to have to worry about failing anymore, or about life's golden opportunities eluding our grasp. One day God will reach us with that same strong arm that raised Jesus, and He will carry us home—to heaven. I don't want to miss that.

So let God demonstrate His power at the point of your weakness today. Let Him replace your sense of failure with an assurance of faith in His power to make you strong.

When the gold eludes your grasp, reach out and grasp the hand of God. He is always reaching toward us, even in our failure.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GOD'S FOREVER FAMILY GATHERS

Welcome and Invocation

HIS FAMILY WORSHIPS IN SONG

"Wonderful Grace of Jesus"

"His Grace Is Sufficient for Me"

HIS FAMILY WORSHIPS IN GIVING

Announcements

Offering

Offertory

HIS FAMILY WORSHIPS IN THE WORD

Scripture Lesson

2 Cor. 12:1-10

Special Song

Sermon

"WHEN THE GOLD ELUDES YOU"

HIS FAMILY WORSHIPS IN PRAYER

Hymn

"He Giveth More Grace"

Prayer Around the Altar

HIS FAMILY DEPARTS TO SERVE HIM

Benediction

2 Cor. 12:9-10

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer Around the Altar Idea

Use the prayer time in this service to include the opportunity for members of your congregation to participate in the message. Provide the members with a blank index card or a piece of paper and a pencil each. Invite them to write down one aspect of their lives in which they feel they need a special touch from God. Be sure to convey to them that they need not put their name on it unless they want. Invite them to come forward and place the notes on the altar during prayer time. Inform them that the prayer concerns will be collected and prayed over in the coming week by the ministers of the church. Allow this time to be one of an awareness of God's grace in the midst of our weaknesses.

LOVE IS A VERB

by Jim Usery

1 Cor. 13:4-8; John 15:12-17

March 31, 1996

INTRO:

What is the place of love in our friendships? What is love? What does it mean for friends to love one another? The apostle Paul helps us here in 1 Cor. 13 with what I call "a hymn of biblical friendship."

We usually think of 1 Cor. 13 as providing us with a definition of love. In this famous "love chapter," Paul does not so much define what love *is* as he tells us what it *does*.

Paul did not write this hymn of love from an ivory tower separated from the real world. He wrote it as an experienced fighter in the battles of life, addressed to a group of Christians dealing with conflicts and strained relationships, living in one of the most pagan cities of the world at that time. This is a very practical passage of Scripture on how to *do* authentic relationships.

I. Love Is a Verb (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

Love is something that a person does. Each of the 16 descriptions of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-8 is a verb, not an adjective. Love is always active and dynamic. Love is not primarily a matter of the emotions, but of the will.

II. Love Has Two Basic Attitudes (1 Cor. 13:4)

A. "Love is patient." The literal translation, "love suffers long" (NKJV), comes from the Greek word *makrothumeō*, "to have a long temper." This means that love endures: It refuses to seek revenge or to retaliate. Love patiently keeps on suffering the "people problems" of life. It does not give up on people.

B. "Love is kind." One commentator put it: "Love has the hide of a rhinoceros and the heart of a mother" (Gary Inrig, *Quality Friendship* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1981], 161). The kindness of love here is not a milquetoast sort of kindness, but an attitude of tough love, even for our enemies.

III. Love Has Unique Relationships Toward Others (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

A. Love "does not envy." The word translated "envy" here can also be translated "jealous" (RSV) and is the word from which we derive our word "zeal." It can mean either a proper zeal or a sinful jealousy. God "is a jealous God" (Exod. 34:14) in a zeal to protect and provide what is best for us. So there is a true jealousy of love, which is a genuine longing for the very best in our friends' lives. However, love is never jealous in the sense of harmful possessiveness and is never envious in the sense of coveting what is not ours.

B. Love "does not boast" or "brag" (NASB). Boastfulness can be expressed not only in words but also in more subtle ways, as, for example, in the newer car, the flashier suit or dress, the larger home, etc. Friends who love each other through Christ are not anxious to impress.

C. Love "is not proud," "arrogant" (NASB), or "puffed up" (KJV). The Corinthians could identify with this characteristic because arrogance was a common attitude among the believers there. They were full of pride (4:6) and did "cherish inflated ideas of [their] own importance" (13:4, Phillips; see 4:18-21). They had become blind to their true condition. Paul puts it bluntly, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (4:7).

D. Love "is not rude" or insensitive. A loving person is other-centered, not self-centered.

E. Love "is not self-seeking" but is based on a selfless motive to build up others in Christ.

PIUS. This is humorously reflected in a classified advertisement that appeared in a rural New York newspaper: "Farmer, age 38, wishes to meet woman about 30 who owns tractor. Please enclose picture of tractor."

Now that is a real John Deere letter! It reflects the self-centered attitude of "I love you for what I can get from you, and for what you can do for me." The essence of love, however, is radically others-centered.

Love is always choosing among many options for the betterment of the other. The next two descriptions of love reveal two choices that love makes.

F. Love refuses to be "easily angered" or "irritable or touchy" (TLB). Irritability is rooted in two things: selfishness and a lack of rest in God's sovereignty. Anxiety increases irritability and causes us to focus attention on ourselves, whereas a confident trust in God liberates us to be authentic friends to others.

G. Love also chooses to forgive: "It keeps no record of wrongs." The word that Paul uses here is an accounting term to picture an accountant who meticulously records every transaction in a ledger. Forgiveness can be very costly, but love knows all about costly forgiveness.

H. "Love does not delight in evil." Love never rejoices in having "gotten away with it." Love never enjoys the sin of others, as seen, for example, in gossip magazines, immoral movies, and the vast wasteland of television. Love never accepts sin, although it loves the sinner.

I. Love "rejoices with the truth." The word picture here is of Siamese twins sharing a common joy. When truth triumphs, love rejoices. When truth suffers, love grieves.

The next four descriptions of love in 1 Cor. 13:7 describe the enduring quality of love by showing us what love always does. Shakespeare reminds us, "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds."

J. Love "always protects" or "bears all things" (NKJV). There are three rich word pictures here that portray

love's protection.

1. Love protects in the sense of a roof or covering designed to keep off the elements—the rain, the snow, or the sun.
2. Love protects in the sense of covering faults and keeping a confidence: Like a watertight ship, love springs no leaks.
3. The protection of love is like pillars that support or bear a heavy load. The image is one of ice strong enough to hold and support an army as it marches across it. Love always supports people.

K. Love "always trusts" or "is ever ready to believe the best of every person" (Amp.). This is not to paint love in large brushstrokes of naive sentimentality, but to color it trustful, as the Holy Spirit gives us discernment in cultivating a sober trust in people.

L. Love "always hopes" or chooses to believe the best about another.

M. Love "always perseveres." Like the "Energizer Bunny," it keeps right on going. True love has staying power. It pays the price of commitment.

IV. Love Has Permanent Qualities (1 Cor. 13:8)

A. "Love never fails." The Greek word Paul uses here is *piptō*, which means "to fall," or "to collapse." In Jesus' story of the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the foolish man who built his house upon sand, when the storms came, the stronger foundation made all the difference. Of the wise man's house Jesus said, "It did not fall (*piptō*), because it had its foundation on the rock" (Matt. 7:25).

B. Love, founded upon the rock of Christ's love for us, does not collapse or fall to pieces. It is stable. It never fails, because love rests on the unchanging, faithful Christ who is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). When many relationships are built on the sand of self-gain, it is liberating to know that God offers to us His love through Christ to be the foundation of all our friendships.

