

6-1-1997

Preacher's Magazine Volume 72 Number 04

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Recommended Citation

Denny, Randal E. (Editor), "Preacher's Magazine Volume 72 Number 04" (1997). *Preacher's Magazine*. 635.
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THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

JUNE / JULY / AUGUST 1997

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

THE GLORY OF
MINISTRY

BAPTISM, WHY DO
WE DO IT?

CARING FOR THE
COCOONED





THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

Volume 72

June/July/August 1997

Number 4

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Offer Hospitality to One Another

Experts tell us that we live in an age of cocooning—people shutting themselves away and pulling the cork of isolation tightly behind them. The art of conversation grows dimmer with each passing year of passively observing people paid to converse for us on television and radio. The problem? An increasing loss of hospitality—even among parsonage families.

The late missionary Jim Kratz told me the greatest tool for reaching people for Christ and the church was his own Christian home. He added that hospitality in their home vividly showed non-Christians the winsome contrast between followers of Jesus and those who knew Him not.

The apostle Peter connected the idea of hospitality to the idea of ministry: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:9-10). Unfortunately, hospitality has become the weak link. Your home can be your greatest base of operations in your service to Jesus. That's why the Lord gave you your home.

The familiar Greek word *philadelphia* means "brotherly love." The New Testament word translated "hospitality," *philoxenos*, means "lover of strangers." Biblical hospitality prepares for guests, welcomes pilgrims on long journeys, makes the stranger feel at home, and offers refuge to travelers.

One of my family's greatest joys has been opening our home to people passing through—to students, to persons coming out of prison, to exhausted missionaries on furlough, to teenage runaways, to visiting evangelists and preachers, to stranded people we had never met, and literally to hundreds of family, friends, and parish-



by Randal E. Denny
Editor, Spokane, Washington

ioners through our 39 years together. The ministry of hospitality is so important that one entire book of the Bible is devoted to the subject—3 John.

Pastoral families, take a good look at the biblical qualifications for the office of pastor: "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, *hospitable*" (1 Tim. 3:2, italics added). Paul repeats the same qualifications in Titus 1:8. Paul emphasized, "Share with God's people who are in need. *Practice hospitality*" (Rom. 12:13, italics added). The instruction suggests habitual hospitality—not an obligation, but an opportunity. Don't be hesitant or embarrassed about your furnishings. You give hospitality, not to impress people, but to express God's love.

When I sang in the Pasadena College Melody Men's Choir on our first tour, my roommate and I stayed in a humble home in the hinterland out of Grand Junction, Colorado. Our hosts' entire house appeared sparse. They did not enjoy running water or indoor-toilet facilities. Their cupboards lacked doors and appeared rather empty. Yet those wonderful people gave up their bed for us—against our objections. What they had, they shared. That generous little family made us feel loved and appreciated. When the family took


us back to the church the next morning, I could not contain my tears as our bus pulled away and we waved good-bye. Those poor people gave themselves—I have not forgotten that sacred gift 42 years later! It isn't what you have, but to *whom* you belong!

Your parsonage home can offer a ministry of love and can serve as a vital extension of your church. The Early Church depended on the gracious hospitality of Christians, most of whom were poor. The gift of hospitality often turns out to be a great blessing to the host and hostess. Use what God has given you.

In our first year after graduating from seminary, my wife, Ruth, and I offered hospitality to Bill and Juanita Moon with their two children. I think they had returned for their first furlough from Africa in 1962. As a result of that unforgettable weekend in our little home mission parsonage, we gained friends for a lifetime. Bill and I played chess through the mail between the United States and Swaziland for more than 25 years. Meanwhile, my family and I gained tremendous insights into the life and ministry of missionaries through their cherished friendship. Our simple gift of hospitality enriched us more than our guests.

Bruce Dale, in the December 1984 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, told of his journey along the old U.S. Route 1. The author commented: "Everett and I reminisced into the balmy tropical evening about this great old highway, and I told him how *I would never forget the people I had gotten to know along the way.*"

"Sure," he said, "you know, *strangers are just friends who never met.*"

It's certainly true for us parsonage homes. So, offer hospitality, making your home God's bed-and-breakfast hostel. After all, we are family! 

Getting a Head Start on the Future

Approaching the end of this century 20, we are surely living in one of the most destiny-making eras of all history.

These are truly days of astonishing development, potential, and transition. History and sociology have moved us through what Alvin and Heidi Toeffler refer to as the "First Wave," centuries of agrarian development; to a "Second Wave," the 300-year industrial development; to today's "Third Wave," a genuine new way of life based on new forms of energy, astounding developments in electronic communication and computerization, and radically changed institutions. Certain global distinctives remain from culture to culture and country to country, but more and more first, second, and third world distinctives are being overshadowed by the face of a world emerging into global community and consciousness. In 1945 Marshall McLuan wrote that television would make the world into "one global community." We are now seeing that since for the first time in history, children everywhere are coming into adulthood with a global consciousness.

In recent years of global travel, I was often intrigued as I found myself in some of the very isolated places of the world that, in spite of their geographic and political isolations, were recipients of CNN and other electronic media data by television. On a dusty street in the outskirts of Rangoon, Burma, I watched people who were, through the technological experience called television, being yanked from their remote society into a new and amazing world. There was only one television set, but it was located in the window of a simple shop, and people came nightly to sit in the street and look at this box that brought another world into their sim-



by Robert H. Scott

*Director, Hiram F. Reynolds Institute,
International Headquarters,
Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City*

plified lives. Their mouths were open in shock, and their eyes were riveted with enrapt astonishment as they gazed at the flickering images on the screen before them, showing sights and sounds of a world they did not know existed.

No one questions that, in other parts of the world, television's presentation of other ways of living had much to do with both the collapse of Communism in East Europe and with the Tiananmen Square incident of Beijing, China, in June 1989.

The Toefflers call our period of time the "hinge of history" and declare that a "new civilization is spreading across this

planet." John Naisbitt writes, "A magnet—the year 2000 A.D.—is pulling forth bold new experiments in market socialism, in a spiritual revival, and in bursts of economic growth that will circumscribe the world."

The information revolution is here, and astonishingly, it will never again be business as usual. *Newsweek* magazine wrote: "Everything from media to medicine, from data to dating, has been and is continuing to be radically transformed, mostly by a tool invented less than 50 years ago—the computer. It's the Big Bang, or the Bit Bang of our time!" ***And, this revolution has only just begun!***

Probably none of us realizes how much all this is affecting our lives. It is said that Americans now experience more technological change in a single year than our grandparents witnessed in a lifetime. A statement was published in this year's *World Almanac* saying, "If the automobile in-



dustry had made as much progress in its lifetime as the computer industry has, today you could buy a Rolls Royce automobile for \$1 and it would go one million miles on a gallon of gas."² Whether this is overstatement or not, it is undoubtedly true that we have woven ourselves into a global electronic nervous system from which we will never be able to extricate ourselves.

With the wedding of photonics and fiber optics, a single fiber strand today transmits 16,000 telephone conversations at once, compared to only 24 on old copper wire technology. The speed of such is so fast that the entire text of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the Bible combined can be sent around the world by fiber cable in less than two seconds.

Soon something called telepresence will be as common as today's telephone, that is, seeing each other and our individual total environment as we talk from any distance. This same technology is erasing language barriers as computers take an English-speaking person and automatically and simultaneously translates into the language of the person being spoken to in another part of the world, and then turns that person's language response back into English as conversation continues. This technology can even deliver one's tone of voice.

The next step, already in limited use, is called Virtual Reality. It is a technique that represents an ultimate application of computer technology, placing a person right in the middle of a computer-created environment. With a visual aid called an EyePhone (a sort of goggles) and a hand apparatus called a Dataglove, you have the same field of vision looking at a computer screen as if you were in a room. Turn your head, and the field of vision changes. Reach out with the Dataglove, and manipulate objects in the Virtual Reality; rearrange furniture in a room, change the location of a picture, even move a mountain.

This kind of revolutionary development is already dramatically changing medical technology. Surgery can be performed by doctors from a distant location. That same doctor, slipping on his Dataglove, can examine the tenderness of the abdomen of a patient lying on a table in another state.

Beyond all this is the genetic revo-

lution that will change medicine even more in the next 20 years than it has been changed in the last 2,000 years.

**For the first
time in history,
children are
coming into
adulthood with
a global
consciousness.**

Genetic mapping is already beginning to permit gene therapy for genetically based diseases or disorders. Bad genes can be replaced with good genes, and where needed, it appears the body can be tricked into producing its own medication as it is needed. Included in gene therapy is a sophisticated drug delivery program that ultimately involves designing and shaping future generations (e.g., height and eye color).

**The information
revolution is
here . . . it will
never again be
business as
usual.**

We are already living in the world of these kinds of realities. The surface is not yet scratched of astonishing possibilities that will yet come in the lifetime of many today.

Dr. Howard Snyder, who distinguished himself a few years ago with a challenging book for religious thinkers called *The Problem with Wineskins*, has written a new book referencing such amazing developments. Titled *Earth Currents*, it contains extensive data on the marvels of new technology. Howard Snyder pens

a daring prediction: "But the most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur not because of technology, but because of expanding concepts of what it means to be human."³

Aware as we are of the social corruptions and deteriorations, the moral degradation and disasters of this day, we may wonder about that. We are watching a disintegration in the historic family unit. The trend in some churches seems downward in an ever increasing spiral toward having to close the doors. Social evils are exploding in huge eruptions of wickedness. Can it be that something noble in the dimension relating to what it means to be human could really happen?

The facts are, such is already happening in today's world. Whether we realize it or not, and whether it is happening where we are at the moment or not, it is true that we are living in a time of the largest ingathering of people into the kingdom of God that the world has ever seen. A major reason we do not know more about this phenomenal reality can be summed up in two words: secular media. A humanistic, secular media will not be reporting this kind of good news. Nevertheless, it is reality now.

Patrick Johnson documents the dramatic evangelical explosion in the latest edition of his encyclopedic book titled *Operation World*. Drs. David Barrett, Ralph Winter, and other research analysts today within the church system, as well as many outside the church system, are reporting on the happening. It ranges across the spectrum of evangelicals and beyond. Catholics, many mainline Protestant denominations, parachurch groups, and organized thrusts, such as Promise Keepers and March for Jesus, are but some of the places where God is dramatically at work.

Evangelicals in this country grew from 57 million in 1960 to 96 million in 1990. In the rest of the world, evangelicals grew from 29 million in 1960 to 208 million in 1980. All over the world, the Spirit of God is moving. He is not losing. He is winning.

Africa, with all its problems, is said to be approaching a 57 percent Christian population. Korea began this century with almost no Protestant

church. Today Seoul is 40 percent Christian, and the country 35 percent Christian. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, is now 20 percent Christian, with the Christian faith growing so rapidly the government is denying permission to report public statistics. China, which had 5 million Christians when the bamboo curtain fell in 1949, now may have 75 million. Nepal, where before 1950 not one Christian was known to exist, now has 100,000 Christians. It's happening across the former Soviet Union also and in the Latin Americas. Overall, 3,500 churches are opened somewhere every week in the world.

"If the automobile industry . . . progress(ed) in its lifetime as the computer industry has, today you could buy a Rolls Royce automobile for \$1 and it would go one million miles on a gallon of gas."

David Barrett and Ralph Winter computed that in century 1 the ratio of believers to nonbelievers was 1 to 220. Today it is 1 to 7, and 1 out of 3 people of the world generally embrace the way of Jesus Christ. He is winning indeed!

We should not be surprised. Did Jesus not say, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18? Paul wrote to the Colossians, "All over the world this gospel

is bearing fruit and growing" (1:6). It was happening then, and it is happening now. So as the new future unfolds, we are not on a losing team. We are on the winning team.

It is appropriate in the light of such things for God's people to take fresh heart in the face of the unfolding future. Certainly, many things are occasions for concern. There are new areas in which we must educate ourselves so we can have meaningful dialogue with and rational judgment in the society of tomorrow. We must equip ourselves with the best possible understanding and vocabulary so that we may have credibility as spokespersons for God in century 21. We need not succumb to bewilderment, and we must not posture ourselves in naïveté.

Writing about the future, one of today's futurists, Arnold Mitchell, has stated well what might be the Christian leader's position:

It is tempting to try to evaluate the probabilities of various scenarios for the future actually coming to pass. But no one is wise or learned enough (or brash enough) to do so with any real chance of success. However, choosing which future one would like to have come to pass is quite another matter.


Having made such a choice, what can you do as an individual to help bring about the future? Many people find it hard to look over the walls of the ruts in which they are imprisoned. If things have gone wrong for them personally, they have trouble believing things can be better. Raised in conventional surroundings, a Transformational society is as unbelievable as science fiction.

We must emphasize what is alive and alert and on the move. The solution is to build a context, a setting, a real-life portrait of what could reasonably be and what it would mean, not in

sweeping generalities but in the everyday terms of living.

It is essential to live in the way you think the world should be. By being what you believe—a task of supreme difficulty—you become an advertisement for the kind of future you believe in. In the long run, this may be the most effective of all ways of shaping the future.⁴

In Isa. 32, the prophet speaks of "noble men" making "noble plans" and doing "noble deeds." Such characteristics recreated in our lives will enable us to get a head start on the future that is already upon us.

Today's peoples are looking for something called hope. We should be the world's best dispensers of hope. We can confidently assert that each changing scene lying ahead will be manageable within the grace and lovingness of God. Let us tell our world that *He* is winning. In fact, in Jesus He has already won. By giving our world noble men and women, making noble plans and doing noble deeds, we will secure the future for our children and grandchildren, and we will help "[His] kingdom come [and His] will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). 

1. *Newsweek*, February 27, 1995.

2. *The World Almanac 1996* (Mahwah, N.J.: World Almanac Books).

3. Howard Snyder, *Earth Currents* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 23.

4. Arnold Mitchell, *The 1990s and Beyond*, ed. Edward Cornish (Bethesda, Md.: The World Future Society, 1990) 22.

FALLOWFIELD CHURCH

BASEBALL FAN IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE.



The Glory of Ministry

Editorial note: The author delivered this message for the 1996 baccalaureate service at Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

The first thing I must say to you is "Congratulations!"—not only for making this milestone (of graduation) in your life (that is sufficient reason for congratulations, to be sure), but also for the step you are taking to engage in the highest calling known to humankind. It is a call to a special ministry. "This ministry" that Paul writes about is "of the Spirit." And he identifies this ministry of the Spirit with "the glory of God." He "shine[s] in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of [that] glory" (2 Cor. 4:6).

It is interesting that Paul contrasts the light-permeated heart with that of "los[ing] heart" (v. 16). He contrasts the heart aglow with the presence of God with the heart overcast with the absence of God. He contrasts an experience of illumination with an experience of confusion.

Light always shines brightest against a black backdrop. And the glory of God shines brightest for this apostle when he sees it against the dark challenges he was facing. I am using Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of these verses in *The Message*. Paul said, We do not lose heart because

We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves (2 Cor. 4:2, TM).

We do not lose heart because

We keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for



by Wilbur W. Brannon

*Director of Department of
Pastoral Ministries,
International Headquarters,
Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City*

themselves in the presence of God (4:2, TM).

We do not lose heart because

If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention" (4:3, TM).

We do not lose heart because

Our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. . . . It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful (4:5, TM).

If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives (4:7, TM).

Yes, if we would allow ourselves, we could give in to the temptation to lose heart. But we are not about to do that! Paul continues,

We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder; what

Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives! (4:8-12, TM).

Losing heart? Not on your life!

We're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the [eternal weight of glory (KJV)] (4:16-17, TM).

Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise! (4:15, TM).

I. WE SEE THE GLORY OF GOD AS DIVINE ACTIVITY

How's that for radical optimism! That's what we need to equip us to minister effectively in this world of ours. It's time we freshen up the face of ministry with the glory of God. For *the glory of the ministry is the glory of God*. The glory of ministry is not something we do. It is something God does. The Shekinah is active—God's work.

The glory of God is not merely the sovereign presence of God made real to us. There is divine activity taking place. His glory is God drawing near to where we are and affirming who we are—whatever our circumstances. His glory is also a luring presence. He not only draws near to us, but draws us near to Him. He draws us by the beauty and holiness of His face—a divine glory recognized in the face of Jesus Christ.

What a privilege to be called by this glorious One and called to share in His glory! Ezekiel speaks of this divine activity that streams from the glory of God. It is a glory that gives life, yet it also has a jealous purpose: "I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake" (Ezek. 36:32), "but for the sake of my holy name" (v. 22). Our ministry must first and foremost and always be a holy ministry corresponding to the glory

of His holy name, reflecting His very nature.

The most important feature of your call is the nature of the One who calls you. To make your gifts and personality the most important feature of your call will inevitably lead to the secularization of your goals and to the ultimate failure of your ministry. Oswald Chambers wrote, "As long as I consider my personal temperament and think about what I am fitted for, I shall never hear the call of God."¹

You cannot take for granted God's call on your life. Your call will need nurturing from time to time, as much as the need to nurture your human relationships, pastoral leadership, and sermon preparation. Our call needs to be reinforced over and over again, or we risk our call growing dim and finally silent.

While serving in my second pastorate, I learned that the pastor of a large church in a nearby city had moved, leaving that significant pulpit vacant. I found myself talking to God about that. The essence of my comment to God was, "Lord, that would be an exciting pulpit to fill. Could it be possible for me to go there?" No sooner had those words left my mouth than I was ashamed.

I heard the inward voice of the Lord saying, "Wilbur, you are not ready to go anywhere unless you are found faithful where you are now. And you cannot be faithful here and be thinking about another place. Forget about that church, and give yourself totally right here where I have placed you." He got my attention. And I stayed.

God used that experience to help me look beyond myself and see His glory. I was learning that *the glory of ministry is the glory of God*. We won't throw up our hands and walk off the job if we freshen up the face of our ministry and keep the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God" in our eyes. Keep looking "in the face of [Jesus] Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6)!

While I was learning that God's glory is active, God was also teaching me the relational dimension of His glory.

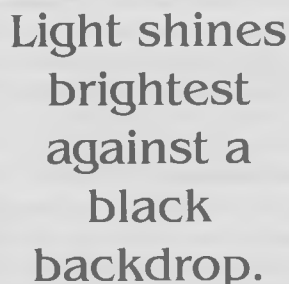
II. WE SEE THE GLORY OF GOD AS RELATIONSHIP

It is God whom we serve. Not an institution. Not an organization. Not a denomination. But a Person. He is-

sues the call, "Who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8).

And with Isaiah, you have said, "Here I am. Send me!" (v. 8). Never forget whom you serve and whose you are. In this context the glory of God engages us in a relationship.

When Dr. Bill Sullivan invited me to go work with him at our International Center, he told me that General Superintendent Eugene Stowe was our responsible general. He suggested that I call him, which I did. In that conversation, Dr. Stowe encouraged me to accept the new position of pastoral ministries director. Then he added, "Wilbur, you need to remember when you come here, for good or ill, it is a bureaucracy." Those words have rung in my ears for 14 years.



Light shines
brightest
against a
black
backdrop.

I didn't know what a bureaucracy is. I had been consumed with pastoring for 21 years. All my concentration had been on meeting new people and trying to get them to know my Savior and assimilating them into the church.

Well, I quickly found out what a bureaucracy is. I had not been there long before I had written a little statement on the back of one of my business cards (I had become a card-carrying bureaucrat very soon), "Whom do you serve?" I pulled it out often just to keep me focused on the One who had called me and to whom I must ultimately give an account of the stewardship of my ministry.

● Relationship with God

When we are in relationship with God, He accomplishes His purposes in our lives. When you find yourself wondering what to do—and there will be those humbling times—follow the example of Jesus. Jesus confessed that His teaching was not His own.

He boldly said, "It comes from him who sent me" (John 7:16). Again, "By myself I can do nothing. . . . I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (5:30). "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (6:38).

After the call, Jesus obeyed by saying, "I come to do thy will, O God." Then followed the divine commission. With the assurance of the Father's presence, Jesus told His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

His first miracle was one that brought the Father's glory flowing out through Him, and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:11). The glory of God reveals itself in the midst of a crisis or conflict when you maintain your balance because your footing is where God is standing. Blackaby in *Experiencing God* points us to "watch to see what God is doing around us and join Him!"² The glory of ministry is not in what we do. It is in what God does. *Our glory is God's glory.*

● Relationship with God's People

Only when you are in relationship with God, listening and watching for His movements, can you tell where He is working. That sensitivity gives integrity and spiritual authority to a pastor. He or she anticipates God's interventions in every human relationship so that both within the body of believers and in the secular community he or she picks up on what God is doing.

I usually felt that any sign of newcomers into my community was an opportunity for God to do His work. I knocked on such a door, but nobody was home. Nonetheless, I left my calling card (I was a card-carrying pastor in those days) with a note. A few days later I got a phone call from Gary Simmons, a banker who was sorry that he had missed me. He asked me to come and visit him, which I did. He had visited other churches but promised that he would come visit us.

This happened over a period of several weeks. Each time he had complimentary things to say about our church but added, "It's a little far, and I'm sure we will find a church closer to where we live." He did have to

drive clear across the city to our downtown location. With five teenagers and junior age children, I could understand his feelings. But I saw God working and continued to call on him.

On one of my visits with Gary in the bank, he said, "Would you come to our house and explain what the Church of the Nazarene is and its beliefs?" What a visit that was! After going over the history and beliefs of our church, I asked them if they would like to confess their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Around their kitchen table that night every member of that family, one by one, became a Christian. The entire family became vitally involved in the ministries of our church.

To build relationships with people is the most important thing you can do for an effective ministry, if it flows from your relationship with God. That supreme relationship is experiencing the glory of God. Again I say, *the glory of ministry is the glory of God*. Nothing, absolutely nothing, should ever diminish "the light of the knowledge of" that luring sovereign presence. When life is smiling on you or when the shadows come, dwell in that light.

It's time we
freshen up
the face of
ministry with
the glory
of God.

The old gospel song has it right when we interpret "glory" to mean "God's luring presence":

It is glory when the shadows fall to know that He is near.

Oh! what joy to simply trust and pray!

It is glory to abide in Him when skies above are clear.

Yes, with Him, it's glory all the way.³

Today's ministers must understand the importance of developing their *relationship with God, with God's people, and with God's world*. If the

first one is neglected, people will soon detect it. Thom S. Rainer, in *Giant Awakenings*, identified a flawed ministry that forsakes servanthood and feeds on the praises of people whose ambitions are to seek larger and more impressive positions. Rainer states, "Because the pastor placed himself on a secular model of success, many church members now hold him accountable to that model. And if he fails, he is gone."⁴

May I say it again? Let's freshen up the face of ministry with the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of [Jesus] Christ." It's that reality that the church would like to experience and the world needs to know.

Our relationships within the community of faith are a given. If members of a local body have invited us to be their pastors, our imperfections will be self-evident soon enough. But we can keep the integrity of our faith intact and our service without blemish.

● Relationship with God's World

Yet the evangelistic burden of this message is for us to properly relate to God's world. It is too easy for our so-called Christian relationships to become isolated and ingrown so that we do not really communicate with the unchurched, much less touch them. We must take seriously our responsibility to our communities of diversity and a spiritual ignorance that has no Christian memory from which to draw. We must remove barriers that keep people from knowing who we are and what is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."

Three months from now I will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first sermon I attempted to preach. I know I don't look that old, but I started very young. I missed being a boomer by a hair—lots of hair.

My first experience of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior was at age six. On Mother's Day morning, General Superintendent J. B. Chapman was the preacher. He gave an invitation to the altar at the close of his message. I was one of a great number that responded. Although I never got away from that moment of forgiveness, it was not until I became a teenager that I made my choice to follow Christ and make Him known to as many as I could.

I remember walking to school one morning, not long after I had become a Christian, with a specific prayer in my heart: "Lord, make me a light in my school so that the other kids can see You in me." I had not become acquainted with my text then. Had I known, it would have given me great assurance: For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The prophet Isaiah gives us a similar word: "For the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Isa. 60:19).

The most
important
feature of
your call is
the One who
calls you.

Back in those days we could arrange for classes on the Bible in high schools, which we did. I led a devotional period over the loudspeaker system in my school with 1,300 students. This was every morning at the beginning of the second hour. This project was still going 10 years later when I went back to visit. In an all-school Easter assembly program my senior year, I gave the Christian message that normally was given by an esteemed minister in the community. This was an awesome opportunity and honor for a senior in high school.

But something significant happened that bears on my text. On the night of my graduation, the president of our class came to me after all the ceremonies were over and we were leaving the gymnasium. Harry Hoza-phel, later to become a Lutheran minister, said to me, "Wilbur, you have been the light of our class." To me that was the culminating answer to a prayer that I had prayed for two years. I considered that compliment a

greater honor than being elected to any class office or receiving any other honor that could have come to me.

Build
relationships
with people—
the most
important
thing you can
do for an
effective
ministry, if it
flows from
your
relationship
with God.

I say that, not to be self-serving, but only to make a point. The generation of busters and Xers that will be in your field of harvest will most likely find little interest in what you have to say. But what impresses them is seeing a life well lived. That's not the idea of some old man, but rather the demand of a new generation coming on. Though they may not be interested in listening to what you have to say, they will demand, "Show me reality." It's another way of saying, "Show God to me" or "Let me see something working for you that really makes a difference when you have to face the kinds of things I'm facing."

The glory of God does shine through a smile, an understanding word, a caring act. There is mystery in

His glory, but there is activity in His glory as well. People who may not understand the mystery will understand the actions. That's why *the glory of the ministry is the glory of God*.

"It started when God said, 'Light up the darkness!' and our lives filled up with lights as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful" (4:6, TM).

Ezekiel saw the glory of God coming into the Temple with the sound "like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory" (Ezek. 43:2, NKJV). There was a stream that flowed below the threshold of the Temple out toward the Jordan Valley and on to the Dead Sea. It was as though the glory was streaming from its Source with ever-increasing depth and width. Ezekiel's guide led him through the water where it was ankle deep. About 1,500 feet farther he found it to be knee-deep. Fifteen hundred feet farther, it was up to the waist. They measured 1,500 feet again, and the river was deep enough to swim in and too wide to cross.

No tributaries were feeding into this stream. God's glory was its only supply. It deepened and widened from its Source in the Temple. An ever-increasing glory is expansive and all-inclusive. No one is excluded, whatever the social class, the nationality, the language, or the gender.

Listen to the word: "Everything will live where the river goes" (Ezek. 47:9, NRSV). I say, "*Let the river flow!*" God's glory is sovereign, and He will change the landscape by His presence. After Ezekiel's guide had led him down the river, he turned him around and asked, "Mortal, have you seen this?" Then he led me back along the bank of the river" (v. 6, NSRV).

That's the trouble so often. We haven't even taken a look at the river to see what is taking place: people fishing, all kinds of trees growing for food, leaves that do not wither and are for healing. They bear fresh fruit every month. The reason for all this? Hear the word of the Lord: "Because

the water for them flows from the sanctuary" (47:12, NRSV). It's a stream of life!

This has implications for multicultural ministries, compassionate ministries, evangelism ministries, and pastoral ministries at the local level. The glory of God will keep flowing if we do not erect dams to stop it. It is ever deepening and widening as it goes. *Let the river flow!*

What
impresses the
generation of
busters and
Xers is seeing
a life well
lived.

Pastors must release the laity for ministry. *Let the river flow* with the new ministries that laity can develop with their gifts. The river is running. A movement is already underway. Let's get in the stream. Let it carry us into the next century with the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God." We will discover that *the glory of ministry is the glory of God*! His glory brings new life to the church and brings hope to the world that it engages. May God's glory shine in our hearts from this day forward, now and forevermore. Amen!

1. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1954), 16.

2. Henry T. Blackaby, and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 66.

3. Avis M. Burgeson, *Worship in Song*, "It Is Glory Just to Walk with Him." Copyright 1918. Renewal 1946 by Haldor Lillenas. Assigned to Singspiration, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

4. Thom S. Rainer, *Giant Awakenings* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 107.

Transformed Troublemaker

by Muriel Larson

Freelance writer, Greenville, South Carolina

He was the worst kid at summer camp! If a vote had been taken among the counselors to select the boy they never wanted to come back, Charlie would have won it hands down.



The 10-year-old threw rocks at people, spit on the younger children, and gave everyone a hard time.

"He was sent to my office three times," said the camp director. "I've never seen another child like him." All the counselors grinned—and they all gave a sigh of relief as the bus pulled off on Saturday with Charlie in it.

That afternoon the phone in the camp director's office rang. "I want to apologize for all the trouble I caused everybody," Charlie said soberly.

The camp director accepted the apology and hung up the receiver. Later that day Charlie called again. "I heard the camp is open for eight weeks in the summer, Mr. Elmer," he said. "Could I come and stay the rest of the time?"

Mr. Elmer rolled his eyes upward. "I'm sorry, Charlie," he said, "but each camper can come for only one week. That's so more boys and girls get a chance to come."

Monday morning the bus arrived with a new group of campers—young teens. At noontime a new counselor asked the camp director, "Who is that little boy sitting out there behind one

of the cabins while everybody else is eating dinner?"

"I don't know," answered Elmer. "This is the week for 12- to 16-year-olds. But maybe he's a small 12-year-old. I'll go see."

Elmer walked around to the back of the cabin. "Who are you?" he asked the boy.

"Oh, you know who I am, Mr. Elmer, I'm Charlie."

Elmer looked closely at the boy. It was Charlie, all right, with his hair fixed differently! Elmer took the boy to the dining hall for lunch. "How did you get here, Charlie? This is 20 miles from Greenville."

"I walked," Charlie said.

Elmer found that hard to believe, but he couldn't imagine how else the boy had gotten to camp.

"Please, Mr. Elmer, can I stay?" Charlie pleaded.

Touched by the boy's earnest desire to stay and by a difference in him he couldn't define, Elmer didn't have the heart to send Charlie back to Greenville. The ladies in the camp kitchen took up a collection so Charlie could have canteen money for the week. Someone dug up a sheet and towels and a pair of swim trunks.

When Charlie's mother was contacted, she wanted him sent home so she could punish him. But Elmer persuaded her to let the boy stay until the end of the week.

"That first week, if there was any trouble, I knew Charlie would be right in the middle of it," said Elmer. "But during the second week he came to tell me whenever something was about to go wrong. I just couldn't believe the change!"

Ten-year-old Charlie had received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and that had completely changed his life. I wonder how many "bad Charlies" we have in our Sunday School classes and other Christian activities who drive teachers up the wall! How many do we have in our communities, in our neighborhoods? Do we

see in these children someone for whom Christ died, someone whose life Christ could wonderfully change? Do we pray for their salvation?

Who can tell how many lives—both children's and adults'—may be changed through a ministry to children? In one church where I worked in Vacation Bible School, the director said, "Let's not try to get outsiders to come. We only have room for our own children!" Needless to say, few unchurched children were reached for Christ there.



In another VBS where I served, the people made every effort to bring in outside children as well as their own. I helped to lead 75 boys and girls to Christ that year in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. I know that at least one of those children talked about the Lord to her non-Christian father. Many families were reached for Christ by this church through the children who came to know Him.

Our primary goal as teachers of children is to help them understand the transforming gospel of Christ. While planting the seed, I also pray that the Holy Spirit will work on their usually responsive hearts to convict them of their sins and bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ. I also

Continued on page 47

Daddy, Why Don't You Practice What You Preach?

Having gone through an extensive, frustrating building program, we were reaching completion on our new church. In a few weeks we would move in and celebrate our first service. This would be a red-letter day for both pastor and people! Little did I know when I was struggling with selling the old property, working through the differences of opinion of church board members, having difficulty in obtaining the so-called right property on which to build, and fighting city hall through court, that this joy would never materialize.

At the beginning of our building program, I heard rumors that another neighboring church would merge with our church when our building was completed. However, I was assured that this would not occur.

Confident of the future, I began to dig into the project and to look toward the day when we would move into our new church facility. The struggle with city hall, threatening phone calls from unknown persons, and many other difficulties that arose didn't seem to matter so much. God had placed me there to do a job. It was beginning to appear that I would get it done. Little did I know what the future held for me.

I will never forget the sorrow and sadness I felt on the Wednesday when I received a phone call telling me that I was to hold a membership vote the following Sunday morning on merging with a sister church. I was to move to another city, get a job teaching school, and start a new church. Refusing to do that, there would not be another church for me.

Depression set in. I felt that God had withdrawn His Spirit.



by Ralph L. Moulton

*Retired minister,
St. Petersburg, Florida*

Never had the clouds lowered so bleak and dark. I was out!

In time, I learned what David was talking about when he said, "Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me; I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (Ps. 142:4).

Thank God for sincere little girls

who grow up to be strong, faith-believing women who will tell it like it is to their father. My own daughter reminded me how I had preached on faith in times past, and in such a forceful way that she believed what I was saying. She believed in the God of whom I spoke. Then she said in a voice so tender, "If you believe in what you were preaching, why don't you practice what you preach?"

Not knowing that her arrow had struck its mark, she opened the Bible that she had been holding and read to me the complete 11th chapter of Hebrews. She read of those ancient patriarchs—how through faith, Noah built an ark; by faith, Abraham went out not knowing where he was going; through faith, Sarah brought forth a son; and by faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. I

began to see how little faith I really had. I had fallen into the slough of despond. She added, "Now do as I have heard you say many times: 'Turn it over to God.'"

Embarrassed? Yes! But, oh, so happy for a sincere, loving daughter who was sensitive to the spiritual needs of a preacher-father.

I have learned that there will be injustices in life, hurts and hardships that we will undergo, and deep valleys through which we will travel, but Jesus will never leave or forsake us. He may appear in the form of a sincere, loving daughter, but He will be there! The Lord spoke through Isaiah: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2, KJV). Thanks be to God!



What Does Fasting Do?

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

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



by Morris Chalfant

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Socrates and Plato fasted periodically. And Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher, reportedly did a 40-day fast before he took his examination at the university in Alexandria. His reason: It cleared his head. He asked his students to follow his example.

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

The modern American wife who happens to live in Alaska must feel thankful that she, unlike the primitive

Alaskan woman, is not compelled to remain at home fasting while her husband is out fishing so that he may have a good catch!

To fast, according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, is "to practice abstinence from food voluntarily for a time as a religious exercise or duty."

To fast, we are told, is not simply nor necessarily to abstain from food, but from anything that hinders our communion with God. Or they say fasting means to do without, to practice self-denial. We have only to widen the meaning enough and the cutting edge has gone.

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

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

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

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

In the New Testament Paul addressed the subject in this manner: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to oth-



ers, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27, KJV). A believer who practices the art of fasting is serving notice on his or her body. It is the spirit saying to the flesh, "I am the boss, and never forget it."

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

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

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

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

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

As we participate in prayer and fasting, under the divine directive, my heart burns day and night with ever-increasing intensity. And I can see by faith great tidal waves of deliverance sweeping across the world. Noth-

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

This truth was made plain to all who lived in the state of Minnesota

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


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

The situation was so serious that Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 as a day of prayer and fasting. He urged every man, woman, and child to ask God to help

against the terrible scourge. On that April day all schools, shops, stores, and offices were closed. There was a reverent, quiet hush over all the state. What happened? The next day dawned bright and clear. Temperatures soared to midsummer heat. It was not normal April weather. Imagine the disappointment and horror of the people when billions of larvae of the dreaded pest began wiggling into life. There were three days of unusual heat, and the larvae were all hatched out and getting ready for their work of destruction.

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

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

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

BEYOND BELIEF



Tunnel of Love

Finding My Way Through the Darkness of Divorce

by Lynn Allen

Freelance writer

This book will always be between us—guiding our steps.” He spoke the words on our first date, holding his Bible, after walking on the dirt path around the tranquil campus lake. Later that week he surprised me in the prayer room at the college with three roses, one representing each of us and the Lord. Bible verses and encouragement cards in my post office box were followed in weeks to come with declarations of love and his desire to have me be his forever. As an optimistic 19-year-old, this was all I had hoped for in a relationship.

It would be my supreme joy to help this man achieve his God-given objectives. The adventure, affirmation, and protection I would receive in return would be my payback. As in a tunnel of love, John and I stepped into our relationship and confidently headed into the dark, romantic passageway. Neither of us realized that the vessel we had constructed from the materials of our previous lives would not prove seaworthy. Never

did I expect, as we sailed into the turbulent waters ahead, that we would capsize midstream.

Naively, I had assumed that a relationship with Jesus Christ and good intentions would be the only glue necessary to keep our craft intact. In my late teen years, I was mentored by a well-meaning friend regarding what was appropriate in my new walk with Jesus. I was told what I needed to forsake, to do, to wear, and to say. I was willing to abide by everything she said. It was easier to follow a list than to think for myself. Since most of the relationships in my early years had been built upon performance-based acceptance, molding myself into a form that would be acceptable to God seemed comfortable and appropriate. However, this legalistic, compliant way of thinking set me up for an unhealthy alliance with a controlling man, a union that felt normal to me.

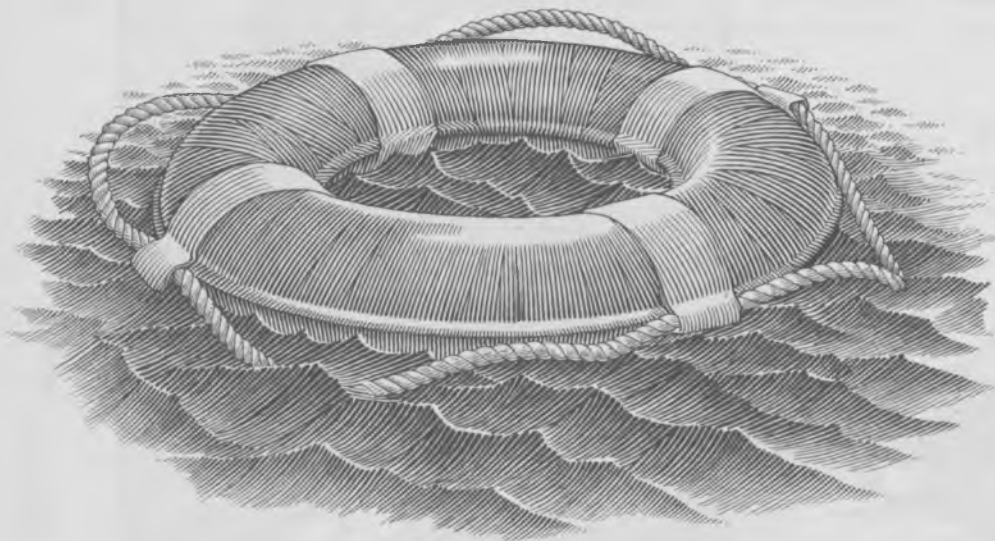
Our honeymoon consisted of driving to the military base where John was assigned. My husband, a choleric-

sanguine, continued pursuing his goals with all the tenacity of a greyhound chasing a rabbit. Once an aspiration was attained, he would determinedly strive for the next. I was proud of his leadership qualities and continually affirmed in him my belief that he would be greatly used of the Lord one day. Local church leaders also envisioned great potential in us.

Two children were born within the first two years of our marriage. Their care kept me busy enough to fulfill my unexpressed desire to feel like a priority, to feel desirable and needed. My self-esteem was derived from seeing John succeed and from nurturing our children. Helping John develop and grow a young marrieds Sunday School class and teaching release time Bible classes to my children and their friends caused me to feel used by God.

A few years later on a memorable Sunday morning, we walked to the church altar to express our desire to enter full-time Christian work. The conviction from the leadership team validated our heartfelt desire to use the majority of our time for the Lord. Even though we knew that four more years of schooling for John, many moves, and a total dependence on the Lord for our finances was ahead of us, we were challenged and excited by this mutual ambition. It was an opportunity to travel together around yet another corner in our own tunnel of love.

Completion of John's degrees opened the door to assume the pastorate at a small-town church. Here John immediately instigat-



ed expansive new church programs. Each of these provided an opportunity to use his creative mind and motivational skills. The church soon doubled in size, requiring two services and fund-raising plans for a new building. The positive strokes John received from his work encouraged him to invest more and more time at it. His hours increased steadily from 55 to 90 plus per week. He believed that was necessary for Kingdom work. Money that would ordinarily be invested in hiring additional staff for this multiplying group of people was placed instead in a building fund. That, too, was all right with John because it would supposedly only be temporary.

During these busy, meaningful days for John, another person began sharing the tasks, the burden, and the vision of the church with him. She represented no drain of energy, no complaints or demands to change things, and no depressed emotions. She had the youth, the vitality, the skills, and the desire to do these things well. And she had no children to encumber her. She had the energy to work excessively long hours to see that the tasks were completed in a professional, top-notch manner. She served as an invaluable assistant to one who had no other help. No longer did John need to share his frustrations or heartaches with me when he finally arrived home at night. They had already been shared.

