

3-1-1998

Preacher's Magazine Volume 73 Number 03

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Recommended Citation

Denny, Randal E. (Editor), "Preacher's Magazine Volume 73 Number 03" (1998). *Preacher's Magazine*. 646.
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MARCH/APRIL/MAY 1998

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

"Speaking the truth in love . . ." Eph. 4:15

A New Crisis
Ensues

Ministry Means
a Cross

The Wacky World
of Ministry to
the Unchurched

"So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. . . . 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand.'"

Jer. 18:3, 6

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

MARCH / APRIL / MAY 1998

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Cover Photo by D. Jeanene Tiner

The Preacher's Magazine is published quarterly by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2923 Troost Ave., Kansas City, MO 64109. Address all correspondence concerning subscriptions to your denominational publishing house. Copyright 1998 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. Canadian GST No. R129017471.

Authors should address all articles and correspondence to Editor, The Preacher's Magazine, 10814 E. Broadway, Spokane, WA 99206. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes should accompany all manuscripts.



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A New Crisis Ensues

Dr. E. Stanley Jones was one of the world's best-known religious leaders of the 20th century—in the words of a biographer, “one of the greatest Christian missionaries.”

Born in Clarksville, Maryland, January 3, 1884, Eli Stanley grew up in a Methodist home. At 15 years of age, he went to hear an overseas evangelist from John Bunyan's church in England. Convicted by the Holy Spirit, Stanley went forward and took his place among the seekers at the altar. In his words he evaluates the experience.

“I fumbled for the latch-string of the kingdom of God, missed it, for they didn't tell me the steps to find.” Dr. Jones continues: “The real thing came two years later. An evangelist, Robert J. Bateman, came to Memorial Church. . . . The third night . . . before going to the meeting I knelt beside my bed and prayed the sincerest prayer I had prayed so far in my life. My whole life was behind that simple prayer: ‘O Jesus, save me tonight.’ And He did!”

A student of Baltimore City College, Stanley was influenced by Evangelist Bateman to transfer to Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. There he was

“The soul
gets on by a
series of
crises.”

sanctified wholly and called to missionary work. He graduated from Asbury with an M.A. degree in 1912 and was later honored with a D.D. from Duke University and the S.T.D. from Syracuse.

Dr. Jones first went to India in 1907 as a missionary of the Methodist Church. For eight years he served in various assignments: pastor of the English church in Lucknow, superintendent of the Lucknow District, and principal of the Sitapur Boarding School. In 1917 he was the evangelist for

the North India Conference.

For these first years he labored chiefly among the low-caste people. But playing tennis in the evening after work, he made contact with the high-class Muslims and Hindus. One of the Hindus asked him, “Why do you work only among the low castes?” That seed began to germinate, and in 1924 he wrote, “I was strangely drawn to work among the educated high castes, the intelligentsia.” Thus he began his lifelong ministry to the high caste, the educated, and student groups.

In 1928 Dr. Jones was elected a bishop of the Methodist Church but resigned after 24 hours, choosing to continue his work in India. In the foreword to Dr. Jones's autobiography his son-in-law writes: “Always at heart . . . he has been an evangelist; this has been at the center. Beyond this has been the real center—his commit-

E. STANLEY JONES
(1884–1973)



ment to Jesus Christ as Lord."

Dr. Jones's first book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, was published in 1925. At intervals of about two years, he wrote 25 others, translated into many languages. His message of the Spirit-filled life permeates all that he wrote. It is the dominant theme of *The Christ of Every Road*, *Abundant Living*, *Victorious Living*, and *Victory Through Surrender*.

A New Crisis Ensues'

In this chapter from Dr. Jones's autobiography, he gives his personal testimony to being filled with the Holy Spirit. The experience occurred about one year after his conversion. In addition to the personal witness, he gives his own interpretation of the experience of entire sanctification as the "conversion of the subconscious."

In the debate over eradication or suppression, Dr. Jones's theology calls for eradication of sin and evil but suppression of the natural human urges.

Regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, Dr. Jones recognizes the miracle at Pentecost as a special ministry of the Early Church but not known today. He distinguishes clearly Pentecostal tongues from Corinthian tongues.

But now, in the words of Dr. Jones's son-in-law, who wrote the foreword to *"A Song of Ascents,"* we will "let him tell his own story."

"The soul gets on by a series of crises." I've found it so. In conversion there is the sudden, or gradual, rise to a new level of life, a life as different from the ordinary man as the ordinary man is different from the animal. Then after the rise life is on a permanently higher level. But on that new level there usually ensues an experience of ups and downs, of alternate encouragement and discouragement, of victory and defeat.

The general tenor of life was victory, but there were disturbing intrusions from the depths.

"Innate depravity" is the self surrendered to nothing except itself.

It was so with me. For a year I lived under cloudless skies. The sun of my happiness seemed to have risen in the heavens to stay there forever. But after a year of unalloyed joy I found something alien began to rise from the cellar of my life. I felt there was something down there not in alignment with this new life I had found—ugly tempers, moodiness, deep-down conflicts. The general tenor of life was victory, but there were disturbing intrusions from the depths. I was becoming a house divided against itself. I was puzzled, confused, hurt with a tinge of disappointment. Was this the best that Christianity could do—to leave me wrestling with myself, or with something alien to myself? What was this dark something within?

Theology has described it as the "old man," the "flesh," "innate depravity." Perhaps it can best be described in more understandable terms as the "unconverted subconscious." The subconscious is like the submerged portion of an iceberg, one-tenth above and nine-tenths below. Freud says we are determined by lower drives in the subconscious. We think we consciously determine our conduct, but these basic drives in the subconscious actually determine us. These basic drives can be roughly described as self, sex, and the herd. These drives come down through a long racial history; hence they have bents, bents toward evil. The self has been asserted so much in racial history that it becomes dominant and demanding: "I want what I want when I want it." Sex has played such a part in a long racial history that it now demands the leading role, as it does in modern life. The herd, or social instinct, urge bids for a dominant place and often occupies it. Think of the things that we do because "everybody does it." We usually do not act, but only react to what other people do. We are not voices, we are echoes.

Which of these urges is the dominant urge it is hard to say, for there are moments when each seems dominant for that moment. But if I were to pick out the most decisive and dominant urge, I would say the self urge. For besides having its own peculiar manifestations, the self is manifested in the sex urge as the self's desire for pleasure and in the herd urge as the self's desire for protection through conformity. So "innate depravity" is the self surrendered to nothing except itself—the self become God.

In conversion a new life is introduced into the conscious mind as we consciously accept Christ as Savior and Lord. A new love and a new loyalty flood the conscious mind. The subconscious mind is stunned and subdued by this new dominant loyalty to Christ, introduced into the conscious mind by conversion. Sometimes it lies low for long periods, subdued but not surrendered. It waits for low moments in the conscious mind and then sticks up its head and, when it sees an opportunity, takes over the conscious mind. Then we are a house divided against itself. Paul puts it this way: "If you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfil the desires of your lower nature. That nature sets its desires against the Spirit, while the Spirit fights against it. They are in conflict with one another so that what you will to do you cannot do" (Gal. 5:16-17, NEB).

This was my condition after a year of almost unalloyed joy and victory. I was in a crisis. I was stymied by this inner conflict. And then a door out of the conflict opened through a book. When I took that book out of a Sunday School library, I felt a sense of destiny in reaching for it. A kind of tingle went through me, a tingle of expectancy. There was destiny in taking that book, for it changed my life and helped me solve a crisis I was in. I began to read *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, by Hannah

Whitall Smith, a Quaker. It told of complete victory for the total person. My heart was kindled with desire as I read it. I wasn't reading it; I was eating it. I got to the 42nd page when God spoke to me: "Now is the time to find." I pleaded: "Lord, I don't know what I want. This book is telling me. Let me read the book first, and then I can intelligently seek." But the Voice was imperative: "Now is the time to find."

I tried to read on, but the words were blurred. I saw I was in a controversy with God, so I closed the book, dropped on my knees beside my bed, and said: "Now, Lord, what shall I do?"

And He replied: "Will you give Me your all?"

And after a moment's hesitation I replied: "Yes, Lord, of course I will. I will give You my all, all I know and all I don't know."

Then He replied: "Then take My all, take the Holy Spirit."

I paused for a moment: my all for His all; my all was myself, His all was himself, the Holy Spirit. I saw as in a flash the offer. I eagerly replied: "I will take the Holy Spirit." I rose from my knees with no evidence save His Word. I walked out on the naked promise of that Word. His character was behind that Word. I could trust Him with my all, and I could trust Him to give me His all. I walked around the room repeating my acceptance. The doubts began to close in on me. I did what Abraham did when the birds came to scatter his sacrifice—he shoed them away. I walked around the room pushing away with my hands the menacing doubts. When suddenly I was filled—filled with the Holy Spirit. Wave after wave of the Spirit seemed to be going through me as a cleansing fire. I could only walk the floor with the tears of joy flowing down my cheeks. I could do nothing but praise Him—and did. I knew this was no passing emotion; the Holy Spirit had come to abide with me forever.