V. The Friend of Friends Loves Us (John 15:12-17)

Listen to the Friend of Friends, Jesus of Nazareth, and what He says about His friendship with us and our friendship with others. The only passage in the Gospels in which Jesus speaks in depth about friendship is found in John 15:12-17.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, be-

cause a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

CONCLUSION:

The danger of spending time in 1 Cor. 13 is that we admire its poetry but do not apply its practical teaching to our lives. Based on that chapter and the words of Jesus to us in John 15:12-17, we can make the following life affirmations about love in all our friendships:

A. Love is not an option, but an inescapable command of the Lord (John 15:17).

B. Love is the key to all our relationships, both within the church and, more importantly, outside the church in the daily round of life. First Cor. 13 teaches us that, from God's perspective, love is the most important aspect of our lives—more important than our spiritual gifts, our talents, our possessions, or our service in the church. In fact, God tells us that without love, we accomplish nothing, profit nothing, and are nothing (vv. 1-3). Love is the key to our responsibilities in our friendships.

C. That love is God's love, not ours. We cannot manufacture love. It is His gift. It is not grasped. As we walk in His Spirit, God gives us the fruit of the Spirit, of which love is the first listed (Gal. 5:22-23). So, find a friend and begin walking!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHOIR DIRECTS OUR ATTENTION

The Pastor Prays

THE PASTOR REMINDS US . . .

Hymn

"Praise Him, Praise Him"

Scripture Reading

1 Cor. 13

A Moment of Friendship

WE WORSHIP AS WE BRING IN GOD'S TITHES

AND OUR OFFERINGS

Doxology of Praise

Sanctuary Choir

"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"

ALTAR TIME

Hymn

"And Can It Be?"

Special Music

Message

"LOVE IS A VERB"

Closing Hymn

Benediction

LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE EASTER PERSPECTIVE

by Jim Usery
James 4:13-15
April 7, 1996

INTRO:

As we begin our journey with Jesus toward Pentecost, let us pause and take perspective of our lives. For Jesus' resurrection brings perspective. Let us pause for a few minutes to look at our lives in the light of His life and His love.

Perspective means to look through, to see clearly. The word "perspective" comes from the same root word as "spectacle." It means to see clearly the relationship of the parts to the whole, regarded from a particular standpoint, or point in time, showing them in their true relations to one another. So, let us put on the spectacles of our life and view the vista of what it means, not only to be alive, but to be alive in Christ.

I. Looking Back, Life Is Short (James 4:14)

The Bible is ruthlessly honest in asserting this truth. Listen to the witnesses who remind us of the brevity of life.

A. James calls our life a "vapor" that "appears for a little while and disappears" (4:14, MLB).

B. The writer of the Book of 2 Samuel says our life is "like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered" (14:14).

C. Listen to the words of Job: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (7:6). "My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away. . . . They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey" (9:25-26).

D. The prophet Isaiah points out how brief our lives are in this world: "A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (40:6-8).

E. The psalmist sums it up: "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath" (39:4-5). "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (90:12).

II. Looking Ahead, Life Is Uncertain (James 4:13-15)

A single adjective could precede most every event in our future: *unexpected*. Unexpected surgery; unexpected change; unexpected loss; unexpected accomplishment; unexpected sickness; unexpected promotion; unexpected death.

Listen to the wisdom of James, who puts it into perspective: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. . . . Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (4:13-15). Think about that: "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow."

Someone said, "Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future!"

Life indeed is uncertain. Jesus spoke of the uncertainty of life and the anxiety it produces in us all. Therefore we should trust Him with all of life—to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). (Read verses 25-34 in relation to this truth.)

ILLUS. Corrie ten Boom said, "I have learned that we must hold everything loosely, because when I grip it tightly, it hurts when the Father pries my fingers loose and takes it from me!" Regarding the uncertainty of our future, everything must be held loosely.

What are you gripping tightly? What tangibles do you hold on to? What image or name are you trying to live up to? Are you a slave to an image, a job, a possession, a person, a goal, or an objective? Things that own us do not have to be simply cars, houses, land, computers, or people. Ideas, convictions, and prejudices can possess our minds and attitudes as well. In fact, they excel as the worst kind of tyrants. There is nothing wrong with having goals and objectives. A prosperous future depends on our having goals and objectives. However, something *is* wrong when they have us in their grip.

Col. 1:9-18 never fails to encourage me when people, places, and things begin to slip away from my own expectations for the future. The apostle Paul reminds us that "all things were created by him [i.e., Christ] and for him . . . so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (vv. 16, 18).

Looking back, life is short. Looking ahead, life is uncertain.

III. Looking to the Present, Life Is Abundant (John 10:10)

Because life is short, every moment wells up with challenging potential and possibilities. Because life is uncertain, it is filled with challenging adjustments. Could this be what Jesus referred to when He promised to us an abundant life? "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10, RSV).

Abundant life—abundant with challenges, brimming with possibilities, spilling over with opportunities to adapt, shift, alter, change, give, and grow!

Again, Paul's prayer to the Colossians (1:9-18) is all

about the abundant or successful life. For it is a life lived worthy of the Lord, "so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (v. 18).

(Preacher, you might want to share at this point how you have come to learn the truth of Christ's words on the possibility of living the abundant life here in the present.)

CONCLUSION:

Looking back, life is *short*. Looking ahead, life is *uncertain*. Looking to the present, life is *abundant*. I especially like the way David put it in one of his psalms of thanksgiving: "But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand" (31:14-15).

"I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand." May I offer you a practical suggestion? Cement those 12 words into the creases of your memory. Each morning for the remainder of these next 50 days on our journey toward Pentecost, right after you plant your feet beside your bed, look out the window and repeat those words out loud: "I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands." Amen.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Praising in Song and Scripture
Call to Worship
Hymn "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Hymn "He Lives"
Scripture Reading
Praising with Thanksgiving and Faith
Pastoral Prayer
Presenting to Him Tithes and Offerings
Participating in His Word
Choir "Crown Him with Many Crowns"
The Preached Word "LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE
EASTER PERSPECTIVE"
Through Commitment
Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

The promise of Easter
The presence of Easter
The power of Easter

Call to Worship

*May the grace of Christ, our Savior,
And the Father's boundless love,
With the Holy Spirit's favor,
Rest upon us from above.
Thus may we abide in union
With each other and the Lord,
And possess, in sweet communion,
Joys which earth cannot afford.
(From "May the Grace of Christ, Our Savior")
—John Newton*

Offertory Sentence

"May our offering be an act of gratitude given from a thankful heart for the promise and the power of Your presence, Lord, in our life this Easter Sunday."

Benediction

1 Pet. 1:3-9

ENCOUNTERING THE ONE WHO FINDS

by Jim Usery

John 20:1-18

April 14, 1996

INTRO:

We devote our attention to John's narrative of a wonderful story in John 20:1-18. It is the story of a seeking woman, who is surprised by what she finds, or better, by the One who finds her. Isn't that the way it always is with Jesus? We think we have found Him, the Lord of our lives, when in reality He has found us. Let's look at this woman, Mary Magdalene, who in her grief was surprised by joy.

Notice the words of Mary to three different groups of people. They tell us a lot about what it means to encounter the One who finds us.

I. Mary Encounters the Two Disciples, Who Create Confusion (John 20:2)

Mary stands in the darkness before the dawn at the empty tomb of Jesus. The empty tomb does not prod her to faith, but rather agitates her to worry about what has become of His corpse. In her encounter with the two disciples, Peter and "the other disciple, the one Jesus loved," John, she cries out in her grief: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (v. 2). Who are "they" who "have taken the Lord out of the tomb"? The Jews? Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? Grave robbers? The gardener?