When I became aware that John was spending an inordinate amount of time with this woman, I spoke to him about it. He became angry and excused his behavior as helping her grow spiritually. Didn't I appreciate the fact that no one had ever understood her as he did? He denounced me as being a jealous woman, as he had so often in earlier years when similar situations had arisen.

I felt as if my life resembled a Scholastic Aptitude Test grading sheet. When the average scores were graphed and placed in red on a clear transparency over me, not only did I not measure up in any area, but I wasn't even on the grid in some.

Now my grid to emulate was another person. She was young, pretty, athletic, perfectionistic, compulsively neat, untiring, compassionate, and a size 8. I paled by comparison. John's

suggestions that I do something like her reinforced my feelings of rejection. "Not only do I not measure up, but I am not accepted because I don't." Focusing on my failure opened the door wide to fear—fear that I would lose my husband; that I would be left alone to fend for myself, which

Focusing on
my failure
opened the
door wide
to fear.

I was obviously inadequate to do; and fear that I would never again experience his affection and acceptance. Guilt over evidently failing to meet his needs and feelings of disapproval plagued me during the day and robbed me of sleep at night.

I remember
writing in my
notebook,
"I hate
Sundays."

Rejection has to be the worst pain imaginable to a human being. The spirit can gird up with strength for almost any physical challenge, but when rejection settles like a soupy, humid fog on our lives, it saps the life, the motivation, the will to try, and the hope from our very being. It would be easier to die, we think, than to continue feeling unloved, unnecessary, and unfulfilled. When heartfelt overtures are received with no enthusiasm, with a spirit of scorn, or, worse yet, without even being noticed, our inner self begins to shrivel and dry up.

I remember writing in my notebook, "I hate Sundays. They begin

with Saturday night when I can't bother John because he is gearing up for the next day. No touching, no feeling, nothing. Sunday he is gone from bed by 5 A.M. so he can get to the office to prepare his heart and complete his sermon preparation. When I sit by him in the service before he goes to the platform, he is so focused on his upcoming task that he is unaware of me sitting there, wanting to squeeze his hand, to reassure him of my love and support. After church he must visit with everyone and see if any pressing needs must be cared for. I drive home to prepare a good meal, which is eaten while he is half asleep. He rests and heads back to church between 3 and 4 P.M. and is the last to come home that night, slumping exhausted on the couch. If he has a leadership team meeting Monday evening, he stays at church through the dinner hour and returns after 11 P.M. *I hate being ignored!*"

John scheduled a study retreat for himself—three days away at the beach. It was apparent that he wanted the time alone, but to my mind it meant a romantic getaway for this couple who were seeing less and less of each other. I insisted that he take me. After all, I could study for my project too. What a mistake! The weekend served only to water the weed growing in my heart. I truly was unnecessary, not only to the church people, but in particular to those I loved the most.

What do you do when you become aware that something you have held in your hand is slipping away and about to crash to the floor? You grasp it tighter. That's what I did with my husband. I pleaded, coerced, manipulated, and controlled to get more time with him. It backfired.

I continued to try to prove to John that I was worthy of his attention. I jogged with him once at a beach retreat for nine miles, when I had never gone more than five miles before. I wanted to show him that he could take me along and I wouldn't be a hindrance. I brought home reports from my employers of my skill and aptitude in given areas, hoping he'd want to use me in those areas with his work. He didn't. When I offered to write his home Bible studies for him to free his time, he accused me of seeking attention and glory.

I watched other couples interacting freely with one another, being affectionate, joking, getting upset with each other, and working it out with no apparent ill effects. I wondered if John and I would ever reach that point in our lives.

I did everything I could to reestablish intimacy in the marriage: ignoring my own feelings and needs, excusing his behavior, avoiding conflicts and confrontation. When all evidence suggested an emotionally empty marriage, I repressed it and denied it. I believed strongly in the permanence of marriage and was uncomfortable consciously acknowledging frustration and anger over unresolved issues. By sidestepping this unacceptable situation, I effectively encouraged my husband to continue his addiction to work, applause, and other women.

Our tunnel of
love became
a black pit
from which
there
appeared to
be no escape.

My attempts to discuss the difficulties in our marriage were met with unsatisfactory responses. One counselor told me that my husband was investing all his energy into being a pastor and into the building project. That left none for me. It was unfortunate but would be alleviated when the new auditorium was completed, he thought. Another gave tried-before dating techniques and solutions to communication problems. The deacon board chair agreed that John and his secretary seemed to have an attachment, but that would change when she decided to have children.

One evening John came home looking ashen and contrite. The associate pastor had discovered John and his secretary in a compromising situa-

tion. The church board had been called immediately and confronted them both. They denied it. John admitted only to having an emotional attachment to her. With only one witness, there was little the church board could do but ask for John's resignation.

I refused to believe what the associate had seen. I took my husband's side, both emotionally and publicly, when he read his resignation the following Sunday evening. My main sentiment was relief. Finally, he admitted to what I had sensed all along; she had taken my place in his emotions. Now at last we would have a chance to work on the reasons for this.

The months that followed were filled with pain. My acknowledged sentiments were sucked in and expelled like a blacksmith's bellows. I would feel hope one moment and despair the next. Our children expressed outrage at the associate pastor who dared to lie about their father. Months of acting out and struggles with bitterness followed for them. John simply wanted to forget the whole thing and get on with life. My plans to enroll in college were scrapped as I sought full-time work. We were left without a place of worship, a paycheck, and supportive friends. Our tunnel of love became a black pit from which there appeared to be no escape. Our boat had tipped.

We began weekly counseling, working diligently on the required homework. The denominational therapist believed in John's innocence. However, during these months, reports came to me that John was being seen with another woman. I received anonymous letters and phone calls recounting the same information.

After repeated denials, John finally admitted to me that he had, in fact, been having an affair for over four years. He acknowledged that he never had loved me. He said he had felt pressured into our marriage. He had a very strong bond with his lover. Divorce would be desirable, if I would be the one to file. The darkness fell again.

I reverted in memory to my first family vacation. I was eight years old. The descent into the cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota was marked by the cool dampness in the air. Profuse yellowish lights cast an

unnatural glare on the dripping walls and paved pathway. As we walked along the route, my pulse quickened. How terrible it would be if the lights went off and I was trapped down here! Then, as if he had read my mind, the tour guide stepped to a switch box on the cave wall and flicked the lights off. I screamed in horror. The intensity of the darkness could be felt. I could see nothing, not even my hand as it groped for my parents. The cave became a place of confusion and abandonment. These same feelings of panic recurred now as I came to grips with my impending divorce and the darkness that now seemed to envelope me.

What
happened in
that tunnel
of love to
cause our
relationship
to overturn?

Gratefully, the Holy Spirit heard my heart's cry. He had, in fact, charged the path ahead of me, both preceding and following me. I read the promise of His presence in even darkest places (Ps. 139). I acknowledged my need for Him in the pit of despair and asked Him to lift me out and set my feet on a hard, firm path. I asked Him to steady me as I walked along (Ps. 40).

God had already prepared a way for me by providing employment at a Christian organization. There my self-respect was reignited as I was recognized as a person of worth in my own right. The large staff not only included me in their meetings but also asked and regarded my opinion on issues. None of them knew me as Mrs. John. They judged me on my merits alone. The Lord graciously surrounded me with believers who offered their friendship to me. They helped me move into an apartment and be-

gin my new life as a single. I found love and acceptance in the midst of my divorce.

I have repeatedly asked myself, "How did this marriage go wrong? What happened in that tunnel of love to cause our relationship to overturn? Could this marriage have been saved? How can a pastor and wife lose their marriage while in the middle of what many would call a successful ministry?"

Though I am
now walking
alone into
unfamiliar
territory,
God's Spirit
is directing
my path.

Three things stand out for me:

First, I believe I lost my own identity in another person in my sincere desire to be a scriptural helpmate to my husband. Instead, I became enmeshed in him. John's needs became my compulsion. I existed merely as an extension of him. His approval became so primary to me that I lost my own thoughts, opinions, and preferences for his. This is never healthy. By being chameleon-like in my life with John, I never developed into the per-

son God had prepared me to become. And John came to disrespect the person I was.

Second, I was surrounded by a group of people who so believed in their pastor that they were unwilling to believe his marriage could ever go wrong. In the motion picture *Witness* one of the final scenes shows a bell being rung when an Amish family is in trouble. How poignant to see the bearded farmers congregate on the horizon with their crude implements, running to the aid of their brothers and sisters. I wept as I observed the camaraderie of that community. I wondered why no one ran to my aid when I rang the bell for help. Did I ring it so weakly that no one understood the urgency of the sound? Paul said, "If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8). Or were the hearers too ready to rationalize the meaning of the noise? "Surely, it isn't as serious as all that." Probably both.

Our congregation was so pleased with the energy and enthusiasm of their approval-driven pastor that they refused to hold him accountable for his time management. When he worked twice as many hours as required, it was calculated by them to be a financial blessing—two people for the price of one. They ignored the obvious in their desire to believe the best of everyone involved. What a penetrating blow these things made to our marriage and family!

Third, I must admit that I refused to take action. I didn't have enough self-love to take appropriate action when I was being mistreated. My passive responses to continual dishonoring behavior contributed greatly to the demise of an already fragile relation-

ship. What masqueraded as humility or martyrdom was, in reality, a failure to love myself. By this behavior, I allowed myself to be a victim. As I rebuild my life, any new relationships must inculcate this truth: I must love myself in order to truly love others.

There remains much that I do not understand. I do know that I have several choices, however. I can focus on the what-ifs and the if-onlys and slowly drive myself to the brink of complete hopelessness. Or I can focus on the unchanging, sovereign Savior, Jesus, who not only experiences my affliction with me but uniquely tailors circumstances and situations for me.

Walking into the unknown alone has always been a source of fear for me. It doesn't surprise me that, with the prospect of navigating my own tunnel into the future, locked inside of my spirit are feelings of fear. But in the midst of my fear, I am reminded of something I have believed in my head for years, but that is now becoming an ever deepening issue of my heart. It is the truth that undergirds my every step with confidence and peace. For I am convinced, as never before, that though I am now walking alone into unfamiliar territory, God's Spirit is directing my path. His promise is sure: "Along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth" (Isa. 42:16). I am beginning to discover the promised treasure of the darkness, "riches stored in secret places" (Isa. 45:3). Although the tunnel of my tomorrows is uncertain, it is filled with light—the light of God's direction. Since He is there, it is and will continue to be a tunnel of love. ✠

Beyond Relief



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In God Alone

by Faith Warren

Michigan

What had
been a close
friendship
between
families slowly
began to
die.

The situation in which Mark* and I found ourselves took two full years to conclude. Kevin Clindon, our music director and my husband's best friend, asked for one more month in ministry in which to decide if he could work with Mark any longer. Instead, Mark asked him to step down from his position until such time that Kevin knew whether or not he could agree with Mark's philosophy of worship. What had once been a closeness in ministry had deteriorated into a sharp conflict over the philosophy of worship.

Kevin had attended a worship conference through which the Lord had worked mightily in his life. Excited and growing spiritually, he naturally wanted to bring that enthusiasm home to the rest of us. Because he had grown through this experience, he assumed that this type of worship was God's will for our church. He felt that my husband should have no power to change anything having to do with his part of the worship service. As Mark was the pastor with the responsibility for delivering the sermon to the people with no outside alteration, so Kevin felt he should have the power to lead worship with no outside input from his pastor.

Problems mounted as Kevin's ideas of praise and worship began deviating from the doctrine of our denomination. As Mark began to draw the reins on Kevin's performance while on the platform, what had been a close friendship between families slowly began to die. When together socially, we behaved as we had in happier days. However, in front of other staff pastors and vocalists before church on Sunday mornings, Kevin had a way of subtly belittling Mark or pouting. He would then include songs and instrumentation in the service that he specifically knew Mark did not want included. Mark would make appointments with him, only to have Kevin

not show up and not call to explain why he wasn't there. These events and others like them kept escalating but were never referred to in our social times together. Because of this dichotomy in what I considered our closest friendship, I was almost at the breaking point emotionally.

In crying to the Lord during that period of time, He faithfully taught me many things. These friends had been closer to us than family. I would never want to repeat that grieving process again, but I do know the Lord used it for many positive lessons in my life. For this I am grateful.

First of all, God taught me that **I can't trust that others will always be there for us or know what is best for us.** Even the best of friends can be separated by circumstances they didn't see coming. I had considered these friends as permanent supports in our lives. I trusted their opinions above my own. If I felt that Kevin and his wife, Cyndi, would think I was foolish for taking on a certain ministry in the church, I wouldn't do it. God helped me to see that I needed to learn how to trust Him and myself with decisions and not to worry about the opinions of others.

Second, I learned that **our friendship had robbed us of family time.** Mark and I were so close to the Clindons that our respective family times often included each other's families. Our children would often ask why we couldn't go out, "just us." When forced to spend less time with Kevin and Cyndi due to the growing estrangement, we drew closer together as our own family. I began to enjoy my children more than I ever had. We spent our evenings together on activities that were on our children's intellectual and emotional level. No longer were they the interruption to adult conversation with friends.

Third, I learned that **being a pastor can be lonely.** We had considered Kevin and Cyndi copastors with

us, even though they were not paid staff. We assumed they would always be in the middle of the battle with us, agreeing with us on how the battle should be fought and fighting alongside us for God. I learned that while all Christians fight the battle, only the pastor has no choice in deciding whether or not to "walk point." This lonely point position was held in military days by a member of a group of foot soldiers. This soldier walked first into battle with the rest of the troops fanned out on either side of him and behind him in a V formation. He did this in order to draw enemy fire on himself while the others rushed in. That lone soldier "walked point."

In our case, Kevin had chosen to walk point with Mark for a long time. However, when he began to disagree with Mark, he had the option of stepping back in the formation. Because of his closeness to Mark, he gave the most hurtful shots. Mark, on the other hand, had no such option. His choice was to lead or leave and let Kevin take the church in the direction he desired. He chose to lead, even though it meant extreme pain for both of us.

Finally, I learned that **God alone is to be my strength, not other friends.** This does not mean that I think God wants us to have no close friends: I believe He wants us to have wonderful friendships with people whom we help and who help us along the way! But I don't believe God is pleased when friends fill the place in our hearts that He is meant to fill. I had allowed that to happen. When

Mark or I had a hurt or a need for strength, I had always gone to Kevin and Cyndi for help. They were the Aarons holding up the arms of Moses when He was too tired to hold them up himself. They gave encouragement when we needed it most. I counted on their strength. I leaned on them fully. Encouragement from a God I couldn't audibly hear was my substitute if I couldn't reach Kevin or Cyndi.

In crying
to the Lord
during that
period of time,
He faithfully
taught me
many
things.

One day near the middle of this two-year struggle, I was reading my Bible, seeking comfort. As I read from the Psalms, my eyes caught the words of the writer: "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never

be shaken" (Ps. 62:1-2). The words "in God alone" burned themselves into my mind. I knew I had not relied on God alone. I had not gone to Him first for hurts in my life. Sometimes the Lord wasn't even the second or third person to whom I poured out my troubles. No wonder I was "shaken" by all this! That day God began rearranging my thought life to establish himself in first place.

Though the personal hurt of this fractured relationship has not left us, we do not feel it daily as we did in the past. It now seems normal not to be constantly with the Clindons. That void has been filled by God as He has provided other friendships for us to enjoy, friendships we would never have enjoyed while spending all of our time with the Clindons. Not one of these relationships, however, has replaced the feeling of family that we felt with Kevin and Cyndi and their teenage son.

Surprisingly enough at this point in our lives, we are doing what we can to rebuild the fractured relationship with Kevin and Cyndi. Kevin, as of yet, has not talked about the events of the last two years with Mark or stepped back into ministry. He and Cyndi still attend our church. In the meantime, we work to create a new friendship with them, undoubtedly different from the old friendship. For me, that means a friendship that does not substitute for my relationship with God but becomes an outgrowth of my relationship with Him.

*Names have been changed.

BEYOND BELIEF



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Made in Heaven, Grown in Earth

My husband, Rick, has been a pastor for 15 of our 21 years of marriage. During the first 10 years we faced serious family problems: infertility, two miscarriages, and depression—pressures that might affect any marriage. Add to that list the specific stresses we experienced because of Rick's position—unrealistic expectations, heavy demands on family time, burnout—and our marriage was potentially another divorce statistic.

How have we survived as a clergy couple?

I believe we've utilized several practices that have strengthened our marriage. Maybe they will help others as well.

Some of the suggestions apply mostly to male pastors and their wives. I don't intend to ignore the



by Sandy Sheppard

Freelance writer,
Cass City, Michigan

many clergy spouses who are men, but I believe they face a unique set of problems that I'm less qualified to address.

1. Most important is to set aside time to be alone together on a regular basis. That might sound simplistic, but it may be the best way

to safeguard your marriage. Accomplishing it has not always been simple for Rick and me.

The first five and a half years in the pastorate were the easiest as far as scheduling time for each other because we did not have children.

Then our daughter and son were born less than two years apart. I stayed home full time. We paid a baby-sitter one night a week so that we could attend a Bible study together, but the budget wouldn't stretch enough to permit another night out. We solved the problem by asking a retired woman from our church if she would keep the children once a week for a few hours while Rick and I went out to breakfast. She turned out to be a real blessing to all of us. The kids had a new grandma, and we had time for uninterrupted conversation!

Now that our children are in school all day, our marriage has entered a new phase. Because I have a flexible part-time job, Rick and I are able to have a lunch hour at least once a week.

Another clergy couple we know are more systematic about their time together. Both of them work full-time, and they schedule the same night every week for their dates.

2. Take your spouse "off the hook." By telling the church people up front, "You are hiring me, not my wife," you can help insulate your marriage from the stress of unreasonable demands.

When Rick meets with a church committee preceding a pastoral appointment, he makes it clear that he and I come a package deal, but not two for



the price of one. He tells them, "My wife has the right to be simply another member of the church, if that's what she wants." His honesty frees me from unfair expectations of church people.

3. Encourage your spouse to develop his or her talents, whether or not they will be used to benefit the church directly. This may open up a whole new area of ministry apart from your own.

Rick makes it possible for me to utilize my talents in ways I would not have imagined possible 10 years ago. By not expecting me to use my abilities exclusively in the church, he frees me to use my abilities exclusively in the church; he frees me to use them as God leads me. His support relieves me from pressures to perform, and his encouragement enhances our marriage in the long run.

Recently I commented to him, "Isn't it amazing how few people in our church know that I speak for women's groups and write for Christian magazines?"

His response made me laugh. "It's kind of exciting, isn't it? Sort of like 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.'"

4. Affirm your spouse's right to say no to unreasonable demands or requests. Aside from teaching Sunday School and singing in the choir, I volunteer very little time to the church. Some clergy spouses may enjoy being more heavily involved, but there are times when we all need to turn down a request for help.

5. Encourage your wife to make friends both in and out of the church. If your community has a ministerial association, suggest that the wives meet separately to get acquainted. No one understands one pastor's wife like another.

The clergy wives in our small town have been meeting on a monthly basis for about a year now. We share needs and joys, as well as compare horror stories. On occasion we pray for each other, but mostly we enjoy being together and talking. Our meetings are unstructured and casual.

6. Avoid embarrassing your spouse from the pulpit. If you

want to talk about your spouse in a sermon, offer rights of censorship before Sunday. Even a spouse with an exceptional sense of humor might be offended if you neglect to mention the funny homegrown illustration you will be using.

7. Let your children be children. Don't require them to act like adults when they are only children. Don't expect your wife to maintain absolute control of them in public. If they embarrass you, your wife is probably not at fault.

Clergy marriages face all the pressures of the average family as well as additional pressures that are unique to the pastorate. I am grateful that Rick

and I have made it this far with our relationship intact—even strengthened—by the problems we've experienced. I don't think we've left anything to chance. We continue to work at our marriage.

Not long ago we lunched together at our favorite local Chinese restaurant. I looked him right in the eyes. "All these lunches alone together—aren't they great? In some ways I feel I'm getting to know you all over again. And, do you know what?"

He leaned back in his chair and returned my look a little warily. "No, what?"

I smiled. "I'm finding out that I still like you!"



"NOT ONLY CAN THE NEW PASTOR'S WIFE TEACH... SHE EVEN PLAYS THE SACKBUT!"

No Hunting

There just doesn't seem to be enough hours in the week to prepare three messages and do all the other things a pastor is expected to do."

These words of the young pastor took me back to my first years in the pastorate. I remember going to the study and facing that blank sheet of paper, trying to feel inspired with something to say to my congregation. Actually, I had an advantage of sorts over my young pastor-friend. When I entered the pastorate, I was still finishing my ministerial studies. My first year's preaching grew out of the books I read in those courses. Although my congregation may not have appreciated it, I set them well on the road to ordination with my preaching!

One of my earliest revelations in the ministry came when I realized that pastoral sermon preparation was different from that of layperson or ministerial student preparation. Before I entered the ministry, my sermon preparation generally began with some flash of inspiration. I would be studying my Bible or reading a devotional book or listening to a religious song on the radio. Suddenly, I would be moved to wax eloquent on some particular subject. I would prepare a message on that topic and eagerly await the pastor's vacation or some other opportunity to fill the pulpit. Once I became a pastor myself, it didn't take me long to realize that I couldn't sit around the study leafing through my Bible or digging through my library or even listening to the Christian FM radio station, waiting for something to grab me. For the first time in my life, I had deadlines to meet. In fact as my young pastor-friend pointed out, I had three deadlines. Beyond that, I had people in the hospital to visit, committees and boards to lead, and denominational meetings to attend. There simply wasn't time to give to sermon-hunting. Pastoral sermon preparation proved to be vastly different from lay sermon work.



by G. R. "Scott" Cundiff

Pastor,
Trinity Church of the Nazarene,
Borger, Texas

In time, the Lord took pity on me and put me under the influence of certain good pastors who directed me to preaching through books of the Bible. Because of this, sermon preparation in the last 15 years of my ministry has been much more rewarding than it was the first 5. The idea is straightforward enough. I prayerfully select a book of the Bible, generally in the New Testament, and preach through it, paragraph by paragraph. Often I have a series going on Sunday morning, another on Sunday evening, and occasionally a third on Wednesday night. There are several advantages to series preaching.

First, series preaching stops the hunting.

Now I go to the study, knowing exactly where to go for preaching material. Rather than spending my time deciding what I am going to preach, I spend it deciding what the inspired writer is saying to us. Rather than haphazardly browsing my library, I seek out what commentators and other writers have had to say about my selected portion of Scripture. Because of this, my sermon work time is much more productive.

Furthermore, series preaching gives biblical balance to my preaching.

If my primary source of preaching material comes from the books I read,

I will find myself preaching on topics I personally enjoy reading. When I preach through a book of the Bible, I find myself preaching on the exact same variety of subjects that is addressed in that book.

Also, series preaching helps me grow in my personal life.

I remember a month of messages that I preached while doing a year-long series from Hebrews. I found myself dealing with how Christ's priesthood was like that of Melchizedek. How challenging it was to grasp the concepts presented in Heb. 7. How rewarding to be stretched intellectually and then see my congregation understand why Jesus can save "to the uttermost."

Additionally, series preaching sets a proper example for my congregation.

One fellow came to me saying, "My wife and I are having a fight over our finances. Can you give me some verses that I can use to get my way?" This man had the same problem many people have. He thought the Bible was only a book of proof texts.

If I am in the habit of picking out a sermon topic and jumping all over the Bible to find verses to support my points, I give my listeners the impression that this is how the Bible should be used. However, when I commit myself to one section of Scripture and apply it to current life concerns, I teach my people to let the Bible say just what it says without manipulation.

Someone might object, "This approach leaves no room for the Holy Spirit to inspire and direct." I have two responses.


First, our Lord inspires through the scripture being studied. I remember digging my way through a portion of 1 Pet. (*digging* is the right word). I was dealing with how Christ "went and preached to the spirits in prison" and how those on the ark "were

saved through water" (1 Pet. 3:19-20). This was not a topic I would have ever picked out! As I wrestled with this tough paragraph, it seemed the Holy Spirit moved alongside to help me out. "Peter is showing us just how desperate God is to save people," He whispered to me. What started out to be sermon preparation by sheer determination became sermon preparation by inspiration. This rather obscure portion of Scripture came alive

for me and my listeners the following Sunday.

A second response to the objection is that I don't have to preach from the series every week. When a different area of the Bible speaks to me in a special way, I merely move over to preach from it the next Sunday. The series will still be there waiting on me the next week.

Now to me, series preaching is like meat and potatoes—good, solid, regu-

lar food that builds strong, healthy Christians. Once in awhile, the Lord gives me something special, a particularly enjoyable blessing to share with my congregation. The remainder of the time, I work in the series, doing my best to feed my congregation from the Word of God. This was the good advice some older, more experienced pastors gave to me years ago. This advice I gave to my frustrated friend in his first pastorate. 

It's Reporting Time Again

by Douglas A. Rohl

*Bivocational pastor,
Agape Church of the Nazarene,
Yakima, Washington*

Editorial note:

One pastor's report from a new church plant rang a bell at our district assembly. "Agape" is the church's name. Enjoy!

As the newest church on the district, let me preface my report with a statement from Phineas F. Brisee: "The Church of the Nazarene is in the morning of its existence, and the sun never sets in the morning."

It's that time once again;

We have gathered in this great hall,
To see what this year has been,
To hear reports from one and all.

Agape is like all the others.

There are many things that I could say—
We want to get out of here before Saturday,
So I'll save most of those for another day.

It's hard to locate the church called Agape.

The building cannot be found.
But you can be sure of this one thing:
There are Agape people all over this town.

The people continue to be faithful;
Budgets paid as they always have been;
Big statistics appear to be elusive;
Great awards we will not win.

The facility in which we meet,
We rent and so do not own.
By the Spirit, we are searching
For a new field to call home.

The workers sometimes grow weary,
As the enemy assails.
Many are the plans in a man's heart,
But it's God's plan that prevails.

Some did not think we should go;
Some thought we would not stay,
And many of them are surprised now;
It's been six years the end of May.

The people continue to grow,
And the Lord continues to call.
We're getting stronger though smaller;
Holiness is preached to them all.

We don't know much about tomorrow;
Yesterday has disappeared into the dust.

We know the Holy Spirit will guide us,
And in Him we must remember to trust.

At one time full of struggles,
As if I was put upon the shelf;
First Church came alongside us,
Thought more of me than I of myself.

On a type of journey now together,
What the Lord has planned, unknown;
Combined forces with one another,
Both ministry horizons have grown.

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
And now He's using me!"

The Lord is speaking to me softly
Something very definite to say.
The doors are opening much wider,
Preparing for exciting new days!

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9).

Respectfully submitted,
Douglas A. Rohl

Passing on the Word!

Recently, my preaching ministry has broadened to include the other six days of the week following the Sabbath. The reason is quite simple. I have started to make copies of my Sunday sermon available for the congregation to take home with them after the service.

I heard that unless a preacher can put something concrete into the hands of his people, the sermon will not have as great an impact. This challenge prompted me to try a new venture.

Making manuscripts of my sermon available has made my preaching ministry more effective. Here are three reasons why:

1. As preachers, we would be misleading ourselves in thinking that our congregations give us their undivided attention for 25 minutes every Sunday.

Let me remind you how we usually listen to sermons. A point or illustration causes our minds to wander away and not come back to the present exhortation until a few minutes later. Sometimes our children, or someone else's, distract us from what is being said. Also, when we are tired, we find it difficult to give our full attention to a message.

The people sitting in



by Mark W. Royall

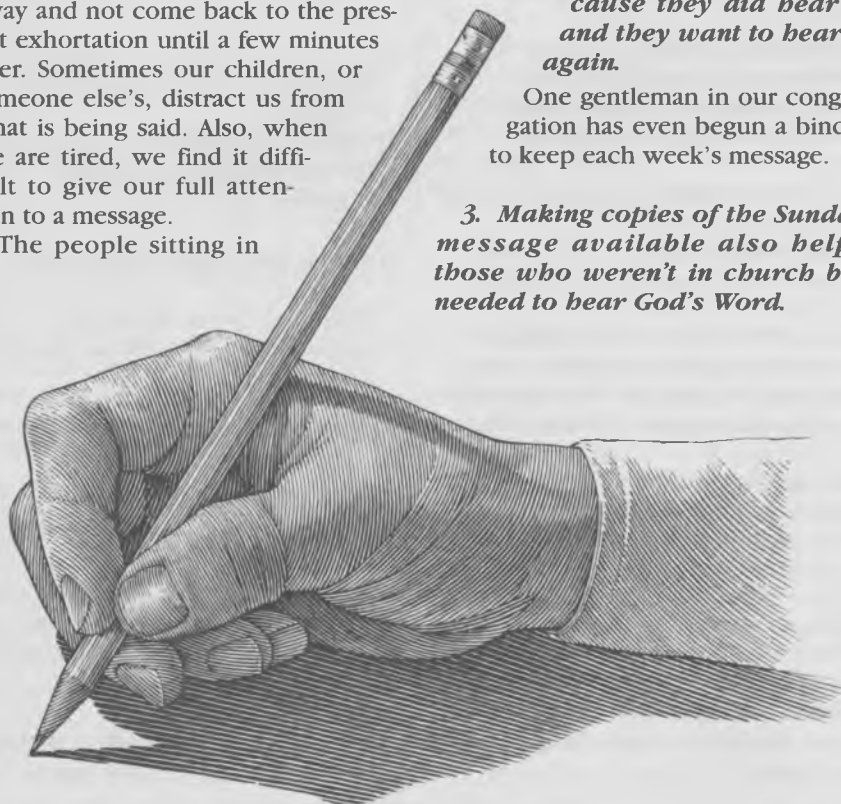
Pastor,
Kolapore Church of the Nazarene,
Ontario

our pews on Sunday morning are no different from you or me. Even if we have a marvelous message and deliver it with enthusiasm and conviction, some will not be able to fully receive the lesson. Having copies of the Sunday message available will certainly help those who, although they were present, missed the sermon.

2. Some people take the Sunday message home because they did hear it and they want to hear it again.

One gentleman in our congregation has even begun a binder to keep each week's message.

3. Making copies of the Sunday message available also helps those who weren't in church but needed to hear God's Word.



I am thrilled when I hear that someone has taken a copy to give to another person because it is thought the sermon could help him or her. The influence of the Sunday message does not have to be limited to those who were actually there on Sunday.

Periodically during the Sunday School hour, I go out and visit those in the community too ill to attend the morning service. I let them know we will be praying for them in the service. I leave them a copy of the church bulletin, where they can see their name under prayer requests, along with a copy of the morning message. The sick, whether church or nonchurch, appreciate this Sunday morning visit from the pastor. For me, it provides an opportunity to let these people know that we do care about them. It also provides them with the occasion to receive a message from God's Word.

On Sunday, tell your people, "If you believe it will help you today, full-manuscript copies of the Sunday message will be available for you to take home after the service." Leave the copies on a table at the back of the church or in the foyer where people can take them at their own discretion.

Include a cover page with the sermon title and the date on which the sermon was preached. Often, I include a humorous cartoon on the cover page that relates to the message within.

Knowing how many copies to run off beforehand can be a tricky decision to make. Try making one copy for every 20 adults in your congregation. If all the sermon copies are being taken week after week, then you will want to make more available. If it appears that the people are not taking the sermons home, don't give up. Give your congregation some time to adjust to this new idea. I know that passing on the Word in this manner can be a wonderful new avenue for God to use in your preaching ministry.

Why I Don't Believe in Evolution

Evolution is the belief that the living things around us developed from lower, less complex life-forms over hundreds of millions of years. Somewhere back in the aeons of time passed, living things came from inert, nonliving substances that in turn came from simpler physical elements. All of this happened naturally and progressively over billions of years.

I don't believe it.

First, I don't believe it because science has not convinced me.

Admittedly, I am not a scientist, but I have taken some science classes and done some reading. In biology class, we learned how silly it was to believe in something called spontaneous generation—the idea that living things can come from nonliving things.

The teacher gave the illustration of people who used to believe that if you put grain in a box with old rags, it would produce mice. How silly. Mice come from mice.

No scientists have ever observed spontaneous generation. It is not an ordinary nor natural process today. So all competent biologists accept the view that on the earth today, life comes only from life.

Later in the same class, we were taught that living things came from nonliving things. This time the teacher called it evolution and told us that all competent biologists today accept the view that life evolved slowly from nonliving things. Billions of years ago this was the ordinary and natural process. No one has ever observed this process nor can it be replicated, but we are supposed to believe it occurred naturally and regularly then.

There is another and better option called creation. Creation is also the making of living things from nonliving things, done once by God him-



by **Thomas Lorimer**

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self. It is not ordinary nor natural. It is divine and miraculous.

I took physics in college. I learned the first two laws of thermodynamics, which basically say that everything proceeds toward maximum randomness (disorder) unless energy is expended. Simply stated, everything becomes simpler, falls apart, or becomes a mess unless some effort is used to keep it together or clean it up. All competent scientists accept these two fundamental laws of nature.

However, those who teach evolution try to convince us that these laws don't apply to biological development. Evolutionists teach that life evolved from simple to highly complex forms on its own. Somehow the evolution from nonliving simple elements and chemical combinations to extraordinary complex substances, such as DNA, and complicated multi-systemic living things, like people, just happened naturally over some 20 billion years.

But while we (and especially schoolchildren) may be made to feel that all reasonable and educated people accept evolution, many tenets of evolutionary theory are far from obvious to modern scientists. Evolutionists Harry Clemney and Nick Badham acknowledge that there was oxygen

in the Precambrian atmosphere. This would have made it impossible for amino acids, life's basic elements, to bind together. The chance that a single enzyme could have evolved by random processes is only 1 in 10^{40000} according to astronomers Hoyle and Wickramasinghe. To make 1 protein molecule by random processes conducted at the speed of light would require 10^{243} billion years. Colin Patterson, curator of the British Museum of Natural History, admitted in writing that there is no scientific evidence in the fossil record for transitional life-forms.

A great deal of scientific evidence against evolution is found in the recent books *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* by molecular biologist Dr. Michael Denton and *Darwin on Trial* by noted Berkeley professor Dr. Phillip Johnson, as well as in other books available today.

Have you considered why something like an eye would simply evolve where there was no survival value in its initial development stages, thus defying the evolutionary principle of necessary immediate functionality of specialized organs? Do you really think whales evolved from four-legged wolf-size animals who liked to swim some 60 million years ago, as evolutionists teach?

The second reason I don't believe in evolution is that evolution and creation are diametrically opposed.

Evolution teaches that humankind came about as the result of death, whereas the Bible teaches that death came about as the result of humankind.

Evolution teaches that human life evolved from lower forms that were not human. These lower-order beings reproduced and died and reproduced and died, all while slowly evolving in-

to higher-order beings and eventually into humans. From humans back to their supposed tree-dwelling four-legged ancestral relative, there were at least some 30 million years of evolutionary death.

The Bible says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . .

. . . For, if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:12, 17; see Gen. 1—3).

According to God, death came about as the penalty for the sin of one man, Adam. So, Adam came before sin, which came before death. Therefore, humans were before death and not the result of millions of years of deaths. Adam and Eve were created.

There really is no way to harmonize these two opposing viewpoints. Either humans came from a process involving billions of deaths or death resulted from one man's disobedience. God's Word declares the later to be the case and says that God created Adam.

Further, evolution teaches that the original man, whatever he was, was deficient. There were intermediary beings who were not quite human. When the first real person mutated from these barely lower things, he or she still was not completely evolved. This process would continue for years until something would develop that would clearly be a human being, but even then would still be in the process of becoming human.

Contrast this with the biblical account in Genesis. "God saw all that he had made and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This was before the Fall and its resultant punishment and effects. The Bible records that the deficiencies in people came after the creation of humankind, and not before.

The third reason I believe in creation and not evolution is that the inspired writers of the Bible believed in creation.

For example, the Old Testament writer Moses, besides writing the account of creation, wrote, "Ask now about the former days, long before

your time, from the day God created man on the earth" (Deut. 4:32).

David wrote, "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:5). Solomon said, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (Eccles. 12:1).

Isaiah testified of creation in asking, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary" (40:28). Ezek. 28:15, Mal. 2:10, and others spoke of God's creation.

All competent
biologists
accept the view
that life comes
only from life.

The New Testament writers believed in creation too. Paul said, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16; see also Rom. 1:25; Eph. 3:9). Peter wrote, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Pet. 4:19).

John heard the 24 elders in heaven affirm creation when they said, "You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created, and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

Did you know that Jesus believed in creation? Speaking of the Tribulation, He said, "Because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again" (Mark 13:19).

Jesus quoted from the account of creation in Genesis: "Haven't you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'

and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?'" (Matt. 19:4-5; see also Mark 10:6).

God himself proclaimed that He created the earth and all living things: "So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them'" (Gen. 6:7). "It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts" (Isa. 45:12).

To reject the truth of creation is to reject what the Old Testament, the New Testament, the elders in heaven, Jesus, and God himself said. In fact, to believe in evolution is to tear a hole so large in the Scriptures as to make them hollow and perfunctory. That is a high price to pay for believing in a theory that has not been proven nor adequately demonstrated.

A fourth reason I don't believe in creation is pragmatic and practical. Belief in evolution results in a hopeless fatalism.

If evolution is true, then you are an accident—just one accident in a world with trillions of other accidents. Your life has no more significance than a leaf being ripped from a tree in the autumn and falling to the ground. The life and survival of your children is no more important than that of termites who try to survive by eating your house.

If evolution is true, then there is no such thing as morality. It is only a figment of our imagination, created to try to help our survival. Of course, if evolution is true, then we will not survive anyway because we are in the process of evolving into something else that may be as different from us as a whale is from a wolf.

If evolution is true, then there is no meaning to love, kindness, compassion, gratitude, respect, honor, faithfulness, justice, hope, and a host of other virtues. They are also simply accidents in the process of becoming.

If evolution is true, then death has no significance. When you're gone, you're gone, and that's all there is to it.

This generation is getting the mes-

sage. Children pour gas on a friend and burn him up. Teenagers shoot other people for fun. Children can drop another child out of a window to his death. An adult man can abduct a little girl and rape and kill her. Others abduct older women, kill them, and throw them in a forest. A mother can drown her own two children. Rock stars can sing about killing policemen and mutilating women. Thousands are spaced out on drugs; millions seek only what is best for them, cheating and deceiving many to get what they want.

But, my friend, if evolution is true, there is no way to say that any of this is wrong. If evolution is true, it is no more wrong for a Jeffrey Dahmer to cut up and eat people than it is for a lion to kill its prey.

If evolution is true, then life is hopeless and pointless. You might as well get what you can; take advantage of whom you can, as soon as you can; or end it all for yourself. If evolution is true, it makes no difference at all.

Thousands today are doing just that. We have removed the message of creation from our schools, taught our children all about evolution, and then we wonder why all the crime, pillage, and suicide. We wonder why they reject God's truth and live for themselves.

But there is another side. If creation is true, then God has a claim on your life because He made you. Then your life has a purpose; it has meaning.

If creation is true, then to follow God's ways is right. To go against them is wrong. There is right and wrong. There is morality. It comes from God, who created us.

Many tenets of evolutionary theory are far from obvious to modern scientists.

Virtues like love, peace, joy, fairness, and so on, have meaning because they are gifts from God bestowed on those whom He designed and created. To respect one another is proper because each of us is made in the image of God.

If creation is true, then death was not God's intention, but instead, is an enemy of creation and life. It is the result of our rebellion but can be overcome and defeated through Jesus Christ.

If creation is true, then the message of Jesus brings true hope. This world is not all there is. There remains another better place for the believer. It also is made by God. It is offered to all those who will take His

Son as their Savior. It is offered to you. It is His best gift. To accept Jesus as your personal Savior makes all the difference in this created world and the one to come.

So, there remains a choice. Neither evolution nor creation can be proven by our scientific methods today. The choice is based on an informed faith.

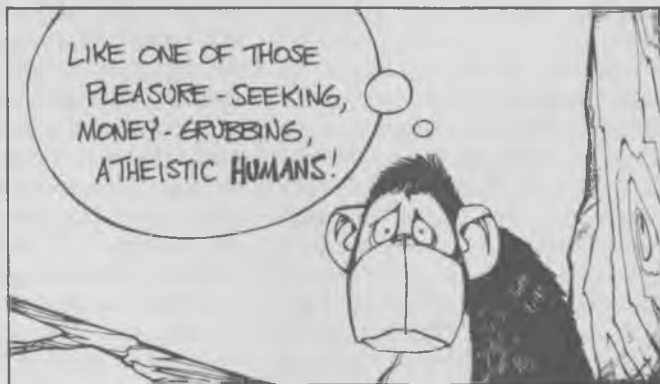
One can listen to the evolutionists who preach a message that results in anarchy, hopelessness, and despair. Or one can listen to the One who lived, died, and rose again with a message of life, hope, and love.