Self,
deposed in
surrender
and
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climb back
into the
saddle and
become
dominant
again.

He had been with me, with me in the conscious mind in conversion. Now He was in me, in me in the subconscious. When He was with me in the conscious, it was conversion limited, for the subconscious was not redeemed; cowed and suppressed, but not redeemed. Now the subconscious was redeemed. These drives which reside in the subconscious—self, sex, and the herd—were cleansed, the self-urge cleansed from selfishness, the sex urge from sexuality; the herd urge from being fastened on society was now refastened on the kingdom of God, the ultimate society. With these drives redeemed it was conversion unlimited, nothing left out of its sway.

Holiness and Human Personality

Note, these drives were not eliminated; they were still there. It is impossible to eliminate them; they are an integral part of us and cannot by any known process be eliminated. But they can be cleansed from personal and racial bents and can be consecrated to Kingdom purposes. The self instead of belonging to its self and trying to be God now belongs to God and seeks His glory and not its own. Sex cleansed from sexuality, no longer an end in itself, is now dedicated to creation: within the home dedicated to procreation and fellowship, outside the home sublimated to creativity, creating new hopes, new movements, newborn souls, new creative activities—creative on a higher level. The herd urge, hitherto fastened on the futilities of allegiance to society around, is now cleansed from that enslaving bondage and fastened on the fruitfulness of the kingdom of God. You do not become unsocial, but loving God supremely you can love others subordonately—subordonately, but with a love intensified, you love others with His love.

These urges are cleansed, consecrated, and coordinated. They

are no longer pulling in all directions, making you a civil war, a divided personality. They are under the one control of the Holy Spirit, so they are now a team working together for Kingdom ends. This is true of the conscious mind as well. The conscious mind and the subconscious mind are now under one redemption and one control, and "according well, they beat out music vaster than before."

That the subconscious mind can be redeemed is good news. For the area of the work of the Holy Spirit is largely in the subconscious mind. So if we surrender "all we know"—the conscious mind—"and all we don't know"—the subconscious—then the Holy Spirit takes over areas in the subconscious which have hitherto been "enemy territory" and now makes them friendly territory. The subconscious works with you, a friend and ally. And an important ally of the new life.

Jesus said: "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. 12:35, *KJV*). Is a redeemed subconscious a "good thing"? Yes. For we are producing a "good thing" in the subconscious by adding to it good attitudes, good deeds, good thoughts, good purposes, good victories day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. We pile up reserves. Then, when in a moment of temptation and pressure we bring these moral and spiritual reserves in the subconscious into action, we come through with flying colors, a surprise to ourselves. The "good thing" was the hidden ally.

So the Creator created the subconscious for security purposes. Without it we would be living from hand to mouth; with it we are living from resource to resource.

This interpretation of what happens with the coming of the Holy Spirit may make possible a reconciliation of two views about the "deeper life." One view says

there is complete eradication of the "old man of sin," and the other says there is suppression but not eradication. Obviously we cannot believe that in the Christian redemption we must provide for suppression of inner evil only, but not for eradication. That would be a half-redemption, a coming to terms with evil, if only it lies low. Sin and evil must be eradicated. So we say with the coming of the Holy Spirit both the conscious and the subconscious minds are cleansed from sin and evil bents. This is eradication. But the driving urges, self, sex, and the herd, are still there. Since they are part of you, you can't get rid of them. Hence they have to be suppressed, lest they try to climb back into dominance; this is suppression. So eradication and suppression are still facts of the Christian life—eradication of sin and evil and suppression of natural urges. These natural urges can be the source of temptation; self, deposed in surrender and cleansing, may try to climb back into the saddle and become dominant again; sex, surrendered and cleansed, may try to depart from procreation and fellowship and may try to become an end in itself; the herd urge, surrendered and cleansed, may gradually listen more to society than to the Savior. These urges are still alive and have to be watched. So there is a truth in suppression.

But it is a half-truth. For the real Christian remedy is not suppression, but expression on a higher level. The self, dedicated to Christ, now expresses itself as the servant of all, thus becoming the greatest of all; sex, now dedicated to the creative God, becomes creative, creating procreation and fellowship within the home and, sublimated, outside the home, creating new movements, new hopes, newborn souls. The herd urge, now emancipated by surrender to God from subservience to society, can serve and love society—"deliver-

Instead of
our trying
by tense,
prayerful
anxiety to
keep old
urges con-
secrated,
the Holy
Spirit
himself
consecrates
them.

ing thee from the people . . . unto whom now I send thee" (Acts 26:17, *KJV*). Delivered from the people, you can now serve them—and only then!

So instead of sitting on a lid in suppression, you now take off the lid and bid these urges, now emancipated, to go forth and love and serve in the name and power of their Master and Lord. And you guide them by watchful prayer.

But even this watchful prayer has to be modified. It would mean tense anxiety about the urges. There is a corrective: Instead of our trying by tense, prayerful anxiety to keep these urges consecrated, there is the fact that the Holy Spirit himself consecrates them. He keeps them "on the altar." "It falls to me to offer the Gentiles to him as an acceptable sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:16, *NEB*). The Holy Spirit consecrates the sacrifice. That is important, for the usual idea is that through consecration we receive the Holy Spirit initially. That is true, but there is the further truth: the Holy Spirit keeps the gift consecrated. When we fully surrender ourselves and our urges to the Holy Spirit, He receives and cleanses them. But He also consecrates them and keeps them consecrated. That is a part of His redemptive work. That takes the strain, hence the drain, out of our Christian life. We are no longer nervously trying the sacrifices of our urges on the altar of consecration. We surrender them to the Holy Spirit, and He keeps them consecrated as a part of His job. So we can go about our jobs released and relaxed, knowing that He will attend to His.

A man introduced his wife to me: "Here is one of your wrestlin' Christians." She was wrestling hard to be good and to be consecrated. But she was tied in knots. She believed in the Holy Spirit, but not in the Holy Spirit as One who receives the consecrated gift and keeps it

consecrated—with our consent. Ours is consent—not constraint.

As I look back, I find my experience coincides with the experience of the Early Church as to the permanent elements in the coming of the Holy Spirit. There seem to be two permanent facts in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter, speaking of what happened in the Gentiles' Pentecost at the house of Cornelius, said: "God, which knoweth the heart bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9, *KJV*). Both Jew and Gentile received the Holy Spirit, and both of them had their hearts purified in the coming of the Holy Spirit. This seemed a permanent element—purity of heart. The other permanent element was in what Jesus said: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, *KJV*). Something would persist from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, namely, the power to witness effectively for Jesus. Not "power"—full stop; but power of a certain kind, the power to witness to Jesus Christ. When we witness to our group, our denomination, our particular brand, it is not power—it is power. So the Holy Spirit means power to witness effectively for Christ.

Two things, then, are permanent in the gift of the Holy Spirit: purity and power. Purity for myself and my own inner needs and power to witness effectively to others. These two things comprehended their needs then, and they comprehend my needs now.

Holiness and the Gifts of the Spirit

But a new complication is brought in: You have the Holy Spirit if you have the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues,

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They say, is an integral part of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is true that in the Acts the gift of tongues was associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit in three places—Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus; the centers of Hebrew culture, Roman culture, and Greek culture. The question was very acute in those early days as to whether if you became a Christian you would also have to adopt the Hebrew culture and language, become a Jew. That pattern was broken at Pentecost. Men were gathered from all that ancient world—Asia, Africa, Europe—and when the apostles began to speak, every man heard in his own language “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11, KJV). What did that mean? It meant that God was going to use every language, every culture, every nation to express the wonderful works of God.

The Jewish mold was broken at Jerusalem. The Roman mold was broken at Caesarea, and the Greek at Ephesus. Over the head of Jesus on the Cross were the words: “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matt. 27:37, KJV). It was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. All the molds were broken. This, I believe, was a special miracle performed for a special purpose and a very necessary one. That power to speak directly in the language of a people *without an interpreter* and without learning the language has not reappeared in our day as far as I know. Many have come to India, hoping to be able to repeat the miracle of Pentecost, but the wreckage of those hopes is strewn across India. It hasn’t happened. The Corinthian type of tongues has appeared, but not the Pentecost type. The Corinthian type was one of the gifts of the Spirit, an unknown tongue which needed an interpreter. At Pentecost no interpreter was needed.