Mary's anxiety is natural. She comes to the tomb early, perhaps for a time of private grieving, for beginning the slow, painful process of coming to grips with the absence of One she deeply loves. Her tears linger near the surface as she stands "outside the tomb crying" (v. 11). The cemetery is an appropriate place to grieve. Yet the removal of the stone and the empty tomb disrupt her and only create fear and frustration. Her mind moves logically to the conclusion that someone has taken Jesus' body. What other possibility might there be?

When faced with the tomb, Mary functions as a reasonable, sane person. Her grief does not cloud her rational faculties. She arrives at the only conclusion at which a person in her right mind can arrive. Dead bodies do not simply "disappear." Someone has to move them. Mary's logic is right on target in a world of cause and effect, of established rules about what can happen and how, in a closed structure that allows only for the old and familiar to recur. Find the body, wherever it has been taken, and get on with the grieving.

Apparently, the two disciples—at least, "the other disciple"—share Mary's predicament. On hearing the news of the empty tomb, they go to the site and confirm things for themselves. The graveclothes are there, all neatly folded.

ILLUS. John says that Peter, on looking into the empty tomb, saw "the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen" (v. 7). The Greek word that is translated "folded up by itself" is also the word used to refer to wrapping chil-

dren in clothes or entangling fish in a net. It implies that before He left the tomb, Jesus took the time to carefully fold the cloth that was wrapped around His head. That speaks of Jesus' profound patience, one who was never in a hurry. Even after His resurrection, Jesus was in no hurry to leave the tomb and to broadcast the amazing news to the world. He took His time. Think about that!

II. Mary Encounters the Two Angels, Who Speak of Mystery (vv. 10-13)

While the two disciples "went back to their homes" (v. 10), "Mary stood outside the tomb" wailing for the loss of Jesus (v. 11). The Greek word here for "wept" (v. 11) is the same one used concerning the mourners at Lazarus's death (John 11:31, 33) and at the death of Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:52). It represents loud and uncontrollable wailing.

Looking into the tomb, Mary saw two figures in white seated on the shelf where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the foot and the other at the head. There they wait, sitting peacefully.

"They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'" (v. 13).

Mary responds with the same statement that she had earlier told the two disciples: "They have taken my Lord away . . . and I don't know where they have put him" (v. 13).

The question the angels asked Mary brought from her only further expressions of grief and frustration. The death of Jesus, which she had witnessed, was in itself distressing and unnerving. The disappearance of His body added apprehension and mystery to her grief. She had hoped for the sad consolation of completing the burial. Even that had been taken from her.

III. Mary Encounters the One Who Finds Her (vv. 14-18)

As Mary is speaking to the angels, she turns around and sees Jesus standing there. She sees Jesus, but she does not "see" Him, that is, with the eyes of faith. She first supposes Him to be the gardener, the custodian of the property, addressing Him as "Sir."

She asks Him whether or not He is the thief who has carried the body away. She then says that if He will only tell her where the body is, she will carry off the heavy corpse herself. Her words reveal her devotion. She never paused to consider how she would carry the corpse of a full-grown man or how she would explain her possession of it.

Suddenly Mary's closed world—and ours—is broken open when Jesus calls her name. Something illogical, impossible, and unnatural takes place. The One who was certified as dead (John 19:33) greets Mary. The established rules about what can happen and how are overthrown. The old, plausible structure is left in shambles. This is a new day.

ILLUS. One of the strange commonplaces of life is that the most penetrating utterance one can understand, no matter by whom spoken, is his or her personal name. Furthermore, the way the name is spoken often identifies the speaker. No gardener would know Mary's name. No one else would pronounce it the way Jesus did. Pause a moment to reflect on Jesus calling you by name. How does it sound?

Mary turned toward Jesus, calling Him "Teacher."

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (v. 17). The risen Jesus, the resurrection Christ, cannot be controlled, even by Mary's loving concern for Him. We, too, cannot control Jesus or manipulate Him in any way, even by our loving concern for Him. He is Lord. Jesus surprisingly encounters us at every turn in our lives, empowering us for service.

The voice of Jesus calling Mary's name shatters her customary world and opens up a whole new future. She is to grieve no longer, but go to the disciples with the word of Jesus' impending ascension (v. 17).

Mary obediently responds with an amazing statement, "I have seen the Lord!" (v. 18). Her preoccupation with the corpse became irrelevant by her encounter with the risen Jesus. Her logical language of cause and effect is replaced by the language of confession. Her confession will sustain her in the new era without the historical Jesus being present, an era in which Jesus' God and Father is the God and Father of the Church.

CONCLUSION:

One woman's mourning in a cemetery turns into an experience of morning in a cemetery. A new day dawned on her life when she found the Lord, or better, the Lord found her. It is true for you and me too. May our mourn-

ings turn to mornings in which we encounter the One who finds.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	
Invocation	
Hymn	"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Prayer at the Altar	
Offering and Offertory	
Doxology of Praise	"Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"
Choir Selection	"Crown Him with Many Crowns" "He Lives" Medley
Special Music	"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"
The Good News	"ENCOUNTERING THE ONE WHO FINDS"
Closing Hymn	"Hallelujah! What a Savior!"
Benediction	2 Cor. 13:14

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

The reality of death
The promise of resurrection
The reality of new life in Christ
Through the power of the Holy Spirit

Creative Worship Ideas

Invite someone to read 1 Cor. 15:12-22 at the beginning of the service to celebrate the resurrection of Christ and our encounters with Him that empower.

Call to Worship

"He is our Joy and Peace. He is our Salvation and Hope. Come, let us worship our God."

THE EMPOWERMENT OF FEAR

by Jim Usery

Matt. 28:1-10; 1 Cor. 16:8-9

April 21, 1996

INTRO:

Imagine being locked in a room with open doors. Think about that. The doors are open, but we're locked in that room by our fear. The fear of open doors paralyzes many people. We become so comfortable in our "locked" room that the promise of an open door to wholeness and authenticity paralyzes us. We cannot believe such good news that we can be free of our fears. So, we remain in a locked room with open doors.

Matthew writes about that sort of fear in his Gospel (28:1-10). He tells of the fear experienced by different people at the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. In these 10 verses, Matthew mentions "fear" four times. First, he says that when the angel of the Lord rolled the stone away from the tomb that held Jesus, "The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men" (v. 4). Second, the angel said to the two women at the tomb, "Do not be afraid" (v. 5). Third, on hearing the glorious news that Jesus was alive, the two women ran from the tomb to tell the disciples about the amazing news, "afraid yet filled with joy" (v. 8). And, fourth, Matthew tells us that Jesus suddenly appeared and said to them, "Do not be afraid" (v. 10).

This is the fear of the miraculous, that which seems so unbelievable that it grips people with fear. As with the two women, it is a fear mingled with joy. Matthew is talking about the marvelous good news of Jesus' resurrection, which gripped people with fear. The good news is so fearful that it is like feeling locked in a room with open doors. The doors have been opened by Jesus Christ, yet out of a strange fear of that good news, we sit in our room, fearful of open doors. In order to better understand this type of fear, which occasionally overtakes us all, let's look at several truths about fear.

I. Fear Is Universal

A. No one on this planet is completely unafraid of anything. We all have our own private fears. Suppose I should lose my health, my family, my comfortable security, etc.?

B. I had a professor of systematic theology who asked us to name the most common characteristic of this world. We all responded, but no one came up with what he was looking for. His response was that the one word that describes the majority of people in this world is "anxiety." People are anxious and fearful. Jesus Christ says, "Do not be afraid."