I could listen to some people who claim to have observed a few things that might demonstrate evolution but who cannot provide one—even one—transitional form. Or I could listen to the One who created it all and demonstrated through miracles of healing, controlling His creation, and bringing people back to life that He was beyond it all. He proved himself by dying and rising again, something not one scientist has done or can do.

You can believe the books that are written by today's so-called scholars who can't make up their minds and keep changing what they say is true. Or you can believe the Book that has held steady through more than 2,000 years of attack and abuse, having been written by the One who created our world.

As for me, I will trust God to know what He is talking about. I'll take Him at His Word. I believe He created the world and the things in it. I believe He created Adam and Eve.

BEYOND BELIEF



Baptism, Why Do We Do It?

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS OF CLEANSING

There are many Old Testament references to ceremonial cleansing or dipping into water, but the word *baptism* does not appear in the Old Testament. Ceremonial cleansing was not baptism. It was a practical demonstration that contamination from the world must be removed before one is acceptable in the presence of a Holy God. Such ritual cleansing was originally limited to adult males. The implication is the same as that associated with the removal of Moses' sandals before the burning bush. The soles of his sandals were in contact with the earth; thus in order to approach God, he must shed worldly contamination.

Many of the laws regarding cleansing dealt with purifying oneself following contact with dead bodies. The underlying lesson is not one of hygiene, but that any relationship with God is marked by a cleansing from all contact with that which is dead.¹ Death represents sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Sin must be cleansed. Sin cannot be washed away by water, but the outward washing becomes a symbol of an inward cleansing. The inward change makes the one being cleansed acceptable in the presence of God. This was true of the priests in ancient Israel and is also true of believers in contemporary Christianity.

From the very day of creation, God has defined His relationship with human beings by specific covenants. In the Old Testament, there were seven covenants. Six were designed to restore the relationship broken by sin. The first covenant, the Edenic covenant, governed that relationship during Adam's and Eve's sojourn of innocence in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Then, moving from Gen. 3:15 through the Old Testament, there are five covenants that God enacted in His plan of redemption.



by John Conlon

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The seventh covenant is recorded in Jer. 31:33-34 and Heb. 10:16-17. It is called the new covenant and was made possible in the passion and resurrection of God's Only Begotten Son, Jesus. In this new covenant the way is made for complete restoration of the relationship that was broken as a result of sin.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAKS OF BAPTISM

Although baptism is not an Old Testament sacrament, according to the Mishnah,² pre-Christian Judaism did hold to a tradition of baptizing converts proselytized into the Jewish faith. However, natural-born Jews were not baptized. Instead, male Jews were circumcised in accordance with the teaching of the law. Circumcision had a twofold meaning: (1) circumcision marked the separation of God's people from all other people of the world (Gentiles), and (2) circumcision marked the cutting away of all hindrances to living a holy life. In essence, circumcision symbolized inherited sanctification. Yet it served as an ordinance in which we find the seeds of Christian baptism.

In the teachings of John the Baptist we find the first reference to New Testament baptism. John's baptism represented the forgiveness of sins

and was contingent upon repentance. However, John conceded that his baptism pointed ahead to a new baptism of God's personal presence (Holy Spirit) in the believer's life that would result in a burning away (fire) of all that is unacceptable to God.

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (*Matt. 3:11*).

The Bible makes it clear that salvation is based solely upon faith.³ The Great Commission, given by Jesus Christ, commands baptism. Baptism follows belief. Thus, baptism is not an act of cleansing but an outward sign of a cleansing that has already taken place within the believer. Peter gave an example in Acts 2:38-41, where we find a dynamic, forthright, and clear example of baptism subsequent to the acceptance of the gospel message, and not prior to it.

Acts 8:36-37 confirmed this sequence where baptism was not permitted until after there was understanding. In Rom. 6:3-4, baptism is pictured as a reenactment of Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection. In Col. 2:9-12, baptism and circumcision are linked together, but neither are considered ends in themselves. Instead, baptism should hold the same significance to the Christian as circumcision held to the Jew. Circumcision confirmed that a Jewish boy was born an Israelite. Baptism confirms that a believer is born of Christ—he or she has put on Christ, a new person (Gal. 3:27).

True baptism (internal heart cleansing) is an act of repairing the relationship with God that was fatally broken at the Fall (1 Pet. 3:18-20). Only God can return life to that which has died. Therefore, no one can work for or perform rituals that will lead to restoration. The act of salvation is a

grace of God, enacted by the Holy Spirit to bring about a spiritual birth. This new birth distinguishes the Christian character as something different from what it had previously been (Titus 3:5-6). Baptism is a public recognition of that change (Rom. 6:4).


III. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

Regenerate baptism offers a clear picture of God's grace in the life of a believer but adds nothing to the life of a person who has not experienced a personal regeneration in Christ Jesus. Salvation is by grace and not by ritual or works. Each person must make the decision to follow Jesus. Sinister influences accosting our generation were present at the time Jesus lived on this earth. We may experience evil more intensely, but the sins of Jesus' day are still the sins of the 1990s.

The decision to follow Jesus is not inherited or purchased by some formula, ritual, or tradition. The Bible holds the key to preparing our children for life. That key is not found in infant baptism or some other formality, but in Deut. 6. Each family and church must dedicate itself to instructing its children. Training begins at birth. Whether a newborn in the Spirit or an infant born in the flesh, each birth requires intensive, organized, compassionate, loving instruction to nurture each baby into a mature relationship with God. Too often Christians simply baptize them and forget them, leaving the nurture to peers and contemporary technology. When a child is trained up in the way he or she should go (Prov. 22:6), the Word of God assures us that the child "will not depart from it" (KJV). That training includes a lifelong process. It takes the combined effort of family, extended family, church, and para-church institutions dedicated to imparting the knowledge of God into the mind and heart of the newborn.

The instruction manual tells us that we all have a responsibility in that training. If we do our part, God guarantees success. The question is, Do we believe God? Churches must begin to organize their ministries to this end, or we will lose the next generation. Christian instruction has broken down in two ways:

First, an assumption that Sunday worship, Sunday School, and possibly a weeknight of prayer by those committed to the church will make it all right. Second, instead of focusing upon the individual, we focus upon violence, incest, abuse, addiction, and other things to the extent that we often lose sight of the power of God in the cleansed heart of a truly baptized person.

What does it take? The answer includes commitment by family and church in baby dedications, home study nights, ritual observances at times of crisis in individual lives, campmeetings, wholesome social activities, weeknight discipleship training, involvement by the church in the lives of individuals, and as many other activities as the imagination can envision that will lead people to focus their attention upon God. These things take work, creativity, and dedication by church leaders. When the whole person is involved, the Body of Christ will grow up to make decisions based upon intelligent thinking. Only then will the ritual of baptism hold its proper meaning. As a result, the entire Christian community can rejoice in the real meaning of baptism, which follows a crisis decision to follow Jesus. 

1. Examples of cleansing can be found in the following: Exod. 30:17-21; Lev. 11:25; 17:15; Num. 19:17-18; 31:19-23, as well as other references.

2. The Mishnah is a part of the Talmud, a codification of the oral law of the Old Testament and of the political and civil laws of the Jews.

3. In this regard faith is more than mental assent; faith is believing. Believing is accepting that which one cannot see to be truth and living out a life in actions that support that belief. This salvation is only possible when a rational, intelligent, and voluntary decision has been made by the person.


The Colors of a Rainbow



by Jennifer Williams

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A brilliant rainbow lights the sky, sending chills down my back. One of God's most precious sights, it is pleasing to the eye, yet even more pleasing to the soul. Each and every enriching color represents the same beauty, yet at the same time each has an inner beauty that is unique to itself. Each color stands proud, and though there are many different shades of each, light and dark, they stand together to form a sacred sight. The colors are combined to make an astonishing sight that brings joy to the heart and a tear to the eye.

So are the colors of the many races that make up our society. Each different shade of skin represents an inner beauty, a sacred heritage. When you gaze upon the many faces in our world, you are reminded of the past, the present, and the future. Each different race stands proud, unashamed to be part of such an important piece of our history. The different races are combined to make an awesome picture. I gaze at that picture, framed by God's love, and my heart grows warm, and my soul is pleased. I thank Him for the rainbow He has painted with His people. 

Caring for the Cocooned

by Steven L. McKinley

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It was one of those rare evenings when everyone in the family was free: no meetings, no classes, no lessons, no social engagements—a free evening. I looked forward to a leisurely dinner, a stroll with my wife, an Uno game for the whole family, maybe even viewing all of *L.A. Law*.

Then our insurance agent called and said it was time to review our family's coverage. I like our insurance agent, and I recognize the importance of reviewing the coverage. So we scheduled him to come on that free evening. But I resented it. I wanted my free time and my privacy. I resented the loss of that quiet evening at home with the family. I really didn't want the insurance agent to come.

I sense that many people today feel the same way about pastoral visits in the home.

The Cocooning Culture

I serve a youthful suburban congregation; approximately 80 percent of the families have school-age children. In most homes, both parents are employed. Children and parents keep up a dizzying schedule of community activities, athletic events, aerobics classes, church groups, music lessons, night-school classes, and on and on.

All the time, they are trying to keep up a high-quality family life. Free evenings with everyone at home are as rare for them as for me. According to the Harris Poll, the average American in 1973 had 26.2 hours of leisure time each week. In 1988, however, that average American had only 16.6 hours of leisure time.

There is a long and venerable tradition of pastoral visits in the home. That tradition has served the church well for many years. But in a culture like the one I live in, pastoral calling has become problematic. It takes

diplomat-level negotiation skills to schedule a visit around the basketball games, business trips, tuba lessons, Scout meetings, aerobics classes, bowling leagues, and trips to the lake. That scheduling often requires a number of telephone messages left on answering machines, both mine and theirs.

In a culture
like the one I
live in, pastoral
calling has
become
problematic.

Even if I can schedule a visit, will it be welcomed or will it be resented? Many of the busy people we serve prefer to use that precious free time to cocoon in their homes and shut out the outside world. While people may like and respect their pastor, they will not necessarily eagerly give up an evening in the solitary comfort of the cocoon for conversation with the pastor.

How I Respond

Recognizing this dilemma, I don't do as much calling in the home as did earlier generations of pastors. When there is a situation of identified need, I am diligent in making the call. But I don't do much old-fashioned calling. I have to be alert to other opportunities for communicating pastoral concern. Here are some of the methods I've come up with:

1. The telephone. There are days when I would like to rip the phone out of the wall. Nevertheless, I've found the telephone a great help in keeping in touch with people. Chet, for example, is typically busy as the president of his company. He is also the treasurer of the congregation. That makes it necessary for us to talk regularly on the telephone. Of course, we spend some time talking church business, but we also talk about families, about the pressures Chet is under at work, about the difficulty of applying faith to daily life. I haven't been inside Chet's home in several years. But he knows I care about him.

2. The supermarket. One management concept these days is called "management by walking around." Across the street from our church is a major supermarket where I do "ministry by walking around."

At any given time, I can meet a few parishioners there. Stopping for milk can take an hour. When I meet someone I know, I'm ready to stop by the pet food display and lean on my cart and chat for a while. I make it a point to go past the counter where Diane is handing out pizza samples, not only to wolf down a minislice or two, but also to talk with her about her chaotic home situation. Being the unofficial chaplain of the supermarket is one way I communicate pastoral concern.

3. The early morning breakfast. Leonard is a high-powered business owner who is an astute counselor when it comes to the financial management of the congregation. He also has major family problems. We are both morning people, so we'll meet for breakfast at 6:30 in a local restaurant. Before we're finished, his secretary will probably be in with letters for him to sign or documents for

him to take to an 8:00 meeting. But over breakfast, he shares his struggles, personal and professional.

4. The parking lot. The committee meeting ends. Slowly we make our way to our cars. Hank seems to be hanging back a bit. I fall in step with him and gently ask how things are going. Hank is concerned about the circle of friends his teenage daughter is taking up with. I know his daughter from confirmation class. We spend 30 minutes leaning on our cars while we wrestle with his concerns. I probably do as much counseling in the church parking lot as I do in my office.

5. Work parties. Last Saturday was cleanup day at church—another opportunity for ministry by walking around. I kept a dust cloth in my hand to look respectable, but I spent most of the time circulating among the workers. Joan was dusting the pews. We talked about her son's continuing battle with cancer. Down the hall, Jack was painting a classroom. As we shared a cup of coffee, he commented that it was good

to be working, but he found his mind jumping to Monday when he would have to fire two people in his department because of budget cuts. We talked about the pain of holding responsibility in a corporation. Betty, busily washing windows, was concerned about her son's special-education program at school. Our daughter is in the same program. We shared thoughts. And so it went. By the time the morning was over, I'd done little cleanup work, but I'd done a lot of pastoring.

6. Community occasions. I coach baseball with Dick. Dick isn't a member of our church, but I get the feeling he considers me his pastor.

Dick is a Vietnam veteran on permanent psychological disability. The demons of Vietnam still rattle around inside of him. He goes back to the VA hospital with depressing regularity.

When our team is in the field, we sit on the bench and talk. Of course, a good part of the time we talk baseball, but some of the time we simply talk life. Dick wants to be a good husband and a positive model for his sons, but it is hard for him. I try to encourage him, because it appears to me that he is doing a better job than he will give himself credit for. Dick knows his head isn't completely right, but the hospital trips have become less frequent. Slowly Dick is beginning to believe there just might be a God of grace with enough forgiveness even for him. I've never been inside Dick's home. The baseball field is the arena of my ministry with him.

I don't want to suggest that I'm some superpastor. I'm not. I'm an ordinary parish pastor trying to care for people. The people I meet are busy often and sometimes harassed. When they get a night or day off, they hunger for peace and qui-

et, time with their family, time to sit back and do nothing. They aren't eager for anyone to visit, even the pastor. But they are still people with hurts and heartaches, people in need of pastoral concern, in need of discussing the adventure of Christian living.

So I settle for the telephone, the supermarket, the restaurant, the parking lot, the scaffolding, the baseball field—those places where we do come together. Because I do take advantage of those opportunities, the people of this congregation know—at least, I hope they know—that they have a church that cares about them, a pastor who cares about them, and, above all, a God who loves them. ¶

I probably
do as much
counseling in
the church
parking lot as
I do in my
office.

Kitten Rescue

by Evelyn J. Behrens

Freelance writer,
Ovid, Minnesota

As the van pulled into our first-time parsonage home, we were greeted with several people from our new congregation who had come to help us unload. All the noise and so many people frightened my newly acquired, little tiger kitten, and she ran up a nearby tree.

No amount of coaxing would bring her down from her perch on a limb. She meowed pitifully.

To avoid embarrassment, my husband waited until everyone had left and then climbed the tree to get her. As he started down, two more cars pulled into the driveway, and more parishioners alighted.

"Where's the new pastor?" one man asked with gusto.

I pointed to my red-faced husband in the tree.

Laughing, the man roared, "Well, he'll go to any lengths to get *anything* saved, won't he?" ¶

Payday!

She was one of those mood-swing teens—highs and lows—unpredictable. She came from a dysfunctional home, though we did not know to use that buzzword in those days. We simply concluded that she came from an unhappy household. No responsible parents guided her and the other children.

When she came to church, she brought all that confusion with her. At times, she would sit and pout. Someone said she did that for attention. Did she? Maybe.

Then, at other times, she could be the life of the party—giggling, innocently acting up, fitting right in.

One time she ran away on us. We looked around for Donna. No Donna. Where had she gone? What would we do? Was she trying to get attention again?

A particular church family took her under their wing. That seemed to help. They invited her to their house for meals, took her on their own family outings, and included her in



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overnights. When she was surrounded in that environment, she seemed to level off a bit. But otherwise—

Once when on a hayride, Donna threatened to kill herself. She seemed particularly out of sorts that night. One of the women took Donna aside and tried to do on-the-spot counseling with her dark thoughts.

Other teens started to get wind of what was going on. It put a damper on things, but it also brought out a lot of compassion from youth who were webbed into her hurts.

"Do you think that she might do it?" an anxious teen friend asked me in the middle of this dilemma.

"I really don't know. We must love her. And we must pray for her," I replied.

Donna went home with her customary head-down, pouting-stuck-on position. How could she ever snap out of this? When would she get hold of herself? *How* could she?

The next Sunday she was alive and going, ready to take on the world. At least she had not taken her life, we concluded with relief.

So it went—week after week, month after month, year after year.

"I wish she would comb her hair," one

woman said under her breath. Donna did not seem to own a comb on some days.

"I wish she would brush her teeth," another scolded to the air.

Poor Donna.

The church tried to play family to her, but so often it seemed that we failed—not for trying, but because we *weren't* family—not that family for which she yearned on a 24-hour basis.

"It wouldn't surprise me if she got pregnant," I overheard one day when going out of church. Most of us had thought our unspoken sentiment.

Yet there was Donna in church and Sunday School, teen meetings and evangelistic services. She would go to the nursing home on occasion. She helped around the church when asked.

But that wild look in her eyes! That unkempt hair! That loose-fitting dress that never seemed to find her shoulders!

She managed to make it from one grade to another in school. Yet, listening to her and parceling out her thoughts, one knew that she was exceptionally intelligent.

All that was over 20 years ago.

The other day I got a note from Donna in the mail. I had not heard about her, nor from her, for all those years. She wrote:

"I was thinking about you the other day. And so I decided to send this note to you and your family. How are things going?

"You might be interested in knowing that I have been married and have three adorable children. We have a wonderful Christian home. We are all quite active here in our church. God has been so good to me. . . ."

On and on went the details. On and on went the beating of my heart. Could this be the same Donna? It was!

She had found home. She had come upon family. She had discovered real love. It just took time—and some friends to stand alongside her in the meantime.

We rejoiced at payday!



Who's Going Back to the Cities? . . .

Renewal Through Social Outreach: Theological Implications

Part Two

RENEWAL IN RELATIONSHIP TO HOLINESS

I do not consider myself a theologian. My major in college was math. It is through this background that I understand the meaning of holiness. Holiness by definition includes wholeness. The closest mathematical term to this is *integer*, meaning a whole number not including a fraction. This is closely tied to the term *unit*, which can be defined as a complete part of a whole. Of course, these terms have their origin in the same place as *integrity* (integer) and *unity* (unit).

As the turn of another century approaches, it is imperative to return to our roots and once again teach the simple doctrine that Jesus taught, one that was so easily understood by His unscholarly disciples. This can be found in understanding how *holy integers* live in unity with one another.

For several decades some messages on holiness have given distorted signals to confused Christians.

Recently I was reminded by a lady that in the church she attended as a child, the life of holiness was evidenced only by the outward appearance of the women. She could not remember anything that the men were required to do to live this holy life. How tragic that pride of one's religious appearance can become a major temptation within the Holiness church. The Bible clearly teaches that



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one theological concept that best depicts the life of holiness is *unity*.

Unity in the Pattern of God

J. S. Whale writes: "He [man] is lifted above all other earthly creatures in being made in the image of God, and in being aware of the fact. He is aware that the Creator is the Eternal Love who calls men into existence that their willing response to his love may fulfill his creative purpose."¹ Humankind was not created to show the variety of color and outward features but created to provide fellowship with God! The biblical statement is that "God created man" (Gen. 1:27, RSV), and it points to the unity of man and woman (2:24). Augustine wrote concerning the unity of humankind that God propagated the

whole human race from one individual, namely Adam, while all other species were started by multiple creation. "Man . . . He created one and alone, not indeed that he should live in isolation, outside human society, but in the unity of that society."²

There are several ways that the Bible shows our unity:

1. We are godlike beings, created by His will in His image. All humans are created in the same way.
2. The Bible teaches that there must be a life of unity with humankind. God said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26, RSV). Creation by God is designed to bring humans together.

- Sexuality brings man and woman together.
- Friendship brings people of both sexes together.
- The Church is God's creation to bring all people together.

3. God gave us dominion over the earth and its creatures. But, even in our stewardship, God calls humankind to show a unity and to properly administer the earth that He has given us.

Unity in the Example of the Scriptures

God wants us to live in unity while recognizing diversity. There are many biblical examples of how He accomplished unity while allowing the diversity of individual cultural differences.

1. *The Trinity.* Each Person of the Trinity has His own personality. Yet as D. Stuart Briscoe points out, the significance of the Trinity is in "a wholeness" and a "completeness about God in His three person-relatedness which made Him totally self-sufficient."³

2. *The 12 Tribes of Israel.* A Dictionary of the Bible and Christian Doctrine in Everyday English gives a simple, yet clear, explanation of the significance of this illustration: "The tribes of Israel were groups of families. The tribes formed one nation. They shared a common history and religion. . . . The Book of Revelation uses the phrase 'tribes of Israel.' It means all the people of God of all time (Rev. 7:4-8). The New Testament also uses 'twelve tribes' to represent the whole Christian Church."⁴ The Bible teaches that the main time for these 12 tribes to come together was at the time of worship. They must have functioned like a church with several ethnic congregations.

3. *The 12 Disciples.* Even though Jesus limited most of His ministry to His own people, the Jews, He chose His disciples from different backgrounds. Uneducated fishermen and hated tax collectors seemed to be worlds apart. Yet Jesus prayed in John 17 that the disciples would "be one, even as we are one" (John 17:11, rsv).

4. *The Birth of the Church (Acts 2).* Peter's bold sermon on the Day of Pentecost was preached to an extremely diverse group, divided not only by culture but also by language. The 3,000 converts that day no doubt represented most, if not all, of these people groups. Yet an amazing unity existed in the Early Church. This unique love and unity was accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit. God led the disciples to carefully bring the people together to promote and encourage this oneness.

5. *The Church at Antioch.* Acts 11 tells of a new group of believers, mostly scattered Jewish people, who were gathering to worship and fellowship (Acts 11:19). Soon their evangelistic outreach brought in many cultural groups living in the city of Antioch. Their spirit of unity had produced an established congregation. By Acts 13, they were sending others to spread the gospel to new cities across that area.

6. *The Book of Revelation.* John

describes heaven as seen in his vision as "a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, rsv). John saw tribes and nations retaining their ethnic identity even in heaven. Once again, they gathered for worship of the Lamb of God, Jesus.

There are countless other examples in the Old and New Testaments. All of them emphasize the fact that God loves each of us just the way we are. He is most pleased and opens the path of communication with us as we put aside our individual prejudices and really love one another. The ideal place to practice this is in our worship before God.

Unity Within Each Individual

The character of each member of the Church is not what makes him or her different from other church members, but what distinguishes him or her from the rest of humankind spiritually speaking. God's people are "peculiar" (different) (1 Pet. 2:9, kjv). They are called to show differences in their behavior. "I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall do my ordinances and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 18:2-4, rsv). Jesus called His disciples to holy living in much the same manner: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:25-26, rsv). Paul follows the same call to be holy in Ephesians: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do" (Eph. 4:17, rsv). I believe Jesus emphasized unity and equality as features of the called-out ones. They were to train themselves to think this way in order to be renewed and to bring renewal to those within their immediate surrounding.

The Church must be on guard never to identify with the philosophy of the world who would look within itself for differences. Do not be confused! The Church is not different within itself but different from the world. Christians are one with each other but separate from the world because they are holy unto the Lord.

In the midst of all the wholeness that is expected from the Church, differences do still exist. Some of these differences are cultural; some are functional. Paul talks about a single human body consisting of many parts. For example: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:4-6, rsv). Paul elaborates further on this in 1 Cor. where he begins by celebrating our unity in the Spirit. He then shows that we have different graces and gifts for service. All these gifts are bestowed by the one Spirit that unites us in one Body (Chap. 12).

The same unity is possible for cultural differences. Mark Edward Oh in his doctoral dissertation says,

The solution was not conceived in the wicked heart of man, but was given from above again—Yhwh, the Incarnate logos in Christ! That is the CROSS culture! What had been "separated and dispersed" on the earth at the Tower of Babel culture has been reunited in the CROSS culture, which I would call, "Christ culture," with Christ's attitudes, His values, and His ways of behaving (Phil. 2:5-11), serving the Lord and one another in humility, speaking the language of love and care, and walking in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit to the praise of His glory.⁵

Renewal is the result of the Christian Church fulfilling the goal of Jesus Christ when He prayed that we all may be one. This leaps over ethnic barriers, socioeconomic differences, social divisions, and personal preferences. God simply unites us in holiness as one people.

GOD AND THE OPPRESSED

The Scriptures give much space to the theme of justice for the indigent and oppressed. Over 400 verses indicate God's concern for the underprivileged, and over 80 verses underscore divine concern for justice.⁶

God gives a direct mandate that we take care of the poor. The reward to those who do is direct contact with Him and renewal of their spirit:

"God blesses those who are kind to the poor" (Ps. 41:1, TLB).

"Anyone who oppresses the poor is insulting God who made them. To help the poor is to honor God" (Prov. 14:31, TLB).

"He who shuts his ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in his own time of need" (Prov. 21:13, TLB).

"If you give to the poor, your needs will be supplied! But a curse upon those who close their eyes to poverty" (Prov. 28:27, TLB).

"The good man knows the poor man's rights; the godless don't care" (Prov. 29:7, TLB).

In the midst
of all the
wholeness that
is expected
from the
Church,
differences
do still exist.

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I." (Isa. 58:6-9, NIV).

"And if you do good only to those who do you good—is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much! And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even the most wicked will lend to their own kind for full return! Love your *enemies*! Do good to *them*! Lend to *them*! And don't be concerned

about the fact that they won't repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as sons of God: for he is kind to the *unthankful* and to those who are *very wicked*. Try to show as much compassion as your Father does" (Luke 6:33-36, TLB).

"But if someone who is supposed to be a Christian has money enough to live well, and sees a brother in need, and won't help him—how can God's love be within *him*? Little children, let us stop just *saying* we love people; let us *really* love them, and *show it* by our *actions*" (1 John 3:17-18, TLB).

Greenway points out, "God is on the side of the weak and suffering."⁷

Standing idly by will definitely turn God away from renewing His people. There is no evidence that the rich man oppressed Lazarus the beggar. He just ignored Him (Luke 16).

In the Old Testament no ruling class controlled real estate while ignoring the poor. Legal statutes were designed to protect criminals from excessively cruel and inhuman treatment, and to protect minorities, widows, orphans, and slaves. Industry was to be furthered and slothfulness condemned. Slavery was restricted so that savage and dehumanizing forms of furthering economic ends were minimized.⁸ The most powerful example of God's emphasis on justice for the poor and needy is shown in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He spent most of His ministry feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and delivering the demon-possessed. Jesus defined His own ministry by saying:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted and to announce that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him (*Luke 4:18-19, TLB*).

This obviously refers to Isaiah's prophecy and the social tyranny of the Old Testament days.⁹

Christ himself was born into a very poor family and was later a refugee and an immigrant entering Galilean society (Matt. 2:19-23).

He was not paid for His public ministry and had no home of His own

(Matt. 8:20). He also placed His disciples in poverty (Luke 9:3; 10:4).

Jesus referred to His identification with those in need in answering the messengers of John the Baptist when they asked whether He was the Christ (Matt. 11:2-6).

Paul emphasized this identification when he wrote, "Though he was so very rich, yet to help you he became so very poor" (2 Cor. 8:9, TLB). John says, "We know what real love is from Christ's example in dying for us. And so we also ought to lay down our lives for our Christian brothers" (1 John 3:16, TLB).

To imitate Christ necessarily involves concern for all the aspects of one's neighbors (Eph. 5:1-2). In fact, acts of compassion done for others are viewed by Jesus as acts of worshiping Him. But, neglecting the needy and oppressed is regarded as abandoning Christ (Matt. 25:31-46).¹⁰

If we view renewal as essential to the Church, then the Church must see itself as continuing the ministry of Christ to the needy. Rene Bideaux seems to indicate that the Church does not become renewed until, by risking change and destruction, it accepts its own death and resurrection for the sake of taking the claims of the gospel to the poor and needy.¹¹ The Christian Church must act as Christ's hands, feet, and eyes in the world. It must both preach a message and perform a ministry—just as Christ did.¹²

1. John S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), 44.

2. Werner Stark, *Social Theory and Christian Thought* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 7.

3. D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *The Communicator's Commentary*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 34.

4. Albert Truesdale et al., eds. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 311.

5. Mark E. Oh, "Cultural Pluralism and Multiethnic Congregation as a Ministry Model in an Urban Society" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1988).

6. David Claerbaut, *The Reluctant Defender* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1978), 92.

7. Roger S. Greenway, "Content and Context: The Whole Christ for the Whole City," in *Discipling the City*, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 96.

8. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977), 85.

9. *Ibid.*, 66.

10. Bill Leslie, "God Loves the Inner City," *Christian Life*, July 1973, 27.

11. Rene Bideaux, "Faith and Obedience for Missional Congregations," *Justice Ministries*, Winter-Spring 1982, 11:15-16. *Justice Ministries* (JM) 621. Note: materials available from *Justice Ministries* are given JM number.

12. William Leslie, "The Ministering Church," in *Metro-Ministries*, eds. Frenchak and Keyes, 132.

The Ministry: Top Ten Tips for Those Getting Started

Recently I spoke to a group of young men and women who were just entering the ministry. They asked me to share some of the things I've learned after 18 years of full-time Christian service. The following is my summary for those who are embarking on the most exciting and challenging of all callings—the Christian ministry.

1. Learn to Define Success Not in Terms of What You Do but in Terms of What You Are

God is not waiting to see what you become in your career; He's waiting to see what you become in your walk with Him. One of the greatest tragedies that could ever befall you is to come to the end of a long and fruitful ministry only to realize that you never *really* knew God. He created you (1) to fellowship with Him and (2) to serve Him. Don't get that order reversed.



by Gary E. Black
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2. Don't Be a People Pleaser

Learn to hear *God's* voice. Do what *He* calls you to do, not for the approval of people, but for the glory of God (see Col. 3:23).

Most people spend a lifetime worrying about what others think of them, only to get to the end of life and realize that most people never thought about them at all! If you

build your self-esteem on the basis of people's approval, you'll doom yourself to a life of either feeling inadequate or feeling proud. God doesn't want you to feel either; He simply wants you to serve Him with joy.

3. Live a Balanced Life

Every minister should have (1) a personal life, (2) a family life, and (3) a church life. Don't derive your spirituality from the church, and don't take the church into the home. If you marry, don't require your wife to be a so-called elder ex officio. Allow her to be your wife, not a copastor in your ministry. Don't raise preacher's children, raise your children. Give them an identity apart from your ministry. Don't define yourself as a preacher but as a human being who is privileged to preach. Serve the church, but always remember that the church did not die for you, Jesus did!

4. Focus on the Positive, Not the Negative

As the years go by you will have many memories—some good, some awful. Dwell on the good, not the bad. Let your memories be greater than your discouragements. That will keep you from becoming cynical and negative.

5. Forgive Often

You will discover in working with people that they will frequently hurt you. Learn to accept the fact that most people are fighting a lot of personal battles. Occasionally they'll take it out on you. Be quick to accept them and forgive them, in spite of their imperfections. Learn from criticism, but don't be destroyed by it. There's some element of truth in virtually all criticism, which is why it so unnerves us. Sift through it carefully,



and don't waste what God would have you to learn. Mend your fences. Don't carry grudges. Bitterness will steal more joy from your life and power from your ministry than will anything else.

6. Constantly Pray for God's Anointing

God's anointing is His divine enabling on any ministry you do on behalf of Christ. It is God's touch on your efforts to preach, teach, sing, administer, dream, serve, and so on. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called it a holy "unction" that you should "seek until you have . . . and be content with nothing less." Paul said, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Cor. 2:4). Spurgeon wrote,

It is extraordinary power from God, not talent that wins the day. It is extraordinary spiritual unction, not extraordinary mental power, that we need. Mental power may fill a chapel, but spiritual power fills the church with soul anguish. Mental power may gather a large congregation, but only spiritual power will save souls. What we need is spiritual power (Oswald J. Smith, *Passion for Souls* [London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1965], 35).

Give God your very best, but don't assume that your very best equals spiritual power. "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent" (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

7. Cultivate Humility

Humility is a choice. Learn that early in your ministry. It is a guarantee of God's blessings in your life. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5, KJV). God does not delight in blessing someone who wants to share His glory.

Don't spend your whole ministry wondering what other people think of you. Don't read your own press clippings, listen to your own sermons, or collect trophies of people's approval. When you receive compliments and praise, use them as opportunities to return thanks to God for allowing you to be His vessel. Remember that on the best day of your life, you deserve hell. We all do.


We live by grace and we serve by grace. "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

8. Learn to Listen More than You Speak

Wisdom comes from learning to see everything, overlook a lot, and correct little. Jesus tells us that on the day of Judgment we will give an account of everything that we say (Matt. 12:36-37). Don't take that lightly. In my ministry I've often been sorry for things I said but rarely sorry for the things I didn't say. Don't speak negatively about a person unless you would be willing to say the same thing in his or her presence. Beware of a compulsion to always give your opinion. You do not need to tell everything you know. Unless the information you have to share is absolutely essential, don't be quick to offer your advice unless asked for.

9. Be a Person of Integrity

Pay your debts. Never compromise the truth. Let your word be your



"Spiritual
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the church
with soul
anguish."


bond. Paul said, "We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men" (2 Cor. 8:21). In the end, what you are will speak more loudly than what you say. Jesus manifested "the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16). That is our quest as well. Settle for nothing less.

One of the easiest places in the world to be lazy is in the ministry. Most of the time you are unsupervised. Often it's easy to substitute being busy for working productively. Live such a life that if you're out of the office three days a week, people won't assume you're out playing golf.

Morally, be above reproach. Don't flirt with the opposite sex. Don't telephone or visit a member of the opposite sex for any other reason than ministry. Examine your motives. If there's any question at all, don't do the thing in question. Ministers seem particularly drawn to the sensual. Most ministers that I know seem to relish the affection of the opposite sex. Ask the Lord to help you guard against that. Don't settle for just being able to resist the temptation to lust; ask God to give you the kind of heart that eliminates the temptation altogether.

10. Finally, Be a Person of Prayer

The worst thing you could ever do in the ministry is substitute working for God for knowing God. You will never get to know God unless you spend time with Him. You will never spend time with Him unless you schedule it and stick to your schedule with determination. Tithe your time as you tithe your money. Give at least 10 percent of your time to communion with God in your prayer closet. You'll discover that He can do much more with the 90 percent that's left. You may teach your people to do many things well, but if you never teach them the value of prayer, you've settled for second best. No one becomes a person of God by accident. No one becomes a person of prayer overnight. We become such over time, through commitment to holiness and fellowship with God. A casual commitment to Christ will never make you a godly person. You will never have spiritual power without a deliberate set of the soul. There is a price to pay. It's called prayer. Pay it with gladness, and pay it all.

Marshall Leggett, president of Milligan College in Knoxville, Tennessee, once said, "The ministry is the calling of an inadequate man, to an impossible task, for an indefinite period of time." After 18 years of service, that's still the best definition I've ever heard. Learn what it means to be inadequate, and accept it. Acknowledge that sometimes the ministry is just impossible; then simply do your best. When God calls you home, you will be privileged to hear those wonderful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21). 

The Challenge of Ministry

I doubt there was ever a day when ministry was easy—a bit less stressful, maybe, but never easy. Every age and culture has presented a unique set of challenges for the pastor. But perhaps our times are complicated by things, some of which no other age has had to contend. H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, writing in their book *Pastors at Risk*, state,

Pastoring is harder now than ever before. Unprecedented shifts in moral, social, and economic conditions are halting congregations and bringing into question the way ministry is done. These changing circumstances and values directly affect pastors and their way of life. Many pressing contemporary difficulties were largely unknown in earlier periods of Christian history.¹

There are two ways we can respond to the challenges to ministry: we can react or we can respond. To react is to set oneself up for bitterness and failure. It is to set the mind on the negative. To respond is to be proactive, creative, and faithful. There is a world of difference between the two.

Let's take a positive look at the challenges.

1. Your Work Is Challenging

Because it is not a cakewalk, it gives one an opportunity to develop, to learn, to stretch, and to be creative. All of these responses are good for an individual and, hence, good for one's ministry. With all that comes to a pastor's plate in today's society, the pastor is forced to expand his or her repertoire of knowledge and expertise. The answers of a few years ago—or even a few weeks ago—are no longer relevant and helpful. In order to have a fulfilling ministry one must read, observe, keep up, expand, stretch.



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On any given week if you were to list the items calling for your attention, you can make a case, even in the smallest church, for challenges beyond your abilities. The social ills, the abuse factors—mental, physical, sexual—the addictions, the bitterness, the loneliness—all call for the pastor's time and expertise. And this is only a small piece of the whole picture. Eugene H. Peterson pictures the scene like this:

We inhabit an atmosphere so full of rush and demand. Pastors practice their craft in the middle of a traffic jam, noisy with people's hurts, dangerous with hurtling ambitions and reckless urgencies, crowded with people intent on getting to their destinations and angrily frustrated when others are impediments in their path.²

But, pastor, be encouraged! Your work is challenging. You preach to people every week whose lives are lived out in monotonous routine. They would gladly trade places with you. You minister to people who must labor every day, doing what they have done for years. They have little or no opportunity to stretch their horizons and expand their minds. They would welcome the

challenge of and the opportunity for variety. So, pastor, be encouraged—your work is challenging. Be thankful for it.

2. Your Character Is Tested

Be thankful for this? Yes. The work of pastoral ministry, or ministry at any level, is a test of our character and integrity. Because of whose we are and the calling He has placed upon our lives, we have a mandate to live holy and wholesome lives. Yes, we should do that, regardless of our work. But because of the unique challenges of ministry, we are tested beyond the ordinary. Such testing hopefully helps to keep us alert, sharp, sensitive.


The challenge to character certainly calls for one to keep his or her spiritual life in order. While I am convinced that God does not have more grace for pastors than anyone else, I am convinced that pastors must live with a greater sense of dependency on God. The minefields in ministry are apparent and are a test of our character. Isaiah gives us a good word when he states, "This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.' . . . the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" (30:15-18). Paul encourages us with these words: "*You have everything when you have Christ, and you are filled with God. . . . He is the highest Ruler, with authority over every other power*" (Col. 2:10, TLB).

The test of character is one of the biggest challenges in ministry. New temptations seem to come on-line every week. Some of them are temptations to succeed, to make money, to compromise one's moral life, to

shade the truth for one's benefit. All of them test the character and integrity of a pastor. Where one withstands them, rises above them, is victorious over them, he or she is a stronger person and, consequently, a better pastor.

3. Your Future Is at Stake in Ministry

Perhaps the most stressful challenge in ministry is to know that one's ministry always seems to be on the line. Because the pastor is such a public person, there are risks and minefields. The challenge, then, is to pursue ministry with excellence, with commitment, and with trust. That the pastor has to work each day knowing that his or her future is at stake is not all bad. For from the consciousness of such knowledge comes the motivation to grow, to give one's best, to be in pursuit of excellence. All such motivations help make not only the future more secure but the present more fulfilling.

So, pastor, be encouraged! Your work is challenging. It is demanding, hard, nearly impossible. But as you respond to the challenges of ministry with dependence upon God's guidance and help, you will be equipped for meaningful ministry. Be proactive—respond to the challenges, and see God work in your ministry. 

1. H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Risk* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993), 30.

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 155.

24th GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS



*Holiness...
The Message of Hope*

Jeremiah 29:11, NIV



JUNE 18-27, 1997, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, U.S.A.

The Bivocational Pastor

A Pastor for All Seasons

Monopolizing the attention of the casual Christian today is the church-planting entrepreneur. With flash and dash, he or she captures the headlines with high-level success and a unique approach to starting a church. However, these ministry mavericks make up only some of what really happens in church planting today. The bulk of church planting is accomplished by pastors who do not capture any headlines or special attention. For the most part, they work with little or no recognition. Apart from the sacrifice of these pastors and their families, many churches would not exist today.

Definition of Bivocational Ministry

Bivocational, as it relates to Christian ministry, refers to a person called by God to a ministry unable to support the pastor or the pastor's family adequately. Such a pastor must secure secular work that enables him or her to do spiritual work. Often this person plants a church in a community with no other clear gospel witness.

This special breed of bivocational pastors willingly sacrifices to plant a church. Not everyone possesses the necessary qualifications. Gifted by God, they enter a town without contacts or any nucleus and begin a church. Usually this stage of ministry is completed in two and a half to three years, and the church planter moves on. One church planter observed, "If I stay much longer, I will destroy what I started." The apostle Paul, the master church planter, said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6).

Bivocational church planters come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some are recent seminary graduates, while a growing number are second-career persons. Older persons, sensing the call of God to leave



by James L. Snyder

Pastor,
Ocala, Florida

their professions or businesses, go back to college to prepare for the ministry. These pastors offer maturity and a variety of experiences to the ministry of church planting. No matter where they come from, one thing is obvious—they have a definite call from God for the work of church planting. With grit and determination, they fulfill God's calling despite difficulties or obstacles.