The gift of the Spirit is for all, but the gifts of the Spirit He is dividing to every man severally

as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11, KJV). Paul puts it: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (vv. 29-30, RSV). The answer is no. Then can we have the gift of the Holy Spirit without the gift of tongues? The answer is simple: Did Jesus have the Holy Spirit? Yes. Did He speak in tongues? And the answer is no. Then I can have the Holy Spirit without the gift of tongues. For He is my Pattern. “The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:39, NEB). Why? For the pattern of what constitutes spiritual power had to be fixed in Jesus—He had to live, teach, die, rise again, and go to the right hand of the Father before the Spirit could be given. The Holy Spirit is a Christlike type of character and produces Christlike persons when He comes within.

Paul evidently found that the emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit was divisive, creating more division than direction, so he dropped that emphasis. He mentioned the[se] gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12—14, but [some of these] never again in all his Epistles. Nor did John mention the gift of tongues in his Epistles, nor did Peter or James or Jude. The working emphasis in the Early Church became the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23, NEB). All of them were moral qualities. So the emphasis shifted from the nonmoral, semimagical gifts, which were divisive then, and are today, to the fruits of the Spirit, the moral qualities beginning with “love” and ending with “self-control,” which are nondivisive and uniting.

Some quote the passage of Mark 16:17 (RSV): “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up

serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” But all the modern versions tell us that the Gospel of Mark was lost from verse 8 on, and this passage was put in as a second- or third-century attempt to fill out the lost portion. It is exactly this kind of list that man, unaided by inspiration, would make out. Not one of the five “signs” is a moral quality. Every one is semimagical power.

Suppose the Christian movement had gone out into that ancient world with these five signs upon their banners. It would have died as a “wonder cult,” tossing off miracles. Instead, it became a moral and spiritual movement remaking and redeeming character. So it lived on. If you take on these “signs”—“new tongues”—you have to take them all. You have to pick up serpents, and you have to drink deadly poison without hurt. Only two of these so-called signs were in Jesus. He cast out demons, and He laid hands on the sick. What kinds of “signs” are these when three of them were not in the Lord and Savior?

Apparently, speaking in tongues occurs today, and it is real to some, but they cannot connect their type with Pentecost; it is Corinthian and one of the “gifts” of the Spirit. The “gifts” of the Spirit are not to be confounded with the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is for all. The gifts of the Spirit He divides “severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11, KJV).

So we say in the fellowship of our Ashrams: “We welcome the immersed and the unimmersed, those who do not speak in tongues and those who do, provided they do as Paul suggests, ‘He that speaketh in tongues speaketh to himself.’ Let him speak to himself and not make it a public issue, for it will divide any group it comes into. The basis on which we come together is this: If you belong to Christ and I

The Holy
Spirit
means
power to
witness
effectively
for Christ.

belong to Christ, we belong to each other." We do not let any side issues divide us.

I said above that after mentioning the gifts of the Spirit, Paul dropped the emphasis on them. There is one exception: "We recommend ourselves by the innocence of our behaviour, our grasp of truth, our patience and kindliness; by gifts of the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by declaring the truth, by the power of God" (2 Cor. 6:6-7, NEB). Here he mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit but defines them as "sincere love," "declaring the truth," "the power of God," but no gift of tongues. He redefined the gifts of the Holy Spirit in terms of moral qualities and then dismissed them, never mentioning them again.

So I'm grateful that I received the Holy Spirit without complications or "riders." The Holy Spirit brought me purity, and He brought me power, for He brought me himself. I need and want no more.

"He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain [Pattern], this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit [Giver]" (John 1:33, RSV). So Jesus is not only the Giver of the Holy Spirit; He is the Pattern of the Gift. If you surrender to the Holy Spirit, He will make you into His image, a Christlike type of person. Jesus was infinite sanctity, and He was also infinite sanity. There was nothing psychopathic about Him. He went off into no visions, no dreams; every virtue was balanced by its opposite virtue and all held in a living blend; He was the most balanced character that ever moved through the pages of history. So I can pray for and receive the Holy Spirit with the stops out—with no reservations. I can ask for and receive the Spirit "without measure," for I cannot have too much of purity, nor too much of power, nor too much of Christlikeness—too little, but not too much.

So a year after I met Christ, I had been led into two vital

The gift of
the Spirit is
for all, but
the gifts of
the Spirit
He is
"dividing to
every man
severally as
he will"
(1 Cor.
12:11, KJV).

things—a new birth and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. One brought me into the Kingdom, and the other brought the Kingdom into me. The first beatitude was fulfilled in me: "How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (Matt. 5:3, NEB). Here blessedness is pronounced upon those who know they are poor—poor enough to receive. The verse could be translated, "How blest are they who are surrendered and receptive; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them." They belong to the kingdom of heaven, yes, but—more breathtaking—the kingdom of heaven belongs to them; all its resources are at their disposal; they could have all they could appropriate and use. And the only qualification was to be poor enough to receive.

There are those who believe that the Sermon on the Mount is another law, more spiritual, more inward, but still a law. You can't do this; you must do that. Therefore it is not a part of the gospel. Therefore it is impractical, for it means a vast whipping up of the will—try harder! A theological professor asked his students: "Is the gospel you preach a demand or an offer?" With one accord they said it was a demand. "Think again," he suggested. "Well, it is a demand and an offer," they replied. "Think again," he persisted. And they finally came to the conclusion that if it is the gospel, it is an offer.

If that be true, then the Sermon on the Mount is an integral part of the gospel, for its opening emphasis is not on the whipping up of the will but on a surrender of the will. Be poor enough to receive, and the kingdom of heaven is yours; all its resources and power are yours. This strikes a dart at the heart of self-sufficiency, at self-salvation; it asks self-surrender! If you are poor enough to receive, the kingdom of heaven is at your disposal—all yours. Then the impossible "demands" of the Sermon on

the Mount become possible accomplishments—possible through an "offer"; the kingdom of heaven and all its powers and resources belong to you if you are poor enough to receive!

Here within a year after I put my feet upon the Way, I had made a major discovery, at least for me, that I could be born again and I could be filled with the Spirit—all for the taking! Too cheap? No, very expensive. For you take the gift, you belong forever to the Giver! He binds you to His heart by cords of love and gratitude, but you wouldn't have it otherwise for worlds.

So I was on the Way. And the only qualification was receptivity, to be poor enough to receive.

But as I look back, I can now see that I came near adopting an emphasis that would have dimmed the emphasis on receptivity as the keynote of my life. I became interested, passionately interested, in the Second Coming. In my eagerness to absorb everything in the Christian life, I got hold of three volumes of *Lectures on the Apocalypse*. I devoured them. I felt the author knew the key to the future and was unlocking it. I became absorbed in this Coming calendar. I became intolerant of those who dared disagree with it. Then I found a subtle change taking place in my emphasis. I was living on expectancy, expectancy of the coming Christ, instead of living on experience—experience of the present Christ. I saw that the First Coming was the working center of the gospel, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the evangelization of the world.

The Second Coming was marginal and not my area now: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons. . . . But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8, KJV). My area of emphasis

was the First Coming. I believed in the Second Coming, but I was told that we knew little or nothing about it, about times and seasons; no one knew, only the Father. So I would put up a question mark about the future. He came once; He will come again. But I would preach and emphasize what I knew—the First Coming. And I hope to fulfill the statement of Jesus when He said: "Happy that servant who is found at his task when his master comes!" (Matt. 24:46, NEB). Note "at his task." Not skygazing, but "at his task," the task of preaching the good news of the present, saving Christ.

(I recently met a man who was emphasizing "revival" by emphasizing the Second Coming. He said to me: "You will not see the Second Coming in your lifetime. You are 82. I will; I'm younger." But he had the jitters at the thought of getting on a plane; cold perspiration stood on his brow. He was living by expectancy instead of by experience. He was not appropriating the living Christ now, but approximating the time of the coming Christ. His experience of the living Christ was thin—so thin it didn't save him from fear *now*.) So I pulled my feet back from the bypaths of speculation about this event or that event as the precursor of the Second Coming. I would preach the event—the living Christ now. I had no map or timetable about the future, but my feet were on the Way. And my heart was singing my Song of Ascents.

The amazing thing is that these basic changes and attitudes were gained within a year. Evidently, human nature is infinitely plastic and capable of great changes in a short time. I need not depend on the calendar, but on Christ, this living Christ, for further and infinite changes.

But my lyre had two very important strings with which I was to begin my Song of Ascents—first, the string of reconciliation; I was forgiven, converted, born

The Holy Spirit produces Christlike persons when He comes within.

again, with the past blotted out or transformed. Second, the string of adequacy—I was cleansed by the Holy Spirit in both conscious and subconscious minds and unified within, and given power by that same Holy Spirit to witness for my Lord. And the amazing thing was that I did nothing to merit all this. I did nothing but receive; the initiative was His. Love invaded me, and now love pervaded me as I began my pilgrimage from what I was to what He is making me. I was at once humbled to the dust and lifted to the highest heaven. I was all of grace!