ILLUS. Of what are you most afraid? A team of market researchers asked several thousand inhabitants of the United States that question. Many named more than one fear. Here is the list of the 14 worst human fears, according to their survey: (1) Speaking before a group. (2) Heights. (3) Insects and bugs. (4) Financial problems. (5) Deep water. (6) Sickness. (7) Death. (8) Flying. (9) Loneliness. (10)

Dogs. (11) Driving/riding in a car. (12) Darkness. (13) Elevators. (14) Escalators. Notice that there is no mention of nuclear war or terrorism. Speaking before a group is more fearful to many people than death. But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

II. Fear Can Be a Friend

A. Someone said, "Rightly understood, fear is the father of courage, and the mother of safety." For example, we look both ways before crossing a road. Fear of disease inspires medical research. Fear of war inspired the founding of the United Nations. One of the things that every parent is concerned about regarding his or her children is if they have no proper fear, when they never see danger. Fear can be healthy at times.

B. Life is difficult and dangerous. Accidents happen. Trouble does come our way. Grief will come to each of us. Evil and pain are realities. Fear itself must be met and mastered. Franklin Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Jesus Christ says, "Do not be afraid."

III. Fear Can Also Be a Foe

A. Fear was the first enemy that attacked mankind. Adam and Eve broke the commandment of God. When they heard the voice of God in the garden, they were afraid and hid themselves (Gen. 3:8-10). Paul tells us that death is the last enemy. Since so many people fear death, fear is, therefore, our first and last enemy.

B. Fear poisons our hope and paralyzes our strength and courage. Fear saps our potential as persons created in the image of God. Because of our fear, over time we begin to live based on itty-bitty rules and, in the process, become itty-bitty people. Jesus says to us, "Do not be afraid. Oh, if you only knew what I am longing to do and to be through you. Do not be afraid!"

ILLUS. Fear paralyzes our potential. There's a story told of two mountain men who were sitting on a log looking dreamily across the valley to a distant mountain range. One mountaineer was a huge man; the other was a small man. The following conversation took place between the little man and the big man.

Little man: "I'll bet there's big bears in them hills."

Big man: "Uh-huh."

Little man: "I wish I was a big man like you. You know what I'd do if I was a big man like you?"

Big man: "Uh huh."

Little man: "I'd go into them thar hills and catch me a big bear—and I'd tear him from limb to limb! That's what I'd do if I was a big man like you!"

Big man, turning to face the little man: "There's plenty of little bears in them hills too!"

C. Fear of what may happen often destroys more happiness than the actual thing that does happen.

IIIUS. A lady on the verge of collapse went to see her doctor. She insisted that someone kept following her. No, she did not see him, but she heard footsteps every time she went for a walk. The doctor solved the mystery. He noticed that the lady was wearing her hearing aid backward. What she had thought were footsteps turned out to be the sounds of her own heartbeat.

When we do not listen to our faith, we turn in upon ourselves and mistake our fears for realities. Jesus Christ says to us, "Do not be afraid."

IV. Six Steps Will Help to Handle Fear

A. Analyze your fear. Examine it critically. Never try to put it out of your mind, but place it in the very center. When you begin to examine it with your God-given intelligence, you begin to rob it of its power to enslave and to torture you. Unhealthy fear produces inner anxiety. Healthy fear keeps us from destroying ourselves.

Take an honest look at the things you fear the most. Do the thing you fear most, and the death of fear is certain. Look your fears in the face. Commit yourself to Christ, and do the very thing you fear most. He says to us, "Do not be afraid."

B. Pay attention to healthy fears. Ask yourself: "Am I doing something I shouldn't do? Am I neglecting something I should do?"

C. Don't fight unhealthy fears. The more we fight an object we fear, the more we increase its hold on us. Praying to have our fears removed usually does not happen. As Christians, we should pray for courage to launch into action in spite of our fears. This is because Jesus Christ, who says, "Do not be afraid," is with us, and He goes before us.

D. Learn to laugh at yourself. We are often afraid of ourselves more than we are of our enemies. Paul was afraid of himself at times. He wrote to the Corinthians that he feared that, after having "preached to others," he himself might "be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27, KJV).

E. Risk failure. Living by faith is another way of suggesting that we do the very thing we fear most.

ILLUS. The story is told of a shipwreck off the New England coast many years ago. A young member of the Coast Guard rescue crew said, "We can't go out! We'll never get back!"

The grizzled old captain replied, "We have to go out! We *don't* have to come back!"

The will of God for us is not that we accomplish an objective, but that we *attempt* it. God does not hold us responsible for success, but for obedience. He judges us by our obedient efforts, not by our successes.

The apostle Paul speaks of this effort in the face of obstacles when he wrote to the Corinthians, "I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" (1 Cor. 16:8-9). Paul faced the open door in spite of many obstacles.

F. Recognize fear as faith in reverse. When we know our fears, we can almost certainly find God's challenge to us. In our fears, He expands our vision to make us evaluate our availability. He says to us, "Do not be afraid."

CONCLUSION:

*When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man, and skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man
To play for Him the noblest part,
When He yearns with all His heart
To build so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Then watch God's methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects;
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him,
Making shapes and forms which only
God himself can understand,
Even while His man is crying,
Lifting a beseeching hand . . .
Yet God bends but never breaks
When man's good He undertakes;
When He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses
Man to act, and act to men,
As it was when He began?
When God tries His splendor out,
Man will know what He's about!*

—Dale Martin Stonell

William Shakespeare declared:

*Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we oft might win,
By fearing to attempt.*

Our risen Lord says, "Do not be afraid."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	
The Organ Helps Us Meditate	
We Pray Silently	
Hymn	"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
Invocation	
Choir	"Be Still, My Soul"
Pastoral Prayer	
Hymn	"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
His Tithes and Our Offerings	
Message	"THE EMPOWERMENT OF FEAR"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Confession; Compassion (His and Ours); Courage

Call to Worship

Rom. 15:5-6

THE EMPOWERMENT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

by Jim Usery

Heb. 10:24-25

April 28, 1996

INTRO:

Why do you and I gather with other Christians in a worship service? We meet to worship our God, to meet with Him, to hear His Word, to praise His name. That's not all we do. We also meet to stimulate and encourage one another.

We don't enter the worship service to sit isolated before God, not touching anyone else, not relating to anyone else, only to hear from Him. That's not healthy. That's not all there is to worship. It will revolutionize our church attendance if we stop to think that our presence is partly to encourage someone else.

ILLUS. John Chrysostom, the "golden-mouthed" orator of the Early Church, observed that "as iron sharpens iron, so also fellowship increases love; for if a stone rubbed against a stone sends forth fire, how much more person in contact with person!"

This involves changing our perspective. When getting dressed for any worship service, consider thinking, "Lord, today, or tonight, I wonder whom You would have me encourage." Rather than thinking to yourself, "I wonder what the preacher is going to say this time." Or rather than, "I wonder if the preacher is going to understand my world." Isn't it significant that our whole frame of reference often is, "Someone come to minister to *me*," rather than, "Lord, how may I minister to someone else?"

The word "encourage" comes from a combination of two Greek words: *para*, which means "beside" or "alongside," and *kaleō*, which means "to call." The word "Paraclete" refers to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I will leave the earth, but I will send another Paraclete; I will send One *alongside*, whom I will *call* to help you" (John 16:5-16). It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to come alongside the child of God and to help him and her. I find it significant that the same term in root form is used for our ministry of encouraging one another. The definition of "encourage" is simply "to place one in courage." To assist us in our creative ministry of encouragement, I ask three questions. Each question resolves around the fact that as our encounters with the risen Lord are encounters that empower, so our encouragement to one another is also an encounter that empowers in Jesus' name.

I. Is This Encouragement Only to be Done on Sundays or More Often than That?

A. The Bible answers for us in Heb. 3:12-13. Notice the emphasis: "See to it" (v. 12). How do I keep others from falling away from the living God? I can encourage others day by day. Do you realize that some people are dangerously near the edge of defection? Do you also realize that a word of encouragement given in due season may be what is needed to put them back on track? It is an encounter that empowers.