The primary motivation is a need for a gospel-preaching church in a particular community that has no available funds to support the work. This has always been the problem—plenty of opportunities in many communities without any gospel witness, but no funds to penetrate these communities. Self-supporting laypersons also respond to the challenge and go to these unreached communities.

For some, a bivocational ministry is a calling; with others, it is circumstance. Some pastors believe this to be God's calling for their entire ministry. When a church comes to the point of supporting a pastor, often the church planter packs his or her bags to start all over at another community. Others have a burden for a particular community and begin the church from scratch, working only until the church can support them.

The bivocational ministry affords

unique advantages. For example, it takes financial pressure off a local situation, enabling a pastor to minister in the community. In light of some recent scandals in Christian circles, the bivocational pastor has helped reestablish integrity in the pastoral ministry. The community sees a pastor who is not preaching for money but is self-supporting while ministering. It helps the community believe in the sincerity of the pastor's motives. Some bivocational pastors discover that working outside the church helps them relate to secular thinking. In addition, their jobs may even provide a steady flow of contacts for the churches.

Demands of a Bivocational Pastor

More than any other minister, the bivocational pastor shoulders many demands. Church planting is more than a part-time job with many things needing to be done—and usually the church planter can turn to no one for assistance. If the pastor doesn't do it, it simply does not get done. Invariably, the pastor and family must set up equipment and furniture for church services with little or no help from anybody. After the services of the day, they must pack everything up for next week. A little of this goes a long way.

When the prospective church planter arrives, the first thing demanding attention in the target community is finding a job. This is the most difficult problem in the initial stage. The entire work of the new church depends upon finding this job. Many church planters are not skilled in any marketable job. As one young church planter put it, "My seminary training did not prepare me to work in the marketplace."

Available jobs pay only minimal salaries, which is not enough to support a young family. Few businesses will invest in someone who is not go-

ing to be permanent. Not only wages but time schedules present a problem. Many jobs lack flexibility, and the young church planter must work around the secular job schedule.

The bivocational pastor, a self-starter, highly motivated and organized, squeezes as much out of each day as is possible. No part of a day can afford to be wasted. A day off from the secular job means time spent in church work. It is not unusual for these pastors to work seven days a week all year. Vacations are few and highly unaffordable.

"One of the difficult things," one pastor reflected, "is seeing people give little or nothing while you and your family are giving everything." Continuing week after week demands assurance of God's calling. The average church plant congregation does not experience supergrowth that calls attention to itself. Some take years before they really get established. The church planter and family are in for a long, difficult road if they will see that church take root in their community.

The pastor's spouse carries much of the burden. Working side by side with the pastor, he or she experiences what the pastor experiences. The spouse sees the pastor working hard at a secular job, only to come home and work even harder at the church. Week after week the spouse sits in the small congregation listening to the pastor preach his or her heart out to the few people who make up the congregation. During the week, the spouse who doesn't work may stay home—but nobody calls. Few people in the church and nobody outside bother finding out how things are going. Soon the glamour of the beginning days degenerates into gloom and discouragement. One pastor's wife reflected, "Sometimes I feel like we're being used by the denomination to fulfill its goals at our expense."

Dilemma of Bivocational Ministry

The contemporary bivocational church planter faces many dilemmas in ministry. Perhaps the most unexpected paradox is that many people, particularly fellow pastors, do not view bivocation as a viable ministry model. Many feel a person is bivocational because he or she can't get any-

thing else or because God is punishing the person. Some pastors try bivocation because they can't get anything else, but God effectively weeds them out. Unfortunately, some people look upon these bivocational pastors as inferior to other pastors.

Because of a secular job, bivocational pastors enjoy little fellowship with other clergypersons in the area. Special conferences have to be passed up because of the secular work schedule.

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Another dilemma facing the bivocational pastor lies in the area of sermon preparation. "I don't know," one pastor confessed, "how often I have finished writing a sermon Saturday night and felt that if I had just one more day, I could do so much better." Another pastor said, "To be honest, I don't feel I have adequate quality time. Therefore, I have a sense of guilt when I preach that I'm not doing the best I could. If I just had more time."

With time at a premium, the bivocational pastor makes the best use of the time available. To solve this problem of study-time, one pastor said, "I always carry my briefcase and put in a minute here and there as I get opportunity."

Reaching new families and convincing them to become part of a

fledgling congregation represents another dilemma. Even people of the same denomination who are moving into the area often are reluctant to become part of a small church group. They would rather support an established church with programs for their children. At times the bivocational pastor feels cast adrift by the denomination. Although working for the Lord and His glory, the pastor still gets a nagging sense of laboring without recognition. A new missionary leaving for some foreign soil is enthusiastically supported and cared for, while the church planter often struggles to make it through the month.

Someone in the community will ask, "Can't your denomination help you?" And the church planter only smiles, hoping that someday there will be enough help.

An important initial aspect of church planting is meeting the needs of hurting people. Often the bivocational pastor misses opportunities that could be helpful for the church. One pastor said, "I missed an important event in the life of one of our church families because of my secular job. Apologies don't always make up for it."

Sometimes after working all day at a secular job, the bivocational pastor finds little energy remaining for the work of the ministry. One pastor admitted, "Some days my secular work takes so much out of me I don't have the energy or emotional strength to be my best and to visit in the evening or to do other ministry duties."

Then there is the lack of workers. No church can grow beyond its workforce. Consequently, the bivocational church planter faces a most difficult job. That workforce must be located and developed. Without secretarial or administrative help the pastor must do that work too. Or the pastor's spouse shares in the burden of the ministry.

Church planting has become vogue in contemporary evangelism. Care must be taken that it be viewed as a platform for systematic evangelism and not merely an evangelistic method. The bivocational pastor may pray:

*Lord, take the frayed strands
of my day,
and weave it into a tapestry
of acceptable service.* 🙏

A Cloud by Day and a Pillar of Fire by Night

by Russell Frazier

Huntertown Church of the Nazarene, Versailles, Kentucky

Have you ever left a church board meeting feeling like you had just been to a chicken fight? In one church the discussion centered around the question: "Should the church purchase a new piano? If so, what will we do with the old one?" A heated argument arose and tempers flared. The pastor grabbed the patriarch of the church by the shirt and held him up against

the wall just to get his attention. Upon release, the patriarch left the church board meeting and went across the street to his home to get his gun! He wanted to show that preacher who was boss! And all in the name of holiness!

I hope you haven't had a church board meeting like that. But if you are like me, you've seen church board meetings that had a higher level of heated emotion than was comfortable. Blood pressures and the volume of voices rose as the people of God discussed the color of the carpet or whether or not to take down the ugly but sentimental painting in the vestibule.

In a previous pastorate, I hated church board meetings because they were frequently characterized by expressions of anger and a very tense atmosphere. Today I look forward to church board meetings (i.e., once my reports for the meeting are completed!). When issues were raised on the previous church boards, I found the board

members quickly divided into two camps: a progressive-oriented group and a more conservative group who often did not see a need to change. For the most part, our church board meetings are now characterized by unity, goodwill, and often by much prayer. What was the difference in the spirits of the two board meetings? Was it only the difference in the board members or the expected style of leadership? Partially, perhaps, but really it was more of a change in the one who chaired the meeting. Let me explain.

Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline* exposed me to and impressed me with the idea of guidance as a corporate discipline. Prior to that, I had always thought guidance was primarily an individualistic matter. Two statements from *Celebration of Discipline* radically altered my thinking about guidance. The first has to do with the nation of Israel: "God led the children of Israel out of bondage as a people. Everyone saw the cloud and fiery pillar. They were not a gathering of individuals who happened to be going in the same direction; they were a people under the theocratic rule of God."¹ The second quote is about the Early Church: "As a people they had decided to live under the direct rulership of the Spirit. They had rejected both human totalitarianism and anarchy. They had even rejected democracy, that is, majority rule. They had dared to live on the basis of Spirit-rule; no 51 percent vote, no compromises, but Spirit-directed unity. And it worked."² Now, I believe it is possible for God to lead a group of His people in unity.

How can I lead my church board to corporately discern God's will?

First, it is necessary to have an understanding of spiritual discernment and a passion for it. Here's a good definition of corporate discern-



ment: "a process of seeking together a common sense of God's will on a particular question or option with a readiness to act on it."³ As pastor, you must operate with the conviction that God will reveal His will to a group of people. Therefore, you must teach your people the value of discerning the Spirit and how to go about it.

Second, a pastor may lead the church board to discern the will of God if he or she leads by consensus rather than voting. "But why change?" you may ask. "Doesn't *Robert's Rules of Order*, our present system, work effectively? Isn't it more efficient than this new system?"

Danny Morris makes an important point: "RRO [*Robert's Rules of Order*] is an adversarial system that creates winners and losers. And when you deal in an adversarial way, you end up with adversaries."⁴ Leadership and management gurus are teaching the business world to aim for win-win solutions. The church whose hallmarks are unity and love can do no less. *Robert's Rules of Order* tends to divide people rather than unite people. Frequently, voting results in people deciding to oppose the decision of the church board either passively or even actively. Or the outcome of voting is often similar to the woman in the cartoon who said to her pastor, "Pastor, I realize the motion passed, but would you like to hear the parking lot version?"⁵ It must be admitted that RRO is a quicker, more efficient model and that it should not be abandoned altogether. However, the spiritual discernment model is best when it comes to answering the question, "What is God's will for our church?"

Third, pastors can lead their church board in discerning the will of God as they function as guides or facilitators and reflective listeners. "What the chairperson (or 'spiritual guide') is trying to determine is a collective thumbs up or thumbs down on the item for discussion. Is there a pervasive feeling of joy, or feelings of doubt, reservation, fear?"⁶ When the spiritual facilitator has heard the discussion, he or she summarizes the action to be taken. "The group reflects on the minute and discusses it and, with the guidance of the presider, comes to consensus. The minute is recorded as the decision of the group."⁷ Not everyone has to agree

with the proposal, but each member of the group must feel good enough not to oppose the decision. "Consensus doesn't mean that before a decision can be made every board member has to support every point of a proposal. The axiom that true consensus means that despite disagreement, when the group looks at the decision as a whole, they can see God's fingerprint."⁸

It is possible for God to lead a group of His people in unity.

Fourth, the chair (spiritual guide) can enable a group to discern the will of God by having any dissent recorded and by recognizing the various levels of dissent. The secretary of the church board records the dissent in the minutes of the meeting. Any recorded dissent is called a minority report. The goal of the meeting is to have the best thinking on a given subject. The levels of disagreement are four:

AGREEING TO DISAGREE

LEVEL ONE

Definition: This is the level of discomfort. This is the softest level, which simply communicates that the way the spiritual guide phrased the conclusion of the group's overall feeling isn't quite right for that person.

Communication: "I am a bit uncomfortable going ahead with this proposal."

Group Response: The group may ask for clarification by the one who expresses discomfort.

LEVEL TWO

Definition: This is the level of disagreement. The one who disagrees puts the board on notice about his or her concern. But the proposal hasn't been derailed.

Communication: "I disagree, but do not wish to stand in the way."

Group Response: The disagreement is noted by the group.

LEVEL THREE

Definition: This is the level of dis-

sent. It slows down the train, stimulating discussion about his or her concern. Other board members may pick up on the objection and let it shape other responses.

Communication: "Please put me down as opposed."

Group Response: The dissent is noted by the group and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The meeting is free to proceed, but the comment makes the group cautious, though it shouldn't stand in the way of final action.


LEVEL FOUR

Definition: This is the level of derailment. The person is unwilling to step aside and allow the matter to move forward. There is clearly a lack of consensus.

Communication: "I am unable to unite with (or affirm) the proposal."

Group Response: The normal procedure is to delay action until a later meeting. By the next meeting, the individual or group may conclude that there was a frivolous reason for objecting, or the proposal is adjusted.

By recording minority reports and the level of disagreement, each member has a sense of being heard, and that promotes the unity of the board.

In closing, something should be said about the general tenor of the meeting. While "taking care of business" might characterize the *Roberts Rules of Order* meeting, the meeting that is guided by the spiritual-discernment model will be characterized by worshipful work. A given meeting might include sharing stories and testimonies, periods of prayer (not perfunctory prayer), quiet periods, visioning for the future, biblical and theological reflection, and singing. When all is said and done, the members leave the meeting feeling as though they have been to a worship service rather than to a hen fight. When all is said and done, the church board members leave the meeting "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32, KJV). 

1. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 151.

2. *Ibid.*, 153.

3. "Raising Prayer to Lifestyle," *The Upper Room*, ed. Stephen Bryant, vol. 2, no. 1 (July—September): 2.

4. Danny E. Morris, *Yearning to Know God's Will* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) 47.

5. *Herald of Holiness*, January 1992.

6. David L. Goetz, "Breaking Out of the Routine for Better Decisions," *Leadership Journal* (Winter 1995), 47-51.

7. *Ibid.*, 48.

8. *Ibid.*

The Preretirement Years: Health-Care Planning

by Gary B. Morsch

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Submitted by Pensions and Benefits USA,
Church of the Nazarene



Probably, most of your retirement planning has focused on financial resources. That's as it should be. But as you anticipate retirement, it's also important that you have plans for the preservation of your *health* and for the provision of health-care services. You should begin this essential planning during your preretirement years.

The Preservation of Health

One of the greatest trends of this decade has been the wellness movement. More than ever before, people are interested in becoming well and staying well. But people nearing retirement often tell me, "It's too late to do anything about my health." Fortunately, this is untrue. It's never too late!

You can be well no matter what your current level of health. Wellness is not the attainment of perfect health—it is the process of maximizing your health potential. Whether you enjoy excellent health or live with chronic disease, you can achieve an improved level of wellness that will make your retirement years the best of your life—a retirement that is productive, joyful, and meaningful.

Let's look at some of the components of a wellness lifestyle.

Nutrition

The adage You are what you eat has never been more true. Scientific research continually proves the profound effect of nutrition on health and well-being.

Poor nutritional habits contribute

to such ailments as heart disease and heart attacks, high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes, diverticulosis, ulcers, and to cancers of the colon, breast, prostate, and uterus. You can reduce, or even completely prevent, all of these illnesses by diet alone.

Following a healthy diet does not have to be a complex task. In fact, let me condense in two guidelines the thousands of diet plans available: (1) Eat less animal products. (2) Eat more plant products.

Only animal products, such as meats, dairy products, and eggs, contain cholesterol. If you reduce the percentage of animal products in your diet, you will reduce your cholesterol level. I have no doubt that your doctor has told you to keep your cholesterol level low.

Your doctor probably also has recommended a high-fiber diet to you. You'll find fiber in foods like fruits, vegetables, and grains. A high-fiber diet is simply a diet with a high percentage of plant products.

You can be
well no matter
what your
current level
of health.

Our motivation for eating properly goes beyond health, however. Scripture teaches that we are to be faithful stewards of our health, even in the area of nutrition: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Exercise

My father once asked, "What is the most important thing I should be doing to stay healthy?"

Without hesitation, I replied, "Exercise!" Almost daily, new research confirms that there are few things as important to health as exercise. Of all

the lifestyle behaviors we can adopt, this is one of the most important.

Exercise has a multitude of positive effects on the body. It can reduce or prevent many diseases, including high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, stress, obesity, diabetes, and even certain cancers!

How much should you exercise? You needn't be an Olympic champion or young or in shape to benefit from exercise. As little as 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three times per week can keep you fit.

Make sure that your exercise is *aerobic* exercise. Aerobic exercise causes your heart rate to increase and elevates your oxygen intake. Walking, running, jogging, swimming, rowing, calisthenics, and cycling are all excellent types of aerobic exercise.

Start now to develop patterns of activity that will carry over into your retirement years. If you are still not convinced, consider that the Bible challenges us to be physically fit! Paul says: "For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because he owns it" (1 Cor. 6:20, TLB).

Attitude

Research indicates a powerful link between our minds and our health. Not only are we what we eat, but equally we are what we think. The Scripture is clear on this matter also: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

A new area of scientific study called psychoneuroimmunology is proving the power of positive thinking as well as demonstrating the harmful effects of a negative attitude. In fact, studies have shown that the body's immune system, which is responsible for fighting off infections and disease, is strengthened by a positive attitude. By contrast, negative attitudes weaken the immune system and may contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers, headaches, back pain, and cancer.

The attitude you take toward your retirement years is vitally important and depends on you! If you look forward to retirement with optimism, purpose, and goals, then your retire-

ment years will be healthy and all that you dreamed they could be!

Preventive Health Care

In spite of our best efforts to lead healthy lifestyles, we still get sick—sometimes seriously sick.


Since we can't prevent all diseases, it is very important that we detect serious illness as early as possible. That's when the best chances for treatment and cure exist. It's also why a relationship with a trusted family doctor or internist is so important.

Few things are
as important
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exercise.

Your doctor can provide regular preventive health maintenance exams (checkups). With these, your doctor will be alerted when early symptoms arise. Depending on your health status and risk factors, a checkup may consist of a physical exam, a prostate exam, a PAP smear, blood tests, X rays, a sigmoidoscopy, an EKG, treadmill tests, and other things.

Conclusion

Good health and well-being are very important, especially as you look toward your retirement years. Our health is a gift from God. We should be careful stewards of what He has given us.

The preretirement years can be a valuable time of refocusing as we re-examine our priorities, our lifestyles, and our health behaviors. With a clear plan for preserving our health, as well as a plan for providing health care, we can look forward to our retirement years with a positive attitude. We can, along with the apostle Paul, "confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be" (Rom. 5:2, TLB). 

Today's Books for Today's Preachers



The Patriarch as Theologian

**PHINEAS F. BRESEE: HIS LIFE IN
METHODISM, THE HOLINESS
MOVEMENT, AND THE CHURCH
OF THE NAZARENE**

by Carl Bangs

(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of
Kansas City, 1995)

PA083-411-6219, \$34.99



by Roderick T. Leupp

Associate professor of theology and ethics,
Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary,
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So far as I know, Phineas Franklin Bresee never claimed to be a theologian. He was, and could identify himself as, many things: preacher, founder of schools, religious journalist, revivalist, businessman, patriarch of the Church of the Nazarene. Yet because theology means simply to think in an orderly and disciplined manner about God, in carrying forth his many tasks Bresee was bound necessarily to articulate and live a theology. "A theological decision lay at the heart of Bresee's message" writes Carl Bangs in the epilogue of his centennial biography *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene*. What can be learned about Bresee's theological hunches, intuitions, and convictions from Bangs's book?

On at least two points, comparing John Wesley and Bresee is instructive. For one, neither is fairly called (as Wesley has been) a patron saint of theological indifferentism. Theologically, Bresee was largely self-taught, never having attended college or seminary. Wesley, of course, earned two degrees from England's greatest university. Bresee was aware of standing in the Wesleyan tradition and that some of his Methodist contemporaries had fallen away from the centrality of Christian perfection. Perhaps unconsciously invoking part of Wesley's distinctive vocabulary, Bresee noted that

Methodism's "depositum," now sadly neglected, was the teaching of sanctification. Yet in that same passage, Bresee reveals his debt to 19th-century American revivalism by speaking of the "baptism with the Holy Ghost" (p. 246); that, Bangs notes, was customary usage for Phoebe Palmer but not Wesley (p. 228).

The second point is probably more telling than the first. Both Wesley and Bresee were "folk theologians," to cite the designation Albert Outler first applied to Wesley. Neither Wesley nor Bresee was entirely comfortable in the subtleties of academic theology. For both, what Wesley called "right opinions" counted for relatively little if one had missed the heart of salvation, knowing the benefits of full redemption. Speaking in fa-

vor of an increased emphasis on personal testimonies at the three o'clock Sunday afternoon meeting, Bresee said: "We rejoice in Christian experience. Few things edify so much. It rejoices the saints, it awakens the unsaved, it shows the way to seeking souls" (p. 222).

Folk theologian is not a fit title for self-bestowment. It must be earned, always surrounded and funded by God's grace, by living amid the lives of ordinary Christian people who are seeking God's heart. Bresee's wider theological intuition is summed up in a dictum he borrowed from a 16th-century Lutheran: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity" (p. 227). He later clarified his meaning by reference to what would be the key doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene: "All not essential to holiness should be relegated to personal liberty" (p. 256). *Delegated or left*



would have been a happier word choice than *relegated* with its connotations of negativity and the residue that remains. Bresee believed that only through holy living could the reality of personal liberty and freedom be made manifest.

In that regard Bresee, as all Christian theologians must be, was deeply Trinitarian. Bresee testified "that Jesus Christ baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit, sanctifying and empowering them. Our unity is in the simplicity of necessary belief and the perfect liberty in reference to all other truth." (p. 256). "The simplicity of necessary belief" is a provocative phrase that could have been Bresee's way of saying "the witness of the Holy Spirit." Belief is necessary, not because one has no other choices, but because God's grace is simply and overwhelmingly efficacious. Again, Bresee reported that the Church of the Nazarene's doctrinal peculiarity is that "it believes in the incarnation of the truth by the Holy Spirit in human hearts" (p. 257). The triune circle is completed in this phrase: The Word of the Father indwells human hearts through the riches of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah was one of Bresee's most utilized biblical resources, and in a 1903 sermon on Isa. 4:2-6 he said, "Without holiness and the presence of him who dwells only in holy hearts, the church is soon a conquered church driveling for show; a beggar holding out its dirty hand for the world's pittance . . . God's holy people are neither players for the world's amusement, nor caterers to the world's taste" (p. 238). Here Bresee accents both holiness and love, two realities that must be held in reciprocal tension in any coherent doctrine of God. God is a holy God, and therefore a God apart from all defilement, but God is also a hovering and dwelling God, a God who comes and sojourns and "tabernacles" (note Bresee's fondness for so designating houses of worship). And God is both of these at once, a God who judges our sin and a God who in Jesus Christ forgives our sin. This God does indeed dwell *only* in holy hearts, as Bresee claimed, because God and unrighteousness cannot coinhabit. Because the dwelling God is the biblical God, there is a sense in which Bresee's claim can be taken at full force. God exists in heav-

en, in perfect bliss and love, yet God's desire is not merely to *exist* but to *dwell* within those creatures whom God has created for this express purpose. Bresee does stress Christian experience, but it is not the experience of experience (as Bresee might have characterized the Pentecostals of his day), but the experience that ultimately reflects the quality and character of God. Surely Bresee believed with Augustine that God created our hearts for His presence, short of which is only hunger, deprivation, and anxiety.

In addition to basic theological commitment and the will to live amid the theological needs of common and ordinary people, Bresee is joined to John Wesley at the point of both being synthesizing theologians. Wesley's synthesis was admittedly broader, deeper, and more nuanced than Bresee's, ranging across Christian centuries and traditions, to where Bresee can look puny and parochial in comparison. But Bresee's "in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity" should keep any of his followers or scrutinizers from restricting the horizon of his vision. Bresee seemed to have the habit of envisioning more than he could speak. In God's presence, words may be the greatest hindrance of all. Bangs closes his biography by noting "the poignant cry of one who has glimpsed the holy God" and appends Bresee's desire that plays at the borders of mystical rapture: "I wish sometimes I could preach with closed eyes. Could preach to you from the solitude of my own soul. Could tell the visions that sometimes come over me. But they are born in solitude, live in solitude, and will not come forth." Bresee's soul, if homiletically exposed, would of course no longer be in solitude, if that means a single soul enjoying its own company. The preaching soul cannot be the solitary soul. So Bresee would say with that other synthesizing theologian, whose legacy he both consciously and unconsciously appropriated, "'Holy solitaires' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than 'holy adulterers.' The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection." ¶

Transformed Troublemaker

continued from page 10

urge those I personally work with to receive Christ as their Savior. Many have become Christians when they were faced with the need to make a decision for Christ.

After individuals become Christians, we have the very important assignment from the Lord to disciple them, to train them in the way they should go, and to teach them good doctrine and how to live for the Lord.

God's Word is our most important Textbook. Second Tim. 3:16-17 (KJV) reads, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

As we study, absorb, and memorize the Scriptures, they will help us to mature as Christians so we will be worthy examples for those we teach. Children look at our lives. They can see whether the fruit of the Spirit is in us—God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. Our examples may make a far greater impression on children than all the lessons we teach.

God's Word will help children grow in the Lord, but we need to encourage them to memorize it also. As we pray for them, the Lord will show us just how to influence them to live for Him. He also can work in their lives in answer to our prayers. Let's go out of our way to be good disciplers!

"Bad Charlies" often come from families that do not know Christ. When parents see good changes come into their children's lives, it may open them up to listening to the gospel also. Through "changed Charlies" we may reach whole families for the Lord, especially if we visit in the homes and invite the parents to church. Most parents appreciate people who show interest in their children.

Who knows how many persons you can influence just by reaching out to one "bad Charlie"? ¶

Why a Correctional Chaplain?

Recently some fellow pastors asked me, "Why, after 20 years of pastoral ministry, would you become a correctional chaplain?" They look at the potential and real dangers of working in a maximum and supermaximum facility with rapists and murderers, and they do not understand.

I came to this position with both heels of resistance dug in and with significant amounts of fear. In the academy, I had to learn not only the dynamics of working in a maximum-security setting but also how to disable another person who might attack us and how to survive if taken hostage. The more I learned, the greater I resisted becoming involved with this type of ministry. However, God opened the door to this ministry, and I could not deny it. This divine call came more clearly than any call I have experienced to a local church.

God pointedly arrested my attention with Rom. 15:19-21. In verse 19, Paul seems to say that he has not only successfully preached the Word but also made converts and founded churches. His ministerial life stands as a model for the church growth movement of this age. As Paul continues in verses 20 and 21 and as I feel kinship with Paul as a correctional chaplain, I think I sense his heartbeat.

He considered it an honor to preach the gospel where that gospel was unknown previously. Without shame, he proclaimed, taught, and felt the honor of doing so, especially among the heathen. Paul did not want to build on another man's foundation, not watering what another apostle has planted. Yet he cheerfully exposed himself to all kinds of dangers and hardships in order to preach the gospel to those who had not



by William R. Hunter Jr.

Chaplain, Wabash Valley Correctional Institution, Carlisle, Indiana

heard and to establish churches in those same places.

We now have a church meeting at Wabash Valley Correctional Institution. Danger lurks all around as we function in the midst of violent men. However, there is the power of the Spirit in the work here as Jesus fights for lost people. I've never before experienced the power of God in spiritual warfare as I have in the months we have served in this correctional setting. I also have new insight into missionaries' requests, above all else, for prayer.

I serve men ages 14 to 66. A majority of the teens have committed one or two murders and lack any background in spiritual things. Local churches must reach families in which there are children and teens. If the church does not teach godly values, then life loses its meaning, which in turn leads to increasing violence, which leads to chaos. Chaos exists in the utter absence of God. So we are locking up a greater percentage of our population than any other country in the world.

As a young man, David Livingstone married into my family. Reading about him, I learned that when he volunteered as a missionary with the London

Missionary Society, they asked him where he would like to go. He said, "Anywhere, 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.

I think that to take the message of Jesus and the story about Jesus to those who have never heard is the highest, deepest, widest, most Christ-like joy to ever fill a human heart. Too often we sit in judgment on the lost when they do not come to the buildings we have constructed. Yet God never told the lost to come to church, but for the church to go to the lost.

As I considered God's open door to correctional chaplaincy, He also focused my attention on Isa. 41:27—42:9. Therein we read Jesus' self-proclaimed job description. While Satan puts up a fearful fight for people, Jesus came "to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (Isa. 42:7, NASB).

The men I serve came into life as innocent babies. Many of them learned that they were bags of trash. They arrived in adulthood full of rage at life's experiences. I have witnessed some of the most dramatic, deeply moving conversions and life changes in this dangerous setting. I am watching a growing light drive away the darkness, and it is exciting. The gospel truly is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone" (Rom. 1:16) and brings men and women out of years of inner pain, cults, and Satanism. Correctional chaplaincy fights "at the forward edge of the battle area," according to Chaplain Curt Bowers. We watch the raw, awesome power of God redeem and resurrect those for whom Jesus shed His precious blood.

Betrayed with a Kiss! Wounded Heart— Healing Love

A pastor's wife came up to me recently. "I hope you will write about this," she said, handing me an envelope. Opening the envelope, I took out a single sheet of paper. Unfolding it, I was surprised to find a letter. I looked at her puzzled.

She said, "This is a letter I wrote to a dear friend. I can never give it to her for reasons that will become evident when you read it. She was a member of our church. Her family still attends there. If I send this letter, it could cause division. I wrote it to get it off my mind and heart."

I asked, "Why give it to me?"

"I'm sure there are other people, not just pastors' wives, who have gone through the same thing," she replied. "They need to know they are not alone. If you can use this letter to bring encouragement to others, please do. But please, don't use my name. It could cause my husband problems."

Slipping it into my Bible, I told her I would read it later.

Forgotten, it lay in my Bible for quite some time before I read it. When I did, I realized I'd heard the same story many times. Not only among the clergy but also among church members.

The following is the letter:

My Dear Beloved Friend,

Yesterday when you hugged me, I felt a sharp stab of pain as you plunged your knife deep into my soul. For 11 years you have been my friend, my prayer partner, my sister in Christ. Never in my wildest dreams did I think the greatest hurt of my life here on earth would come from you.



by Carol McGarry

*Pastor's wife, Church of the Nazarene,
Boswell, Pennsylvania*

We've cried together over the loss of loved ones; rejoiced in victory when God snatched a precious soul from Satan's grip; laughed over silly mistakes my husband made in the pulpit; and planned and wrote programs together. "Friends forever," your card said, sent just last month.

What happened, my closest friend, to make you turn so violently against me? When they told me it was you who went to the district superintendent to have us removed from the parsonage, I defended you. When they said you talked behind my back, I denied it. I trusted; I loved! You betrayed!

How will I ever be able to trust anyone again who says she wants to be my friend? I am hurt, broken, and bleeding, not because we argued and parted, not because you died, but because you betrayed me with a hug—the very night before you would stand before our superiors trying to remove us from the charge that God placed in us. You hugged me, saying the words, "I love you, sister."

I write these words to tell you

that I forgive you—I love you. Jesus Christ has healed my wounds and given me victory. Although I have forgiven, the scars you inflicted will stay with me a long time. I may never be able to open my heart freely to anyone again as I did to you. Please never do this to another. Some people, especially new Christians, would never understand an act of betrayal such as this. They expect to see the love of Jesus from Christians who have been in the church for decades, from those who have served on the board for over 30 years.

I will always cherish the memories of our friendship and forget the tarnish of the last few days. As you leave the church to serve elsewhere, my prayers go with you.

With the love of Christ,

Your pastor's wife

At the bottom of the letter, she penciled these words:

Betrayed, Oh, I loathe to proclaim it. Betrayed by my best friend. Cut, wounded, and bleeding. Will I ever be able to love again?

Tears blurred my eyes as I read the words she had penned. I, too, remembered a time I had felt the same type of betrayal, the same hurt cutting deep into my soul—betrayal from a friend so close that people thought we were sisters. The only Person who could break through the tears was my best Friend, Jesus. Going to the bookshelf, I took down a book. I knew opening the pages would open old wounds pushed deep into the recesses of my mind. I also knew if I were to minister to this pastor's wife, I would have to do it. Opening the

book, I thumbed through the yellowed pages until I found the journal entry. Sitting down at my computer, I typed the following entry:

I am hurt and wounded. I've become angry and bitter. I've been stabbed in the back and left bleeding. My attitude has been so infected by this virus, I can no longer lift my hands to praise God. Words come out of my mouth that do not honor God. I need God's healing touch on my heart, my life, my soul.

Jesus answered:

I, too, was wounded, betrayed by one of My closest friends. He sat at the same table to eat with Me. Then a few hours later, he betrayed Me with a kiss. I was scourged and beaten until I was bloody. My hands were nailed to the Cross by those I created. I was left to be ridiculed and killed. But, that's not where it ended.

I rose from a cold, dark grave, unbound and glorified. My enemies are as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach. But I rose above it all and you can too. Rejoice, My child, grief like death can only invade this earth. You won't have to live with it in heaven. Be glorified, be glorified in Me. Death could not hold Me. And it cannot hold you. I went there before you so that I could help you make it!

My heart soared. He did go before us. There is nothing we can suffer on this earth that our Lord did not experience first. He was broken and spilled out for us. Jesus suffered it all: laughter and tears, love and betrayal, death and resurrection. We can, too, because our hope is in Him—the glorious hope! He will understand when no one else can because He has been there and experienced it all. Look to heaven with your tears of grief. Lift up your hands with all the broken pieces. Jesus will reach down, take them from you, and glue them all back together again. Don't be afraid to love again. Jesus wasn't. He loves us unconditionally with no strings attached. Forgive, forget, and go on walking and leaping and praising God.

The Lord said to write this down, and I did—with the hope it will help someone to heal from the act of betrayal. Amen!

Eleven Important Things for a Minister's Wife to Know

by Carol Swift

Sparks, Nevada

When I was 52 years old, my husband changed careers from radio broadcasting to pastoral ministry. I needed help in knowing how to be a good pastor's wife. I wrote to a friend, a Methodist minister's wife for almost 50 years. Here's the advice she sent:

1. You belong to your husband first, and then to your parish.

2. Look animated! A smile goes a long, long way!

3. I never expected anything of a parishioner that I wasn't willing to do myself.

4. Keep your cool—no matter how unjust or unkind the comment aimed at you.

5. Pay special attention to the elderly. Life is very lonely for some of these folk. I wish I had realized it years ago. Start a Bible study in the home of a shut-in, and line up 8 or 10

persons to attend regularly. That gives something to look forward to. Limit it strictly to one hour because this may be all a shut-in can take.

6. Keep an ear to the ground to learn what the parish expects of a pastor's wife. Comply—within limits.

7. Keep up with your reading and study, including secular material so you'll be aware of trends.

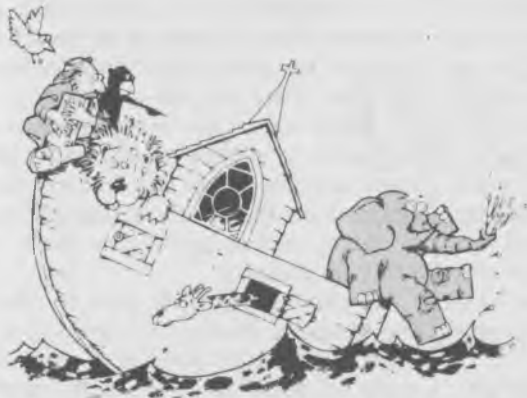
8. Keep yourself looking neat and attractive.

9. Be available. One woman said, "Sometimes I've wished to chat with my pastor's wife, but she always seemed so busy."

10. You can't be a superperson, so don't try.

11. Never comment on any mistakes in the sermon or service before the next Wednesday! Bolster the good points.

These ideas helped me. I pass them along to you.



Return the Church to God

A comatose victim could rightly judge that America's church has slipped far over the side of the cliff. Is it merely a matter of time until it sinks below history's sands into the wrath of God?

How did we reach such a state of mockery and reproach to the holy name of God? It has slowly come about by:

Putting the Drama Couch in Center Stage

Historic Protestantism has always placed the sacred pulpit at the center of worship. That is why God's Holy Word is placed atop the sacred desk. Pivotal to approaching the Almighty is to hear from Him through Scripture—to hear with conviction, certainty.

The sermon. The message. The "thus saith the LORD." This used to be the zenith of the Protestant gathering.

Heretofore, Christians looked up to the pulpit table for more food. They yearned for nourishment. They had to have it in order to be strong enough for another week's go at the gates of hell.

Therefore, preachers spent hours perspiring over the precisioned fire they could ignite through the power of the Lord himself. Hours upon hours they prayed through the Book, as well as those resource materials made available to each generation of earnest biblical students.

When the man of God stepped into His pulpit, the people waited in awe. Anticipation!

Today—we have a couch in place of the pulpit! And around the couch are some other limp props: end tables, lamps, draperies, side doors and

exits, prompters—wimpy skits to tantalize the impatient, the fidgety. What is this? What has become of *worship*? What tripe has set up camp in the holy of holies?

Naturally, it is simply an extension of our culture's *demand to be entertained*. We demand that we be entertained or we'll die! It has become a fungus with us. We have to have our fix come Sundays.

If we don't get the fix from the church building—or mall worship center or warehouse for Jesus—then we *will* get it at the tinsel mall saturated with merchants' banners, balloons, and pumped noise. One way or the other, we *will* get our deserved fix. It is our right—under God!

Therefore, scores of entertaining "clergybobs" are out to gather in the wandering don't-know-where-they-want-to-go addicts, luring them with the latest smoke-and-mirrors act to provide a moment of suspense—that awful relief from life's boredom.

This is called worship? This is approaching with honor the holy abode of the Maker of heaven and earth! This is what the church has come to!

With this, church folk are growing up before their weary eyes a whole generation of youngsters—some of them middle-aged—who do not know the difference between Samuel and Zacchaeus, Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary.

However, "They show up in droves," you say. How they love the theater seats and no-Christian-symbols platform—bare as bare can be. They flock to the building's side-shows with little kiddies in hand. So what?

When are we going to get it

through our American thickheads—wedded to business measurements and braggadocio—that *God really has never won the numbers game*? He has not won with the droves.

Ask Noah. Ask the Old Testament prophets. Ask Jesus tied to the Cross.

Does not the Word say something about a narrow way and *few* on it? Further, about a broad-as-can-be way with the *droves* slipping and sliding all over it—finally falling off into "the lake"?

To return the church to God—patient and merciful that He truly is—a host of courageous spiritual warriors must retrieve the pulpit, cementing it back in the center of all worship. They must then open its Bible with vigor, preaching forthrightly its eternal truths so as to royally trumpet the statutes of Creator God.

A return to the study, to the mystery, to the labor. A return to the holy of holies. Else, as we are witnessing on all sides, it's beneath the sands we go.

Contenting Ourselves with the Most Childish Drivel Called Praise

A woman said to her friend last Sunday as she left our church, "He doesn't allow enough room for praise. His worships are too structured."

Not enough praise. So that's it, eh?

Well, down the road a group meets Sundays to stand for 50 minutes while they stretch their necks toward a large screen at the front of the room. On it is the magic overhead-projector tale impaled for all to gawk at.

Older people, after 20 minutes, begin to waddle a little to the right and then to the left. To be truly spiritual, they must not complain, but instead

gather strength to make do for the 30 minutes left. Following that will be an hour's sermon. Well, that should do it for another week!

Younger ones in the room—for those first 50 minutes—are seen whispering and jostling, even leaning on the chair backs in front of them; sometimes youth may give way to giggling. You can't really blame them, considering the high level of aesthetics abounding.

Of course, there is the signal when all raise their hands. Then there is the signal when all smile broadly. There is another cue for singing louder and still another for dampening it a bit, but rarely the latter—for that would be quenching the hype.

What in the name of God is going on here? I sincerely would like to know.

Praise? I hardly think so. It is more like cloned ditty singers to me. I hear a ditty; don't you hear a ditty? And that is basically what that group has for religion—a collection of shallow choruses that go no farther through the brain than what a straw could push under heavy winds.

It makes me so sad to hear youth from the same group come to our worship. They leave church asking my daughter, "Where is your overhead projector? You don't have a large screen. We have an overhead and screen. You don't have any of that. You only know how to sing out of that book."

"That book" is the church hymnal—laden with tradition and inspiration, rich in dedication and wonder, overflowing with eternal treasure. Writers before our flighty times gave blood for those praises!

That book has been with us a long, long time. The Spirit of God has messaged himself through those words and music. Yet this generation would settle for dingo ditties.

Is there then a chorus of God-fearing elders who will lead the Church of God back to the truly moving praise of centuries preceding us? Can we afford to lose our heritage so whimsically, simply letting it slip away into the caverns of do little and think less? In one selfish, spoiled generation we could be done with God's coffers.

Thinkers, singers, musicians, sol-

diers refined and cultured in God, those who know splendor, please retrieve the precisioned instruments, dust off the music stands, and let us give back to the Lord His majestic troubadours. They will then sing, not because of ritualistic, monotonous, predictable signals given in the name of informal, inspired worship, but because they are overcome with heaven's song of worth. That praise simply must sing out; it *must*—for everyone will thrill that it is integral to the wonder called worship.

Or else we sink, sink, and sink deeper, deeper into the suffocating superficial.

Saturday Protestant Mass Coming into Its Own

There is no reason for this. Nevertheless, there are actually some out there who conclude that today's made-in-the-image-of-God human cannot content himself with the Lord's day as the Lord's day. Therefore, there is that enticement—actually a very devilish game going on—to play up Saturday evening as the Lord's day.

As the new religion makers would have it, there is this Saturday night time with the couch in the center and the ditties sprinkled on the screen. With such time served in the name of worship, these good Protestants then have got it "over with," a phrase attributed in days past to some Catholics' weariness with their own ritual collection.