In addition to the two strings of forgiveness and cleansing was

a third and an important one—the string of knowing personally and at first hand my Heavenly Father. God was no longer a name. He was a fact, a living fact—within me, around me, above me. I could drop into the silence of my heart and commune with Him there, in a wordless communion; but not always wordless, for He is a God who speaks. He speaks and I speak to Him—we talk together. I can never be alone again; hence I can never be lonely again.

With these three strings in my lyre I set out a happy pilgrim. More strings would be added, for what I had set me on fire for more.

PM



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The Triumphant Defeat

A Study for Use in Preaching

G K. Chesterton once said that "a paradox is a truth standing on its head to attract attention."

The paradox closest to hand is the human situation. This is a situation dominated by polarities, tensions, ironies; by contradictions that often baffle us, frequently overwhelm us, sometimes crush us. It was with this paradox that the eternal God identified himself in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Alien to "Success Syndrome"

This paradox—God's becoming human—speaks to our predicament because it corresponds with our actual experience of life, which is so full of incongruities.

Among the contradictions revealed in Jesus Christ is that He who is life placed himself within the context of death. This takes human concepts of success and victory and stands them on their heads. But this reversal of values reveals a depth of reality that is absurd by human standards.

This truth is dramatized in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, in John 12:12-16. The stage is set for the death of the Savior. Yet Christ is acclaimed King. "Victory, glory at last!" the disciples probably thought as the crowds cried: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the

Lord, even the king of Israel!" (v. 13, RSV).

But it is just at this point that standards of value and success are jerked upside down. Jesus does this by making the word "glory" radically alien to the "success syndrome" prevalent in His day and in ours. And by doing this, Jesus enables us to become aware of and reflect upon "the triumphant defeat."

John, in recording Jesus' words about the factor of "glory," reflects the Old Testament understanding of the blinding revelation of God's nature, which is expressed by that term. The glory of God in the times of the prophets probably was seen with the greatest clarity by Isaiah. Thus his prophecies about the coming Messiah reach the highest level found in the Old Testament. Therefore, it is natural that John should draw upon two important passages in Isaiah to point us to Jesus' understanding of "glory" at the highest moment of His ministry—the Triumphal Entry, just before plunging to the lowest depth of His mission—the experience of the Cross. John employs the first passage in Isaiah in a way that tells us:

1. Christ's glory gives a vision of defeat that is success (related to Isa. 6).

Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said,

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them."

Isaiah said this because he saw [Christ's] glory and spoke of him (John 12:39-41, RSV).

This is the dark future of a bright vision, which raises some important questions about Isaiah and John:

What did the sight of Christ do for the prophet?

What did this statement mean for the evangelist when he penned these words?

It also raises important questions about us:

What does this declaration mean for believers who long for victory in Christian service?

What does this revelation mean for congregations of believers who desire to impact and influence their communities with the gospel?

A clue to the answer to these queries is found in Isaiah's transforming experience of the Holy One of Israel in chapter 6 of his prophecy. Isaiah's vision of Christ's glory resulted in:

1. the purification from indwelling sin (vv. 1-7);
2. the call to God's service (vv. 8);
3. the promise of a ministry of failure (vv. 9-13).

In this deeply moving experience, which points toward what

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the New Testament calls entire sanctification, a purified and responsive Isaiah doubtless expected an exciting commission for victorious ministry.

And this is often where we stop in reflecting on Isaiah's transforming vision: we usually zero in on the cleansing and the calling but, for some reason, fail to move on to the depressing promise of failure.

This promise, which Isaiah heard, fell most likely on his heart with depressing weight. That same expectation of success naturally comes to believers following the full cleansing of entire sanctification. Dare we admit that such victory that Isaiah probably expected is often held up to us as the absolute norm and unchanging outcome of the holy life?

Small wonder, then, that depression and confusion come to us when this standard may elude us after the purifying touch of God in the experience of holiness. But the dismal results assured to Isaiah—and sometimes to us—are spoken with a stark clarity that cannot be explained away:

Go, and say to this people: "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive." Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed (6:9-10, *RSV*).

The dark future predicted for Isaiah's ministry is quoted five times in the New Testament. Each time it relates to the ministries of Jesus or Paul, who are so often lifted up to us as the models of victory in God's service:

In the Synoptic Gospels, Christ uses the words of Isaiah in the parable of the sower to explain the variety of responses—not all of them positive—to God's Word. (See Matt. 13:1-15; Mark 4:12-20; Luke 8:1-15.)

Luke, in Acts 28:23-27, quotes God's message to the prophet when Paul's ministry to his own people produces meager results.

The glory of the cross

And John, in our text (chap. 12), places the promise to Isaiah in relation to the greatest defeat and failure in all history—the cross of Christ. Surrounding John's quotation of God's words to Isaiah are four references to "glory"—in verses 16, 23, 28, and 41.

These are prefaced by Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (vv. 12-19).

Following this spectacular event, some Greeks expressed a desire to see Jesus. He responded by saying: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v. 23).

But what was this "glory"?

Was it Christ's victorious entrance into the city, when people hailed Him as King? No, for Jesus, the great Paradox, stands the truth on its head to draw attention to reality. Each time Jesus or the evangelists speak of "glory," they are thinking of the Cross.

Even the prelude to Christ's entry into Jerusalem was an object lesson of the Cross, for the Master said that Mary's extravagant anointing of His feet was "for the day of [his] burial" (v. 7).

With this anticipation of death, Jesus' shattering concept of glory is about to break upon us. This is because a cross in Jesus' day was not the symbol of success, victory, or glory.

Yet this instrument of defeat and death was Jesus' concept of "glory." The Cross was the "hour" of glory toward which Jesus moved throughout His earthly ministry, and it cast its shadows back over His work. This was the reason for the rejection of His person and message:

"Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him" (v. 37, *RSV*).

This points us to the second

emphasis that John derives from Isaiah—the fact that:

2. Christ's glory calls to a mission of failure that is triumph (Isa. 53).

This is because Christ is the Servant with a mission to fail.

John says in 12:38 that the unbelieving response to Christ in verse 37 occurred so that "the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" (*RSV*).

The evangelist is drawing here from the portrayal of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isa. 53. This prophecy stands at the heart of Isaiah's "servant poems"—the Servant whose calling is to be "a light to the nations" (49:6, *RSV*). Isaiah says that the Servant will fulfill this missionary calling through failing, suffering, dying. John writes in 12:39-40 that this is in harmony with God's mission for the prophet in Isa. 6:9-10.

But Christ's kind of glory as the Suffering Servant is our glory as well. For we are the people of the Servant with a mission to fail.

Did not Christ say:

The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. . . . Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:23-25).

This axiom of spiritual life was "fleshed out" in Peru more than 85 years ago. A young English missionary lay dying with typhoid fever. In her book, *Prophet from Peru*, Mrs. Brig. Raquel N. Martin says:

He was not only a dying man but probably a disappointed one—by human standards a failure. After years of faithfully proclaiming the gospel he had won only one person to the Savior—an

Isaiah's vision of Christ's glory resulted in the promise of a ministry of failure.

eight-year-old lad. But as this lone convert knelt by the side of his spiritual father, the missionary asked the little boy to carry the gospel throughout Latin America.

Eduardo Palaci never swerved from his boyhood promise made to that young missionary who died with a gnawing sense of failure. Growing into manhood, he met The Salvation Army—not in Peru, but in Panama. He became one of the Army's most distinguished officers. He made an impact for Jesus Christ on all of the Spanish-speaking American countries that has been felt far beyond the movement in which he served for more than 40 years. The apparently barren ministry of the dying missionary was a triumphant defeat—one that continues after more than 85 years to reflect the glory of Jesus Christ.

The young Englishman is but one graphic instance of the fact that as the new Israel, the Church is the people of the Suffering Servant. Thus the Church has the missionary mandate to be "a light to the nations." This calling centers in the Cross. Hence, obedience to that call will not always result in what we consider success.

This centrality of the Cross brings every area of the believer's life within the scope of God's purpose. This is because the Cross is the context of the

Church's total existence. For this reason, the expression of Christian service—both individually and corporately—must be molded by the Cross.

Only slaves permitted

Many years ago two young men who were members of the Moravian Church—the oldest Protestant missionary body in the world—felt that for them the Cross-molded life involved missionary service on a remote Caribbean island. One obstacle to fulfilling this call was that only slaves were permitted in that far-off place. They overcame the problem by selling themselves into slavery in order to preach Christ there. This meant that never again would they see homeland, family, friends.

As their ship sailed from the shores of Germany, they expressed the motivation for this drastic choice by raising their hands to heaven and crying out with one voice the motto of the Moravian Church:

"That the Lamb slain may receive the reward of His sufferings!"