B. We will slander the person who is about to defect,

but we don't say a word of encouragement. We're ready to pounce with slanderous remarks behind his back, but we are not ready to say: "Hey, my friend, I've noticed this is a struggling time for you. Can I help? I want to come alongside. I care."

II. Do I Wait and Watch for a Hint from Someone, and Then Do I Respond to That? Or Do I Initiate It?

A. The Bible answers that question in Rom. 14:19. The apostle Paul says, "Make every effort," "pursue" (RSV), "go after" (Beck). We are to "make every effort" to encourage one another.

B. We should take the initiative in encouraging others, day by day. We are to initiate encounters with others so that both they and we are empowered by the ministry of encouragement.

ILLUS. Dr. William L. Stidger sat down and wrote a letter of thanks to a schoolteacher for having given him so much encouragement when he had been in her class 30 years earlier. The following week he received an answer, written in a very shaky hand. The letter read:

"My dear Willie: I want you to know what your note meant to me. I am an old lady in my 80s, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and seeming like the last leaf on the tree. You will be interested to know, Willie, that I taught school for 50 years, and in all that time, yours is the first letter of appreciation I have ever received. It came on a cold, blue morning and cheered my lonely old heart as nothing has cheered me in many years."

III. Is It Necessary for Me, if I'm Going to Encourage Someone, to Do Something Big, or Is It Possible to Encourage Simply by a Word or Two?

A. The writer of Proverbs assists us here.

1. Notice Prov. 12:25. "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up."

2. Notice Prov. 15:23. "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!"

ILLUS. I recently heard about a project being carried on in a church in Oregon. The project is called "Encouragement Cards." These cards are postcard-size cards that are stuffed in the hymn racks of the sanctuary. At the top of one side of the card, it says "Encouraging One Another." On the other side there is a place for a name.

In the pre-worship time, while some are praying or reading a portion of Scripture, others will take out this card and write the name of a person on it whom they want to encourage. There is no address—just the name. On the other side of the card is a place for writing a sentence, or two, or three. After those interested have written their message of encouragement, they always sign it.

The cards are collected during the worship service. That week the church staff takes the cards, adds the addresses and stamps, and mails them.

Some may say this project will get old and lose its punch. The church has been involved in this process for nine years, and it is more effective, according to the pastor, than ever.

CONCLUSION:

May I give you and me a word of encouragement? When is the last time you or I directly gave a word of encouragement to someone else—a family member, or a child?

There is a time for instruction. There is also a time for compassion. Without compassion we will drift. We will lose what a family is all about.

Allow me to share with you several practical suggestions on how to do this ministry of encouragement.

A. Observe and mention admirable qualities. For example: punctuality, faithfulness, hard work, etc.

B. Send correspondence and small gifts with a note of appreciation. Don't do it only at birthdays or Christmas. But do so five days after New Year's, for example, or two or three days after Christmas.

C. Make a phone call. Send flowers or a gift of money.

D. Find some tangible way to say, "I believe in you. I am confident that you'll make it. I love you. Call me if you need me."

Listen to some wonderful words of encouragement from the author of the letter to the Hebrews, a group of people who really needed to hear them. (Read Heb. 10:32-39.)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"Let us not give up meeting together . . . but let us encourage one another" (Heb. 10:25).

Call to Worship

Choral Call to Worship

Hymn

"To God Be the Glory"

We Kneel for Prayer

A Moment for Friendship

Sanctuary Choir

"And Can It Be?"

Hymn

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

We Worship with His Tithes and Our Offerings

Special Music

Message

"THE EMPOWERMENT OF ENCOURAGEMENT"

Closing Hymn

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Highlight in the prayer those who may be discouraged. Accent God's encouragement to us to cast all our care upon Him.

Call to Worship

"Let us open our hearts and minds this day to the encouragement of our Lord. For, as we listen at His feet, we are promised an encounter that will empower this day for living victoriously in His name."

Offering Sentence

"Let us thankfully give out of the bounty of God's blessings on our lives."

Benediction

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . . And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:15-17).

THE MATURITY THAT EMPOWERS

by Jim Usery
Heb. 5:11—6:3
May 5, 1996

INTRO:

I was lost—somewhere inside one of the largest malls in the city where I live. Last Christmas season, surrounded by hundreds of people—I was lost. I was lost until I stumbled upon a large green neon-lighted directory of the huge mall. As I stood there looking down at the diagram of the mall, I noticed a large arrow pointing to a small dot, with the words, “You Are Here.”

Today you and I have stumbled upon a directory with those three profoundly revealing words: “We Are Here.” “Let us . . . go on to maturity” (Heb. 6:1). Christ wants to empower us with His presence in our lives, which always leads to growth and maturity.

I. Maturity Is Ultimately a Question Not of Convenience but of Obedience (Heb. 6:1)

A. The little word “therefore” in Heb. 6:1 is like an arrow pointing from the author’s portrait of a passionless and malnourished Christian in 5:11-14 to his passionate call in 6:1-3 to “go on to maturity.”

B. Notice the tough love attitude of the preacher in 5:11-14. He soberly states the immaturity of his readers. We have much to say about this [difficult doctrine of Christ and Melchizedek], but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn” (v. 11).

He is almost humorously saying: “You are becoming dull in the ears.” “You are becoming sluggish, slothful, and dormant.” “Having lost your momentum, you are now lying dead in the water.”

ILLUS. Jerry Bridges, in *The Pursuit of Holiness*, pulls no punches when he says:

It is time for us Christians to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are “defeated” by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient! It might be well if we stopped using the terms “victory” and “defeat” to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms “obedience” and “disobedience.” When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me ([Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978], 14, 84).

II. Immaturity Creates a Malnourished, Passionless, and Immature Christian (Heb. 5:11-14)

A. These Hebrews had been Christians for some time (see 10:32-33). Ordinary growth would have made them capable of teaching others the faith. Yet, here they are, hesitatingly mumbling through their ABCs. The writer of the letter sees no excuse for this, for “by this time you ought to be teachers” (5:12). What is the

reason for this sluggishness? Spiritual immaturity.

B. So, with cutting clarity, the author states the obvious: immature Christians are those “not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness” (v. 13). Mature Christians are those “who by constant use [of solid food] have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (v. 14). Whereas the immature are those who still need “milk,” the mature are those who feed themselves on “solid food.”

1. The author scolds his readers for still being in infancy, which requires milk. They are chided for living as clear examples of the Peter Pan Syndrome—for refusing, like Peter Pan, to grow up!

2. The apostle Paul speaks of milk in a passage very much like this one, when he scolded the Corinthian Christians, urging them to go on to maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

3. The apostle Peter mentions the milk of nurture (1 Pet. 2:2-3).

4. The difference, however, between the Corinthian church to whom Paul was writing and this Hebrew congregation was that many of the Corinthians had not yet learned “the elementary teachings about Christ” (Heb. 6:1). The Hebrews knew them but had not yet lived them out with vigor. So this is the portrait of a malnourished, passionless, and carnal Christian (5:11-14).

ILLUS. Speaking of the need for solid food, the opera singer Luciano Pavarotti remarked, “One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.” This is what the mature Christian does. He or she eats the solid food of God’s Word, drinking not merely the milk, but feasting on the meat of His Word.

ILLUS. David Seamands wrote a wonderful book titled *Putting Away Childish Things*. This is what the immature are needing to do. They would have no trouble writing a book titled *Putting Away Mature Things*!