Saturday Catholic mass came out of the Vatican Councils of this century. It was an accommodation; we all knew that. When it began to erode the Sunday mass attendance, then Saturday mass was referred to as a vigil in preparation for Sunday mass. As if masses of Catholics were going to traipse off to church on Saturday evening and then again the next morning—the vigil and then the real thing.

Fat chance.

Consequently, the Catholic Church has suffered all around for sacrificing the Lord's day for a Saturday convenience.

Does it take much brain power to realize that parroting Protestants will come to the same dragging, desperate end—and right quickly?

What is going on here?

It is blasphemy. It is unthinkable. It is unbiblical. It is not what God expects of His people nor what He will stand for. Time will tell—severely.

God is not in the accommodation business. God gives commands. He does not invite mortals into conference rooms to talk about formulating religion. His religion has been in place for eternity.

Nowhere in the Bible does one find the Almighty asking for human input when it comes to how He is going to mold the faith? He presents the faith. He dictates, if you will. He orders. This is very hard for today's American freelance liver to stomach; nevertheless, 'tis true—eternally.

How can God have such brass as to see this ordering business through with vigor? Guess how? Because God is God, that's how—a concept just about dumped by today's experimental American church.

Sunday is the Lord's day—plain and simple. Do not tamper with it. It is the day of Resurrection, the day Jesus came back from the dead to pronounce victory over hell.

It is special, to speak in understatement. It is holy. It is the testimony of the Christian that he is indeed of the new covenant, no longer worshipping on the day of the old covenant.

In the first century, to separate oneself from the seventh day to the first day was to expect expulsion from family and employment, ridicule in the community, and a lonely existence except for others of like courage.

Therefore, as in days past, so today, the truly spiritual must stand firm with the Lord's day being just that—no compromise, no waffling, no baptizing of Saturday as the day of convenience. It simply cannot be if one wants finally to stand.

Then rise up, O people of God! Let your convictions be known. See to it that your own worship remains intact on His day, that you are found faithful to His house, in your place of worship with firm faith. See to it that the day is kept sanctified for His use and pleasure. Teach your children likewise.

Or else, we slip even farther into the dreadful sands.

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Carlton F. Harvey

June/July/August 1997

Prepared by Carlton F. Harvey

INTRODUCTION

As is my habit when given writing assignments of a practical nature, I inquired of ministerial students and active pastors for guidance in the development of my material. In response to the question "What kinds of sermons would be most useful to you?" I was encouraged to prepare these messages on some basic doctrinal themes.

Admittedly, my own denominational tradition prevailed in providing the basic structure of the series based on the Articles of Faith in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*. Although the Church of the Nazarene embraces 16 Articles of Faith, my series treats only 11 due to limitations of space, the multidenominational audience of the *Preacher's Magazine*, and my personal bias toward emphasis on Christian holiness. I readily recognize the frustration of limited treatment of themes so fundamental and broad in our belief system. For readers in sister holiness denominations, my hope is that you will not only find equivalents within your own statements of faith but also take liberty to adapt my material to suit your needs.

I was profoundly moved by the realization that some churches may utilize my Suggested Worship Orders and sermon outlines virtually unchanged. Therefore I found myself poring through stacks of resource material and fervently praying that God would direct me in my selection process. The Suggested Worship Orders are presented in a variety of styles and patterns to provide flexibility. My prayer is that the material on these pages will be tools of grace and redemption in the hands of Spirit-filled preachers of the Word.

Let's do something great for God!

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?

by Carlton F. Harvey

Gen. 1

INTRO:

ILLUS. It was Christmastime, and a fresh snow had fallen over most of the state of Oregon. An overcrowded train left us stranded at the station. Determined to make it home for the holiday, my wife and I connected with another couple and a single girl to drive across the state.

We were delighted to learn the couple possessed a strong Christian faith—and stunned to learn the girl in our vehicle had no faith that God existed, even at Christmastime. For the next several hours, pinned in the backseat of a car, we were repeatedly challenged to review and explain our belief in God.

Our faith becomes an integral part of who we are and reflects in everything we do. It is a healthy exercise to occasionally review the foundations of our Christian faith.

One of Satan's subtle tricks is to get us to gradually drift in our thinking. We can move so slowly away from truth that we don't realize we have begun to accept notions that are not true. For instance, what do we believe about God?

SCRIPTURE READING: Gen. 1

Although much could be said about God, more than can be contained in one sermon, I will draw out seven characteristics, mostly gleaned from the Old Testament.

I. God Was in the Beginning

ILLUS. Now that baseball season is in full swing, I suppose it is time to repeat the joke that sports are in the Bible. The Bible begins by saying, "In the big inning." Elsewhere you'll find a tennis match in which it is said that Moses served in Pharaoh's court.

Seriously, we believe that before anything ever was, there was God. This concept is so dramatically large that our minds find it difficult to grasp.

ILLUS. Every one of us has a birth date. And all will have a date of death. We know when we begin and when we end. But it is not so with God. He always was, always is, and always will be.

This is the argument for which the evolutionists have no answer: Who was in the beginning to initiate the process of evolution? Who brought the atoms together in the beginning? If one accepts the big bang theory, who generated the energy to cause the initial explosion? Without belief in God as the One who has always been, there is no answer for these questions.

God was not only God in the beginning of the earth but also is present in our beginnings. Before you were born, there was God. After you have gone, God will still be. We find a consistency and a security in our belief that God was in the beginning.

II. God Is the Creator

Gen. 1 recounts the story of God's creation. As fantastic as it seems, it is yet the only acceptable explanation of how and why the world came into being. Furthermore,

that is a point of wonderment, awe, and even comfort for us who believe in God as the Creator. Wonderment and awe because of the infinite variety and magnificent detail!

ILLUS. In the summer of 1996, I journeyed with my family across the Trans-Canada Highway from Montreal, Quebec, to Victoria, British Columbia. We returned home via the United States. We still reflect with wonder and awe at the encounters of creative variety seen in God's earth.

We find comfort in knowing that God has created our environment with everything we need for living to His glory. God left nothing out of creation essential to our living.

III. God Is Holy

We read in Lev. 19:1-2, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."' " God demands so much of us because He is the absolute standard. Graciously God has created us to meet His demands of holiness.

ILLUS. Different peoples of the world have worshiped many gods. In my studies, I have noticed that the gods of the world usually fail the test of holiness. Their followers live in constant fear and dread, always striving to please gods that really aren't any better than they are.

The God we Christians believe in is not a fabrication of the human mind. He is a God who has always existed, has created the world, and exists in absolute purity. God never has a stray thought or ulterior motive. We find no deception or deviousness with God, nor the slightest trace of sinfulness and corruption. Our God is absolutely holy, and all attempts to prove otherwise have utterly failed.

IV. God Is One

The Bible declares: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4).

Christians are not burdened with a variety of gods to deal with all the different circumstances and aspects of our lives. We deal with a God that is all-encompassing, all-inclusive, comprehensive in every way. In His oneness, God reaches out to us and supplies every need.

In a later message in this series, we will learn about the Trinity and how that truth impacts our faith. Realize today that even the Trinity cannot be separated. God is still one. To worship any part of God, we worship all of God. To serve any aspect of God, we serve all of God. If there is any truth in God, then it is all truth demanding our allegiance.

ILLUS. Some people have said, "I love Jesus, but I hate God." Impossible! Because God is one. We cannot compartmentalize God, separating out only those aspects most attractive to us at any given moment. God is a whole being who must be recognized as such. We are challenged to allow God to reveal himself more fully so we may know and appreciate the unified oneness of God.

V. God's Holiness Reveals the Sinfulness of Humankind

Isa. 6 records the account of Isaiah's encounter with God. When the prophet saw the Lord, high and lifted up, with the seraphs crying, "Holy, holy, holy," the man of God immediately acknowledged his sinfulness. The prophet saw not only his own uncleanness but also the uncleanness of all humankind (cf. Isa. 6:5).

Once we truly get a glimpse of God and see His holiness and purity, we instantly discover that all our goodness is disappointingly worthless. As Isaiah later testifies, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isa. 64:6).

We are tempted to assess ourselves by comparison to our fellow human beings, especially when we come out looking fairly respectable. Peer comparison is not the measurement. Rather, self-measurement in light of God's individual call upon us reveals the standard to which we must compare. Not until we confront our own sinfulness do we open ourselves up to the gracious restoration and forgiveness offered within God's salvation plan.

VI. God Is Beyond Human Description

Up to this point this message sounds like a contradiction. Throughout this sermon I have attempted to describe God, though ever so inadequately. The greatness of God should not bind us from any attempt to describe Him. Even our best attempts at describing God will fall short. God is bigger and better and bolder and broader and braver than anything we can imagine.

Though we need to see that humanity is limited, finite, and confined to certain boundaries, God is not limited in any way. The biggest problem remains that our perception of God is too small. We don't see God as infinitely bigger than whatever problem we are facing.

ILLUS. About the time I realize that God is big enough to handle a problem I'm facing, another problem of greater proportions looms on the horizon. Immediately I face the question: How big is my God?

Every time we start to get God figured out and understand what He is like, He intersects our lives with a fresh opportunity for growth. It isn't God who grows, but our appreciation of His greatness grows to a new level of trust and belief. The Christian life is one discovery after another of an ever-increasing grasp of God's greatness.

ILLUS. For a tremendous blessing, read Isa. 40:18-31.

VII. God's Greatest Aim Is to Save Humankind

Where does all this lead us? What can we do with a God who was in the beginning, is the Creator, is holy, is one, reveals our sinfulness, and is beyond description? What is God up to in my life and yours?

Matt. 28:19-20 is such familiar territory: By the authority of God in Christ, go make disciples! We learn about God that His greatest aim is to save humankind. That includes you and me. Regardless of the sinfulness we know

resides in us, God is on a mission to redeem us for His own.

ILLUS. As my father lay dying of cancer, his last words to me assured me of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. It has been my most treasured memory, the best gift I ever received from him. God's words from the Cross assure us of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. His resurrection proclaims salvation as God's gift to humankind for all time.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

COME BEFORE GOD

Responsive Reading of Ps. 100
Song of Worship "Great Is the Lord"
Invocation Prayer
Choruses of Worship "He Is Exalted"
"I Will Call upon the Lord"

SPEAK TO GOD

Prayer Chorus "Father, I Adore You"
Pastoral Prayer
Choir or Solo "When I Look into Your Holiness"

SING HYMNS FOR GOD

Hymns "Come, Thou Almighty King"
"O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

GIVE TO GOD

Service Through the Activities of the Body
Support Through Tithes and Offerings
Offertory "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"
Doxology "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"

LISTEN TO GOD

Choir or Solo "God and God Alone"
Sermon "WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?"

RESPOND TO GOD

Closing Song "I Give All to You"
Invitation
Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Billy Graham said, "Heaven is full of answers to prayer for which no one ever bothered to ask." Let us come courageously before the God of whom we have been singing and present to Him the prayers no one has ever bothered to ask.

Offering Sentence

As an expression of our confidence in the gracious provision of an Almighty God, we bring our tithes and offerings as a sacrifice of praise.

Offertory Prayer

As a portion of the offertory prayer, quote the chorus of the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

Visual Aids

Invite the children's department and youth department Sunday School classes to create posters expressing their answer to the question, "Who is God?" Display the posters on the walls of the sanctuary, and use them as a focal point to illustrate various points in the message.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?

by Carlton F. Harvey
John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-3

INTRO:

"We believe in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead; that He was eternally one with the Father; that He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, are thus united in one Person very God and very man, the God-man.

"We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He truly arose from the dead and took again His body, together with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven and is there engaged in intercession for us" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, 1993-1997, Constitution, Article of Faith II).

So say the Nazarenes. Other denominations within the Wesleyan tradition have similar statements of faith. Each carries the burden of packing powerful, poignant precepts into a paragraph or two. It seems absurd to capture the scope and essence of Jesus Christ in a paragraph, no matter how carefully crafted and descriptive the language.

Equally impossible is the task of packing that message into a single sermon. At first the preacher may be tempted to hit the highlights of what we believe about Jesus Christ. Yet *everything* we believe about Jesus Christ is a *highlight*.

Two passages of Scripture stand out as a starting point on our journey to know and understand Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING: John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-3

I. John Writes as an Eyewitness

What is recorded in the Gospel of John and in the First Epistle of John comes not from hearsay or noted authorities or informed sources who asked to remain anonymous. This report comes from an eyewitness who willingly went on record for the things he had seen and heard.

ILLUS. In courts of law, the testimony of an eyewitness is virtually unrefutable. Journalists support their stories by the credibility of eyewitnesses. Our own experience tells us that we speak with conviction, confidence, and certainty concerning those events we have personally witnessed.

John had personally seen the life of Jesus up close. He had watched as the disciples were called and trained for the work of God's kingdom. He had seen the way Jesus reached out to touch hurting people. John himself had been touched by Jesus' hands and felt the impact of that encounter. John had listened carefully as Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven. John had heard the words of forgiveness offered by Jesus. In every way John had fully experienced Jesus, so much that he came to believe in Jesus completely.

John stood nearby the Cross as Jesus suffered the agony of crucifixion. John and others took the body of Jesus from the Cross and closed it in a tomb. But John was among the disciples to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection. John had seen the empty tomb, saw the risen Christ standing before the disciples, and heard the words He spoke.

John's experiences with Jesus were so real that even

when exiled to a deserted island, his faith remained solid in Jesus. In the midst of suffering, loneliness, rejection, and heartache, John experienced Jesus, and his faith held.

So the Gospel of John, the three Epistles of John, and the Revelation of John all come from the pen of an eyewitness. He had seen, heard, touched, and experienced Jesus. So what does this eyewitness say about Jesus?

II. John Writes an Account (John 1:1-18)

A. John identifies Jesus as God.

We are introduced to Jesus' role in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John identifies Jesus as the Son. Verses 1-2 combined with verse 14 identify Jesus as God, one of the Trinity.

ILLUS. My role in the family illustrates the Trinity. I am father, son, and husband simultaneously. In each relationship, my role is different, yet I am one person. Likewise in the Trinity there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each relates to us in a different way, yet all are one. When we talk of God in creation, we do not speak only of God the Father but also of the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we talk of God in the salvation of humankind, we especially see the different relationships. Yet all come together in one supreme God. Jesus is a dynamic member of the Trinity, with equal standing and importance. He is God.

B. John identifies Jesus as light.

Philip P. Bliss said:

The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin;

The Light of the world is Jesus.

Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in;

The Light of the world is Jesus.

Come to the Light; 'tis shining for thee.

Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me.

Once I was blind, but now I can see.

The Light of the world is Jesus.

The condition of humankind apart from God has been characterized as walking in darkness. Human beings, when separated from God, grope about. They stumble over one thing and then another. They are helpless to find the way to spiritual safety.

ILLUS. I returned home with my family one summer to discover that our home had been ransacked and robbed while we were on vacation. As we faced the task of putting things back in order, a fuse blew out. Our home was pitched into total darkness. Imagine the frantic helplessness of trying to clean up our home in the dark.

Praise be to God, Jesus has come into our world as light. He brings light to our sin-darkened, messed-up lives. The light of Jesus cannot be imitated. Nor can it be extinguished. His light compares to the dawn like a beautiful sunrise in our hearts and minds as we open the windows of our inner selves to Him.

ILLUS. After a cold, wet night of camping in the wilderness, when matches have been soaked and darkness en-

velops everything, what joy and relief to witness the light of dawn. Jesus is that light that dawns upon our souls.

C. John identifies Jesus as Messiah.

Verses 10-13 tell us about the coming of the Messiah into our world. The Jews had long awaited the Anointed One who would liberate them once and for all from captivity and bondage. They looked for a deliverer whom they could follow forever.

Admittedly, the Jews did not see Jesus as their Messiah (see v. 11). Still today the Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Why? Because Jesus did not live up to their expectations.

ILLUS. I was once angrily accused of not truly being a pastor because I failed to live up to one person's expectations.

Instead of coming as a warrior, gathering an army and overthrowing the Roman government, Jesus came with a different mandate. He came to overthrow the enemy of our souls and to set people free from the captivity and bondage of sin. Further, Jesus came to change the destinies of liberated people, rebirthing us as "children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). With *all* humanity God has wanted to establish a spiritual relationship within their hearts.

D. John identifies Jesus as man (v. 14).

ILLUS. I cannot tell you scientifically how Mary conceived Jesus in her womb without ever having sexual relations with a man. But then, science has never been able to tell us how life is breathed into every living person. Do we stop breathing because we don't understand scientifically how it all happens? Of course not! Nor should we discard the reality of Jesus' birth from the womb of a virgin simply on the basis that we cannot scientifically explain it.

Who can explain it? Ask John. He knew Mary and Jesus personally. Though it caused him great suffering, John refused to alter the details of what he knew to have happened in the virgin birth of Jesus.

So we accept that Jesus was born of a virgin, both God and man. As a man, Jesus suffered and died for our sins. As a man, Jesus died a physical death, bled real red blood, and became the human sacrifice for the sins of all. As a man, Jesus was buried. There are no degrees of dead. Either you are or you aren't. Jesus was dead.

But Jesus, the Son of God, shook off the power of death. Jesus, the Son of God, came back to life and broke forever the grip of sin. None but Almighty God could let sin overpower Jesus on the Cross only to overpower sin and come back from the grave.

ILLUS. As I wrestled with my father, occasionally he would allow me to get on top and think I had defeated him. Then my father would flex his powerful muscles. Rising again, he tossed me aside in absolute assurance that he was the victor. Jesus the man merely teased Satan with a short-lived victory. He reigns on the throne of heaven victorious.

E. John identifies Jesus as giver (v. 16).

ILLUS. Since the time of Moses and the giving of the Ten Commandments, humankind has been trying to do enough right to please God. Invariably, humanity's works have ended in spiritual defeat.

Jesus came to extend grace in such a way that humanity is no longer obliged to be good before approaching

God. The blessings we receive from God, one after another, indicate the abundance of God's resources offered to make us righteous.

ILLUS. Joseph Mayfield wrote: "This idea of abundance recurs again and again in the words and works of Jesus [as recorded in the Gospel of John]. At Cana of Galilee there was sufficient of the best wine (2:10). He gave the Samaritan woman 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (4:14). For the hungry multitude there was more than enough (6:13). To the thirsty soul He promised not only enough to satisfy but an overflow of 'rivers of living water' (7:38). Life abundant for the true believers is made possible by His coming into the world (10:10). . . . Every area of the life of the man of faith is permeated by God's abundant grace."*

CONCLUSION:

The Bible says, "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). Each of us must choose whether or not we will receive Him as God's personal gift to us. Receive Him and become one of the "children of God" (v. 12).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WELCOME TO WORSHIP!

Announcements of Church Activities
Welcome to Guests
Chorus of Greeting "We Are the Body of the Lord"
Greet Your Neighbor

SING PRAISE TO THE LORD

Hymn "Jesus Is the Joy of Living"
Choruses "All Hail King Jesus"
"Jesus, Name Above All Names"
"There's Something About That Name"
Hymn "That Beautiful Name"

FAMILY PRAYER TIME

Chorus "In the Name of the Lord"
Praises for Answers to Prayer
Prayer for Needs Among the Family of God

WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING

Offertory Sentence
Offertory Prayer
Offertory Song "A Name I Highly Treasure"

WORSHIP IN HEARING GOD'S WORD

Choir or Solo "All the Glory Belongs to Jesus"
Sermon "WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?"

RESPONDING TO CHRIST'S INVITATION

Closing Hymn "All for Jesus"
Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Welcome to Guests

Station warm and friendly people in strategic locations to welcome guests as they enter the church. Encourage the guests to sit with or near the greeters. At the moment in the service when guests are welcomed, the greeter stands and says something like this: "I would like to introduce my new friends, Mr. and Mrs. Smith. I am so pleased that they have chosen to visit our church this morning." The greeter sits down, and welcomes are extended to others in the service.

*Joseph H. Mayfield in Vol. 7 of *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 32.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

by Carlton F. Harvey
John 16:7-15

INTRO:

The Holy Spirit . . . one with the Father and the Son . . . the living presence of God in the world today . . . Guide to the Church . . . Giver of Gifts . . . Convictor, Convincer, Cleanser, Communicator.

The Holy Spirit—what do you believe about the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit an it or a person? Is the Holy Spirit active in your world today, or is He only a manifestation of God in the pages of the Bible? How would you characterize your relationship with the Holy Spirit right now?

These and other questions are asked as people attempt to understand the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's purpose in the world today. Certainly much confusion and error exist regarding the Holy Spirit. This message addresses some of the common questions about the Holy Spirit. (Nazarenes may wish to refer to *Manual* Article of Faith III.)

SCRIPTURE READING: John 16:7-15

I. The Holy Spirit Came in the Absence of Jesus

Jesus ascended into heaven to be with God the Father. So God would not be limited to the physical boundaries of a single man, Jesus returned to heaven, and the Holy Spirit entered the world in His place.

II. The Holy Spirit Has Come to Our Advantage

The Holy Spirit bears no human limitations. He is present with all of us simultaneously, ministering and interacting with all.

III. The Holy Spirit Has Come as a Counselor

ILLUS. The Greek word *paraclete* means one who comes to stand alongside. The picture describes one who comes to help lift a load, to give guidance and direction, one who can be leaned upon, a helper.

God's Spirit did not come here to check us out, to see what we're doing wrong, and then to go tattling to the Father. The Father already sees and knows. The Spirit has come to strengthen us in weakness, to guide us into truth and blessing, and to enable us to stand against the forces of evil.

IV. The Holy Spirit Has Come to Expose Sin

ILLUS. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, defines *convict*: "to find or prove to be guilty" and "to convince of error or sinfulness." Exposure of wrong is required to obtain a conviction.

The Holy Spirit works to expose the problem of sin, to reveal the danger of sin, to uncover the end result of sin. Simple logic suggests that if a person knew what danger is guaranteed in sinful living, he or she would refuse to participate. We fail to see the end results, so we depend upon the Holy Spirit to help us by exposing sin for what

it is and by helping us move away from it.

ILLUS. While driving through a mountain pass, our progress was slowed by an unexpected detour. Bold signs directed us to reduce speed and follow the pilot car. Thankfully we obeyed and were guided around a portion of road washed out by recent storms.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is not intended to stop our progress in life. Rather, the Holy Spirit slows and redirects through conviction for sin, helping us avoid disaster on the washed-out road of sin.

V. The Holy Spirit Continues to Reveal What God Is Like

That is the meaning behind the phrase "convict the world . . . in regard to righteousness" (v. 8). Jesus, the living and vivid picture of God, has returned to heaven. We need an example of true righteousness before us through the convicting, exposing work of the Holy Spirit. As I seek to model my life after that of the Father, the Holy Spirit helps me see and understand true righteousness.

ILLUS. From time to time the Spirit comes alongside me to challenge certain thoughts and behaviors of mine. Refusal to heed the Spirit's warnings will lead to sin. Obedience leads to increasing the power of righteousness in my life.

VI. The Holy Spirit Exposes the Doom of Evil

The battle between the forces of good and evil has been waged since Satan rebelled against God, left heaven, and set up his own kingdom. Satan defiantly shook his fist in the face of God and challenged the Almighty to a flight for the souls of humankind.

Satan made a fatal mistake because God would not be defeated. Throughout the pages of history, you can read about the struggle that has continued. When it appears that evil has won, that God has been defeated, Almighty God steps in and manifests His overwhelming power once again.

ILLUS. At the Cross, Satan presumed that a crucifixion would insure final victory. Three days later, evil was crushed, defeated once and for all as the resurrected Jesus stepped forth triumphant.

ILLUS. Yogi Berra said, "You can observe a lot by just watching." With the help of the Holy Spirit, you can watch and observe the doom of evil and the triumph of godliness.

VII. The Holy Spirit Is the Guide into All Truth

Satan is committed to deception, leading "the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9) apart from the will and plan of God.

In stark contrast, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Jesus explained the liberating power of truth when He declared, "The truth will set you free" (8:32).

VIII. The Holy Spirit Is in Harmony with the Father

"He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (v. 13). This tells us that the Spirit is working in harmony with God the Father as our Helper.

Never be fooled into thinking that the Spirit of God is going to guide you into something or tell you something contrary to what the Father has revealed in His Word. Nor will we find that Jesus sets an example in one area only to have the Spirit guide us into a different course of action.

ILLUS. As parents, we learned fairly quickly that when our children would seek permission that was refused by one parent, they would go to the other parent in hopes of a different answer. In order to be consistent, parents need to communicate with each other, harmonizing decisions and responses.

The Spirit of God always works in harmony with the Father and the Son. The Godhead communicates together. One never speaks except He has met with agreement from the others.

IX. The Holy Spirit Came as Jesus Promised

On the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came into the world in absolute and convincing fulfillment of the promise.

The Holy Spirit came in a mighty display of power, showing that He possessed the power of the Omnipotent.

The Holy Spirit came in a mighty display of cleansing and purity, revealing holiness, just as the Father is holy.

The Holy Spirit came in a mighty display of enablement, an empowerment giving the disciples spiritual victory. He made them bold Christians and equipped them to witness to the life-changing power of God. It was all as Jesus had promised.

ILLUS. I shall always remember my own experience when the Holy Spirit came into my life. At an altar of prayer on a Thursday night in July of 1973, following a message by evangelist Norvie Clift, I made my complete consecration. In a miraculous moment of crisis, the Holy Spirit entered my heart and life to take full and complete control. The powerful grip of carnality was broken by the greater power of the Holy Spirit. The residue of sin was cleansed in the purifying flame of the Spirit's holiness. The frustrating, inconsistent struggle for spiritual victory was over. With the Spirit's empowerment, I possessed new confidence and courage to witness, making me into a Christian with true spiritual competence. Indeed, the Holy Spirit came into my life with Pentecostal power as Jesus promised.

X. The Holy Spirit Has Come to Live in Your Heart and Mine

God has always sought a right relationship with humankind. God the Father created Adam and Eve for companions. Jesus called 12 disciples to follow Him as companions. So also the Holy Spirit desires a living relationship with us.

The Spirit's holiness will not allow Him to dwell in the heart of a nonbeliever. The Spirit's holiness will not live in the same place as the carnal sinful nature. When a spirit of rebellion exists within our hearts, it sends a clear message that the Holy Spirit is not welcome.

However, the Holy Spirit is very anxious to come and help us see our sin so that confession and forgiveness might follow. The Holy Spirit is anxious to come and help us see our need for a clean heart, leading to surrender and His purifying work of grace. The Holy Spirit is very anxious to live in us and give us spiritual power so we can be effective Christians. The Holy Spirit *wants* to live in your heart and mine. The question is this: Will you allow the Holy Spirit to fill you?

ILLUS. In the diamond mines of South Africa, they often find a substance that is half charcoal and half diamond. It was intended to be a diamond, but somewhere nature's chemical processes were interrupted, leaving it partly a cinder and partly a jewel. It stopped short and will never get placed in the king's crown. Let us go all the way with God so that when Jesus makes up His jewels, we will be so completely in His perfect will that He will be delighted with us.*

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Choir or Solo "Come, Everyone Who Is Thirsty"
Scripture Reading John 14:15-17, 25-26
Invocation Prayer

WORSHIP IN SINGING AND PRAYER

Hymn "Holy Spirit, Be My Guide"
Chorus "Spirit of the Living God"
Pastoral Prayer

WORSHIP IN GIVING AND SHARING CHURCH FAMILY LIFE

Offering Our Gifts
Offertory "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart"
Announcements of Church Family Life

WORSHIP IN THE WORD

Choir or Solo "Open My Eyes, That I May See"
Sermon "WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?"
Closing Hymn "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"
Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Jude wrote: "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). Let us approach God in prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Offertory Sentence

The problem with our giving is that we too often give the widow's mite, without the widow's spirit (Anonymous). May the Spirit of God direct the spirit of our giving today.

*Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 22.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE?

by Carlton F. Harvey

2 Tim. 3:16-17

INTRO:

ILLUS. (Holding the Bible aloft in one hand) If I were to ask you to describe what I am holding in my hand with one word or phrase, what would you say? (Invite audience participation, and get some responses.)

All of your answers are correct. Even though all of you described the same thing, isn't it interesting to listen to the variety of responses? To one person, it was one thing; to another person, it meant something else. Perhaps some who did not speak up were thinking along an entirely different line. However, we all described exactly the same thing.

What we illustrated is one of the important things we believe about the Bible, God's Word. One statement regarding the Bible, found in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, reads like this: "We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith" (Article of Faith IV).

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Tim. 3:16-17

I. The Bible Came by Plenary Inspiration

At the beginning of this message, we illustrated plenary inspiration. I revealed to you what I wanted you to describe. I showed it very clearly so that you understood what I was talking about. However, I did not tell you exactly what words you were to use. You provided a variety of answers, all correct, and each reflected something about the person describing what I had in my hand. Your relationship to what I had in my hand largely influenced what words you used to create your description.

In a similar manner, plenary inspiration suggests that God revealed to the heart and mind of people the thoughts, concepts, principles, and ideas that needed to be recorded. God divinely inspired the writers of each of the 66 books of the Bible. God revealed very clearly what the authors were to write about. There was an understanding between the mind of God and the mind of the authors.

In God's inspiration, there was also a great variety of expression. There was detailed, factual recording of historical events, such as the writings of Moses in the Old Testament and the writings of Luke in the New Testament. There was the greatly emotional writings of the Psalms and the sage advice of a wise man written in the Proverbs. The fiery passion of the prophets as well as the feisty, yet intellectual, personality of Paul are seen in various passages. Still we hear the glowing warmth and compassionate voice of the aged apostle John as he wrote letters to young Christians.

ILLUS. Throughout the Scriptures you can clearly recog-

nize the personalities of the authors. When faced with a situation that is alarming and wrong, I often express my feelings by echoing the thundering voice of James when he writes: "My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:10). At other moments, my sentiments more closely resemble the psalmist—sometimes praising, other times pouring out my heart in frustration and agony. Personalities can be seen in the writings of the Bible.

Students of the Bible find interest in the various styles employed in the Bible. To capture the perspective of a non-Jewish doctor writing about the life of Jesus, turn to the Gospel of Luke.

The Bible is not a word-for-word transcript of what God had to say to humankind. God did not call up one of His favorite writers and have that person sit down to receive a dictated message. God inspired the thoughts of the writers and revealed to them the concepts and principles, and then the authors wrote within the framework of their own personalities and experiences. That's plenary inspiration—God gave human beings the principle; human beings wrote it down. Thus, the Bible makes fascinating reading, full of interesting variety, yet all coming from the heart and mind of God.

II. The Bible Has 66 Books

The writings called the Apocrypha are a series of books usually placed between the Old and New Testaments. However, we do not view them as part of the Bible, which we believe to be God's inspired Word. As fascinating as some other writings that have been written and circulated as so-called inspired scripture may be, we do not accept them as God's Word. The writings of Muhammad in the Koran, the work of Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy in Christian Science, and a host of other materials are not what we believe to be God's Word—the Bible. We hold strictly to the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, no more and no less.

III. The Bible Reveals the Will of God for Humankind

Everything a person needs to know about God, about God's relationship to humanity, and about humanity's relationship to God can be found in the Bible. That is the reason for a strong emphasis on the printing and distribution of the Bible. The Scriptures remain essential for people to know and to understand the will of God.

ILLUS. Mission agencies the world over are anxious to obtain Scriptures in the languages of all the peoples of the earth. Hundreds of missionaries devote their full time to translating and printing the Bible.

Why emphasize getting the Bible into people's hands in every language of the world? Quite simply, everything we need to know about God, everything we need to know about how we should live, everything we need to

know about having a right relationship with God and making heaven our eternal home, *literally everything we need to know* is contained in the Bible.

The Bible, God's Word, has one central purpose: to reveal to us God's will.

Not only do we get our start as Christians through the Word of God, but also we find along the journey of life that the Word of God continues to bring guidance, comfort, challenge, rebuke, healing, and everything we need as Christians. We subscribe wholeheartedly to the lesson our Scriptures teach: The Bible stands as the complete source book for the Christian.

IV. If the Bible Doesn't Say It, Don't Believe It

ILLUS. The question might be asked: "If the Bible is all we need, then why are so many Christian books around? Why not restrict our reading to the Bible?"

Every Christian is well advised to exercise caution when selecting books to read, even in a Christian bookstore. Not everyone who claims to be going to heaven is going to get there. Neither is every book claiming to be Christian truly so. Discretion is in order.

Christians through the ages have shared their thoughts, wisdom, victories, and struggles as they have lived in the light of the Bible. As a Christian, you can find great insights to be helpful in understanding the message of the Bible by reading the works of Christian writers. Experts in the original languages can reveal word meanings that enrich your understanding of the Scriptures in a beautiful way. Others have found a passage of Scripture particularly meaningful in a given situation. That information can help you as you pass through similar territory.

The number one criteria is that whatever you read must line up with God's Word. Failure to be faithful to the Scriptures is grounds for immediate dismissal of an idea. The only way you can know if something lines up with the Bible is if you are reading and studying the Bible for yourself.

ILLUS. An elderly gentleman frequently quoted his favorite verse of Scripture: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). *The Living Bible* paraphrases that last phrase this way: "Know what his Word says and means" (TLB).

ILLUS. The late Dr. William Lyon Phelps of Yale University said, "I thoroughly believe in a university education for both men and women, but I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college course is more valuable than a college course without the Bible."¹

V. The Bible—Don't Read a Part; Read It All

Picking and choosing parts you like will only give half the truth. The same Bible that tells us about God's love also tells us about God's righteousness. We will be held accountable for the way we live. Far too many people mistakenly think they will inherit eternal life on half the truth. Read it all! You'll be glad you did.

ILLUS. Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, challenged his day as Billy Graham has challenged the present generation. A key to his success lay in a fixed rule to begin his day with devotional Bible reading. Nothing could interfere. No letter, telegram, or even the newspaper was opened before his time alone with the Book. Certainly the morning moments with the Book explain the peace and power of many Christian lives.²

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Scripture Reading	Ps. 1:2-3
Invocation	
We come into this house of worship to hear and meditate upon Your Word, O God. May the Holy Spirit guide us into new truth and blessing as we focus our attention upon You. Amen.	
Hymn	"Wonderful Words of Life"
Responsive Reading	"God's Word"
Chorus	"Thy Word"
Testimony from the Word	
Chorus	"All Your Anxiety"
Pastoral Prayer	
The Lord's Prayer	
Giving Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory Prayer	
Offertory Music	"I Know God's Promise Is True"
Children's Special	"Tell Me the Stories of Jesus"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE?"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Praise for the Word

Select one or two persons to recite their favorite Bible passages and give a short testimony of how the Word has helped them in a specific time.

Family Prayer Time

Try singing the Lord's Prayer at the close of the pastoral prayer.

Giving Tithes and Offerings

As a youngster, I remember using a Bible for collecting the offering when the plates could not be found. Try passing open Bibles down each aisle and collecting the offering into plates at the end of the rows.

Children's Special

This feature may be a prime opportunity to incorporate children into the worship service as a follow-up to the previous week's emphasis on Father's Day, providing an attraction to invite fathers to return to church again.

1. Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 60.

2. *Ibid.*, 60.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT SIN?

by Carlton F. Harvey
Gen. 3

INTRO:

ILLUS. In May of 1988, the country's newspapers carried a story of unusual heroism. An earthquake-sized explosion obliterated a Nevada factory. A workman in the factory, stricken with polio, had the opportunity to get out of the factory along with his fellow employees. Yet instead of saving himself, he remained behind so he could make the all-important phone call to notify authorities of the impending catastrophe. By staying long enough to make a call that would save many lives, he sacrificed his own life.

In these days, it is highly unusual to find people making that kind of sacrifice. Our world is so filled with persons seeking their own satisfaction and fulfillment that an attitude of giving and sacrifice has become a rare, precious quality.

What has happened to the spirit of self-sacrifice? Why are we so caught up in the pursuit of our personal pleasures and happiness? Where did the attitude of "me first" get started? Yet we admire the person who gives sacrificially. We appreciate a good story in the newspaper. Why has sacrifice of self become so rare?

The answer reaches back to the very beginning of humankind on earth. It relates to the topic of this message: What do we believe about sin? (Nazarenes may wish to refer to *Manual* Article of Faith V.)

ILLUS. A U.S. president, Calvin Coolidge, returning home from Sunday worship, was asked what the minister had preached about. "Sin" was his one-word reply.

Pressing for more information, the president was asked the minister's thoughts about sin. With similar brevity the president retorted, "He's again' it!"

We smile at that short conversation, but we dare not smile at sin. Sin must be considered in all its seriousness in a way that acknowledges the implications of sin. When did sin enter the world?

SCRIPTURE READING: Gen. 3

I. How Sin Came In¹

A. There was inducement to evil.

Inducement to evil is seen in the first five verses where the devil tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He came asking questions, planting seeds of doubt in the heart of the woman. He challenged the woman with the question of whether or not God really meant what He said. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (v. 1). Then, even more boldly, sensing that the woman was weakening, Satan openly challenged the woman to believe him rather than believe God: "You will not surely die" (v. 4). It was Satan's way of saying, "God won't punish your disobedience. Believe me instead." The rationale is that God knows that the result of eating the fruit will be that Eve's eyes will be opened. She will be like God, know-

ing good and evil. Satan cast God in the role of holding out on Eve, while the evil one offers to reveal truth.

Quite the opposite is true. God never holds out on us anything that would be for our good. On the contrary, Satan continually tries to deceive us as he did Eve. While everything the devil said to Eve was true, he failed to mention that the awful consequences of sin would be more terrible than she could imagine. Satan always induces people to evil by covering the full consequences of sin.

B. There was the yielding to the tempter.

In verse 6 Eve gave in to the temptation. Further, she became a tool of Satan to tempt Adam.

Once we give in to temptation, we must never be deceived and think we have harmed no one else. Our surrender to sin places us in the hands of the devil to become tools for tempting and deceiving others.

ILLUS. Robert E. Lee, who headed the armies of the South in the Civil War, was not only a great general but a great Christian. After the war, Lee became president of a college afterward to be known as Washington and Lee University. The salary at that time, however, was very small. Because of Lee's popularity, his name was often sought as a recommendation of certain articles of merchandise. Good money was offered to him for the use of his name in connection with various products.

General Lee received his best offer from a tobacco company. The offer was several times his salary as college president and required only that he recommend a certain brand of tobacco. Robert E. Lee did not use tobacco. He did not believe that it was consistent for any Christian to use it. In spite of his need for the money, he wrote the tobacco company and declined their offer and told them his reason for refusal.²

Yielding to Satan's temptation leads to sin in us as well as in others.

C. There were the fatal consequences.

In verses 7-15 we find the full consequences of their sin being unfolded.

1. They saw their nakedness.

Sin glitters with the allurements of bigger and greater accomplishments. In reality, we lower ourselves to wallow in the oppression of guilt and shame. Freedom is turned to bondage and embarrassment.

2. They became afraid of God.

They hid from the One with whom they had previously shared unhindered intimacy. Sin never leads us into a closer relationship with God. Our sin drives us away from God because sin and holiness cannot dwell in peace together.

3. The couple started on a long and fruitless journey of blame.

Adam pointed the finger at Eve, saying, "The woman you put here with me" (v. 12). Eve pointed at the serpent, saying, "The serpent deceived me" (v. 13).

ILLUS. When we sin, we can point the finger at someone else and claim, "It isn't my fault. I was deceived and gave in to the temptation." As the consequences of our sin begin to set in, we realize the joke was on us and no one but Satan is laughing.

4. They were finally expelled from the garden.

When we live *for* God and *with* God, then life is lived in perfect balance. Everything needed is supplied. Every legitimate desire is satisfied. We enjoy the contentment, delight, and joy of an unbroken relationship with God. When we sin, we get cut off from our fellowship with God and expelled from the relationship with Him. Life takes on new struggles that we never could have imagined.

Thus, sin entered the world and all human beings, as descendants of the first Adam and Eve, are subject to the same curses and temptations to which they were exposed. We have all sinned. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

The Good News came to tell us that God did not leave humankind alone to wander outside the garden and to be eternally lost. God immediately began to reach out to humankind.

II. God and the Sinner¹

A. Sin causes personal guilt.

Even though Adam and Eve pointed their fingers at someone else, they themselves realized their own nakedness. Eve did not feel guilty for Adam's sin. Nor did Adam experience a sense of guilt for Eve's sin. Each experienced guilt for his or her own personal sin. The guilt for which each of us is responsible is produced by our own acts of sin.

B. Sin separates God and humankind.

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:8-9).

Had they not sinned, they would have had no reason to hide in the trees. Had they not sinned, they would have had no reason to be ashamed to face the Lord. They could have welcomed the Father and enjoyed His fellowship as before. Sin broke the fellowship; friendship turned to fear; and the couple went into hiding.