Although we may not be called upon to make a decision as drastic as the one made by those two Moravians, the motto that they cried out as they sailed from sight must be the motivation of our lives as believers, for this is what it means to share Christ's glory—to "fall" with

Christ "into the earth [as] a grain of wheat [and] die."

But the call to such sharing, such falling, such dying, is an invitation to possible defeat, possible failure.

This is not to countenance the failure to live a holy life, for the Cross makes full provision for deliverance from that kind of defeat. Entire sanctification is the triumph over indwelling sin. In fact, only the heart that knows the purifying touch and liberating dynamic of Calvary can commit itself to a service that may end in failure.

For remember, Isaiah was first cleansed from inward sin before he answered God's call to what proved to be a mission of failure. Nor is this to excuse spiritual laziness and its negative effects, for Isaiah was faithful in the work to which he was called.

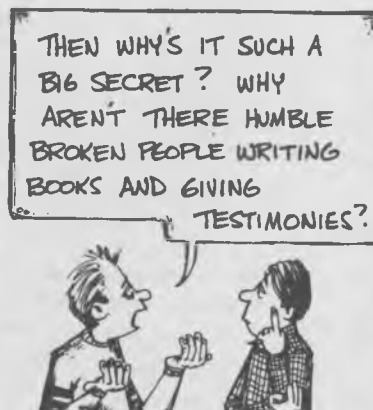
The redeemed of all ages

But identification with the unwelcome prospects of what the world—sometimes the Church, and sometimes even The Salvation Army—considers defeat and failure hastens that day when the fickle and short-lived "Hosannas" of the first Palm Sunday will be transcended by the redeemed of all ages crying out in adoring worship:

To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever! (Rev. 5:13, RSV).

A cross in
Jesus' day
was not the
symbol of
success,
victory, or
glory.

BEYOND BELIEF



Is There a Place for Shepherds in This Era of Ranchers Complex?

When I was a pastor, sometimes I was tempted to view persons no longer in the pastorate as having lost touch with the realities of the pastorate. Though I knew this was not true of everyone, I perceived it to be true in some. As we grow older or our circumstances and assignments change, we often see things from a different point of view. I cannot say that all perceptions of my early years have completely changed, but I can say that, due to my assignments, I've seen a bigger picture.

For the last 10 years, I've served as a district superintendent. I'd like to share an observation or two that are valid and can help us to become more effective as pastors, ministers, and coworkers.

First, I speak to the issue of change. Over the last several years I've heard a number of voices talk about the changes that have occurred regarding the pastorate. Expressions have been made concerning the difficulty of the assignment, the necessity of new methods, the sociological changes, the decline of the organization or institutional/denominational church or both, the lack of interest among people, and on

and on. Sometimes pastors remark, "You are a superintendent, and because of that, you are out of touch, and you don't get it." Some may no longer be aware of the realities confronting the church. In every group—pastors, educators, superintendents, or whatever—there are those who do not engage in the efforts necessary to stay abreast of their field.

Nevertheless, a district superintendent who keeps close to the pastors and churches and spends time in the field with them may be one of the better informed. A superintendent deals with every size church in a multiplicity of situations and circumstances. A superintendent may know and understand the church to a far greater degree than people might think because of listening to so many people. With that in mind, I'd like to share several observations that I believe after serving for a decade as a superintendent.

Things have changed. There's no question about it. Worship styles, generational differences, societal demands, the work environment, the influence of mass media and television, and so on have brought about profound changes since the time I entered

college in 1962 until now. One thing has not changed, however. That is human nature. It is the same as it was in the Garden of Eden. People are still the same. The results are broken lives, estranged relationships, shattered dreams, emotional and physical and spiritual isolation, and existential hopelessness. One does not have to be a great philosopher or theologian to recognize it. When one moves beyond the superficial, human nature is still the same. People are still hurting, still lost, and still need to know God. The importance of restored relationships, both spiritual and human, is as crucial as ever. People ultimately hunger for it. Augustine is still right: "Our hearts are restless, O God, until they find their rest in Thee."

People respond to love and personal attention. After being involved in seeking scores of pastors to place in churches, I can honestly say that, more than anything, churches desire pastors who really love them and let them know it. There are a lot of different skills and gifts a person can bring to a particular situation, but none are more important or crucial to the success or failure of one's ministry than the

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reality of pastoral care and loving people. A long-standing, oft-repeated saying suggests, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

In a high-tech society, the Church of our Lord Jesus has opportunity to be "high touch" in her ministry. We live in the midst of a cold, sterile sociological environment where people find it easier to withdraw behind natural and self-imposed barriers rather than to be exposed to the disappointments, hurts, and brokenness of relationships, change, and hostile adversaries. The Church of our Lord Jesus has a golden opportunity to embrace people with warmth and love that comes from God alone. That is what people hunger for. That is what churches tell me they want most in a pastor, that is, someone who will honestly love and care about them.

Rethink the biblical idea of being a shepherd. The overwhelming favorite psalm is Ps. 23. That psalm finds its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Peter follows that with his admonition to "be shepherds of God's flock" (1 Pet. 5:2).

My father-in-law has been a cattleman and a farmer all his life. He has been a very successful cattleman because he always stayed close to his herds. He watched over them, paid attention to them, and was there in the middle of the night when the cows were calving. Many times he helped pull a calf, sometimes saving the cow or the calf or both. Not long ago, his successful birthrate for his herd averaged 100 percent. This is most unusual. It happened because of his personal attention. I've watched with interest and observed that when good care is given to the herd, it grows.

So it is with the flock of God. Where care is given, the flock seems to be healthy and it grows. In the last several years I have read that the idea of being

The importance of restored relationships, both spiritual and human, is crucial.

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

a shepherd is out-of-date and irrelevant. Having observed all sizes of congregations from a different vantage point for the last 10 years, I take strong issue with that idea. People, the flock of God, still respond to the care of the shepherd. They long for it, desire it, and receive spiritual help from it. They also respond to it.

Being God's man or woman to fulfill His call to shepherd is hard work. To be a good pastor, the shepherd of the flock, is very challenging and highly stressful. According to some of the studies, the ministry rates near the top of high-stress-level professions.

One of my observations has been that pastors who are always seeking the "magic formula" or the easy way out are usually those who have not been very good shepherds. I cannot think of a single successful pastor who has not worked very hard in tending the flock of God. He or she may be blessed with gifts and skills that aid in the ministry, but as much as anything, such a pastor has been willing to stay disciplined and to work hard at the task in order to see the flock well cared for and growing. Someone has said that the process of pastoral service is as important as the results.

U.S. President Calvin Coolidge once said:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent, and the slogan "Press On" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

From practical perspectives, his point concerning persistence and hard work is valid. Most successful pastors I know are average in their talent. It's what they have done through hard work and

persistence that made them good and successful shepherds.

Some side effects occur as a result of a pastor being a good shepherd of the sheep. For one thing, a bond develops. Some of the finest people that I have ever met and that I deeply admire have been many laypeople I have had the privilege of serving. Most were not known much outside the context of their local churches. Yet they were "salt" and "light," marvelous people who deserved the best this pastor could give them. To this day, when we revisit them, there is a sense of spiritual reality and love that cannot be fully described. It can only be experienced and observed in the invisible bond that exists between us. I have had the privilege of experiencing that with many of my pastors, too, and I have worked alongside them. Those relationships are more precious than gold. They are an extension of our bond between the Good Shepherd and ourselves as we become His avenue of grace and ministry to the flocks He has entrusted to us.

With the bond between pastor and people, there is a realized permission to lead. Much is written about leadership in our time. One important reality is to consider the levels of leadership. For instance, our initial level of leadership is referred to as positional. A pastor is by definition the president of the corporation and the chairman of the church board in many disciplines. The congregation grants to the pastor a certain degree of permission to lead them as a result of the fact that he or she is the pastor. However, for one to lead effectively, there must be much more permission extended than what is granted at the entry level.

The next level of leadership strength comes from what might be termed personality. As a pastor begins to work in the life of a congregation, and they observe his or her personality and interpersonal relationship skills, they may grant more permission to

their leader as they develop a liking for the way the shepherd sets along with them. If one cannot get along with the flock of God, the ability to lead is arrested at this point.

A third level of authority or power is granted by a congregation to their pastor as a result of competency that is demonstrated as he or she works among them. This is developed over a long period of time as a result of both a record of deeds done and the spirit in which they are done.

Finally, and most important, is the authority granted by a congregation to its leader because of his or her character. This, too, develops over a period of time as he or she walks among the people as the shepherd does the flock, until a level of trust is developed because they know the pastor truly loves them, cares for them, and has their best interests in mind. Paul addressed the fundamentals of this dynamic via a different metaphor in Eph. 5.