III. Maturity Creates the Portrait of a Nourished, Passionate, and Mature Christian (Heb. 6:1-2)

A. We are urged to “go on to maturity” (v. 1). In order to do so, we are given the principles upon which this maturity rests, in verses 1-2. The author mentions the content of these basic principles by dividing it into three pairs of two items:

1. The first pair: “repentance from acts that lead to death, and . . . faith in God” (v. 1). This pair represents one’s purely *personal* confession of faith.

2. The second pair: “instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands” (v. 2). This is one’s *public* confession of faith.

3. The third pair: “the resurrection of the dead, and

eternal judgment" (v. 2). This represents one's *promise* of an eternal order.

B. These foundational truths span the whole of the Christian life, from the first scene of repentance and faith to the final scene of the resurrection and judgment. But this is the *milk*! This is basic catechism. Solid food and strong meat belong to later stages of growth.

C. Christian perfection or spiritual adulthood is what the author of the letter to the Hebrews means by Christian maturity. There are two noteworthy truths here about Christian maturity or perfection.

1. Christian perfection is subsequent to regeneration, or the new birth in Christ. As God gave His only Son to the world for its redemption (John 3:16), so Christ gave himself to the Church, that through the Holy Spirit He might "make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Eph. 5:26). And as Christ, the Gift of God, is received by faith, so the Holy Spirit, the Gift of the risen and glorified Christ, is likewise received by faith. It is always an encounter that empowers.

2. Christian perfection does not deny or preclude further growth. Rather, growth is the hallmark of the Christian life. Christian perfection is ushered in by Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit in a person's life, which purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) and fills him or her with divine love (Rom. 5:5).

D. Christian perfection is the love of God and of our neighbor, which implies deliverance from all sin. It is loving God with *all* our heart, *all* our mind, *all* our soul, *all* our strength; and loving our neighbor as ourself. This love of Christ in a person becomes the compelling motive of life. This love is capable of eternal increase. So the purpose of this foundation of "the elementary teachings about Christ" is to stimulate maturity that is characterized by a life of fruit bearing.

E. This is the message: "Let's get on with it. Let's grow to our ministry potential. Let's touch the world with the redeeming love of Jesus Christ in every facet of its agonizing need."

ILLUS. We're chronically indecisive, however, about this matter of maturity. We're like Augustine, who holds up the mirror of indecision to our own lives, when he once remarked, "Save me, O Lord—but not yet."

ILLUS. Isn't it strange that we are fearful of obeying what we know to be God's will for us? We're like the Joads in John Steinbeck's classic novel of the dust bowl days, *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Joads set out from Oklahoma during the terrible days of the depression for California and the promise of a better life. Like the Joads who have finally decided to embark upon the holiness pilgrimage, we too echo the fear of the journey. Listen to the anxious dialogue between Al Joad and his ma on the way to California along famous Route 66:

Al: "Ma, you scared a goin'? You scared a goin' to a new place?"

Ma: "A little. Only it ain't like scared so much. I'm jus' a settin' here waitin'. When somepin' happens that I got to do somepin'—I'll do it."

Al: "Ain't you thinkin' what's it gonna be like when you get there? Ain't you scared it won't be nice like we thought?"

My friend, are we scared maturity won't be nice like we thought? One of the reasons for our phobia of perfection is the very notion of "What's it gonna be like when we *get there*?" That is, we have often tended to reduce the life of holiness, the life of Christian perfection, to be some sort of "arrival." The Christian life of perfection is lived on a highway, "the Highway of Holiness" (Isa. 35:8, NASB). Holiness is never an arrival, but always a pilgrimage, as we follow Jesus Christ, who is "the Way" (John 14:6, MLB).

CONCLUSION:

Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist, said: "It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. Lighthouses do not ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining—they just shine."

Let us go on to maturity. Let us begin to shine in the radiant love and strength of the resurrected Christ, who calls us to the holiness pilgrimage. Let us begin today.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Let Your Spirit Find Peace	Meditate on Christ's Peace
Let Your Spirit Rejoice	"All Hail King Jesus" "Lord, Be Glorified"
Let Your Spirit Praise His Name	Hymns
Let Your Spirit Give Thanks	Offering and Offertory
Let Your Spirit Hear from the Lord	Prayer
Let Your Spirit Rest	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
Let Your Spirit Be Fed	"THE MATURITY THAT EMPOWERS"
Let Your Spirit Sing	"Grace to You"
Let Your Spirit Share What the Lord Has Done Today	Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation Suggestion

"Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Christ our Lord, Amen." (From "The Collect for the Communion Service")

Sermon Help

You might want to schedule a dinner after the service to coincide with the theme of feasting on God's Word, as mature and growing Christians.

THE FIRE MUST NOT GO OUT

by Jim Usery

Lev. 6:8-13

May 12, 1996

INTRO:

Tucked away in the sixth chapter of Leviticus is a quiet passage describing the duties of the priests of the Tabernacle in handling burnt offerings. The priests had many tasks. Among them stood one supreme duty. The fire on the altar, the eternal flame on which sacrifices were offered to God, was not to go out. Other duties could slide. Other tasks could be put off. But the fire on the altar was not to go out.

We are far removed from those ancient days and customs. We do not worship with burnt offerings. We do not maintain a literal eternal flame in our churches. But there is a sense in which this challenge to keep the altar fire burning remains true and binding on all who believe. The fire that glows warmly in the interior life of the Christian likewise must not go out. Whatever else we may choose to do or not to do, the fire must be tended and preserved. The fire must not go out.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, contrasted our inner life with our outer life when he said that "though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). We are renewed inwardly day by day by tending the fire on the altar of our hearts. Many threats to the interior life, if left unchecked, can extinguish the fire of our devotion to God.

I. One Fire Extinguisher Is Exhaustion (Mark 6:30-31)

A. The meaning of "exhaustion" is "used up, drained, thoroughly emptied." No fire can burn without fuel. Many Christians struggle with spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. Many run their lives on empty.

ILLUS. A man was restless and dissatisfied with his job. He explained his problem to a wise friend, who replied with a request. "Inhale as deeply as you can." The man did. "Now exhale as fully as you can." The man complied. The friend then said, "Now exhale again, before you inhale." The man tried but quickly began to sputter and cough. Regaining his composure, the man asked his friend the reason behind this silly request. The friend replied, "That's exactly what you've been doing in your life, and that's why you're all used up!"

B. You need fuel in order to maintain the fire of devotion. "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'" (Mark 6:30-31). It is really that simple: "Get some rest. Get some rest with Jesus." The truth is that we will not become the people of God without the presence of solitude. As the Psalmist recorded, "Be still, and know that I am God" (46:10).

II. A Second Fire Extinguisher Is Neglect (Heb. 2:1)

A. Neglect was a constant threat to the priests. There is nothing terribly exciting about watching a fire for hours at a time, especially at night. The temptation to neglect the fire raises its head.

B. Neglect is not an overnight thing, but a slow, gradual oozing process in which the neglect of tending the fire gradually extinguishes the flame of devotion. "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Heb. 2:1, NASB).

C. More people give greater attention to beginning a relationship with Christ than they do to cultivating the relationship once begun. The solution here is nourishment! Are you nourishing yourself in Christ? Are you feasting on His Word?

ILLUS. I have friends who have in their home a large saltwater aquarium. That saltwater aquarium is full of saltwater fish, all of which are expensive. They had a tragedy strike them recently. Four fish died. Four expensive fish died!

They related to me the story that as soon as they called the place where they had purchased the fish, they were asked one question: "We'd like to see the food. Could you bring it by?" Interesting? Bad food kills fish. Bad food kills people. Bad food kills Christians. So how is your food? Is it the habit of your heart to feast regularly, daily, on the meat of God's Word? Or do you find yourself in that procession of commuters who settle for a Sunday drive through their local church for a spiritual "Big Mac"?