ILLUS. We know the pain of a broken relationship with one we love. When we have wronged another, we stop talking to him or her. We avoid meeting him or her. We tend to immerse ourselves in busy activities as a means of hiding. So also in our relationship with God. Our sin breaks the fellowship with and separates us from God.

C. God seeks sinful humanity.

God went looking for the couple in the cool of the day. God came calling out, "Where are you?" (v. 9). God

compassionately "made garments of skin" for them to cover themselves (v. 21).

God continues to seek sinful humankind. While we are busy trying to cover our sin and hide from God, the Father is looking, seeking, and trying to find us, and providing the remedy for the problem we created.

That is why Jesus came into the world. In the all-time greatest act of sacrificial love, God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. He paid the penalty for our sins. He arose from the dead and resides in heaven preparing a place for us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Opening Chorus	"His Praise Fills the Temple"
Invocation	
Announcements	
Worship sequence	"Rejoice in the Lord"
	"He Has Made Me Glad"
	"This Is the Day"
	"Bless His Holy Name"
Hymn	"Love Lifted Me"
Testimony of Salvation	
Hymn	"Grace Greater than Our Sin"
	"I Must Tell Jesus" (1 verse)
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir or Solo	"Then I Met Jesus"
Giving of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory Sentence	
Offertory Music	"Jesus Saves"
Choir or Solo	"There Is a Savior"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT SIN?"
Invitation Hymn	"Jesus, I Come"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Testimony of Salvation

Interview the most recent convert in your church family. Spend one-third of the interview discussing life before conversion and two-thirds describing life after. Emphasize the crisis moment of decision.

Offering Sentence

Construct a brief paragraph in which recent offering victories are highlighted, and praise the people for their continued faithfulness.

Invitation Hymn

Prepare altar workers to be ready to deal with seekers at the close of the service. Have packets ready for new converts that include *Basic Bible Studies for New/Growing Christians*, "Lesson 1" by Charles "Chic" Shaver (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House), PAVE-81, \$1.50.

1. The first point and three following subpoints are taken from Alexander MacLaren in Vol. 1 of *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969), 47. The written commentary is my original work.

2. Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 87.

3. The following outline points are from G. B. Williamson, in Vol. 1 of *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969), 45-46. Again, the commentary is original to me.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE ATONEMENT?

by Carlton F. Harvey

Titus 2:11-14

INTRO:

These are the facts:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Before the world was created or humankind was placed upon the face of the earth, God's plan of atonement was put into place (cf. Rev. 13:8).

The Scriptures tell us that "the woman saw . . . the fruit of the tree . . . and ate it. She also gave some to her husband . . . and he ate it" (Gen. 3:6).

God entered the world in the person of Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin, Mary (cf. Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7).

Jesus suffered and died, being crucified on a cross. In doing so, He became the atoning Sacrifice for our sins (cf. Mark 15:33-39).

And it is also a *fact* that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is as much needed today as it was when Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden. The Atonement is needed now just as much as it was needed 2,000 years ago when Jesus died on the Cross. His atonement will *always* be needed by sinful men and women who are lost and destined for eternity in hell.

In this day as our world is filled with innuendo, partial truth, deception, and outright lies, it is important for us in the church to have a firm grip on some essential facts. The Church of Jesus Christ has entered a world for which too few are prepared. More than ever before, we Christians are under scrutiny to see if there is any truth to our religious beliefs. Without a solid foundation based on what the Bible says, we will find ourselves unable to give a viable, persuasive reason for the hope that lies within us (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).

Within the Christian Holiness tradition, each denomination espouses a statement of faith that forms the foundation for all that is believed and taught. Sunday School lessons and other printed materials are evaluated by the statements of faith unique to each Holiness denomination. Yet despite the fact that statements of faith are embedded within all our printed materials, you must not assume universal knowledge and understanding among members of our churches.

ILLUS. Fifty percent of the members of the Church of the Nazarene in Canada have joined within the last 10 years. Thus, we have a constant need to teach and to review the foundations of our faith.

For example, today's topic is What do we believe about the Atonement? The first question is this: "What does the word *atonement* mean?" (Nazarenes may wish to refer to *Manual*, Article of Faith VI.)

SCRIPTURE READING: Titus 2:11-14

I. What Is the History of Atonement?

A. Let's look at Cain and Abel.

Introduce the idea of a price being paid in exchange for the forgiveness of sins. Each brought offerings to give to the Lord, offerings that were to be sacrifices made in exchange for the forgiveness of sin. These sacrifices would also be the means by which God would enter into fellowship with humankind.

B. Let's look at the laws of Moses.

More sacrifices were instituted to cover various situations. As before, all sacrifices were presented to God as a means of finding forgiveness and restoration in the relationship between God and humankind.

C. Let's look at the New Testament.

The King James Version uses the word *atonement* only once (Rom. 5:11). The *New International Version* translates it *reconciliation*. Paul uses the phrase, "God presented [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement" (Rom. 3:25). The author of Hebrews, speaking of Jesus, says, "that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

In both the Romans and Hebrews references the *New International Version* carries a footnote giving the alternate rendering "turn aside God's wrath."

In the Old Testament, atonement was found in the sacrifices of animals and other items. In the New Testament, the wrath of God is turned away because of the sacrifice of one Man, Jesus Christ. Simply stated, atonement is whatever is offered as a means of bringing reconciliation between two offended parties.

II. What Is the Purpose of the Atonement of Christ?

Look to the scripture passage from Titus for the purpose of Christ's atonement.

A. Jesus' atonement was founded upon grace (Titus 2:11).

Underlying the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the unmerited favor of God toward humanity. Grace drove Jesus to the Cross to turn aside God's wrath toward the sins of humankind.

B. Jesus' atonement provides purpose in teaching (v. 12).

The Atonement teaches the difference between evil that destroys and good that builds up. God wants all people to see that continuing to live without Him, continuing to be drawn by worldly passions, results in the self-destruction that comes from sin. The preferred lesson learned from the Atonement is to say *yes* to living under discipline, living that is noble and good, living that is centered around God. This latter kind of living brings about a relationship with God beginning now and lasting through eternity.

C. Jesus' atonement gives purpose in the blessed hope (v. 13).

Had it not been for Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, had Jesus not died and shed His own blood to cover our sin, had He not placed himself in the position to turn away the wrath of God, we would die with no hope.

ILLUS. On May 21, 1946, a young scientist performed an experiment to determine the amount of U-235 necessary for a chain reaction. Preparations were made for the first atomic bomb.

On that day, a screwdriver slipped, bringing the hemispheres of uranium too close together. A brilliant bluish haze filled the room. The young scientist, instead of protecting himself, pulled the two hemispheres apart with his hands and interrupted the chain reaction. His instantaneous moment of self-forgetful daring saved the lives of seven other persons in the room.

Waiting for the car to take him to the hospital, the scientist Louis Slotin said, "You'll come through all right. But I haven't the faintest chance myself." Following nine days of agony, he died.*

Jesus came into our world. At the critical moment when the forces of evil appeared to reach critical mass, threatening humanity with total destruction, Jesus broke the chain reaction of sin by dying on the Cross.

Jesus' sacrifice brings hope that one day God's redemptive plan will be fulfilled and believers will be taken home to heaven. Jesus has already gone ahead to prepare our eternal dwelling place. Our blessed hope is that Jesus Christ will appear again to take us with Him into heaven forever.

D. Jesus' atonement provides purpose in redeeming us (v. 14).

Through the Atonement, we are lifted from the wickedness that defiles us. Further, God purified us as God's very own people, eager to do what is good.

The atoning death of Jesus for our sins occurred for a specific reason. God saw sin's destructiveness. God's holiness could not tolerate sin in us. Therefore, in order that God's wrath toward sin might be turned away, God gave Jesus as our atoning Sacrifice. Therefore, we can enjoy a relationship with God that is healthy, wholesome, loving, exciting, exuberant, and exhilarating. God wants that kind of relationship with *you* and *me*!

*He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free!
For, O my God, it found out me!
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

—Charles Wesley

III. What Are the Questions of Grace?

Does the atonement of Jesus Christ cover persons without the ability to think and reason due to lost mental health? Does the Atonement work for them? Yes! Persons without the ability to discern between right and wrong, who are genuinely not responsible for their actions, are included in the gracious atoning sacrifice of Christ.

And for children who die in innocence, before they are old enough to be accountable for their sins, God's grace is sufficient. What a comfort to know that God's loving and gracious act in the atonement of Christ reaches out to even these.

What shall we do with the Atonement? Will we allow it to impact our lives, turning away God's wrath and bringing us into fellowship with Him?

ILLUS. When I return home from a busy day, I search for a chair in which to sit and rest. My feet are tired, my back is aching, but I find no relief in simply looking at the chair. I have to sit in the chair, resting my full weight upon it, in order to make the chair work for me.

So it is with the Atonement. I must turn from my sins, believe on Jesus alone for my salvation, and place the full weight of my trust upon Him. It is then that the Atonement works its miracle of grace in my life.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choruses	"O Magnify the Lord" "Let There Be Praise" "I Exalt Thee"
Prayers of Praise	
Hymn	"Wonderful Savior"
Choir	"He's Worthy"
Prayer Thought	
Prayer Chorus	"I Will Call upon the Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory Sentence	
Offering Our Gifts	
Offertory Song	"The Wonder of It All"
Children's Report	
Solo	"Reborn"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE ATONEMENT?"
Invitation Hymn	"Just As I Am"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayers of Praise

Advise several persons prior to the service to be ready with sentence prayers of praise. In the service, explain to the congregation what you are asking them to do. Then call upon one or two of the people you've prepared in advance to lead out and start this period of prayer. Remember, these are sentences of praise to God. Avoid asking God for anything during this time of prayer.

Prayer Thought

Many people quench the Spirit by being in low moods or discouraged rather than rejoicing, by planning rather than praying, by murmuring rather than giving thanks, and by worrying instead of trusting Him who is faithful. (Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators)

Children's Report

Interview a number of children in the Sunday School, and report on their responses to the question: "What do you think *atonement* means?" Use the report to introduce the subject of the sermon.

*Vialo Weiss in *Leadership Journal*, Fall Quarter, 1988.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT FREE AGENCY?

"It is your decision"

by Carlton F. Harvey

Josh. 24:14-24

INTRO:

In "A Psalm of Life" Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned these lines:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime.*

Throughout the days and years of our lives, we make choices that determine much of our destiny. Our choices may cast us into infamy, forever plagued by the destructive consequences of our decisions. Or our choices may elevate us into the sparkling air of a clear conscience, echoing Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

There are three, perhaps four, choices more important than all others that we make. The choice of your life's work, your life's mate, and your life's faith. Each choice impacts us in significant measure. The fourth choice, that of life's attitude, will also have a permeating effect on us.

ILLUS. One of the oldest stories in the sales field is that of two shoe salesmen who went to Africa many years ago to sell shoes. They got off the boat and headed out to their assigned territories.

One salesman, after surveying his prospects, wired the home office immediately: "Cancel all orders. No one here wears shoes."

The other salesman also wired home his review of prospects: "Double all orders. No one here wears shoes!" The choice of attitude made the difference.

How can you assert that we are the products of our choices? God's Word teaches that in the divine scheme God turned over the power of decision to humankind, setting us free to determine our own course. God chose not to make our decisions for us nor to allow others to decide for us. No power, supernatural or human, righteous or evil, nothing forces a person to make a decision against his or her own will. The implications are enormous because we are responsible for our decisions.

ILLUS. A couple struggling through difficulty in their relationship often accuses each other of wrongdoing. In the end, each partner has made choices for which no one else is responsible.

(Nazarenes may wish to refer to *Manual* Article of Faith VII.)

In a society that has taught itself to blame others, we must address the reality that we ourselves are responsible for our decisions. We cannot hide behind Flip Wilson's comic line "The devil made me do it." God's Word speaks clearly that each one is responsible for his or her own choices.

ILLUS. Adam pointed the finger of blame at Eve when *he* chose to eat the forbidden fruit. Eve pointed her finger at the serpent when *she* chose to partake. Yet each one was

responsible for the consequences of his or her own choices.

What is the ultimate choice in life? Of the four primary choices, which is the greatest? The ultimate choice is whether or not we are going to serve God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Josh. 24:14-24

I. The Choice to Serve God Is a Spiritual Decision (v. 14)

God created a spiritual dimension in the living soul of humankind that lives for eternity. The spiritual dimension reaches into every aspect of life. Body, mind, and emotions are touched by our spirituality.

Our decision of faith is spiritual in nature, thus impacting other facets of our being. Our decision determines the spiritual course of our lives in addition to other areas.

Joshua instructed the people to throw away the gods their forefathers had worshiped in earlier days. They must choose to serve the one God who would rule over their spiritual nature as well.

Many people wander aimlessly through life attempting to resolve personal spiritual struggles through nonspiritual means. Our spiritual nature demands spiritual answers to our faith in God.

II. The Choice to Serve God Is an Influential Decision (v. 15)

There is no contradiction here. Each person can freely choose but we must not diminish the power of influence. Joshua said, "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (v. 15).

The Scriptures teach that choices we make have an impact on as many as nine future generations. Attitudes, lifestyles, value systems, priorities, responsibility or lack of it, work ethic, and a host of other facets of life are indelibly stamped upon the minds and hearts of those we influence, particularly our children.

ILLUS. At an early age, I was taught to live at the edge of my credit instead of the edge of my income. By my 24th birthday I was in a downward spiral of increasing and unmanageable debt. Not until I sought financial counseling and made some firm decisions was I able to reverse the direction of my life.

Patterns of personal finance are not as difficult to break as patterns of attitude, lifestyle, and priorities. Only by the grace of God does anyone ever break with the pattern of ungodliness and turn to serve the Lord.

May God help us to say, "As for me and my household, as for me and my circle of influence, we will serve the Lord."

III. The Choice to Serve God Is An Attractive Decision (vv. 16-18)

Joshua presented options: serve the Lord or serve the gods of the local population. How beautifully the people responded! (Read vv. 16-18.)

The goodness of God is evident. He has delivered us from slavery to sin, performed innumerable miracles, protected us from the enemy of our soul. God has knocked down the obstacles Satan places in our path. When we consider what God has done for us, it becomes a very *attractive* decision to serve the Lord (cf. Rom. 12:1).

IV. The Choice to Serve God Is a Weighty Decision (v. 20)

The decision to follow God has many consequences. Trouble, disaster, disappointment, and every sort of heartache await those who turn away from God. For a time Satan will paint a picture of happiness that never lasts.

ILLUS. Two young men made initial decisions to follow Jesus Christ. They were delivered from drugs and alcohol addiction and a host of other problems. However, when faced with the decision of full surrender to God, they both turned away. Today one lies in a hospital bed, paralyzed and mentally handicapped as a result of an accident while on drugs. The other spends his days in a prison cell as a result of crimes committed while on drugs.

Joshua issued a solemn warning: "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you" (v. 20).

V. The Choice to Serve God Is an Eternal Decision (vv. 25 ff.)

Later in the passage, Joshua made a covenant for the people: "And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD" (v. 26). His purpose was to impress upon the people that an eternal decision had been made that day.

Acceptance of God's salvation includes acceptance of responsibility for divine rejection should you choose to abandon your faith. The Old and New Testament Scriptures make clear that once a child of God, having tasted the blessing of righteousness, turns away from the faith, severe punishment follows. Multiple generations can be affected by the decision to quit the faith. The person who concludes life in a backslidden, unrepentant state will spend eternity in hell.

On the positive side of the eternal decision to follow Jesus, there are blessings in this life and the blessed hope of eternity in heaven awaiting the believer. Satan can never take away what has been given to God.

IV. The Choice to Serve God Is a Positive Decision (v. 24)

In light of all the facts, the most positive decision anyone can make is to "serve the LORD our God and obey him" (v. 24). A decision to serve God will

- Give positive direction to your spiritual life
- Make your influence upon others positive
- Always be attractive for your personal benefit
- Avert alarm over its weighty consequences
- Qualify you for the blessings of eternity
- Reveal that the choice is truly a positive decision

CONCLUSION:

1. Joshua laid out the challenge before the people: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (v. 15).

2. Joshua took a stand for himself: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (v. 15).

3. The people responded: "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him" (v. 24).

4. Each one of us must make the choice. Who is there that will take a stand and say, "I will serve the Lord my God and obey him"?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Responsive Reading Ps. 116:1-8

Chorus "I Love You, Lord"

Invocation

SING TO THE LORD

Hymns "Our Great Savior"

"Our God Reigns"

Solo "I Want to Thank You, Jesus"

FAMILY PRAYER TIME

Prayer Hymn "Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"

Prayer Sentence

Pastoral Prayer

WORSHIP IN GIVING AND SHARING CHURCH

FAMILY LIFE

Offertory Thought

Offering Our Gifts

Offertory Music "Find Us Faithful"

Announcements of Church Family Life

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

Choir Special "Shine, Jesus, Shine"

Sermon "WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT FREE AGENCY?"

"It Is Your Decision"

Invitation Hymn "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Family Prayer Time

On this particular Sunday, families may be invited to meet the pastor at the altar for prayer time. Affirm the family's value and strategic role in society. Pray for heads of households and specially for school-children.

Prayer Sentence

"At the point of desperation is the time for rededication" (Wellington Boone).

Offering Thought

"When we give . . . we celebrate the gifts of God's love, hope, and encouragement.

"When we give . . . we offer thanks to the One who gave the ultimate sacrificial gift.

"When we give . . . we provide for the local church needs both today and for future generations."*

*Stan Toler, *Stewardship Starters* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1996), 72.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT REPENTANCE?

by Carlton F. Harvey
Luke 15:11-24

INTRO:

ILLUS. Wabush, a town in a remote portion of Labrador, Canada, was completely isolated for some time. A few years ago a road was cut through the wilderness to reach it. Wabush now has one road leading into it and, thus, only one road leading out. If someone would travel the unpaved road for six to eight hours to get into Wabush, there is only one way he or she could leave—by turning around.

Each of us by birth arrives in a town called Sin. As in Wabush, there is only one way out—a road built by God himself. In order to take the road, you must first turn around. That complete about-face is what the Bible calls repentance. Without it, there's no way out of town.¹

Repentance is a tough and rugged road to travel. Keep in mind, however, that the road into the town called Sin isn't exactly smooth, overcoming every obstacle that would hinder our path; so also we must determine to travel the road of repentance, past every obstacle, if we want to come into the city of Heaven.

Repentance is not exactly a popular topic these days. Christians especially enjoy talking about the peace, joy, and contentment of walking with God. We relish the thought of forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and a personal relationship with a loving God who is preparing heaven for us. Yet we'd as soon sidestep the hard facts of repentance leading to salvation. Repentance, though appearing harsh, brings about rewards that make our journey worthwhile.

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 15:11-24

(Nazarenes may wish to read *Manual*, Article of Faith VIII.)

First we deal with selected Old Testament passages prior to the final point built on the Scripture lesson.

I. Repentance Is for All, Including the People of God

The Bible says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

We read: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

The Isaiah passage places the focus clearly on the sinner who must repent, turn away from sin, and change his or her mind. Those who have been traveling the road into the town of Sin must decide that they are going to turn around, change the direction of their lives, and start traveling toward God.

However, those people that have become the people

of God, called by God's name, must never be deluded into thinking that their days of repentance are over.

ILLUS. Dr. Larry Fine, professor at MidAmerica Nazarene College in Olathe, Kansas, presents an effective method of spiritual journaling. An important component of the exercise is confession. Prof. Fine says, "Anyone with children in the home knows that parents commit errors for which there is no other solution but confession."

When sin creeps into our lives, no matter how minor, we need to change direction and repent. When wrong attitudes or wrong habits are discovered, the Christian needs to claim the grace and help of God to repent and to be different. Many of us need to repent for our

- Lack of prayer
- Lack of faith to believe God for great solutions to great problems
- Shallow commitment that causes us to back away when faced with trouble
- Inconsistencies of conduct
- Joylessness and absence of praise (We call ourselves Christians but too often we appear as the sorriest looking people on the face of the earth.)

ILLUS. What sort of testimony is it when asked, "How are you doing?" and the best we can respond is "Oh, I'm making it"?

A life without faith, prayer, commitment, joy, and praise becomes a lifestyle, a habit that becomes deeply ingrained. We're often unaware of what we're doing. But thank God, when as Christians we stand honestly and openly before God, asking Him to bring a spiritual revival, we can ask for God's help to identify our problems. With God's help, we have the strength to repent and be overcomers, unleashing all the power of heaven on our behalf.

Depression, discouragement, defeat, and despair can be turned to victory for the person willing to repent, change direction, and experience a renewing of the mind (cf. Rom. 12:1). Repentance is not only for the sinner but for the Christian as well.

II. Repentance Means Acknowledgement of Guilt

"Return, faithless Israel," declares the LORD, "I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful," declares the LORD, "I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt—you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me," declares the LORD" (Jer. 3:12-13).

The biggest challenge we face is admitting we are wrong. We'll do almost anything to avoid having to acknowledge that the problem is ours and that we have to do something about it.

We rationalize and come up with every logical reason

why what we've done, or are doing, is justified and legitimate.

We make excuses to explain why we should not be held responsible for our actions.

ILLUS. Lloyd H. Steffen wrote in *The Christian Century* how when King Frederick II, an 18th-century king of Prussia, was visiting a person in Berlin, the inmates tried to prove to him how they had been unjustly imprisoned. All except one. That one sat quietly in a corner, while all the others protested their innocence.

Seeing him sitting there, oblivious to the commotion, the king asked him why he was there. "Armed robbery, Your Honor."

The king asked, "Were you guilty?"

"Yes, Sir," he answered. "I entirely deserve my punishment."

The king gave an order to the guard: "Release this guilty man. I don't want him corrupting all these innocent people."²

God offers immediate and liberating release to the individual willing to confess and repent of sin.

III. Repentance Brings the Father's Forgiveness

Returning now to the scripture lesson in Luke 15, we read of a son living in the wealth and blessing of his father's home. However, the call of the world became so enticing that he decided to launch out and make his own road.

Interestingly, the son did not sit and discuss his decision with his father. He simply announced his intentions. How much grief and pain could be avoided by a meaningful discussion with your Heavenly Father concerning your proposed course of action. Without counsel or advice, the son launched out.

When happiness in the world ran out, the son found himself in a terrible predicament. Paul wrote: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Note also: "The way of the unfaithful is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

How did the young man deal with his problems? Did he make excuses? Did he hold out for reasons of pride? No. He remembered that even the servants in his father's house lived better and were treated better than he at that moment.

So it is with us. If we will think it through, we'll also remember that the blessings and favor of God are always far better than the very best that our world offers. The young man got up, acknowledged his guilt, changed his direction, and headed home.

What was his father doing? Had he ignored his wayward son and gone on about the family business? Had he forgotten his son? Was he fussing and fuming and fighting mad over what his son had done to spoil the family name and waste the family's fortune? Not at all!

The father waited anxiously, day after day, looking out the window, waiting, hoping, praying, searching the horizon for the first sign of his son's return. At last, a weary, disheveled, repentant figure is seen coming down the lane. It was the son's long-awaited return!

The door is thrown open as his father runs to greet his

son. Forgiveness is given before it is asked. There is a celebration with new clothes, a new ring, and a restored relationship.

CONCLUSION:

The same grand welcome awaits anyone who turns around, leaves his sin, walks the road of repentance, and accepts the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Scripture Opening	Ps. 103:8-18
Invocation	
Hymn	"I Come with Joy"
Scripture Verse	1 John 3:1
Choir or Solo	"The Love of God"
Scripture Verses	Rom. 8:38-39
Hymn	"Such Love"
Prayer Chorus	"I Love You, Lord"
Prayer Verse	John 15:7
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory Sentence	
Offering our Gifts	
Offertory Music	"My Tribute"
Doxology "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"	
Salvation Testimony	
Choir or Solo	"Hallelujah! I Love Him"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT REPENTANCE?"
Invitation Hymn	"Lord, I'm Coming Home"
Scripture Benediction	Jude 24-25

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

The Suggested Worship Order leads in a progression from the love of God to a call of repentance. The aim is to affirm that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) before the message in which the appeal will be made to repent and return to our loving God. Therefore, it would be well in the pastoral prayer to thank God for His numerous expressions of love, in particular for His forgiving love.

Scripture Readings

The Suggested Worship Order above calls for numerous Scripture readings. An effective enhancement to these readings is to assign the selections to various members of the congregation, both adult and youth, to be read from locations scattered throughout the sanctuary. With advance preparation, the service can flow smoothly through the music and Scriptures without hesitation.

Offertory Sentence

"A man is only as good as what he loves" (Saul Bellow).

Scriptural Benediction

These verses were selected as a word of assurance to new converts who prayed to accept the Lord at the close of the message. They are a message of promise to experienced Christians as well.

1. Brian Weatherdon in *Leadership Journal*, Spring Quarter (1987): 52.

2. Donald W. Brennenman in *Leadership Journal*, Spring Quarter (1991): 45.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION, AND ADOPTION?

by Carlton F. Harvey
Titus 3:4-7; Luke 15:11-31

INTRO:

The son had left the safety and comfort surrounding his father's home. The son had embarked on a life of spending money and living loose. The son had come to his senses in the pigpen and decided to return to his father's home. His life messed up, his money gone, his misery as the result of living in sin, the son headed back down the road of repentance toward his father's house.

Ah, but what of the father? Daily he had kept his vigil, watching for his son to return. No anger, no malice, no resentment for the money that had been undoubtedly lost. He was an anxious and loving father waiting, waiting, waiting for the moment he would glimpse his son returning home.

Looking down the lane, wondering, watching, waiting, hoping that this might be the day! The father might be heard talking to himself: "When he comes home—and I know he will, I just *know* it! But when he comes home, we'll have a celebration. We'll kill a calf! We'll invite all the neighbors! We'll do things right. If he needs clothes, I'll give him something new to wear. If he needs shoes, I've got those ready too."

Pausing for a moment and stroking his beard, the father says thoughtfully, "One thing I haven't figured out. How can I prove to him that he is still my son?"

Suddenly, an idea flashes through his mind! With a snap of his finger, he says, "I know! I will give him the family ring—that's what I'll do! I'll give my son the family ring and that will prove to the whole world that he is *my* son."

Advance the story. The son returned as the father expected. They planned the celebration. The son received new clothes to wear and new shoes for his feet. And as the great sign to prove that he was once again part of the family, his father had slipped the family ring upon the finger of his son. The son had been restored to full rights as a member of the family.

What happened after that? Oh, to be sure, the older son sulked and complained that he was no longer the center of attention. How much better it is to rejoice and celebrate over the progress of a repentant person than to turn sour and possessive!

But what else happened in the relationship between father and son after the celebration ended? Not until we reach heaven will we participate in a celebration that lasts forever. In the meanwhile, relationships must be built while living on this earth.

That brings us to this week's topic in the sermon series "What Do We Believe?" The topic revolves around our relationship to God following conversion and is summarized in three significant words: *Justification*, *Regeneration*, and *Adoption*. (Nazarenes may wish to refer to *Manual*, Article of Faith IX.)

Is it possible that justification, regeneration, and adoption could all be contained in one scripture passage? Indeed they are!

SCRIPTURE READING: Titus 3:3-7

I. All People Have Gone the Way of the Prodigal (v. 3)

Every one of us has sinned. Paul wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). We have all taken the way of rebellion against our Heavenly Father, gone our own way, and suffered the consequences. Some have been carried by their sins into literal piggens of existence. Others suffer more figuratively. Life in sin is a nasty existence.

All must come to the point of repentance, turning around, and starting back toward God. The Good News is that a loving Heavenly Father awaits us, anxious to welcome us back into the family of God. But again, what of the relationship after the homecoming celebration?

II. We Are Justified by God's Grace (v. 7)

Despite our guilt, God is so excited about our return to Him that He throws all our guilt away. He treats us with complete forgiveness. Our relationship with Him is restored to what it was before we ever sinned.

Somewhere I heard the term *justify* explained as being treated "just as if" it never happened. It is all because of God's grace, "having been justified by his grace" (v. 7).

Back in the story of the prodigal son, think of justification as the robe given by the father to his son. The robe of forgiveness covered all guilt and shame. The robe of righteousness granted total release from the penalty of sins committed. When we come to God, walking the road of repentance, we are given a new robe to wear and with it a whole new identity—an identity that erases the past.

III. We Are Regenerated by the Washing of Rebirth and Renewal by the Holy Spirit (vv. 4-6)

(Read again Titus 3:4-6.)

ILLUS. Jews are very serious about their faith. If a son or daughter ever walks away from the Jewish faith, the family goes through a funeral ceremony and list their child as deceased.

A woman named Faye grew up in a Jewish home. Though she lives today, her family considers her dead. Why? Because she professed faith in Jesus Christ. Faye has actually seen her name in her home synagogue listed among the dead.

The reality of spiritual death was vivid in the Jewish understanding. When they turned their backs on God, something spiritual died inside. The only solution was a return back to obedience to God.

So it is when a person repents and turns back to God. Along with justification, there is regeneration—bringing back to life our spiritual being. Sin causes spiritual death. In the divine act of rebirth, God restores, regenerates, and renews spiritual life.

Along with the robe of justification, God also places the shoes of regeneration on our feet. With those shoes, we are able to walk God's way—walking by faith, walking in love and obedience to God's will. God's shoes of regeneration direct us along the path of righteousness.

IV. We Are Adopted as Heirs (v. 7)

(Read again Titus 3:7.)

We have the hope of eternal life with our Heavenly Father all because we've been adopted into God's family on a permanent basis.

God places the ring of the divine family upon our spiritual fingers. It carries the symbol of the Cross, the family emblem. Those who have received the forgiveness of the Cross are adopted as permanent members of God's family.

CONCLUSION:

The robe of justification.

The shoes of regeneration.

The ring of adoption.

ILLUS. There's another tragic chapter to the story of my friend Faye, mentioned earlier. On one occasion, she decided to return home to visit her family, if they would have her. It was the trip when she discovered her name on the synagogue wall listing the dead.

It was a number of years ago. She traveled by train. Across the miles, her mind was filled with apprehension. Would her family meet her? Would they talk to her? Could she stay in her own home again?

Tragically, when she arrived at the station, none of her brothers or sisters were there to meet her. Nor was her mother anywhere to be seen.

Standing off in the back of the crowd stood a lone gentleman, tears streaming down his cheeks. He could not turn away from his daughter. With a tender, loving embrace, Faye's father said, "Welcome home, my child."

As humans struggle to unpack the baggage of a lifetime of human hurts and disappointments, we find it difficult to model these holy characteristics of justification, regeneration, and adoption. In reality, modeling those concepts is impossible until we have first experienced them in our relationship with God. Releasing ourselves into the security of a relationship with our Father challenges us deeply.

ILLUS. The three-year-old felt secure in his father's arms as Dad stood in the middle of the pool. But Dad, for fun, began walking slowly toward the deep end, gently chanting, "Deeper and deeper and deeper," as the water rose higher and higher on the child. The lad's face registered increasing degrees of fear and panic. He held all the more tightly to his father, who of course, easily touched the bottom.

Had the little boy been able to analyze his situation, he'd have realized there was no reason for increased anxiety. The water's depth in *any* part of the pool was over his head. Even in the shallowest part, had he not been

held up, he'd have drowned. His safety anywhere in that pool depended on Dad.

At various points, we all feel we're getting out of our depth—problems abound, a job is lost, someone dies. Our temptation is to panic, for we feel we've lost control. Yet as with the child in the pool, we've never been in control over the most valuable things in life. We've always been held up by the grace of God, our Father, and that does not change. God is never out of His depth, and therefore, we're as safe when we're going deeper as we have ever been.¹

Relax in the arms of your loving Heavenly Father. Let Him securely carry you into the relationship of justification, regeneration, and adoption.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Opening Chorus	"We Are His Hands"
Greet Your Neighbor	
Church Announcements	
Hymns	"He's Everything to Me"
	"Since Jesus Came into My Heart"
Chorus	"He Touched Me"
Choir or Ensemble	"Can He? Could He?"
	"Would He? Did He?"
Chorus	"Thank You, Lord"
Prayer Thought	
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory Scripture	Acts 20:35, NEB
Offering Our Gifts	
Offertory Music	"Ring the Bells of Heaven"
Announcements of Church Family Life	
Solo	"Because of Whose I Am"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION, AND ADOPTION?"
Invitation Hymn	"Jesus, I Come"

Creative Worship Ideas

Service Theme

The Suggested Worship Order was prepared for a midsummer service when attendance may be lower and spirits sagging in the heat. Therefore, the theme of celebration is intended to lighten spirits and bring a cheerful, balanced approach into the very serious material of the sermon. Have some fun with the celebration in the early portion of the service. Then allow the Holy Spirit to create a positive spirit in the service at the time of the invitation. After all, the decision to accept Jesus Christ is the most positive decision one can make!

Prayer Thought

Max Lucado said: "Prayer is the most powerful tool in God's kingdom, because in prayer we are in perfect communion with God, interceding with the Father on behalf of his creation. The majesty of prayer puts us in the relationship God intended to have with man: perfect communion."²

1. J. Alistair Brown in *Leadership Journal*, Winter Quarter (1988), 37.

2. Max Lucado, *Walking with the Savior* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), February 4.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?

Part 1

by Carlton F. Harvey

Gal. 2:20

INTRO:

ILLUS. My family and I boarded an airplane in Portland, Oregon, underneath a cold and cloudy sky. In many ways, my spirit resembled the day—overcast, clouded with the pain of having to say good-bye to family and my beloved home state.

Moments after liftoff, we were enveloped in the cloud cover. A white fog shrouded the window. Then, almost as quickly as we had entered the clouds, we blasted out into the most glorious sunshine. Is there anything so bright and blue as the sky above the clouds?

As we soared along, I anxiously looked out the window once again. I hoped for a glimpse of the majestic peaks of the Cascade Mountain Range stretching from Washington through Oregon and down to California. From the altitude of a jet plane on a clear day, you can see the mountains: Mount Rainier, Mount Adams, Mount St. Helens, Mount Hood, Mount McKinzie, Mount McLaughlin, Mount Shasta, and on into California.

I was fascinated by the clouds surrounding the base of the mountains, covering everything in the valleys below. But the peaks stood tall enough to pierce through the clouds, standing high and proud in the sunlight. Those peaks stand as landmarks that can be seen for hundreds of miles.

Each one of us needs some mountain peaks in our faith. These are the things we know and believe that will pierce through the clouds and confusion of this earth. We need some landmarks for our faith that will rise above our problems and guide our daily lives. Our faith needs some core values.

This sermon series has addressed some mountain peaks of our faith. These statements of faith have withstood the test of time, withstood the challenge of the skeptics, and continue to stand guard over our people and the Holiness churches of which we are a part. This present message is based on our belief in entire sanctification. (Nazarenes may wish to read *Manual*, Article of Faith X, paragraph 13.)

God's Word is filled with passage after passage that speaks of a holy God who wants to sanctify us and make us a holy people. By direct address and clear inference, God makes His will clear on the issue of sanctification. Further, numerous references testify to the experience of sanctification. Such is our scripture verse for today.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gal. 2:20

I. Sanctification Is for the Believer

Recall the meeting Jesus had with Nicodemus recorded in John 3. "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miracu-

lous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (v. 2). Though not stated explicitly, the words of Nicodemus reveal that he was searching for a relationship with God. His heart desired to be right with God. The closest thing he knew to do was to get close to Jesus. What was Jesus' response to Nicodemus's inquiry? "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v. 3).

The place for all of us to begin our search for God is at the point of being born again. We must ask Jesus to forgive our sins and, by faith, receive Him into our hearts. Salvation is an experience that can be known for sure.

II. ILLUS. A veteran of the seas enjoyed giving his testimony. One night the minister was talking to him after the service and asked him, "Where were you saved?"

To the minister's astonishment, the sailor replied, "Latitude 25, longitude 54."

That was new and puzzling to the minister. He asked what he meant.

The sailor answered, "One day at sea I had some time at my disposal. From a pile of papers I pulled out one that had a sermon by a man named Spurgeon in it. Sitting on a coil of rope on the deck, I read it. As I read, my heart believed and I was saved. I thought if I were on shore, I would like to remember where I was saved, so why not on sea? So, I took my reckoning and found I was in latitude 25 and longitude 54."¹

We each must know that we have been saved before we are ready to be sanctified holy. We all must be born again.

II. Sanctification is for the Crucified in Christ

Did Paul suffer and die on a cross of crucifixion like Jesus? No. But as the life of Jesus in the flesh came to an end, so the self-will of Paul likewise had come to an end.

Crucifixion with Christ, surrender of our self-will, is necessary for sanctification. The song writer called it the "stubborn will"—and with good reason. Once we get a taste of having our own way, determining our own choices, sensing the power of being in control of our lives, we will do almost anything to avoid the surrender of our will.

Pride stands in the way of surrender. In our day, surrender is considered defeat and a cause for disgrace. But in the spiritual world, surrender to God is the way to victory. Yielding to God brings spiritual power. Crucifixion of self results in honor and glory.

ILLUS. Consider the life of Paul—hardly a soft, whimpy fellow. Rather, he was rugged and determined, an athlete, successful in business, highly intelligent and educated, an outstanding leader/missionary, a prolific writer. In every

way Paul was brilliant and capable. Yet he said, "I am crucified with Christ."

ILLUS. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is striking for its simplicity. Etched in a black granite wall are the names of 58,156 Americans who died in that war. Since its opening in 1982, the stark monument has stirred deep emotions.

Some visitors walk its length slowly, reverently, and without pause. Others stop before certain names, remembering their sons or sweethearts or fellow soldiers, wiping away tears, tracing the names with their fingers.

For three Vietnam veterans—Robert Bedker, Willard Craig, and Darrall Lausch—a visit to the memorial must be especially poignant. They can walk up to the long ebony wall and find their own names carved in stone. Because of data-coding errors, each of them was incorrectly listed as killed in action.

Dead, but alive—a perfect description of the Christian.² It is the description of the crucified with Christ.

The experience of sanctification is for the believer that has been crucified with Christ.

III. Sanctification Is for Christ to Live in You

(Read again Gal. 2:20.)

ILLUS. The idea of Christ living in us can be illustrated by comparing it with oxygen in the atmosphere. Oxygen is all around us. When we breathe, we take it into our lungs where it spreads throughout our bodies. Oxygen must be in our blood and moving to every part of our body in order for us to survive. When deprived of oxygen long enough, we will die. We cannot see oxygen, but it surrounds us and fills us and brings us life.

In like manner, we are filled with the Spirit of God in the experience of sanctification. That is what Paul means when he says, "Christ lives in me." We cannot see Him, but He is all around us. He fills us and gives us spiritual life.

Everywhere we go, the Spirit of Christ is there. On the job, at home, in the marketplace, in the school, whatever we are doing, the Spirit of Christ is there. Not only is He surrounding us, but Jesus Christ is actually in us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. That abiding presence of the Holy Spirit makes our lives a melody of spiritual power and praise.

ILLUS. Certain phenomena in nature aptly illustrate the soul without the Holy Spirit, the change that takes place when the Holy Spirit comes in regeneration and the fullness of the Spirit. A piece of iron is dark and cold; imbued with a certain degree of heat, it becomes intensely hot without any change of appearance. Imbued with a still greater degree of heat, its very appearance changes to that of solid fire, and it does set fire to everything it touches. A piece of water without heat is but ice, solid and brittle; gently warmed, it flows; further heated, it mounts to the sky. A pipe organ filled with the ordinary pressure of air is dumb; the touch of the player can elicit but a clicking of the keys. Throw in an unsteady current of air, and sweet but imperfect notes immediately respond to the player's touch. Increase the current to a full supply, and every pipe swells with music.³

The indwelling Spirit of Christ enables us to communicate with God without ever saying a word aloud. Thoughts and actions can be directed without the unnec-

essary wait to arrive at church or for some other special place to meet God. When difficult decisions demand an answer, the Spirit is there in the mind.

The most marvelous relationship in the world is known by the sanctified as Christ's Spirit dwelling within.

CONCLUSION:

Sanctification is for the believer who is crucified with Christ and yet lives with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship

"Worship helps us to find who we are and why God has placed us here on earth. When we bow in God's presence with worship, only then are we made complete" (Judson Cornwall).

Invocation

Hymns

"The Comforter Has Come"

"The Cleansing Wave"

"Come, Holy Spirit"

Prayer Chorus

Pastoral Prayer

Sanctification Testimony

Choir Special

"Bring Your Vessels, Not a Few"

Announcements

Offering

Offertory Sentence

Offering Our Gifts

Offertory Music

"Fill Me Now"

Special Music

"He Who Began a Good Work in You"

Sermon

"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE
SANCTIFICATION?"

Part 1

Closing Hymn

"Fill Me Now"

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer Sentence

"Souls without prayer are like people whose bodies or limbs are paralyzed: they possess feet and hands, but they cannot control them" (Teresa of Avila).