This level of leadership authority is realized by those who have received permission from their people to be their leader. When this happens and one has moved from the entry level of positional leadership to the level where the sum total of all leadership elements result in the trust of character, there is almost nothing that a congregation will not do as they follow their shepherd.

While character is the

strongest element in the leadership equation, it can be shattered overnight by one who compromises his or her integrity. This highest level of leadership must be earned in every church and in every assignment, even though he or she has a verifiable history and track record of ministry. By the way, this was the leadership level of our Lord. He taught as one having authority because of His character. It was so overwhelmingly powerful in its spiritual depth that people were ready and willing to give Him unconditional permission to lead.

Nearly every pastor I know wants to succeed. Most whom I have ever been associated with want to be able to stand in front of the mirror, look themselves in the eye, and know that they have honestly given to God their best effort. Yet, as we've already noted, the ministry is a very difficult task.

If we were able to hear a fresh word from the Lord today, I am not sure what He would say. It might be something like this: "And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9-10, RSV). It is possible He would follow up by saying, "Do not be afraid to love My

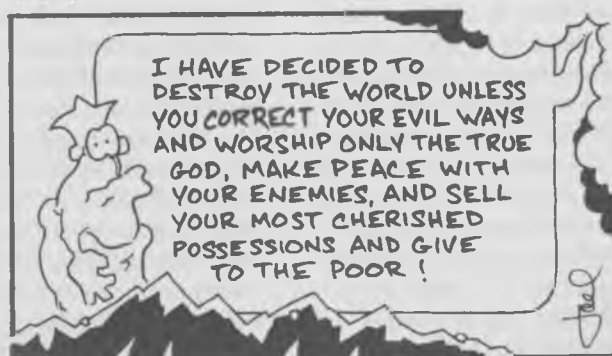
people more and have more patience with them. After all, that is the way I have treated you, and no servant is above his or her Master."

A final thought. Sometimes in our humanness it is easy to forget that we are called by the Lord Jesus and that we work for Him. It is true that we find the avenue to fulfill that calling through some form of structured organization or denominational church. Nevertheless, our call and ultimate reward comes from Jesus Christ himself. I have now passed the midcentury mark and have probably served longer than I am going to serve. I have realized afresh that it won't be general superintendents or colleagues in the district superintendency or anyone else who will say to me, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, cf. 23, KJV). With that in mind, I am trying more than ever to see people the way God sees them. I am seeking to understand His mind and His precepts. Only then can I minister effectively in a changing world. Sir Walter Raleigh said, "There's a beginning to every mission, but a mission finished to the very end is what yields the true glory."

I cannot speak for you, but my hunger is to finish the mission and experience the glory of the only One who ultimately matters. God's blessings on you all! **PM**

Being God's man or woman to fulfill His call to shepherd is hard work.

Pondius' Puddle



Ministry Means a Cross

Anyone wishing to be a minister of Jesus Christ must "take up his cross" and assume the posture of a servant. "Minister" comes from the Latin meaning "a servant." Jesus issues a call for disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). In Mark's account of the Gospel, the whole ministry of Jesus transpires in the shadow of the Cross. Jesus calls any who wish to follow Him to take up their cross and go with Him to a skull-shaped hill outside Jerusalem.

More than a century ago, Martin Kahler defined a Gospel as "a passion-resurrection narrative with an extended introduction." The definition is inadequate because it does not describe some literature that belongs to the Gospel genre. More important, in this context, it hardly describes Mark's account of the Gospel. Almost everything in Mark's story of Jesus describes the suffering and death of Jesus. Mark 1:1—15:47 is a passion narrative. Chapter 16:1-8 is the story of the empty tomb. Mark really does not have a Resurrection narrative.

In Mark's story of the Suffering Servant Messiah, Jesus is no mere passive, dejected victim accepting an unjust death. Jesus consciously and willingly chose a way of life that put Him on a collision course with His culture and its leadership. In the first century, Jesus challenged would-be followers, including the Twelve, to take up their cross. Can we imagine that the call of Jesus involves less in the 20th century?

According to Mark's story of Jesus, the Man of the Cross calls followers to a cross. Every major divi-

sion of Mark's account closes with a suffering motif. The first division ends at 3:6 with a plot to "destroy" Jesus (RSV). Second, at 6:6 there is the "unbelief" of "his own country" (RSV). Third, there is the misunderstanding of His disciples (8:21); the Twelve do not understand who Jesus is. At the end of the fourth division, Jesus declares that the "Son of Man" will "give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). The fifth section ends with the widow's mites (12:44, KJV), which anticipates Jesus' sacrificial death. Chapters 14 and 15 narrate the trial, scourging, mockery, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus. In the baptism of Jesus, the shadow of the Cross stretched across His entire life span. "You are my Son" (1:11) derives from Ps. 2:7 and is a coronation formula for a king. "With you I am well pleased" comes from Isa. 42, the beginning of the "Suffering Servant" songs. With these two references to Hebrew Scripture, Mark establishes Jesus as King who is a suffering servant of God.

Sometimes we forget that the Man of the Cross did not want a cross. The Temptation story (Mark 1; Matt. 4; Luke 4) is about avoiding the Cross. Jesus' temptation, especially in Matthew and Luke, emphasized alternative ways of becoming Messiah. In Mark 8:27-30, we have the account of Peter's so-called great confession. Note that Peter did not understand what he had "confessed." Jesus rebuked him with the words, "Get behind me, Satan!" (v. 33). It was the same temptation Satan presented in the Temptation story. In John's account (6:1-15), Jesus fed the 5,000. With that the people wanted to make Him King; it was

an easier way to become Messiah. In Gethsemane (Mark 14:34-42), Jesus prayed repeatedly, "this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39, KJV). Till the very end, Jesus wanted to avoid the Cross. On the Cross, He heard the mockers say, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:31-32, RSV). Bystanders taunted Him with the words, "Save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (v. 30, RSV).

In the words "He saved others; he cannot save himself," ironically we have a true distillation of Jesus' entire mission. He "saved" the woman with the issue of blood (5:25-29). He "saved" sinful people in villages around Genesareth (6:5). He "saved" blind Bartimaeus (10:52), but He could not save himself. Challenged by opponents for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus asks the poignant question: "Is it lawful on the sabbath . . . to save life to kill?" (3:4, RSV). Jesus lived the principle He enunciated for others: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (8:35, NRSV). He poses the rhetorical question to which we know the answer: "For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (v. 36, RSV). He did not come "to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45, RSV).

In the first century, only a Messiah without a cross is believable. His opponents say He is in league with Beelzebul (3:22, RSV). His mother and brothers wanted to take Him home because they thought He was insane (v. 21). The Nazareth synagogue, where He preached His first sermon, reacted in disbelief to "Mary's son" (6:3). His disciples could not decipher His parables (4:10) and were not certain of His identity (v. 41; 6:52) and the significance of His ministry (8:17-21). They

Sometimes
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BY JERRY McCANT
SAN DIEGO



did not understand that He must die on a cross.

Peter could declare forcefully, "You are the Christ" (8:29, RSV). Jesus responds that He must go to Jerusalem and die (v. 31). Peter thinks Jesus has misunderstood what he "confessed," and he takes Jesus aside for a private rebuke (v. 32). The Big Fisherman did not have the foggiest idea of what his great confession meant. Jesus' instruction about going to Jerusalem to die simply went over his head. Jesus' disciples want a Messiah without a cross. On three occasions Jesus predicted His death in Jerusalem (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Each time the disciples have the same two reactions: (1) they misunderstand Jesus; (2) they respond with crass arrogance and ambition.

All the disciples misunderstood what Jesus was saying (8:33); thus His rebuke was not simply aimed at Peter. They expressed their lack of understanding in having Peter, the apostolic spokesman, rebuke Jesus. Immediately after the second prediction (9:30), the disciples argued with one another about who was the greatest among them (vv. 33-34). Immediately after the third prediction (10:33-34), James and John make an audacious and politically ambitious request: "Grant to us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (v. 37, RSV). Three times, in Mark 14, Jesus asks His inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—to stay awake and watch while He enters Gethsemane alone to pray. Even though He told them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch" (v. 34, RSV), each time Jesus returned to find them sleeping, totally oblivious to His inner struggle with death on the Cross.

The disciples wanted a Messiah without a cross. Peter can declare that Jesus is Messiah, but he cannot accept the Messiah on a cross. Peter's defective confession leads Jesus to begin teaching, "If anyone would come after me, he must . . .

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take up his cross." Obtuse disciples argue about who is greatest among them, provoking Jesus to say, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35, RSV). After James and John request a seat on either side of Jesus, He teaches them about a Kingdom in which no one is master over another person (10:41-45). Jesus shared His vision of a "partnership world," a Kingdom of radical egalitarianism, with the sons of Zebedee. The kingdom of God is not a kingdom where one ruler replaces another, but a Kingdom where there is no ruler and there is no servant. Ministers of Jesus Christ must invest in Paul's kenotic theology (Phil. 2:5-11) of self-emptying if our vision of a kingdom of partners is to become a reality.