III. A Third Fire Extinguisher Is Compromise (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:14)

A. There is a wide difference between healthy flexibility and unhealthy compromise in integrity and values. Fire and water are not compatible. A blazing fire cannot come from drenched logs.

B. Do not underestimate the devil as the enemy of your life in Christ. He roams to and fro, "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8, KJV; 2 Cor. 11:14).

C. However, do not underestimate the power of God (Eph. 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:57-58).

D. Jesus asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:25). It is a call to fight with all our powers to retain integrity and inner character regardless of cost. Augustine once asked, "O greedy man, what will satisfy you if God will not?" The issue of compromise touches who and what we are, who and what we are before God and before the mirror of our own souls. Compromise can quench the flame, dimming both the vision

and the desire for God. Character and courage, drawn from the shared strength of friends in Christ, the Spirit of Christ, and the Word of Christ, can kindle and enflame anew our relationship with Him. They are all encounters that empower.

IV. A Fourth Fire Extinguisher Is Familiarity (Matt. 13:52)

A. The saying suggests "Familiarity breeds corruption." That with which we become familiar, we begin to take for granted.

B. The psalmist knew that when he wrote: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (51:10-12).

C. Familiarity with God's Word is the needed fuel to ward off this fire extinguisher. For even though one may know the Bible backward and forward, familiarity with the Word never breeds corruption but gives birth to God's truth for us ever anew. As Jesus said, every person who is familiar with the riches of His Word is "like the owner of a house who brings out of his store-room new treasures as well as old" (Matt. 13:52).

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. French philosopher and scientist Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "Someday, after we have mastered the winds and the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love, and then for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." (Quoted in Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979], 192.)

Keep the fire burning. The fire must not go out.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	"All Hail the Power"
Invocation	Ps. 46
Congregational Singing	"Higher Ground"
	"How the Fire Fell"
Call to Prayer	"Come, Holy Spirit"
Prayer at the Altar	
Giving of His Tithes and Our Offerings	
Scripture Lesson	Lev. 6:8-13
Special Music	"Is Your All on the Altar?"
Sermon	"THE FIRE MUST NOT GO OUT"
Closing Hymn	"Take Time to Be Holy"
Benediction	
Choral Benediction	"Grace to You"

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

"Our Heavenly Father, we have an altar. It is the altar of the heart on which burns a fire kindled by Your grace. On this altar rests the deepest allegiance of our lives given to You, the flaming presence of the risen Christ. May we be assisted, dear Lord, in keeping the fire burning. Whatever else may be deferred, help us to keep the fire burning. Whatever the pressures and whatever the cost, help us to keep the fire of devotion in our hearts burning. We know, dear God, that Your mercy through the Cross first brought that flame to life. You will not leave us alone in this. For that we are thankful. Amen."

Creative Worship Ideas

For this service, you might place lighted candles throughout the sanctuary to symbolize the flame of devotion to which we are each called to tend.

Benediction

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:1-2).

WASTING TIME FOR GOD

by Jim Usery

Acts 1:1-11; selected Psalms

May 19, 1996

INTRO:

Luke records the story of a fearful, waiting community that is anxious and bewildered and has no power of its own. It possesses no power and can generate none for itself. It has no claim and no cause for self-congratulation. Yet, oddly, power is given that causes this fragile little community to have energy, courage, imagination, and resources completely disproportionate to its size. How can one speak about this changed situation that can only be attributed to the inscrutable generosity of God? How is it that this Church with no claim becomes a powerful force in the larger scheme of public life?

Luke's narrative lets us see in wonderment glimpses and hints of this empowerment, but not more. God's new rule goes beyond our logic. We see only its residue and effect in a transformed community. That community is not certain what has happened but is certain enough to affirm its identity and embrace its proper work.

After a brief statement of purpose in the first two verses, Luke sets forth a terse summary of events of the 40 days following Easter, a time when Jesus "showed himself" to the disciples "and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (v. 3). Luke's purpose, however, in these verses is to present Jesus' promise of power to His disciples. The risen Christ says to His impatient disciples, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v. 5). "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (v. 8). And "You will be my witnesses" (v. 8). But they are commanded to wait for that promise of power.

When we wait, we yield up our expectations of what God should do and invite Him to move in our hearts with complete freedom. The work of waiting serves as one of the most practical openings to life with God. In waiting we learn to listen to Him. In waiting we become wise enough to reject "staying busy" as a goal in life. We learn how better to spend our energies. Using Acts 1:1-11 as a springboard, let us look at a few passages in the Psalms on "waiting."

I. Expect the Encounter (Ps. 130:5-6)

Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life. Patience and expectancy are essential to waiting, but they easily elude us. We never entirely outgrow the spirit of the child's incessant questions while traveling: "Are we there yet? How much longer will it be?"

A. The impatience that undermines waiting for God springs up in many forms. Some people are impatient with the present. Preoccupied with dreams for the future or with fears of what it might bring, they ignore or are blinded to the grace of the present moment. Let us each endeavor to sink deep into the present as it is, for life is special, and every moment is a special gift from God. Wait for it.

B. Others are impatient with God. One of the psalmists complains: "I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking [waiting, RSV] for my God" (69:3). Waiting for God means living in the confidence that His wisdom and power outstrip our own scenarios for divine action.

C. One antidote for impatience is to live in hope. One psalmist clearly connects waiting and hope as he sings: "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him" (62:5). So, sit back restfully, knowing that God will come on time.

II. Still the Noise (Ps. 46:10)

Besides patient expectancy, waiting for God is also to learn stillness. The psalmist in verse 10 invites us to pause awhile, to drop what we're doing, to take a deep breath, relax, and take a rest. "Be still, and know that I am God."

A. Many of us who would be devout seem not to believe that God is at work while we are at rest. Jesus was never in a hurry. Look at what He accomplished! What is the point of complaining that God is absent from our agenda if it is we who are absent from God and from ourselves by our lack of awareness of His presence in our waiting? Our spirits wither when we do not wait on God.

B. We may come to a centered and inner stillness by what is called "listening prayer." To approach God with only an endless stream of words is a filibuster, not prayer. On the other hand, listening prayer helps us learn how to wait.

ILLUS. Henri Nouwen points out that "contemplative prayer is not a way of being busy with God instead of with people, but it is an attitude in which we recognize God's ultimate priority by being useless in His presence, by standing in front of him without anything to show, to prove, or to argue, and by allowing him to enter into our emptiness. It is not useful or practical but a way of wasting time for God" (Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1979], 53).

III. Yield Control

A persistent barrier to waiting is our reluctance to allow God to be completely in control. We even try to dictate the terms of our own devotion to God. Yet waiting for Him requires giving Him complete freedom to act.

ILLUS. Meister Eckhart, the great devotional giant in church history, speaks directly to this barrier to waiting:

"Aware of it or not, people have wanted to have the 'great experiences'; they want it in this form, or they want that good thing; and this is nothing but self-will. Yield completely to God and then be satisfied, whatever he does with his own. Indeed, one step taken in surrender to God is better than a journey across the ocean with-

out it" (D. Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney [New York: Harper and Row, 1941], 16).

CONCLUSION:

We are summoned to rest and to wait on God. We are promised power in waiting. This is the Sabbath principle. God's sovereignty remains so sure that even He can ease off daily management of creation, and the world will not fall apart.