Sanctification Testimony

Select one of the saints whose experience of sanctification is clear to share a brief testimony of how he or she entered into the experience. Remember, this is a testimony. The *sermon* comes later!

Offertory Sentence

"Giving should not be done because of pressure, it should be done through praise and pleasure"⁴

Closing Hymn

It is intentional that the closing hymn repeat the offertory selection. The purpose is to refamiliarize the listeners to the melody during the offertory so that singing will be easier during the invitation.

1. Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 13.

2. Craig Brian Larson in *Leadership Journal*, Summer Quarter (1990): 48-49.

3. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations*, 40-41.

4. Stan Toler, *Stewardship Starters* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1996), 83.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?

Part 2

by Carlton F. Harvey
1 Thess. 5:23-24

INTRO:

The Holy Spirit, Spirit-filled living, and the subject of sanctification have been the source of much confusion in more recent days. Everywhere there are spiritually frustrated people because, as Paul wrote

I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't . . . I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can't help myself, because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me . . . that makes me do these evil things.

. . . When I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. . . .

. . . I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me (*Rom. 7:15-23, TLB*).

It is easy to identify with Paul's frustration. We come into the Christian context and environment. We learn about sin and feel sorry. We ask God to forgive us, and suddenly a whole new world of joy opens up to us.

It isn't long, however, until our beautiful new world is suddenly smashed to pieces because we have given in to a temptation. The beautiful sense of freedom from sin is snatched away. We find ourselves hanging in the balance between evil and righteousness. What can be done to address the problem of returning to sin?

ILLUS. In the world of criminals and courts of law, a repeated offender is called a habitual criminal for whom punishments are much more severe than first-time offenders. In the world of sin and evil, we are all habitual sinners, desperately in need of a cure.

Thank God, there is a cure! There is a freedom from the sinful nature that liberates our souls from habitual sinning. It is found in an encounter with God called sanctification. (Nazarenes may wish to read *Manual*, Article of Faith X, paragraph 13.)

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Thess. 5:23-24.

I. Sanctification Is the Work of God

Paul wrote, "May God himself . . ." (v.23).

A. Sanctification is not a result of who I am or what I've done. It does not depend upon gifts or talents. It has nothing to do with position in society or personal looks.

B. Sanctification is not a result of meeting with the pastor or some spiritual leader. Nor is it a product of my membership in some religious or community organization.

C. Sanctification is a result of a unique encounter with God himself. As salvation and forgiveness of sins result from an encounter with God to remove my guilt, so al-

so sanctification results from an encounter with God to remove my sinful nature. It is the work of God.

II. Sanctification Is the Restoration by God

Paul further identified the work of God in the phrase "the God of peace" (v. 23).

A. When am I most fully at peace? When I am balanced in my relation to myself, my world, and my God—that results in peace. The first two areas cannot achieve peaceful balance until I have experienced peace with God. "Peace, in the classic Hebrew sense . . . includes complete spiritual prosperity or well-being."¹

B. God is unlike the gods of the world who are difficult to please and hard to get along with. God is anxious to bring us into a balanced, peace-producing relationship with Him. Look again at John 3:16-17.

C. God wants to restore spiritual balance in us.

ILLUS. Thomas Carlyle wrote, "Holy in the German language, *heilig*, also means healthy; our English word *whole*—all of one piece, without any hole in it—is the same word. You could not get any better definition of what holy, or sanctified, really means than to say healthy, completely healthy."

When we are "healthy, completely healthy," balanced in all areas of life, we experience peace. God wants to restore us to this complete health and wholeness.

III. Sanctification Is the Cleansing Power of God

What is the definition of sanctification?

A. Sanctification means cleansing. It is a work of God that purifies the heart and makes it clean, ready for the living presence of the Holy Spirit to dwell within.

ILLUS. Although some guests would be willing to stay in your home despite its uncleanness, most will be very uncomfortable and desire to leave as quickly as possible. When we wish to make guests in our home most comfortable, we offer them clean dishes upon which to eat their meal, a clean chair upon which to sit, and a clean bed upon which to sleep.

So, it affects our hospitality with God. Our sins may be forgiven. There is a sense of cleanness that accompanies the removal of guilt. Even so, as Donald Metz said, there remains the residue of the sin nature. If left untouched, that sinful nature will start a process to reinfect the heart with sin. Unless purified, the heart will return to its state of sinfulness and sinning. Sanctification means the cleansing or purifying of the heart, routing out the sinful nature and making a pure dwelling place for the Spirit of God.

B. Sanctification means to set apart. We call upon

God's power to not only cleanse but also separate our lives from things profane and to dedicate us to God. As our consecration of heart and life is made complete, the power of God sweeps in through the filling of the Holy Spirit. From that position, we enjoy God's power to live in spiritual competence and victory.

IV. Sanctification Shows the Thoroughness of God

How much of life is affected by this experience of sanctification? Paul summarized in three words: "your whole spirit, soul, and body" (v. 23).

A. Every part of life must be cleansed and set apart for God—spirit, emotions, body.

B. God's plan of full salvation includes all that we need for complete spiritual health and victory.

V. Sanctification Shows the Expectation of God

Sanctification has also been called Christian perfection. Paul clarifies the expectation of God toward perfection in these words: "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless" (v. 23).

A. Being kept blameless does not imply being perfect in all ways or the absence of mistakes.

ILLUS. As a pitcher once broken will never have the same ring it had before, neither will we be totally perfect until we have returned to dust and have been reshaped into new, immortal bodies by God in heaven.

B. Being blameless deals with having the motivations and intentions of our hearts in complete harmony with God's will.

ILLUS. If a blind child took a piece of paper and pencil in hand to write a letter to her dad for Father's Day, telling of her love and devotion, what would be the response of a loving father? Would he be mad and upset because the lines were crooked? Would he reject her letter and reject the little child because the writing wasn't neat? Of course not!

So also with God. Because of sin's effect upon our world, we can no longer write a perfect love letter with our lives. God looks less at the results and more at the intentions. He sees when we are truly trying to please Him through a yielded and devoted heart. From that perspective, we can be kept blameless through the power of the Spirit.

VI. Sanctification Is the Promise of God

"The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (v. 24).

God has promised that if I will allow the Spirit to cleanse me, to set me apart, and to fill me with His power, **He will do it!** It is God's work anyway, so I need to step aside and let God do His work in me. I once heard someone say, "God, You supply the grace and I'll supply the person."

ILLUS. In one of our large cities lived a dentist who enjoyed the experience of full salvation. He was a staunch supporter of those who preached it. A minister was having a tooth filled by the dentist. The cavity was large, and

its treatment had been neglected. Patiently the dentist cleaned out the decayed matter. As he got near the living nerves, it became very painful to the patient. In a spirit of jest, the minister said, "Doctor, I came here to get my tooth filled, not to be tortured."

The dentist replied, "And that is what I am going to do just as soon as I get the carnality out. If I failed to do a complete job of taking out this impurity, not only would the filling not stay in, but in a short time your peace would be turned into pain. And," continued the doctor, "that is why God insists on a complete cleansing. He is the God of peace and harmony. He cannot fully dwell where there is something that will eventually cause discord."²

I've never known a dentist to attempt the cleansing and filling of a tooth in his or her own mouth. It requires another. Likewise, we need Another, the Holy Spirit of God, to cleanse and fill our hearts today.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome	
Invocation	
Worship sequence	"Called unto Holiness" "Holiness Forevermore" "Holiness unto the Lord"
Responsive Reading	"Sanctification"
Prayer hymn	"Take Time to Be Holy"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	"When I Look into Your Holiness"
Announcements	
Offering	
Offertory Sentence	
Offering Our Gifts	
Offertory Music	"Spirit Song"
Special Music	"The Refiner's Fire"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?" Part 2
Closing Hymn	"Whiter than Snow"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer Scripture

Read Matt. 7:7-8. During the prayer, bring before the Lord the needs of those people seeking the fullness of the Spirit. Pray on their behalf that their asking, seeking, and knocking will be rewarded with God's sanctifying Spirit.

Book Display

Set up a display of selected books and articles that deal with the subject of sanctification, the Holy Spirit, and Spirit-filled living. Encourage the congregation to browse through the books and to select some for personal reading through the week. Reading good materials on holiness will help prepare hearts for the third sermon in the series scheduled for next week.

1. Arnold E. Airhart, in vol. 9 of *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 499.

2. Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 22.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?

Part 3

by Carlton F. Harvey

Jude 15-25

INTRO:

Think back to the Day of Pentecost. Where is it that the 120 people had gathered to wait for the Holy Spirit? Was it at the sacred Temple? Was it within the walls of their synagogue? Was it at some holy shrine?

It was in the upper room of a common, ordinary home where the Holy Spirit descended. E. Stanley Jones noted that religion had been built upon sacred places, religious vestments, and assigned priests. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the emphasis shifted from places to people, from outward vestments to vigorous inner life, and from performing services to doing service.

God does not want to be confined to a church building or a special place, or to some special people. God wants to bring His power, His cause, and, most of all, His holiness—right into the places where humans live and interact. God wants to be a part of our homes and our everyday living to use us as agents to stem the tide of worldliness.

How then can we bring the power of God into everyday interactions? How can we bring God's holiness to bear on the way we are living? Unless we can experience God's power in the most basic areas of our lives, then we are wasting our time. We cannot settle for an inadequate God who is unable to address the needs of our homes, families, and other relationships.

The Good News is that God *does* make a difference. From the moment I accept the forgiving grace of God right on through until I accept the sanctifying grace of God, all the way along as I grow in grace, God makes a difference in me! (Nazarenes may wish to read *Manual*, Article of Faith X, paragraph 14.)

There is a crisis moment when I make a full consecration of my heart and life to God. In that crisis moment, God the Holy Spirit comes in to cleanse, purify, and give access to His power in unprecedented measure. I fully belong to God and God fully belongs to me.

The question arises: Have I arrived when I experience the crisis of sanctification? Is that all there is—that one moment of experience? No, for we are not a finished product when we are sanctified wholly. The crisis is the beginning of a new relationship in which God is at full liberty, starting a process in which we will be "transformed by the renewing of [the] mind" (Rom. 12:2). Christian growth and development begin in earnest when we have surrendered fully to the Spirit's control.

How do I then grow as a sanctified Christian? What will help me to grow and to mature in my faith so I'll develop spiritual competence?

SCRIPTURE READING: Jude 17-25

I. Be Aware That Satan Will Use People Against You (vv. 17-19)

ILLUS. As a new pastor I was devastated to learn that Sa-

tan would use both the just and the unjust to attack me in my area of vulnerability—discouragement. "Surely," I thought, "I will never be discouraged by my Christian brothers and sisters." But soon I discovered that both inside and outside the church were persons whose actions would be used to turn me aside from my faith in God.

A. Scoffers, those who make light of the teachings of God's Word, mock those persons who would devote their lives to obedient, holy living.

B. Those following ungodly desires, rather than being motivated from a heart of perfect love, operate from a paradigm of self-interest rather than God-interest.

C. Dividers, following the example of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, drive wedges of doubt and conflict into our foundations of faith.

D. Those following natural instincts are corrupted by sin and unable to follow the divine leading of the Spirit. The Bible says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Rom. 8:5).

E. Those devoid of the Spirit are filled with themselves. Of these persons, even sanctified people need to beware and seek the help of God to overcome.

II. Build Yourself Up (v. 20)

A. While the experience of sanctification is entered into in a moment of time, living in the experience is progressive. It is a building process where one step leads on to a next step that is higher than before.

ILLUS. Once the decision has been made to construct a house and contracts have been signed, the carpenter does *not* begin to install a roof. Rather, the ground is prepared and the foundation put in place, followed by supporting walls. Then at the proper time, a roof is situated atop the whole structure to protect it from the elements.

Christians must be prepared to start with the foundations of faith and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide them in the building process. Patience and discipline are required on the journey toward maturity.

B. Building yourself up is a personal responsibility: "build yourselves" (v. 20). We cannot expect the pastor or Sunday School teacher to take responsibility for our personal growth in the faith. Do not expect that an hour or two in church on Sunday will sufficiently counterbalance the influences of the world throughout the remainder of the week.

C. Constantly direct yourself toward the things of God.

ILLUS. Some folks work on perfecting their ability to criticize. Others are devoted to the art of doubting. Still others delight in seeing how close they can live to the world and keep their experience with God. Thus, they focus more on the world than on Jesus Christ.

III. Pray (v. 20)

A. Develop a time when you get alone and talk with God.

ILLUS. My friend Claude Dufresne has been suffering with a neck injury requiring daily appointments for physical therapy. He said, "While I'm working in therapy, being treated by a machine, I have started to pray. Before, I dreaded each appointment as painful to my body and an encroachment on my daily schedule. Now I look forward to those hours, for I have set that time aside to pray."

B. Ask God to help you learn how to pray.

ILLUS. For years I struggled to find a truly meaningful way to pray. I knew the routines of prayer in public places, such as church services and prayer meetings. But it wasn't until Dr. Larry Fine introduced me to prayer journaling that personal prayer became precious. Since then my system has been refined as I have grown in my prayer life, thanks in part to the coaching of Dr. Morris Weigelt. God answered my prayer in helping me to know *how* to pray. After all, I'm not alone in needing help with my prayer life. So did the disciples in Luke 11:1ff.

C. Pray in the will and power of the Holy Spirit. The challenges we face in our pilgrimage toward heaven exceed the resources of our pitiful selves. But as we yield ourselves before the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, seeking truly to harmonize our will with that of the Father, we can experience the dynamic moving of God in us.

IV. Hold on in God's Love (vv. 21-23)

A. Do not abandon your faith in the midst of a trial. The experience of sanctification is no insurance against difficulty in any area of life. Problems do not testify to the ineffectiveness of the experience of sanctification. Rather, the effectiveness of sanctification is demonstrated in the stress-filled moments of life.

ILLUS. A sponge reveals what is on the inside when it gets squeezed. When sanctified people are squeezed by the pressures of life, the Holy Spirit of God emanates from within.

B. Be persistent in your faith. Don't forget the man knocking on the door of his friend (cf. Luke 11:5-8).

C. Be merciful to the doubters; pull others away from the fire of self-destruction; and help others along the way. Self-centered religion has no place in the sanctified. Remaining aloof and separate from the people of the world banishes the lost into utter hopelessness. Enter the world of doubters and unsaved to be as salt and light for Jesus' sake.

V. Rejoice, God Will See You Through (vv. 24-25)

These final verses of Jude offer sublime confidence for the sanctified and spectacular praise to the Godhead.

A. Blessed assurance! Our God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). That includes guiding us safely through the perils of life in such a way that we need not stumble and fall. To be sure, we retain the privilege of free agency that will not prevent us from abandoning our faith should we so choose. However, so long as we continue to choose God's way, He will keep us safely on the way.

B. Blessed benediction! In view of all that God offers—forgiveness of sin, cleansing of the heart, power to live a victorious Christian life—it is no wonder that we lift our voices in praise:

"To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (v. 25).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome	
Call to Worship	
Responsive Reading	"Worship in Holiness"
Chorus	"Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"
Invocation	
Hymn	"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
	"There Is a Redeemer"
Prayer Chorus	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	"Holy Spirit, Be My Guide"
Announcements	
Offering	
Offertory Sentence	
Offering Our Gifts	
Offertory Music	"He Abides"
Special Music	"Let Thy Mantle Fall on Me"
Sermon	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?"
	Part 3
Closing Hymn	"I Surrender All"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer Thought

Louis Pasteur said: "Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal. My strength lies solely in my tenacity."

As we approach a holy and omnipotent God, let us hold on in tenacious prayer until we receive the strength needed to meet the challenges of our week. Let us find our strength in the One "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).

Offertory Sentence

"Giving to God should be a time of worship, rejoicing, and celebration. Giving is our grateful response to God for all things."*

*Stan Toler, *Stewardship Starters* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1996), 82.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE SECOND COMING?

by Carlton F. Harvey
1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58

INTRO:

ILLUS. While visiting my aged great-uncle one summer, our conversation turned to spiritual matters. Living in his later years, he had waited expectantly for the time he would be called to his eternal reward. As a devout Baptist, he would occasionally challenge me on my theology. On that visit, which turned out to be our last, he startled me by saying, "Just what do you Nazarenes think about the second coming of Christ?"

Taken by surprise, I stammered a bit and then blurted out, "We believe in it!"

Though the conversation changed and our visit came to an end, that question stayed with me. Just what do we Holiness people believe about the return of Christ?

Turning to one statement of faith, I read, "We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall not precede them that are asleep in Christ Jesus; but that, if we are abiding in Him, we shall be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord" (*Manual*, Article of Faith XV; Nazarenes may wish to refer also to *Manual*, Article of Faith XVI).

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

I. Belief in the Second Coming Is Based on the Resurrection

A. Jesus kept His word concerning the first advent.

Prophets had foretold the coming of the Messiah into the world. They spoke according to what the Word of God revealed to them concerning Christ's appearing.

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

B. Jesus kept His word concerning His death on the Cross.

Despite the protests of His disciples, the anguish of His mother, and the unfathomable suffering of crucifixion, Jesus kept His word.

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die" (John 12:32-33).

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46).

C. Jesus kept His word concerning the Resurrection.

Just as He had promised, on that first Easter morning Jesus broke the chains of death and burst forth from the tomb in power and victory. He kept His word!

"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'

"... the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:19, 21-22). As surely as we believe in Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, we believe that Jesus Christ will keep His promise to return to earth again.

ILLUS. A doctor, known for his sunny disposition, passed away. Many thought it would be too great a grief for his frail wife to bear. But both she and the doctor had been earnest Christians. The life of faith they had shared together did not fail her. She found the doctor's card that he sometimes left on his office door, Gone Out—Back Soon, and put it near the front door.¹

Let us remember the pronouncement concerning our Lord: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

II. Jesus Will Return in Triumph

Jesus came to the earth rather quietly. There was no fanfare or royal welcome. His birth was simple, unassuming, in a stable. Yes, a choir of angels welcomed His arrival as the Son of God upon the earth. But the only ones to hear it were a band of lowly shepherds working the night shift in the fields.

However, when He comes again, it will be a different story.

A. The Lord will issue a loud command.

ILLUS. I've heard the loud commands of teachers as their voices rose above the noise of a classroom and brought instant joy as children were released for recess time. I've heard the loud commands of sports coaches as their voices rose in a crescendo to send an eager team onto the field of play. I've heard the loud commands of presidents and queens open the Olympic Games with the words "Let the games begin!"

But when Almighty God speaks, it won't be for recess time or a game or even a world athletic competition. It will be the command "Son, go and bring my people home!"

B. The voice of the archangel will be heard.

It will truly be a voice to "awaken the dead!" The call will go out to the dead in Christ to arise and prepare to meet the Lord.

C. The trumpet will sound.

Whenever something important happened in the Scriptures, something of solemn majesty, it was always accompanied by the blast of a trumpet. Nothing in this passage supports the idea of a secret rapture. The trumpet will sound throughout the earth with excite-

ment and authority. The very foundations of the earth will rattle and shake at the coming of the Lord.

III. Jesus Will Come for His Own

A. "The dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

Those martyrs who came to the end of life holding fast to their faith in Christ will be rewarded as the first to meet Him upon His return. It almost makes one envy their position of getting to see the Lord's return first.

B. The living faithful will follow in line.

It will be one grand procession entering the heavenly city of God.

ILLUS. I enjoy attending our great assemblies and conventions in the church. It is rewarding to see old friends and colleagues, catching up on relationships that have carried over the years. But when the moment comes, we all start moving toward the auditorium in preparation for the start of the service. The early birds move into their seats first, and eventually the stragglers find their places. The happy chatter begins to diminish as the worship leader opens the service. Then on command, we stand to our feet and sing our praise to God. The worship has begun. It is the climax of our coming together.

So also the early birds will rise to meet the Lord when He comes. They will be followed by stragglers coming in at the last minute. All will gather around the throne of God and *worship* will begin!

IV. Therefore, Be Encouraged

It is interesting and instructional to note that many of the passages that speak of Jesus' return and the promise of heaven all end with one of two admonishments: Keep on working for the Lord, or be encouraged by the prospect and promise of Jesus' return.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!" (Phil. 4:1).

"You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

ILLUS. After church, where she had been taught about the Second Coming, a little girl was quizzing her mother.

"Mommy, do you believe Jesus will come back?"

"Yes."

"Could He come this week?"

"Yes."

"Today?"

"Yes."

"Could He come in the next hour?"

"Yes."

"In a few minutes?"

"Yes, dear."

"Mommy, would you comb my hair?"²

The question each of us must ask is this: "What are we doing to get ready for Jesus' return?"

CONCLUSION:

We believe that because of the Resurrection, Jesus will also come again to the earth. We believe He will return in triumph for His own. We can be encouraged with the hope of His return. But what are we doing collectively and individually to prepare for His return?

ILLUS. A Muslim woman had a daughter who had become a Christian. This daughter became sick and died when she was 16 years old. The mother sought the missionary and asked, "What did you do to our daughter?"

"We did nothing," said he.

"Oh, yes you did," persisted the mother; "she died smiling. Our people do not die that way."³

The preparations each of us make now will determine our disposition when we meet the Lord.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome	
Choruses	"All Hail King Jesus" "What a Mighty God We Serve"
Scripture Reading	Ps. 147:1-7
Invocation	
Hymn	"Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty"
Chorus	"O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
Hymn	"Jesus Is Coming Again"
Prayer Chorus	"Give Thanks"
Prayer Scripture	1 John 5:14-15
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory Sentence	
Offering Our Gifts	
Offertory Music	"When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder"
Announcements of Kingdom Business	
Special Music	"Soon and Very Soon"
Moments of Memory	
Special Music	"What a Day That Will Be"
The Word	"WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE SECOND COMING?"
Special Music	"It Will Be Worth It All"
Benediction	Heb. 13:20-21

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

Maimonides, a medieval Jewish philosopher, brings a healthy perspective to giving when he says, "No soul has been impoverished by giving to charity."

Moments of Memory

Use this opportunity to publicly read the names of godly persons who have passed away in the previous one to five years, depending on the number of names involved. Reflect upon the hope we have in Christ that these saints of God will be summoned first at the second coming of Christ. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the heritage passed on from these deceased saints and for the hope we have in Christ.

Special Music

A variety of solo, ensemble, or choir may be used in the three slots designated for special music.

1. Earl C. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 90-91.

2. Don Hussong in *Leadership Journal*, Summer Quarter (1983): 94.

3. Wolf, *Choice Illustrations*, 89.

Highpoint

REMEMBER WHEN INFORMATION CAME THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY?

Preparing sermons meant clearing a space on the desk of the study, lining up your Bible, favorite commentaries, book of illustrations, and maybe, the Greek New Testament and Thayers' Lexicon. While many preachers still use this means of sermon preparation, times have changed. Now, through the Internet, tools to help you preach effectively week in and week out, are available for immediate downloading to your personal computer. Bible software, illustrations, and now through Highpoint Preaching Resources, your computer can become a virtual library for sermon preparation.

Only recently, we thought we were approaching state of the art transmission of information when we made Highpoint Preaching Resources available to pastors in diskette form. The changes in technology make accessing this information as easy as a telephone call. By accessing the Nazarene Home Page on the World Wide Web (WWW), you can pull down Highpoint Preaching Resources for easy manipulation on your personal computer. When combined with access through your favorite Bible software such as LOGOS, you can do the

word studies, customize the illustrations, and configure the application to your local needs. Follow these four simple steps:

Step One: Using any online service, connect with <http://www.nazarene.org>

Step Two: Page down to Church Growth Resources, looking for Pastoral Ministries.

Step Three: After clicking on Pastoral Ministries, select Highpoint Preaching Resources.

Step Four: Download to your personal computer. When you have completed your download, log off, and begin manipulation of the data to suit your needs.

Where is technology leading us? That's a good question. While we know there are any number of possible answers to this question, we believe it's the wrong question. The right question is "Where is God leading us . . . and how can we use technology responsibly as His servants to accomplish His mission and task?" We hope you will discover the potential technology offers clergy for effective use of limited scarce resources, viz., their time for study of the Word in preparation for its proclamation.

WELCOME TO *HIGHPOINT*

The sign outside read, Casual Worship, Saturday Evening, 5 P.M. The passenger in my car read the sign and asked, "What does that mean? Does that mean *casual* worship, as in come dressed as you are; or does that mean *casual worship*, a low-key, laid-back style of worship that doesn't take it all too seriously?"

Frankly, I had not attended the service advertised by the church, though I knew something about the congregation and its beliefs, values, and core assumptions. I thought about my passenger's question, wondering to myself if I understood the meaning behind the words on the sign.

Obviously, there's nothing casual about worshipping God. Coming into the presence of Him who fills eternity is no small, insignificant, casual experience. Indeed, preparation for worship once occupied the minds of Evangelicals everywhere. Preachers often knelt by their chairs on platforms, indicating a willingness to hear one last time from the Almighty before delivering the sermon or message to the congregation.

High Church worshipers know something about preparation for worship. Reverence, long a hallmark of such preparations, dictates the cessation of frivolous conversations about ball games, shopping trips, or the latest antics of one's middle child. Meditation, reflection, even prayers occupy the mind and spirit of such worshipers as they prepare to participate in the liturgy of the day.

Perhaps there is a clue as to our practice in that last statement. Too often we are not conscious, at least as laypersons, of *participating* beyond the somewhat obligatory songs and choruses. The formative influences of European currents of

free-church, antilurgical notions in our historical antecedents have quite often blurred the distinction between worship as awesome encounter with God and worship as pep rally for the people of God. Indeed, in the experience of the church as faith community, both events may be useful, even desirable.

When it comes to Sunday nights, however, a certain *cluelessness* concerning the role of this service seems prevalent. In many situations, churches struggle to maintain faithfulness to a weekly pattern that has remained relatively unchanged since the time before electronic media, space travel, nuclear weapons, and VCRs. Add the interesting mix of conflicting opinions surrounding the whole notion of public worship styles, and it is easy to understand the challenge of planning such services.

Some churches, however, may challenge the statement above. They may cite their faithfulness to a *seeker-sensitive* format on Sunday morning, followed by a training, instructional/disciple-making format for the evening. Clearly, the spectrum of public worship service styles is broad. Bob Huffaker, pastor, Grove City First Church of the Nazarene, Grove City, Ohio, asks, "Are we ready to be the kind of church that can reach our kind of world?" He follows this up with a prescription combining a powerful mix of *praise*, *performance*, and *personality*. His application of praise emphasis, high performance music, and his own sincere, charming, down-home personality answers his own question. While citing a major emphasis on prayer, it is clear, however, that Huffaker's congregation maxes its potential, utilizing these three elements in a highly creative, energized, and passionate manner.

All of this, however, leaves open the nagging question of what to do with Sunday night. Few are willing to say outright that Sunday night is a struggle, though privately they will admit that it is not the event it was 25 years ago. If one admits the urgency of Huffaker's question and the relevance of his own response, and models the prescription he offers for building the church, one then must consider his format. While he is quick to point out that no one should model his format simply for the sake of copying success, it is clear that a high-energy, praise-releasing service in the morning is a difficult act to follow on Sunday night. Indeed, the Sunday night service often comes off looking like an anemic repetition of the A.M. service.

One alternative is to build on the instructional, disciple-building model used by some churches. Sunday evening, by design, becomes much less formal (shall we say *casual*?), more conducive to learning through participative study. Some congregations are maintaining some of the traditional elements of public worship while incorporating newer, more promising elements that focus on meeting the needs of personal Christian development through the preaching of themes, emphases, and topics.

Highpoint was not designed to settle the argument or answer the questions concerning the preferred design or even the *fate* of Sunday evening services. It is, however, a tool or resource for helping you think through an approach that might work in your situation. It contains elements of sermon material, outlines, even an occasional illustration. It also contains a series of suggestions for variety to spice up the Sunday evening event, adding community-building and nurturing ideas as well.

Whatever you think of Sunday nights, there is growing evidence that believers need a special time of strengthening, enrichment, and skill building in order both to navigate the perils of a secular age and to chart a path of personal ministry contribution. With this in view, take the suggestions in this quarter's series and mold them to fit your church. May God enrich and bless you in the process.

David Felter, editor, *Highpoint*

MEET LARRY MORGAN

David Felter, editor

Heard any good sermons from Jonah lately? Well, take a look at these pages. Larry Morgan preached this series of sermons recently in his pulpit at Newton First Church of the Nazarene, Newton, Kansas. Sorry, there are no fish stories or even jokes about Jonah swallowing the whale—just good, thought-provoking messages aimed at the hearts of his listeners.

Larry Morgan is a boomer, born in 1950 in Ohio. Surrounded by believers, he grew up in a family whose traditions run deep in the waters of Christian experience. After high school, he attended Mount Vernon Nazarene College and Olivet Nazarene University, from which he graduated in 1972. His graduate work was done at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is a graduate of the School of Large Church Management. Larry has held pastorates in Kentucky and Ohio before coming to Newton First Church in 1990. He served as an associate pastor in Illinois and Kansas. Larry and his wife, Pam, have two married children and enjoy being grandparents as well.

Morgan has long been a champion of lay ministry. His church averages "371 attendees each week," with a membership of 445. He writes, "This is a very active congregation ministering through three full-time pastoral staff members, about 10 part-time staff persons, and a great host of lay ministers. Together we provide over 71 different ministries to our congregation and community."



Larry Morgan

1. Bob Huffaker, statement taken from public address given March 1, 1997, College Hill Church of the Nazarene, Nashville, with permission.

JONAH

Rev. Larry Morgan

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- Sermon 13 God Would Have a Word with You! "Three Questions for Jonah"

WHO'S LISTENING?

Jon. 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION. Many voices are calling for our attention. Some loud. Some soft. Some mysteriously confusing. And in our day, there is an accompanying hesitance, even resistance to having to respond to outside voices, especially if they place any demands on us. And if you hear too many voices, they may put you in a little padded room!

Jonah hears a voice. Actually he hears God's voice! Remember the story?

God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah runs away from God's call on a ship. God sends a great storm. The crew of sailors throw Jonah into the sea, and a big fish swallows him. From the belly of the fish, Jonah prays. Somehow he miraculously ends up on the beach. Once again God speaks to him and commands that he go to Nineveh. This time, Jonah obeys. He preaches a message of impending destruction, and the people repent. Jonah becomes angry because God forgives them. Jonah begins to pout.

Now that's not the whole story. There are some great messages here about disobedience, prejudice, repentance, and the God who includes everyone. In this message, Jonah brings to mind the truth that God would like to have a word with you! God speaks. In the midst of all the voices, our Creator would speak to us. By His sovereign will and pursuing love, He vies for our attention and obedience. Do you believe God speaks? Jonah heard the word of the Lord. Both scriptural and secular history confirm that God speaks.

Creation, the Exodus, crossing the Red Sea, Jericho, and more testify to God's speaking. And He speaks to Jonah!

I. GOD SPOKE AND JONAH LISTENED—He heard.

Jonah is a prophet. He waits to hear from God so he can speak to humanity. Second Kings confirms he prophesied rightly. He probably was anxious to hear. Well, God spoke! But suddenly, Jonah didn't like what he heard. Perhaps the comfort and familiarity of home

was threatened. Go to Nineveh? That's a long way off. That's a city with an evil and demoralized people. Go to Nineveh? God spoke, but Jonah struggled. In fact—

II. JONAH RAN, BUT GOD PURSUED—Unlike other prophets (like Amos “the lion,” or Samuel, who heard and obeyed), Jonah runs. He deliberately turns the opposite direction from Nineveh and runs. If he had succeeded in his flight, he would have ended up 1,000 miles from home and 1,500 miles from Nineveh. He is the only prophet to distinguish himself in disobedience. However, he is not the only person to do so! God speaks every day to many people with whom He would like to have a word. Too many, like Jonah, hear but turn and run. The scripture says he tried to “run from the presence of the Lord.” Bad decision! Bad choice! “Where is there to run?” asks the psalmist (139:7-9). The question is answered by Jonah and most people with “Anywhere but where God is!” The Word says Jonah “paid his fare.” He already had done so with disobedience. Why did he run? Who knows? Maybe he didn't feel good about the assignment. Maybe he just didn't like Nineveh—was prejudiced—or did not want to complete the mission. He runs—and almost gets away. Right? Wrong! No one ever does. Disobedience always results in destruction. You cannot run far enough to escape the loving arm of the Lord.

III. GOD STILL SPEAKS, BUT WHO'S LISTENING?—God would like to have a word with you! What is He saying? Do you recognize His voice? Have you distinguished it from all the rest of those voices of the world that would choke out the voice of God? There are many voices that tempt, confuse, rationalize, and feed the desires of the self. Jesus said, “Consider carefully what you hear” (Mark 4:24). He is speaking today. What is He saying to you? Maybe it's a mission in life. Maybe it's about His will for you. Are you listening? Are you running? Headed for the nearest ship to somewhere else? But honestly, to where can you run? Away from God? Not likely! Into self? That is not very productive nor very fulfilling. God wants to hear our hearts, lives, and voices say with Frank Simpkins's song,

When God speaks, 'tis mine then to answer.

When God speaks, my tempest to still.

When God speaks, 'tis mine then to follow.

And following Him, do His will.

*Speak to my heart, speak now I pray.
God of salvation and Lord of Creation,
Oh speak to my heart today!*

CONCLUSION: God would like to have a word with you.

He would speak about His call on you.

He would speak about His concern for the world, your world.

He would speak about His will in and through your life.

Will you listen? Will you obey?

**THIRTEEN WEEKS OF
SUNDAY EVENING VARIETY
HIGHPOINT PREACHING RESOURCES**

Theme: Sermon Series from Jonah

Introduction:

The variety of suggestions for previous Highpoint series included suggestions for music, fellowship, mission education, discussion, and so on. This series focuses on the themes that will be developed in each sermon. Suggestions are made to help you add variety and dimension to each sermon. If you need help with music and the other areas of suggestion, refer to previous editions of the Highpoint Preaching Resources series.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 1

1. Talk about the problem of runaways.
2. Since Jonah tried to run away from God and his responsibilities, discuss the reasons why youth often run away from home.
3. Have a family-led roundtable to discuss communications issues, how to really listen to each other.
4. Tonight's sermon is titled “Who's Listening?” Ask selected teens to write an essay on what they think about adults listening to them.
5. Invite selected representatives to share humorous stories about how their spouse never seems to be listening? (Be sure to let participants know that the stories are to be humorous.)

EVERYONE? REALLY?

Jon. 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION. What a surprise! Jonah disobeys. The prophet, appointed by God to be His representative and spokesperson, refuses to obey and go to Nineveh. Why? Maybe he really did know the facts about this sinful, demoralizing place. Perhaps he just didn't see how he could go to such a people. Maybe Jonah was like the man who saw the people who were coming into his church, people who didn't look like him or talk like him. They made him feel so uncomfortable that finally he went to the pastor and questioned whether they should be permitted to come—seeing that they were so different. “After all we can't love everyone, can we?” What a phrase!

This story has significance for the Body of Christ as the Body seeks to be obedient to God's call to reach out to all. “Can we?” concerning obedience often means “We can't.” “Can we?” concerning love for others often means “We don't care to.” How about us? Are we a group of persons, believers, who have heard the call of God to be, to do, to serve, to minister? What's our response? Let's look again at Jonah.

I. JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE WAS WILLFUL

- A. Disobedience is always willful. The will was given by God as a tool for obedient responses to God.
- B. Jonah serves as a mirror for us. From where does his willful disobedience come? For some, they may be: (1) Fearful of God's voice and grace. Bad concepts of God or the self cause fear. (2) Unclear of what God wants, which can cause fear (really it is the “why”). It could be a question about the task or mission, but most often it is the product of questioning God.

(3) Unsure of their God-given gift. Like Moses or Jeremiah, maybe Jonah fears he is not equipped for the task.

II. JONAH'S WILLFUL DISOBEDIENCE IS ENCOUNTERED BY GOD'S PRESENCE—The first thing we notice is:

- A. God's power to accomplish His mission and will is not hindered. Perhaps Jonah thought God's power would diminish the farther he ran, like a fading radio signal.
- B. God's power and presence was more than enough to show Jonah his error. The windstorm was sufficient to give him pause as to the course he had chosen. God's providential power is always at work trying to reveal the path of obedience.

CONCLUSION: What kind of people are we? Many of us have listened to God's call. We are hearing His voice even now. Is our response a surprise? To us? To others? To God? What power or form of His presence will God have to employ to lead us in obedience? If it involves people, can we care about everyone? Really? Can we love everyone, really?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 2

1. The theme of tonight's sermon is inclusive love for the lost, even those who are different from us.
2. What is it like to be left out? Now think about this question from another perspective: What is it like to be left out simply because you are different?
3. Prior to tonight's service, select volunteers who will share a story of being left out and how that event made them feel.
4. What are some of the risks involved in targeting society's left-outs with a real invitation to become acquainted with Christ through the ministry of the church?
5. Using something on which to write so the entire congregation can see, ask them to list those whom the church often leaves out and why.

IT WON'T HURT ANYONE ELSE!

Jon. 1:4-17

INTRODUCTION. The first, and often the most serious, words spoken by someone who has chosen to disobey the Lord are "It won't hurt anyone else!" That is what many people would like to think.

Jonah teaches us some important lessons: (1) Disobedience and sin are always willful. (2) Sin always affects others! It matters little that people say they did not intend for their sin to affect anyone else, it always does. "No man is an island" is a gross understatement. In fact, very few choices we make are without effect on someone beyond us. Look at Jonah's story in 1:4-17.

I. JONAH'S CHOICE GREATLY AFFECTED OTHERS AROUND HIM!—When he ran, boarded the boat, and sailed with the sailors, Jonah didn't think his decision would hurt anyone. The minute he chose wrongly, however, he began to affect himself as well as others. Recall the story. Here is Jonah on a ship that is being buffeted by wind and storm, threatening to break in two and take Jonah's life. Notice how his actions affect the others with him. His disobedience:

- A. Endangered them (v. 4)
- B. Frightened them (v. 5a)
- C. Cost them (v. 5b)
- D. Confused them (vv. 7-8, 11)
- E. Frustrated them (vv. 6, 13)

Family, friends, associates, acquaintances, those you

spend time with—all are touched by the sin and wrong perpetrated in personal disobedience.

II. JONAH'S CHOICE AFFECTED EVEN THOSE NOT AROUND HIM!—It's not just Jonah who is facing a problem because of disobedience—not just those on the boat. The people of Nineveh are directly affected. Don't forget Nineveh!

- A. They are left without a prophet.
- B. They are left in their wickedness.
- C. They are left separated from God by sin.
- D. They are left to face God's judgment alone.

III. GOD'S CHOICE AFFECTED JONAH AND THE OTHERS FOR GOOD!—God used the storm to drive home His plan and purpose. Jonah is starting to get the picture.

- A. Jonah realized that disobedience does affect others (v. 12).
- B. Jonah instructed the men to throw him overboard (v. 12).
- C. As a result, they are all saved (vv. 15-17).

CONCLUSION: Consider your choices very carefully. Realize that your choices always affect others. Understand that sin will always endanger everyone in its path. Recognize that obedience has its own reward.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 3

1. Tonight's theme is "It Won't Hurt Anyone Else!" Do these words sound familiar? What instances from your own ministry come to mind from your counseling experiences or spiritual sharing times with individuals attempting to ignore the truth about the social impact of sin?
2. Ask volunteers to cite specific examples from the media, such as movies and television programming, music, and so on, that actually encourage this type of thinking.
3. Using the flip side, illustrate tonight's sermon by asking volunteers to tell of the best choice they ever made and how that choice positively affected those whom they loved.
4. Illustrate tonight's sermon by having volunteers tell of the impact others' choices and actions have had upon them.

THE PROVIDENCES OF GOD! OR, EVER NOTICE GOD'S PREPARATION FOR YOUR CHOICES?

Jon. 1:4-16

INTRODUCTION. What is providence? The dictionary definition includes such ideas as divine guidance or care, and the quality of making provision for the future. I am coming to believe that it's the activity of a sovereign, loving God that works to prepare us for our choices in life.

We see providence at work in the life of Jonah. In chapter 1 we witness five obvious dynamics of providence: The *wind*, *sea*, and *storm*—they all work together for Jonah's choice. But there is another aspect of providence at work here. God also uses the *sailors* in the providential workings of Jonah's life. Notice we have not even mentioned the *fish* yet! God uses the sailors in conjunction with the other elements to bring Jonah back to the place of obedience. Ever notice how God often uses people as a part of His providential dealings with humankind? Notice the following truths:

I. GOD USES WHATEVER HE CAN TO GET OUR ATTENTION—It doesn't take a mental giant to notice the dramatic interventions of problems, sickness, and special life events (vv. 9-10). The wind, sea, and storm are effective. They get Jonah's attention. They open his eyes to his mistake. The sailors also add to the picture (vv. 5-6). The captain warns him! God sends people to awaken, to warn, to alert. Maybe it is a friend (a friend of your soul), family member, or even a stranger. Sometimes such interventions bring specifics to our attention (vv. 7-12).