Lack of faith prevents the disciples from exorcising a demon-possessed boy (Mark 9:14-29). They criticize another person, not of their company, who casts out demons in Jesus' name (vv. 38-41), thereby earning a stern rebuke from Jesus. Later they hinder children from coming to Him, provoking the Lord to anger (10:13-16). Jesus healed a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), and as He leaves Jericho, He heals the blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). Mark frames this whole section on discipleship with the healing of two blind persons to emphasize the blindness of His disciples. There is a sharp contrast between the bountiful mission of Jesus in Galilee (1:4—8:21) with the conflict and death that dominate the events in Jerusalem (11:1—15:47). The section on discipleship and the blindness of the disciples (8:22—10:52) joins these contrasting depictions of Jesus' ministry.

After Jesus confronts the "rich young ruler," Peter asks, "So, what do we get out of this?" (cf. 10:28).

Jesus answers, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time,

houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, *with persecutions*, and in the age to come eternal life" (10:29-30, RSV, emphasis added). He must remind His disciples, who wish to emulate Him, that He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (10:45).

Ministry means serving, giving ourselves to ransom others. In a world where suffering abounds everywhere, Jesus calls to any who would be ministers, "Take up your cross." Ministry in a suffering world means suffering for the minister. We cannot avoid the cross if Jesus is the Model of ministry we follow. We must live among the wounded and learn to suffer *with* them and *for* them. The cross is uncomfortable and inconvenient, but it alone gives authenticity to our preaching. Without a cross, we may be "successful," but we cannot be ministers of Jesus Christ.

Let others boast of what they gave up to follow Jesus; give your life "a ransom" for all. Let others seek political position, on the right and on the left; learn to drink the cup that Jesus drank, and enter into His baptism as "suffering servant." Live among the walking wounded; weep with people whose eyes can no longer cry. Be there for persons facing the impossible situations in their lives: incurable cancer, AIDS, poverty, divorce, and so on.

We can have more fun in Galilee, but Jesus calls us to Jerusalem.

We can be safer in Galilee, but Jesus calls us to Jerusalem.

We can be more successful in Galilee, but Jesus calls us to Jerusalem.

We can be more comfortable in Galilee, but Jesus calls us to Jerusalem.

We can have more miracles in Galilee, but Jesus calls us to Jerusalem.

If anyone would be a minister of Jesus Christ, let him or her take up a cross and follow Jesus to a place of suffering and death!

PM

Willing Workers

10 Steps to Building a Vibrant Volunteer Program That Will Keep Them Coming Back for More

Who hasn't felt discouraged about recruiting people to do the church's work? The music ministry sags, teachers vanish, and lay officers burn out and quit.

It doesn't need to be so. But the solution may call for a revolution in how we think about church work—and about the volunteers who do it.

Susan K. Mallory, a lifetime volunteer, recalls how a skilled pastor enabled her to find her God-given calling, and in the process helped transform their congregation's membership from 350 to 1,200.

After eight years as a full-time volunteer staff person at Brentwood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, Mallory has some tips on healthy volunteerism.

"We need to change our mindset from recruitment of volunteers to inviting people into the ministry," she says.

The old "volunteer program" becomes a gift-evoking ministry that focuses on the needs, desires, gifts, and talents of the person. The institution changes to fit the people rather than squeezing the people to fit the institution.

"We're at a time when people need to know they can make a difference," she says. "It's a time

of spiritual renewal." People are coming back to church, but how they grow depends on what the church does.

Here are Mallory's keys to creating an environment in which volunteers flourish:

1. Meet the needs that bring people to church.

But wait. What does meeting needs have to do with volunteering?

There are lots of broken people out there. When the church serves their brokenness, they in turn will serve the church.

Soon after Mallory began attending her church, she experienced a health crisis. Gifted in caring, the congregation rallied around her and her family for months. "Because they responded to my crisis, I was compelled to give back," she said.

The needs of the buster generation (the one following the baby boomers) are unique, Mallory says. These 20 somethings have grown up with television and are visually oriented. Many have never read the Bible and feel little commitment to institutions. Churches that know this can attract busters and help them grow in grace.

"I have three busters [her children]," Mallory says. "Self-es-

teem is a big issue for this generation." Helping them discover that God has gifted them to be unique is affirming.

2. Before you ask for help, create the vision.

Corporate worship is the forum for marketing at Mallory's church. Pastors can preach about the vision and value of ministry so that it becomes a living, breathing need. If churches are educating members about living out their faith, Mallory says, recruitment doesn't loom so large.

3. Not everyone's ministry takes place within church walls.

Fifty percent of your volunteer working within the church and 5 percent outside is a healthy balance, Mallory asserts. The moment a church recognizes members' work off-campus, its volunteer force has increased, along with its energy. Commission them in worship to affirm their service.

These off-campus ministries return blessings to the church, Mallory points out. They attract new people and present a powerful witness in the community.

4. Find out what kind of work sets your people's hearts afire and what they never want to be asked to do.

"What feeds your heart and soul?" Mallory likes to ask. People who are passionate about issues are coming into the church, she says, but we aren't asking them what those issues are.

Years ago, a newcomer to Mallory's church was set to work doing data entry. Mallory took her to supper and said, "Tell me what you're passionate about." The woman confessed to an interest in leadership development, but she was doing data entry, simply because the church had asked her.

"She was willing, as most people are, to say yes," Mallory says "but unleashed to use her gifts, she could be training a hundred people in data entry."

A panel of similarly high-ca-

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MOTÉ

Freelance writer

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CALIFORNIA



capacity laypeople spoke to a group of pastors about being underused. Strong negative feelings emerged. "If I don't fit your need, you cast me off," they said.

5. Avoid pigeonholing people.

A fund-raising expert at Mallory's church, it turned out, had no desire to do more of the same. Was this dream job? To cook gourmet meals for the church. So that is what he does—with zest.

Look beyond stereotypes of age and gender. Now it's the baby boomer woman, often with multiple degrees, who belongs on the stewardship committee, Mallory says.

"We're asking the right people to do the wrong things."

6. Use skilled interviews.

A good interview can uncover hidden gifts and passions. Meet one-on-one with the person, face-to-face. Listen with God's ears. Such exploration is really spiritual development.

Interviews are most readily done in seekers' or new members' classes. It's easy to ask people why they have come now and what their needs and desires are.

Mallory teamed with her pastor to present new-member classes. In one-on-one and group interviews, she developed her preferred approach. She likes to use a gift-assessment tool as a complement to an interview, but only after she has looked into the person's heart.

"Busters don't know the spiritual implications of a gift inventory," Mallory says. First they need help gaining that awareness before they can understand the inventory.

7. The younger they are, the more important it becomes to give volunteers a sense of ownership.

Their parents are institutionally loyal. They aren't. [Busters]

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are creative, innovative, and bright, and they'll only commit to decisions they help make.

Invite them into leadership early, Mallory says. Allow them to have a voice. Risk doing it their way.

8. Train your volunteers.

"The church is the only non-profit organization in the world that doesn't train its volunteers," Mallory says. "With every recruitment invitation should come an offer of training."

Jesus identified His disciples and then taught them. One of His first lesson plans was the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12), which present the ideal character qualities for leaders.

9. Affirm and recognize your volunteers.

People serve out of commitment, but lack of appreciation prevents them from stepping up for more. "Until we begin to treasure each person as a gift in the congregation, the churches will continue to shoot themselves in the foot," Mallory says.

One of the largest groups on the inactive list of mainline churches is former church officers. One reason they leave? No one affirmed them.

On Appreciation Sunday, Mallory's church offers pertinent scripture, a celebration of gifts, and a testimony by someone whose life has been changed by serving. "The stories of spiritual growth are fabulous," she says.

A service of appreciation also makes good marketing. It sends a strong message to visitors and regulars that the church cares about its people.

10. What about rehabilitating church members already hardened against requests for help?

The care-invite-nurture format works for them too.

"Reeducate, revalue, and reaffirm who they are," Mallory says. If you take time to help them discover their gifts and offer training, you'll find them willing.

"You don't burn out in the area of your passion," she says. "You get tired, you need a sabbatical, but you don't burn out."

One of Mallory's favorite success stories involves a young man in her church who possessed a passion for mission. Nothing inside the church met his needs. In the community, he helped form Housing Options for People to Excel—HOPE—filling a need for homeless women with children.

Using some new mission money from the church, HOPE won a matching grant, persuaded the city to lease land for \$1 a year, and secured a free house from a contractor for the trouble of moving it. A contractor donated his services, and church members rehabilitated and expanded the house.