Sabbath is an invitation to yield. Sabbath and waiting on God are the practice of letting life rest safely in His hand. The life of Jesus is presented in its full, dramatic power as a life of yielding and of gifting. Jesus is the One who yielded in trust and obedience. He had all things given to Him, but He did not grasp. So, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

Obedience is the daily task of yielding more regions of our lives to God's sovereign purpose. We do not yield easily. But the grace-filled truth of waiting on God makes clear that, if we do not yield, we shall die. Let us continue waiting on God for His promise of power. Waiting on God is always an encounter that empowers.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP

The Choir Leads Us in Celebration

Hymn

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn

WE ARE ONE IN THE BOND OF LOVE

Family Altar Time

His Tithes and Our Offerings

Greeting One Another in Fellowship

WE HEAR HIS WORD

Ministry of Music

Message

"WASTING TIME FOR GOD"

Closing Hymn

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Wait on the Lord.

Watch for His leading.

Welcome His Holy Spirit.

Call to Worship

"With all that is in us, let us give praise and thanks to God!"

Offertory Sentence

"Out of the abundance of our hearts, dear Lord, we give to You today a portion of what You have so generously given to us. Thank You."

Benediction

Phil. 1:9-11 or Ps. 46

THREE WISHES FOR PENTECOST

by Jim Usery

1 Kings 3:5

May 26, 1996

INTRO:

"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you'" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon asked for wisdom. His request was granted by God.

Imagine this day, Pentecost Sunday, in this place, that the Lord would say to us, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." What would you ask for? If you and I were granted three wishes for this Pentecost Sunday from the risen Lord, for what would we ask? May I offer, on behalf of a congregation of believers gathered this day in this place, three wishes for Pentecost?

I. Our First Wish: We Want to See the Lord More Clearly (Matt. 16:13-17)

A. How do we see Jesus?

Jesus asked this question at Caesarea Philippi. The context for His question is very important. Surrounding Him and His disciples were statues, monuments, and idols devoted to the gods that the people worshiped. Just as Jesus stood there, surveying those idols and gods, He comes to us in the midst of our idols and false gods to ask us the same question that He posed to His disciples. According to Matthew, Jesus wanted to know who the people said He was. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (16:13).

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets'" (v. 14).

Jesus turned, looked at His disciples directly, and asked them bluntly: "But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?" (v. 15).

Peter answered quickly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah" (v. 17).

Jesus asks us the same question today, "Who do you say I am?" So, how do we see Jesus? How do people see Jesus today?

1. Some people see Jesus as a myth. Some say that Jesus is no more than a myth constructed by the religious imagination of people back then as well as people today.

2. Some people see Jesus as a man. Jesus is no more than a man, although a good man. But only a man who lived for about 33 years and then died a cruel and painful death, like countless others did, by crucifixion.

ILLUS. *The One Hundred* is the title of a recently published book, in which people were asked to rank the 100 most influential people in the world throughout history. Who do you think was rated number one, in terms of being the most influential person in history? Isaac Newton was rated number one; Muhammad was

rated number two; and Jesus of Nazareth was ranked number three. The Lord of the universe, the risen Christ, came in third!

3. Some people see Jesus as Messiah. Believers see Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is Peter's answer. This is our answer. How do we see Jesus? We see Him as Messiah, the Anointed One who has conquered death and reigns at the right hand of the Father in heaven on our behalf. This day He wants to grant us our first wish: To see Him more clearly as Lord and Savior.

B. But how does Jesus see us?

He sees us in at least four different ways, according to His Word.

1. He sees us, first, as lost (Matt. 18:11, KJV).

2. He sees us, second, as found (Luke 15:6, 9, 24, 32).

3. He sees us, third, as dead—spiritually dead, as the apostle Paul testified (Eph. 2:1-5).

4. He sees us, fourth, as alive. This is the blessed promise and reality of Pentecost. We can be alive with the power of the risen Christ, empowered for service in His kingdom (Acts 1:7-8).

II. Our Second Wish: We Want to Follow the Lord More Nearly (Luke 9:57-62)

A. To follow Jesus Christ implies that He does the leading.

B. Therefore, we are His followers (John 10:4).

Rest in His promise that He will lead us. We do not lead Him.

ILLUS. The Josephine County, Oregon, sheriff's log contained this entry on how to find an abandoned car: "Go past the green bridge on Eight Dollar Road. At the first fork, go down through the open gate past the house, down the road, past the culvert, down the road, up the hill around the corner. The vehicle is down the first road after the corner to the left." The final line said, "Good luck."

We are not the recipients of "good luck," but of the "Good News" that the risen Christ encourages us to follow Him as He leads us into the life of empowerment for service in His Kingdom. He has promised that He will lead. Rest in that promise. Become a follower of Jesus more nearly.

C. How do we follow Jesus? (Luke 9:57-62)

1. Some people follow Jesus, but from afar.

2. Some people follow Jesus no longer (John 6:66-67).

3. Some people follow Jesus more nearly. Thomas declared upon seeing the risen Christ, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). We, too, long to follow Jesus more nearly.

III. Our Third Wish: We Want to Love the Lord More Deeply (1 John 4:7-12)

A. How does Jesus love us?

1. He first loved us (1 John 4:19, 10).
2. He gave His life for us (John 3:16).

B. How do we love Jesus?

We love Jesus:

1. With our heart (the seat and center of our being).
 2. With our mind (Rom. 12:1-2).
 3. With our soul (to underscore our heart's longing).
 4. With our strength (apart from Christ, we can do nothing—John 15).
 5. And our neighbor as ourselves (1 John 4:7-12).
- When we follow Jesus more nearly, we always arrive at the truth that to love Jesus is to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the message of Pentecost. We are truly witnesses of His love "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

ILLUS. C. S. Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce*, writes about a bus trip to hell. The most recent arrivals to hell step off the bus and ask the tour guide, "Where are all the people?"

The tour guide responds: "They've been moving on and on. They're getting further apart from one another in the darkness. In fact, they're so far off by now that they could never think of coming to the bus stop at all. They are astronomical distances apart from one another. You can see the lights of their houses in the distance, where those old ones live, millions of miles away. Millions of miles from one another. They move further and further apart from each other . . . a distance of light years." Lewis's point is that hell is having the company of yourself for ever and ever.

The truth of Pentecost is that we really do need each other. Because Jesus is the risen Lord, the love He sheds in our hearts fills us with the desire to see Him more clearly, to follow Him more nearly, and to love Him more dearly, and our neighbor as ourselves.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE WORSHIP IN HIS NAME

Welcome and Invocation
Praise Choruses

"Grace to You"
"Give Thanks"

WE WORSHIP HIM IN MUSIC

"Pentecostal Power"
"The Comforter Has Come"

WE WORSHIP HIM IN FELLOWSHIP

Announcements

Offering/Offertory

WE WORSHIP HIM IN THE WORD

Scripture Lesson

1 Kings 3:5

Special Music

"Day by Day, Three Times I Pray"

Sermon

"THREE WISHES FOR PENTECOST"

WE WORSHIP HIM IN PRAYER

Pastoral Prayer

Prayer of Commitment at the Altar

WE WORSHIP HIM IN THE WORLD

Closing Chorus

"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"

Benediction

Eph. 1:18-23

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

To see Thee more clearly.

To follow Thee more nearly.

To love Thee more dearly.

Sermon Help Idea

Include in the worship bulletin a card for each worshiper, on which is printed the following: "How can you see Jesus more clearly, today?" "How can you follow Jesus more nearly, today?" "How can you love Jesus more dearly, today?" Provide ample room for a written response to each question. Allow the congregation to respond to the sermon by filling in the answers to those three questions. You might encourage them to carry the cards with them each day of the coming week. Or, you might encourage them to pray over their answers at the altar.



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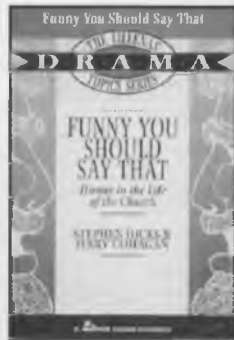
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