II. GOD USES WHATEVER HE CAN TO GET OUR

Highpoint

REVERENCE—Circumstances and events that show God to be God display His authority and power. They cause us to recognize His greatness, evoking awe from us. Jonah witnesses the mighty acts of God before his eyes (v. 6). The actions of the captain and sailors move Jonah toward his God. "Wake up man . . . call out to your God . . . could He not be an awesome God who can do something about this?" God is looking for more than just awe. He uses providence to convince us of His redemption and restoration power (v. 12). Trying to throw cargo out and row faster or better did not work. God uses the sailors to show Jonah the way of redemption.

III. GOD USES WHATEVER HE CAN TO GET US TO PRAY—How many times have we heard or said: "It brought me or him or her or them to the knees"? If anything brings us to our knees, then we probably were standing a bit too tall and proud anyway (vv. 5-6, 16). The sailors already see the need and are praying.

Back to the fish—notice (2:1) God longed for fellowship, so He made humankind. He longed for conversation and communication. God would have a word with us!

CONCLUSION: Ever notice God's preparation for your choices? How can we more readily notice and respond to God's divine providences in our lives?

1. Stay close to the Lord so that His Spirit can operate freely and graciously through nature, life's processes, events, and more.
2. Stay close to people so that the Lord can use them to communicate to you when you do not hear God's voice directly.

The goal of divine providence is restoration and redemption. And it comes in the context of relationship. It's the activity of a sovereign, loving God working to prepare us for the choices that affect our lives and our destinies. That's divine providence!

What providences are at work in your life today?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 4

1. Your Attention Please! What does that phrase mean? With what do we most frequently associate it? Tonight's sermon focuses on this theme: "The Providences of God: Or Ever Notice God's Preparation for Your Choices?"
2. Select some children old enough to be interviewed. Ask them, "How does your (mother/father) get your attention?"
3. Bring items with you that are often used to get the attention of persons or groups. For example, bring a yellow flag. This could be used in auto racing to warn of impending danger or a football game to indicate a foul has been committed. A striped shirt is worn by basketball officials so players and coaches can easily see them.
4. Ask volunteer adults to share testimonies of God's providential intervention in their lives.

THE BEST FISH STORY IN THE WHOLE WORLD!

Jon. 1:17

INTRODUCTION. Perhaps the title of the sermon today should be “Man Overboard!” However, our focus today really isn’t on the man but on the fish. This is a fish story. This is the best fish story in the whole world. Some have gotten hung up over all the arguments about Jonah’s story. Is it just a story? Is it historic fact? What size was the fish? Why would God allow him to be eaten, only to be spewed out in three days? How could he have lived? If we get hung up there, we will miss what God has to say through Jonah. Jesus thought Jonah’s story was important enough to mention it. Matthew and Luke record His thoughts on the subject. The sign of Jonah. What is the sign of Jonah? And it’s not an *ichthus* I am talking about. The real question is Of what is the fish a sign?

Yahweh provided a fish. God ensures His place in the story again. There was wind, sea, the storm, and the sailors—now a fish! A man is overboard! And a big fish is about to eat him. Sounds like a logical end for a prophet who disobeys. He is deserving of such punishment, isn’t he? But wait a minute. The fish eats him and in three days spits him out on dry land unharmed. The great fish is not about punishment or the threat of punishment. Look at the text: “The LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.” Not to punish, but to save! Can you imagine? A great fish is about to become a rescue vehicle. How unlikely and ironic! In spite of Jonah’s deserved punishment (lost at sea and no lifesaving patch earned), Jonah is still going to be saved! God provided a fish. He ought to be hung up in the seaweed, gasping for breath. But instead, he is going to be delivered.

- I. WHY DID GOD PROVIDE THE GREAT FISH?—Could it be the result of Jonah’s disobedience? Jonah is

suffering the consequences. That’s reason enough to send the fish. To pay a price for his rash and wrong choice—that’s a good reason for God to send the fish. Maybe it’s to scare Jonah: “Cross me and I’ll send something to put the fear of God in you.” No! No! No! The story doesn’t support that. Why did God send the fish? It was to save Jonah. To rescue him. To give him a quiet place, undisturbed, where he could pray and reflect. To carry him to a place of obedience. If we miss this truth, Jonah’s story loses its effectiveness in our lives. God sent the fish to save Jonah!

- II. WHEN DID GOD PROVIDE THE GREAT FISH?—Shouldn’t Jonah be made to stay in the belly of the fish at least for a while? Until the point *sinks* in? Is three days long enough? Did God send the fish too soon? I am coming to believe that Jonah was praying before he hit the water. Perhaps he was already repenting, already feeling the possibilities of deliverance. Did God send the fish too soon? No, He sent it just in time! The Lord provided a great fish just in time to rescue Jonah. The real threat to Jonah was the water. So God provided a fish just in time. Chapter 2 confirms it. (Read 2:2, 5, 7.) God always provides salvation—just in time.

CONCLUSION: God has always provided! What a statement of truth and reality. God has always provided. Think back: Gen. 6:18—God provided a boat for Noah, just in time to save his family. Gen. 22:8—God provided a ram for Abraham, just in time to save his son. Exod. 14:13—God provided an east wind to dry up the sea for Moses, just in time to deliver His people. And God provided a fish to swallow up and save Jonah—just in time. “*The LORD provided,*” and He always will. You may think or feel that your life is ebbing away in the situation or circumstance in which you find yourself. You may think life is about punishment for your wrongdoing. You may assume that the place where you find yourself now is a place of destruction. And you may feel as if you’re being swallowed up, that time is running out. God wants to provide something to rescue you. In fact, God has provided. Once; finally; for all; just in time (the right time); while we’re in distress, calling from the depths;

while we were yet sinners, powerless, God provided His Son, Jesus Christ, to take our deserved punishment, to be swept up in our consequences, to die for us. God provided! For sin—He has provided a Lamb slain. For death—He has provided life in Christ, the resurrected Lord. For temptation/suffering—He has provided an escape (1 Cor. 10:13) that can save you.

Two things are clear: We must respond to God’s great provision. We can rejoice in what God has provided. In Gen. 22:14, Abraham rejoiced and called the place “The LORD Will Provide.” In Exod. 15, Moses and the people of God sang, “He has become my salvation. . . . Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

Do you need a great fish today? Look around. What is God providing for you today?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 5

1. Tonight’s sermon is titled “The Best Fish Story in the Whole World!” What does a title like this suggest at first glance? What have you thought about this story as you have read it in your own spiritual experience?
2. Ask volunteers to cite their favorite fish stories, such as *Moby Dick*, *Jaws*, and so on. Do any of these stories have anything in common—anything that connects them?
3. Build around the theme that God is gracious and that His grace provides for us, though we may not anticipate the form of those provisions.
4. Prior to the service, identify a family in need, and ask the congregation to bring foodstuffs, clothing, and so on as a demonstration of working together with God to help meet the needs of those less fortunate. In this way we demonstrate, by living parable, the provisions a gracious God makes for us.

NEVER WASTE MERCY AND GRACE!

Jon. 2:8

INTRODUCTION. Too many really learn spiritual lessons only by the hard way. It's as though learning a lesson must be preceded by a threat or by feeling some effect from sickness, danger, or even death. Then they cry out for help. The names, faces, situations, and circumstances have changed. But the pattern is the same. Even the cry for mercy is predictable. Well, Jonah learned his lesson. He cried for mercy. God heard him. Now, notice that the fish is not the focus of Jonah's prayer. Mercy and grace are the big subjects here.

What is *mercy*? It's "an attribute of God . . . a combination of righteousness and love . . . compassion in action" (*Beacon Dictionary of Theology* [BDT]). What is *grace*? It's "God's spontaneous, though unmerited, love for sinful man, supremely revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . It is God's love in action empowering those whom God regards with favor" (BDT). Mercy is what we cry for. It is delivered by grace. Mercy is the reservoir. Grace is the fountain. Jonah's prayer recognizes both mercy and grace in his life and culminates his crisis-and-rescue story with a hearty "I've learned my lesson." But what has he learned?

I. JONAH HAS LEARNED ABOUT MERCY AND GRACE!

- A. Jonah speaks out of his own experience. He is a recipient. Experience is a great teacher. Look at verse 8. "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs" (NIV). "Those who regard vain idols / Forsake their faithfulness" (NASB). That's Jonah, all right! He has forfeited mercy and grace to cling to the idol of his own will and way. Now from within the belly of the fish, a new awareness and response to God is taking place in his heart.
- B. Jonah cried out. Mercy answered. Grace delivered. That's mercy and grace at work—the energy of God springing up like a fountain.
- C. Jonah learned about worthless idols. Worthless idols are defined by that which proves vain (e.g.,

self-will). His words reveal the tone of how the Old Testament deals with idols. It treats them with bitter contempt, referring to them as "lies," "nothingness," "vanities." All idols are worthless and empty, especially self. Only the person of God can fill the place in the soul where love, loyalty, allegiance, faith, and honor fit. And it comes through mercy by grace!

What have we learned?

II. MERCY AND GRACE CAN BE OURS!—God's infinite, matchless mercy and grace, greater than our sin, can be ours!

A. God's mercy and grace is:

1. Unconditional: "not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). "While we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "For God so loved the world that he gave" (John 3:16). It is God who has, does, and will initiate grace out of His mercy for us.
2. At the same time, it is *conditional*: it "comes by faith, so that it may be by grace" (Rom. 4:16). Grace must find a response in faith for mercy to be granted.
3. Universal: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Whosoever will may cry out and receive. To the sinner, it is the love of God in action (mercy and grace given *to* us). To the believer, it is the energy of God in action (operating *within* us).
4. Unending: "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (John 1:16, NASB). That mercy and grace is always available, always satisfying. Jonah's story reminds us that this mercy and grace can be ours!

B. However, both can be wasted.

1. By rejection, refusal, and disobedience, we can nullify them.
2. By procrastination and neglect, we can frustrate them. Putting off mercy and grace does not weaken them. It weakens our ability to respond to them.

C. By faith, they can be ours!

CONCLUSION: Why wait? Why waste? Why forfeit the wonders of mercy and grace in your life just to cling to worthless idols? Jonah has said it clearly: He found mercy and grace to be much more desirable. Or should we say, mercy and grace found him! Paul writes, "God, being rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4, NASB); "we have gained access by faith into this grace" (Rom. 5:2, NIV). It is by the mercy and grace of our God, through faith, that we are saved. Why wait until crisis or distress? God's wonderful mercy and grace can be yours today.

What in your life needs His mercy and grace? God extends that mercy and grace to you today.

What of God's mercy and grace do you need to extend to others?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 6

1. Mercy and grace are usually thought of in New Testament contexts. Here in chapter 2 is a reminder that mercy and grace are attributes or characteristics of God. They characterize His dealings with humankind.
2. While the title of tonight's sermon is "Never Waste Mercy and Grace," a subtheme that bears potential is *forfeiture*.
3. Illustrate the sermon by discussing the concept of forfeiture. List things that can be forfeited, and cite the reasons why (e.g., a sporting event, an inheritance, a prize, etc.). List the differences between forfeiture and disqualification.
4. Consider using the story of Jacob and Esau and the selling of Esau's birthright. Here is a story of impetuosity, thoughtlessness, and, then, the great tragedy of a lesson learned too late. Link this with the sermon to forge a powerful illustration.

Highpoint

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! (JONAH SERIES) “EVERYBODY OUT OF THE WATER!”

Jon. 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION. Jonah is saved and rescued! How marvelous! How wonderful! Not surprising! God would have a word with him. And with us.

I. THE STORY TO THIS POINT—In Jonah’s story, he disobeyed, running from God and what God wanted. He was promptly swallowed by a big fish, which spared his life. Now Jonah is spending time contemplating the bigger things of life. Listen again to Jonah’s thoughts. Up to this point in the story we see that:

- A. Jonah recalls that God answers *prayer* (v. 2). This is from inside the fish. He cried out to the Lord for help! God’s response to faith convinces Jonah!
- B. Jonah remembers the details of his *rescue* (vv. 3-8). After the great deliverance, Jonah reports his personal crisis in detail. It was good for him to review from where God has brought him.
- C. Jonah rejoices in the God who *saves* (v. 9). With genuine gratitude, he celebrates the God of salvation and gladly commits to doing exactly what God wanted.
- D. Notice now what follows. It’s a temptation of sorts.

II. THE TEMPTATION AT THIS POINT—Jonah thinks,

Highpoint

“Wouldn’t it be nice to stay right here for a bit?” How good it would be to remain in that place where we encounter God and His truth, enjoying it over and over again. It’s a place of rest and contemplation. Illustration. In high school, while conditioning for baseball during the winter, we ran indoors. We were instructed on how to take care of ourselves and our legs since we were running on hard surfaces. I didn’t really pay a lot of attention. As a result, I suffered from shinsplints. Pain, suffering. But I was rescued. A great fish swallowed me. No, the coach put me in a wonderful whirlpool training tub. Oh, I wanted to just stay in that tub. It was great. No pain. No strain. No running. Just warm, pleasant, safe surroundings where no weight was put on my legs, no expectation to perform. But you know what they say: “No pain, no gain!” At some point, to mix a metaphor, it was out of the water and back on dry ground for more conditioning. Fellow believer, at some point God blows the whistle and says, “Everybody out of the water! I would like to have another word with you, and the word is that you cannot remain in this place.”

III. THE CALL FROM THIS POINT—This word from God comes, and it says, “Your living is to be done on dry land.” Yes, you can enjoy those moments of rescue, renewal, contemplation. But God’s act of deliverance is to put us right back on dry land, where God has called us to fulfill His mission. In an abrupt manner, Jonah was violently ejected from within the fish and deposited on land again.

Sometimes it seems as though we are cast from that place where we have found peace and contentment, forgiveness, and relief, only to be thrust right back into life situations that call for faith, obedience, and trust in the Lord. So it is! And so it shall be! That’s life. And living is to be done on dry land. Running from God may land us in the water. But living for Him must be done on dry land. Tears that result from landing in the water can put us back on dry land. In other words, obedience is proven through our faith and action. That’s the call of God on our lives.

CONCLUSION. This rescue is complete now. Jonah is

now back on dry land. It’s a place welcomed by Jonah. It is instructive—he learns never to disobey. It is a divinely ordained event, for God controlled the fish. And this rescue was easy—God just spoke and it happened.

So, where are you? In the water? Back on dry land? Jonah’s story is a revelation of our soul’s inner life. It tells of God’s nearness, ability, and willingness to help. He awaits our response.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 7

1. Tonight’s sermon lends itself to a discussion of life’s *comfort zones*. Everyone has one, that special zone where all the forces of life are equalized and the pressure is unnoticeable.
2. What are some examples of personal comfort zones?
3. Is it true that some sociologists characterize our generation as *cocooning*, *less activist*, and so on?
4. Review the history of your congregation. Are there evidences in the stories of this faith community of individuals breaking free from their comfort zones in order to obey God?
5. What does it cost to break out of one’s comfort zone, to walk in obedience, to sacrifice, and to have a visionary commitment to God’s leadership?

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "REMEMBER YOUR VOWS?"

Jon. 2:9

INTRODUCTION. Jonah is back on dry land! But before we move on in the story, there is something for us back in verse 9. Jonah is responding to the "grace that could be" (v. 8) by singing and speaking. He sings a song of thanks. He acts out a sacrifice of praise. That's wonderful! But notice. He speaks of a vow made good. Remember your vows? What are they? Somewhere earlier in this story, Jonah made a vow to the Lord. Maybe it was in the water or on the way down the throat of the fish. Perhaps it was even in the belly of the great fish. Wherever it was, Jonah made a vow.

I. WHAT ABOUT VOWS?—The earliest mention of vows occurs in the life of Jacob (Gen. 28:18-22). Jacob had a dream and awakened to see that God was with him. Awestruck, he erected an altar, calling it *the place of God*. Job spoke of three types of vows: (1) a vow of devotion; (2) a vow of abstinence; (3) a vow of destruction. The vow of devotion was entirely voluntary. In response to the grace of God, at some point, Jonah vowed his devotion to God. "I'll go, speak, do, be what You want me to be." That is a great place to be—recipients of God's grace while fulfilling our vows to Him. What is a vow? It's not an oath. An oath is similar, yet different. An oath is related to swearing to or by something (Heb. 6:16). Such oaths make an appeal to a higher or divine authority to ratify some assertion or to validate a testimony as true (court testimony). A vow, on the other hand, is a solemn promise by which one binds himself or herself to act and/or speak in the future according to that vow. One example is the marriage vow. A vow may be rendered to God, to another

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human being, or to one's community. Jonah made a vow to God and now desires to keep that vow.

II. SHOULD CHRISTIANS MAKE VOWS?—Jesus clearly implies that Christians are not to make an oath, are not to swear by anyone or anything as if being truthful was not the regular mode of life (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12). But what of vows? The Bible indicates that vows were made as commitments of men and women to their God, expressed in voice and action, and involving others as well. (See Ps. 76:11; Eccles. 5:4.)

What kind of vows or commitments should we make? Let us suggest just a few based on God's Word and the practice of believers throughout history. We should make:

- A. Vows of worship—These are made to God and ourselves. These are commitments to worship God and Him only. These are our proper responses to God's first priority in Scripture, to love and adore Him.
- B. Vows of devotion—These are promises made to God and to another person(s). They are an extension of our vow of worship. These are vows to the priorities required to be a disciple.
- C. Vows of service—These are commitments to ministry, to use one's gifts and talents in response to the call of God on one's life. These commitments are made to God and delivered to and through human beings.
- D. Vows of fellowship—These are promises of relationship. This is the reality of the shared life between humanity and God, as well as between persons. Here is where faith's intimacy is enjoyed and expressed.
- E. Vows of witness—Here are the commitments we make to God to speak and to share and to live out His love and gospel story in the world with the men and women with whom we come in contact.

These are vows a Christian can and should make.

Jonah, upon being rescued by the grace of God, and realizing or remembering his vow made to God, renews that vow out of a heart of gratitude. Look again at what he says:

"I . . . will" = a sincere heart
"sacrifice to you" = a devout spirit
"I will make good" = a practical

action

In this response Jonah's character is restored.

CONCLUSION. Our world could use some Christians who will make vows/commitments in word and action and keep them.

What vows have you made? Have you made good on them?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 8

1. Tonight's sermon is subtitled "Remember Your Vows." How important are vows in our society? Think of everyday examples in which vow making or vow exchanging is unique to your ministry. (Wedding vows, church membership vows, etc.)
2. Using a good word search (e.g., *Logos Bible Software* or a good concordance), check out the examples of vow making and vow exchanging throughout the Bible.
3. You may want to consider investigating other cultures' use of vows and the meaning and significance they attach to such actions.
4. Prior to tonight's service, list the suggested vows herein on a separate sheet of paper. Make them available to the audience as you preach. Ask them to respond to these suggestions as the Holy Spirit leads them.

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE"

Jon. 3:1

INTRODUCTION. Illustration. "Before I knew it, I was under the water, drowning, air was gone. I gasped, but took in only water. I was going to die." No, that's not Jonah. It could have been. No, that's how a TV commercial from a few years ago began. But quickly, the scene shifts. Now rescuers are leaning over the person, administering lifesaving measures. Suddenly the drowning victim coughs—again and again. She's going to make it! It's a commercial about second chances. Of course, you need just the right insurance company to get that second chance. Second chances are important.

Do you remember that assignment given to you by someone in authority, like a boss? It was an important one. You were trusted. Confidence was placed in you. But you botched it. By your own doing, you failed and messed up. And you just knew you would never be trusted again. But for some reason, you were allowed another opportunity, a second chance. Have you ever seen that bumper sticker that reads, "Please forgive me. God isn't finished with me yet"? Well, God is not finished with Jonah or us, despite our disobedience and failure.

I. LESSON 1: OUR GOD IS A SECOND-CHANCE GOD!—He gives Jonah a second call or chance. Amazing! Now that's not the way human beings think. That's not the way human beings typically react. Even Christians sometimes fall prey to typical reactions. Remember Acts 15:36-40? Even the great apostle Paul prematurely wrote John Mark off as a failure in Pamphylia.

Listen to this: "But because of his great love for

us, God, who is rich in mercy . . ." (Eph. 2:4). Or 2 Tim. 2:13, "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful." Jonah failed! (Review Jon. 1:1, 3:1.) Out of His loving grace, God gives Jonah a second chance. Here is the heart of the Jonah story. Here is the desire of the Almighty dawning upon humankind. The truth is the law could not bear such an offense as a disobedient prophet. But God's mercy came running past all Jonah's failures. Grace was provided. Our God comes to us a second time—many times. What wonder! What gratitude should be ours that He does! "That God should love a sinner such as I . . ."

Our God is a second-chance God! And Jonah is a second chance-person! And there are other second chance people around. People like Moses, David, and Peter. Remember Peter? (Read Mark 1:16-17.) For three years he tried to follow Jesus. When the pressure hit in the crisis moment, Peter failed. (Read Mark 14:66-72.) But Peter repented and God called him a second time. John 21:22 says that after asking Peter if he now loves, really loves Him, Jesus said, "follow me" again. And Peter did all the way to his own cross.

God gives second chances. Indeed, most of us are probably second-chance people. Our God is a second-chance God who offers you another opportunity, whether you have failed, disobeyed, neglected, or just lost touch. He offers His call to you again.

II. LESSON 2: WE SHOULD BE SECOND-CHANCE PEOPLE—Our God is a second-chance God. And if we are to be what God wants us to be, we will give second chances too! Remember, Paul was wrong to write off John Mark. In order to be what God wanted him to be, Paul had to give him a second chance. And he did.

III. LESSON 3:—Notice that following Jonah's disobedience, there was no real progress in his life, no real success in living. Remember, "The Word of the LORD came to Jonah" in chapter 1, but Jonah ran away. No new light came to Jonah while he was

running. So it is with us. No new light, no real success in living will come until we obey what we know.

CONCLUSION. God will do whatever it takes to reach out to us. And He gives second chances so as to redeem us and use us. He also desires to help us do whatever it takes to reach out to others. He is a second-chance God! Because of Him, we can be second-chance people. (Read 1:1; 3:1.)

Variety Ideas for Sermon 9

1. What comes to mind when you hear the words second chance?
2. For tonight's sermon, begin compiling a list of famous second-chance people. While Jonah provides an excellent example of those with whom God has dealt a second chance, what about David, King Saul, Peter, and others? In what ways did God give them opportunities to rectify mistakes and make a new start?
3. Invite someone in your congregation to share their story of God's grace as illustrated in His generous gift of a second chance. Perhaps it came through a life-threatening illness or accident. Whatever form it took, highlight the grace of God.
4. Use familiar illustrations from signs or markers that indicate the opposite of tonight's theme (e.g., Last Chance for Gasoline Before Toll Road, etc.).

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "FOUR MORE THINGS ABOUT WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO"

Jon. 3:1-10

INTRODUCTION. Jonah has preached the word of the Lord. The message has been received. It is interesting, if not extremely helpful, to realize that the changes experienced in Nineveh were the *result* of the people *repenting*. The world around Jonah listened to his message, and finally, the leaders of the government began following its example. The only way a nation is reformed, the only way people are revived is to do as Nineveh did—respond to God's Word, to the reality of impending doom, and repent! The truth of the matter is this: Government, in very real ways, simply reflects the moral and spiritual qualities of the hearts of its people. What we need is to experience the change that Nineveh experienced, to understand the full meaning of repentance, and to allow it into our hearts.

The account of chapter 3 offers four responses to what God is doing in our lives. Here are the four responses we should consider:

I. TAKE NOTHING IN EXCEPT GOD'S WORD (v. 7)—The people had fasted. When the king responded, he ordered a national fast. The truth in this story reminds us that we, too, need to hear what God is saying and take nothing else in so as to allow it to penetrate and find a home in our hearts. The heart of fasting is self-denial. We need a fast from our selfish ways by listening to what God says. We need to fast from other voices to hear His alone.

II. IDENTIFY WITH GOD'S WAY (v. 7)—The people of Nineveh responded to God's word by fasting and putting on sackcloth. The king followed and even

sat in ashes. Sackcloth and ashes were traditional symbols of repentance. Sackcloth was the symbol of accepting the affliction of God, just as the rough goat's hair cloth worn next to the skin brought affliction to the person. Sitting in ashes represented humiliation and sorrow before God. Both were required to show genuine repentance. When the people identified with God's way, the king followed their example. And what an amazing thing happened in Nineveh. Everyone repented.

(Read 2 Cor. 7:9-10.) Sorrow that leads to salvation is God's way. Our realization of God's forgiveness follows personal sorrow, repentance, and faith in His provision for our sin. We need to identify with God's way today instead of resorting to all our rationalizations and excuses for the wrong in our lives. We need to understand the affliction that God feels when we sin, and we need to encounter true sorrow for sin so that we may embrace the Cross and Christ's forgiveness. God's way is the only way!

III. CALL OUT TO GOD'S HEART (v. 8b)—Here is where the king really begins to lead the way. He calls for all the people not only to fast, putting on sackcloth, but also to pray "*urgently*." And they did. Here we are back to prayer! How can we experience what God wants to do in and among us if we do not urgently seek Him? It means earnestly speaking with God, pouring out the heart's deepest longings. It means strengthening our understandings of what His Word tells us, communing as well as communicating with Him. It's more than telling Him what we want. It's telling Him what we understand to be what He wants and agreeing with it. Call out to Him in prayer!

IV. FORSAKE EVIL (v. 8c)—The people of Nineveh were instructed first by God through Jonah and then by God through the king to give up their evil ways. Sin leads to destruction, violence, and, often, cruelty to others.

Real repentance means changing one's ways. This is what God has always intended. Simply put, we must recognize our evil ways, sorrowing all the way to forgiveness, and then turn from that evil to

live in redemption. One of our problems is that we allow ourselves the destructive luxury of thinking we can be forgiven without any change taking place in our lifestyle. Yes, salvation comes to the heart by faith. But as James said, "I will show you my faith by what I do" (2:18). We need to allow the wonderful gift of salvation by faith to be lived out by giving up all that leads to destruction and by forsaking all that is cruel to others. Forsake evil of every kind!

CONCLUSION. What are you taking into your life that competes with God's Word? Have you really identified with God's way to repentance? Are you sincerely calling out to God in urgent prayer? What do you need to forsake in order to be His? That's what Nineveh did and look what happened (Jon. 3:10).

Variety Ideas for Sermon 10

1. Do you believe God works in a step-by-step fashion?
2. To illustrate this point, refer to a set of instructions for assembling something. These instructions may come from a child's toy or something with which you are working right now (e.g., new computer software, a recipe in the kitchen, etc.).
3. Why are we often tempted to skip one of the key steps? Ask for responses.
4. Share a humorous story about attempting to do something and trying to follow the steps or about getting lost, skipping steps, and ending in near disaster. Make the application to tonight's sermon.

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?"

Jon. 3:1-10

INTRODUCTION. The events in Nineveh deserve another look. What an incredible story of grace and mercy is found here! Even in the midst of a perverse people whose wickedness deserved more than just condemnation and judgment, God sent a voice of warning, of hope, of a possible escape from judgment. And Jonah got to be that voice. The fact that everyone, from the greatest to the least, repented of sin and experienced the joy of God relenting on His threat to destroy serves to bring about a realization of the grace and mercy of God. Such events should cause us to consider our own spiritual responses to all that God has done for us.

I. CONSIDER GOD'S METHOD—If we look at what God did with Jonah in Nineveh, we can see an example of how He works with every generation. Even ours!

A. We have not had just *one* prophet. God hasn't sent just one messenger to bring His message to us. We have had *many* voices. There have been many of them, from childhood to the present. Such voices brought the good news of God, sometimes in the form of warnings and threats and sometimes with actions and consequences being made known to us. These many voices came through a variety of personalities, purposes, and methods—all designed by God.

B. Consider, too, that we have not had an *unwilling* prophet. Jonah was unwilling to go to Nineveh, this very wicked place. He just did not want to go. We, on the other hand, have had a *very*

willing and loving Jesus to convict us of sin and convince us of salvation. At just the right time, Paul says, God sent His own Son into the world to redeem. John says that God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved. He has called us, reaching out to us, coming to us. He has created circumstances whereby we might recognize Him. I say again that God has done and is doing all that He can to redeem us.

II. CONSIDER GOD'S TIMING—In Nineveh, God issued a timetable of 40 days, and then judgment would come. Destruction would hit this wicked people. Then the message was given, and in not more than one to three days, repentance began. It didn't take 40 days!

A. We've not had just *one* or even *40* days. We have had *years* and *years* to hear and respond to the message that calls to our hearts. This message has been brought by many faithful messengers. Truly, we have been blessed. The question comes, especially in light of the swift and complete response of the people of Nineveh, *how shall we escape?*

CONCLUSION. In the words of the writer of Hebrews . . .
How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (2:3)

God has spoken in so many ways. And now, finally, having spoken through Jesus, the Son, how could anyone resist, let alone neglect such a salvation? I can't help but wonder if the issue of escaping from evil consequences is really defined for us by whether our hearts have become hardened or remain soft toward God. I fear that the frequency and the familiarity of warnings by God and His Word, which have come to us again and again over the years, have been met with resistance so often that they harden our sensitivities to eagerly and quickly respond to His Word. The question still remains, "How shall we escape?" All those places where the gospel has been received with eagerness and excitement and where true repentance has been offered

will stand in testimony against those who have wasted or neglected opportunities for salvation.

I ask again, "How shall we escape?" Is your heart soft toward God?

Variety Ideas for Sermon 11

1. Another way of describing the theme of tonight's sermon is Don't just sit there, do something!
2. Neglect is both *cumulative* in its effect as well as *dynamic* in its extent. To illustrate: Think of the consequences of neglecting your car's maintenance. Neglect it long enough and the cumulative effect of such neglect may well result in mechanical failure. The extent of neglect's impact, however, may not be limited to one's automobile. When mechanical failure occurs, accomplishing an important task may be interrupted. For example, car failure may interfere with getting your wife to the hospital in time to deliver her baby.
3. To illustrate tonight's sermon, invite children/teens to bring objects of neglect, and have them tell the consequences, real or potential, of that neglect.
4. You may want to explore the many facets of the term *escape*. The question "How shall we escape?" may be illustrated in many ways. It offers a good way of linking *neglect* of God's mercy and grace to eternal separation from God and the impossibility of escaping the consequences of ill-conceived choices.

GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "HOW DO YOU VIEW GOD?"

Jon. 3:10—4:4

INTRODUCTION. Reuben Welch, well-known speaker and author, speaking from John 17, said, "A false mental image of God is just as bad as a false metal image of God." He asked that we pretend we take a 3" x 5" card and write on one side "What does God look like?" On the other side, we write "Where did you get that idea?" His answer—Jesus! Reuben's answer was always Jesus. It showed how he viewed God.

In an imaginary dialogue with Jonah, let's ask him about his view of God. Jonah has a problem—a yo-yo problem. He's up and down, up and down. Chapter 4 points it out. (Read 3:10—4:4.) Here's what we see: The man of faith fails. The man of faith is restored. The man of faith gets peeved at God.

Before we talk about the specifics of the anger Jonah experienced, we need to look at what was underneath this anger. What gave birth to this anger? I think the problem is related to how he viewed God.

I. A BAD VIEW OF GOD CREATES A BAD VIEW OF ALL OF LIFE—Look at how Jonah sees life: "It's better for me to die than to live" (4:3). Not real encouraging! His view is off center. In fact, it is off God. He has moved from a God center to human or self-center. A bad view of God results in:

- A. Jonah missing God's purposes. He misses it by not liking what God did. Jonah needed to be reminded that God always intends to save. Instead, Jonah acts as if God is bound to destroy Nineveh. Of course, he didn't really believe that. He even admits that his suspicion that God would save them led him to run in the first place. His struggle is obvious. Yes, he was embarrassed by God changing His actions towards Nineveh. He thought God's mercy was outweighing His justice, thus intimating a weakness in God's character. His bad view of God yields a bad view of life.
- B. Jonah ignoring the good of others. A bad view does that. Nineveh's corporate and communal life is on the line here. But Jonah's view of God renders him oblivious to their need or plight. He is consumed with

himself and therefore misses the impending danger of destruction to the city.

- C. Jonah forgetting God's mercy to him. Only recently he was drowning in his own sin. A bad view of life causes you to forget God's mercy to you and creates hard feelings toward others. This leads to the next step.
- D. Jonah saying things he really doesn't mean and the implications of which he doesn't fully realize. "Now, O LORD, take away my life" (4:3). More than just a bit peevish, wouldn't you say? Bad words . . . bad thinking. His bad view of God warps his view of life so much that he is ready to give it up. But there is a better view.

II. A GOOD VIEW OF GOD CREATES A GOOD VIEW OF LIFE—Jonah, the person, is peeved. But Jonah, the prophet, unwittingly offers some great truths concerning this good view of God.

- A. God is gracious. He is full of grace and mercy toward humankind. Though Scripture declares, "There is none good but God" (Ps. 14:1), God still shows His graciousness. Such grace affects all of life, making it good.
- B. God is compassionate—Ps. 145:9 confirms, "The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." This loving energy provided by grace brings a sense of caring toward others.
- C. God is slow to anger. It is interesting that Jonah's anger really begins to burn as God's anger begins to be extinguished. God is slow to become angered. Shouldn't we be this way as well?
- D. God is always abounding in love. Love overflows from the heart of God. His heart is full of love for all people. That love should affect our love.
- E. God relents from calamity. Instead of carrying out His promised destruction, God changes focus to allow redemption to be completed. Our God is that kind of God. What a better view of God and, as a result, a better view of life. This much is true: God's mercy always outweighs His justice. That's what Christ is all about. God's ultimate justice is proven in and by His mercy. That view of God affects the way we look at everything else in life. It makes a difference! A bad view of God creates a bad view of life. A good view of God creates a good view of life.

III. THE BEST VIEW OF GOD CREATES NEW LIFE—What is

that view? Remember Welch's illustration? Only two questions remain. *What is God like?* and *Where did you get that idea?* All such questions are answered in Jesus Christ. He is our best view of God. He came to earth, experienced all that we experience (maybe even got peeved), and did so to redeem us with a grace and mercy so wonderful that, once tasted, turns our view of life all around.

CONCLUSION. It's true—a bad view of God creates a bad view of life. On the other hand, a good view of God creates a good view of life. But, the best view of God creates new life! And that view, that life, is found in Jesus! Incidentally, there's more about this part of Jonah's story. Instead of rejoicing at the mercy of God and celebrating with the Ninevites, the prophet was peeved and angry. He missed out on the celebration. While he went out to pout, the Ninevites were celebrating. We ought to be rejoicing too.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 12

1. Prior to tonight's sermon, get a brightly painted yo-yo. It will serve to visibly illustrate one of the main points of tonight's sermon.
2. Last year, the Continuing Lay Training denomination-wide study was a book by Dr. Earl Lee, *Cycles of Victorious Living* (PA083-410-2757, \$4.99). Note that our text tonight seems to indicate that Jonah was a man who experienced *cycles of defeated living*.
3. Use the yo-yo to illustrate how Jonah was up and down, up and down.
4. Prior to tonight's sermon, interview children in your Sunday School. Ask them to give their understanding of God. Use a tape recorder or video camera. Play back for the audience to hear or see.

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GOD WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU! "THREE QUESTIONS FOR JONAH"

Jon. 4:1-11

INTRODUCTION. We near the end of our study of Jonah. Let's review the story one more time.

God would have a word with us! We've been overhearing that word in God's conversation with a runaway prophet. He's been having more than just one word or conversation. What is God's final word to us today? I believe God has three questions in chapter 4 for Jonah and for us.

I. SHOULD YOU BE ANGRY?—Notice verse 4 of the text. It's a direct question. There is no verbal answer at first.

A. Yes is certainly implied. Remember that Jonah is embarrassed and feels foolish because God reversed His judgment. God's question, however, and Jonah's answer reveal more.

B. An object lesson is needed. So God gives the vine-and-worm illustration.

C. Out of this object lesson comes several revelations about the character of Jonah.

1. Jonah has a very small view of the person and nature of God. God's question reveals God's answer.

2. Jonah needs more of the mind of God to gain an understanding about God himself and the world around him.

II. WHO'S IN CONTROL?—Look at verses 5-8. This is

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an implied question found in the "Do you have the right?" part of God's inquiry.

A. Jonah again says yes. Remember that he is in great discomfort because of the saving of Nineveh and the destruction of the vine by the worm.

B. A straight forward response from God is needed to Jonah's yes.

C. The implications of God's response tell us much about His person and nature.

1. God is sovereign—Ps. 115:3.

2. God is in control—Exod. 15:18.

3. God is wise—Job 12:13 and Isa. 40:13-14.

4. God is faithful—Deut. 7:9.

III. SHOULD I NOT FORGIVE?—Notice again verses 10-11. Perhaps here the greatest question of the story is implied.

A. Jonah doesn't answer. But remember, Jonah's overall response to God's first call, and the result of His second chance, is to question whether God should save Nineveh at all.

B. Another straightforward response from God is required. God reviews the object lesson in the light of Jonah's lack of compassion for God's call to save Nineveh.

C. Again there are some implications for Jonah and for us. We should recall what is true and already known about God. Revisit Jon. 4:2.

1. God is gracious. He allows Jonah to vent his anger.

2. God is compassionate. He listens, understands, and even provides for Jonah's discomfort while Jonah is ranting and raving.

3. God is patient. The Lord gently argues the truth of His character and position on the subject of forgiveness.

4. God is loving and forgiving. He demonstrates His love and forgiveness for Nineveh by relenting on His promise of destruction. He demonstrates His love for Jonah by giving him a second chance, providing the vine, and, more pointedly, by not simply destroying Jonah for his actions.

CONCLUSION. God has been having a word with us. And His final word and challenge through Jonah for us today is to:

- A. Acknowledge God's sovereignty
- B. Remember God's mercy and love
- C. Give yourself to trust in Him

Variety Ideas for Sermon 13

1. What do you do when your ideas of God are challenged? Perhaps another way of expressing this idea is this way: *What do you do when God doesn't act the way you think He should?*
2. Tonight's sermon touches on the great attributes of God and His character.
3. If you could ask God any question, what would it be? At the beginning of the service, distribute slips of paper, and ask individuals to write out one question they would like to ask God.
4. Review the outline of the sermon. In the conclusion, the author offers three responses. Emphasize those responses. Remember, *some questions we think are uppermost will often over time disintegrate under the load of weightier matters.*
5. Think of your own life and how God has reacted to you in mercy, grace, and compassion that went far beyond what you deserved or expected.

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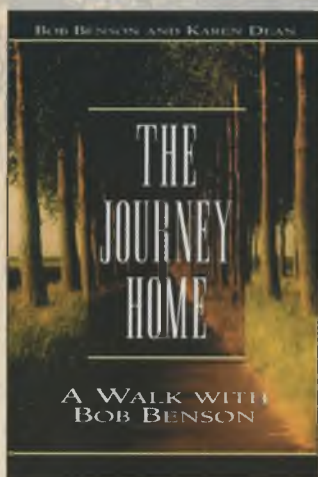
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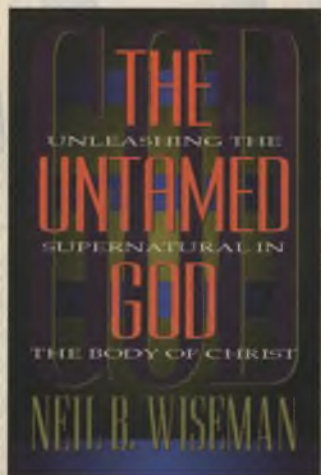
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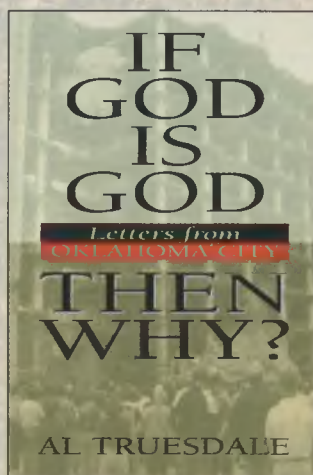
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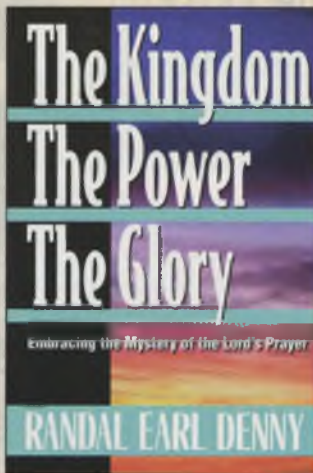
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