Was the young man lost to the church? "He's currently serving as our mission elder," Mallory said.

"Take a high-capacity volunteer like that, turn him loose, and let him do what God has called him to do in the name of the church," Mallory says. "The church takes great pride in it."

Daily, the evening news demonstrates that the world has tremendous needs. Peter Drucker has said that government can no longer meet those needs. Social service agencies and religious communities must do it together, with limited resources.

That need was never more obvious than during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Many secular non-profit organizations had structure but no volunteers. It was religious volunteers—Jewish, Muslim, and Christian—working alongside the secular organizations who began the healing. **PM**

The Wacky World of Ministering to the Unchurched: The High Cost of Reaching People You Never Expected to See in Church

When I became a pastor's wife, I pictured serving in a nice church with nice people who read God's Word and did good works. Now, after 12 years of ministry in what some people affectionately call "The First Barely Baptist Church" of Colton, California, I have a far different understanding of what church is supposed to be.

In February 1983 my husband, Dane, accepted the call to pastor this 98-year-old church with 89 members. Around 700 people now come to one of the three services we offer on Sunday mornings. The bulk of this growth has come from unchurched people. Some 52 percent of the people in our congregation were not attending church before they walked through our doors.

When you have that many unchurched people in the pews, you are in for a wild ride! They don't leave their baggage at the door. They bring all their sin, all their dysfunctions, all their worldly habits, all their misconceptions, and secular ways of thinking right along with them. Watching God take all these broken lives and accept them as His very own children has been the most rewarding thing Dane and I have ever done.

When I look around our church, I am amazed at all the people God loves. It is a humbling experience when people you wouldn't want as next-door neighbors are now serving you Communion. I know God loves every one of them as much as He loves me. The purpose of our

church is to make sure *they* know God loves them just as they are and to help them become all He wants them to be.

No More Misfits

I was recently reminded of what "doing church" really means. At the mothers' group I attended, the newest believer among us shared about the struggles she was facing.

"My ex-husband just moved back into the area, and he wants to see our daughter more often," Tracy said. "She's only 12, and it scares me to death to think of her spending weekends with her dad. I've started drinking again. One day last week things were so bad I wanted to shoot something up my arm. There weren't any drugs in the house, so I couldn't. I need help."

Although my life experience has not included any of the three Ds—divorce, drinking, or drugs—I knew this woman with all her problems was every bit as qualified to receive God's love as I. In fact, we were both completely *disqualified* by our sins, different though they may be, from deserving God's love at all. Every woman around the table that day needed God's mercy to make it through the next 24 hours. We all reached out to share the love and grace God had shown us with our hurting friend and prayed for Him to strengthen her.

The next time we met, Tracy could hardly contain herself. "I haven't had a drink for 12 days!" she proudly announced. We rejoiced with her as we enjoyed another meal together. When our

time was coming to a close and a few women started to get up to leave, Tracy was the first to say, "Why don't we pray again before we leave? We prayed the last time, and look how it worked!"

I'll never forget Tracy's simple heartfelt prayer that day: "Dear God, thank you for this group of women, Oh God, I never thought I would fit in."

Something has gone radically wrong with church when people with problems think they couldn't possibly fit in. Somehow we have given the impression to the world that we are looking for beautiful, talented, problem-free people to fill our pews, and if their lives are not already all together, they needn't bother coming.

Jesus, the Sinless Friend of Sinners

Philip Yancey comments in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew* on this strange departure from the kind of crowd that Jesus attracted. Yancey recounts the following story told to him by a friend who works with the down-and-out in Chicago:

A prostitute came to him in his wretched straits, homeless, her health failing, unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Her eyes awash with tears, she confessed that she had been renting out her daughter—two years old—to men interested in kinky sex, in order to support her own drug habit. My friend could hardly bear hearing the sordid details of her story. He sat in silence, not knowing what to say. At last he asked if she had ever thought of going to a church

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When you
have many
unchurched
people in
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It's
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for help. "I will never forget the look of pure astonishment that crossed her face," he later told me. "Church!" she cried. "Why would I ever go there? They'd just make me feel even worse than I already do!" (pp. 147-48).

Yancey concludes:

Somehow we have created a community of respectability in the church. . . . The down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome. How did Jesus, the only perfect person in history, manage to attract the notoriously imperfect? And what keeps us from following in his steps today? (p. 148).

Indeed, how far we have come from the ministry of Jesus, who welcomed people with problems to become part of the kingdom of God. When the Pharisees came to tattle on Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, he responded: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). Most churches today could not be accused of doing what Jesus did—rubbing shoulders with sinners.

Jesus never lowered God's standard of righteousness; He called people to be perfect as their Heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Instead of lowering the standard to include the lost, Jesus lowered *himself* to reach the lost.

Sunday Morning Culture Shock

Our church has been accused of lowering the standard because we welcome and accept all kinds of people at our worship services. Some Christians are shocked by the people they see at our church on Sunday morning—people smoking outside the building, men with long hair in ponytails, teenagers with pierced noses and lips (and probably other body parts we don't see), pregnant women with no wedding rings, couples with the same address and different last

names, divorced, gang members, homeless people, and ushers serving Communion in shorts and baseball caps. Apparently they think the people they see worshipping at church on Sunday morning should look different from the people they see shopping at Wal-Mart that afternoon.

The problem with the church in America today is that there is a difference. A cultural chasm separates the people on the outside of our churches from the people on the inside. You used to have to cross the border or go to a strongly ethnic neighborhood to have a cross-cultural experience in America. Now we have to develop a ministry mind-set just to reach mainstream U.S.A.

The Cost of Reaching the Unchurched

It takes more than a nice handshake at the door to truly welcome people into our churches. Reaching unchurched people who may not wear the right clothes and display the right behavior is a monumental task with a big price tag. While the pastor can't do the job alone, the pastor still pays the biggest price. Here's a look at some of the costs involved for the pastor who wants to bridge the gap and minister to the unchurched:

1. *Being misunderstood by the very people you are reaching out to.*

A person who had only been attending our church for a few months told Dane, "I have to admit that when I started coming here, I had a real problem when I saw your wife's car. It doesn't seem like a pastor's family should be driving around in such a fancy car."

Dane kindly explained to him that the car, a Chrysler New Yorker for the curious, was nine years old, and we bought it used for \$4,600. This seemed to relieve his concern, and he drove away satisfied in his brand-new \$40,000 Cadillac!

Unchurched people don't have a clue how pastors live or how

churches operate. Many people tell Dane they love his sermons on Sunday but were wondering, what do you do the rest of the week? I get phone calls at home in the middle of the day from people wanting to talk to Dane. They seem so surprised to find out he works at the church during the week!

Working with unchurched people requires a great sense of humor and an unshakable conviction that reaching the lost is worth the cost. You have to extend grace to people who aren't even aware that they need grace and to pray as Jesus did, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

2. *Being willing to minister to the people who are the least likely candidates to help pay for the ministry.*

Our church has lived with financial problems ever since we started reaching unchurched people. Tithing is a completely foreign idea to many of the people who have been saved through the ministry of our church. If they put a \$10 bill in the plate, they leave feeling magnanimous. Dane has been faithful to teach our congregation about giving, but it seems as if there's about a two- to four-year gap before new Christians are willing to surrender this part of their lives to the Lord.

It is discouraging to see much smaller churches operating on much larger budgets. "Think how many people we could reach with that kind of money," we say to each other. But the Lord always reminds us of all the spiritual fruit we've seen, the people we've reached for the Lord who would not be welcome in most other churches. We'd still rather have fruit without the money than the money without the fruit.

3. *Facing the formidable task of trying to build and expand the kingdom of God with untrained volunteers.*

When your congregation

grows with church transfers, you get a steady influx of new children's Sunday School teachers, Bible study leaders, choir members, ushers, greeters, prayer coordinators, evangelism team members, and so on. But when your congregation grows with the unchurched, you get a steady influx of broken, dysfunctional people trying to heal from drug addictions, alcoholism, divorces, affairs, pornography, homosexuality, and so on.

Many newcomers are months away from being ready to lead ministries, even though their hearts are often eager and willing. Sometimes, even years after being saved, old habits, desires, or wounds will resurface that incapacitate people for a season, interrupting their ability to be involved in any kind of ministry.

We have to constantly train people to do things that would be second nature to people who grew up in church. It takes many reassuring words to convince new believers that God has gifted them to minister to other people in ways they never thought possible before.

4. *Being misunderstood by the so-called mature Christians in the church.*

Without question, this price is the most painful for pastors trying to love the unchurched. When the people on your own team question your motives and accuse you of compromising God's standards in order to attract a crowd, that hurts.

One couple who had been Christians for years expressed concern that Dane didn't show enough regard for the holiness of God and that people were not reverent enough in our worship services. One Sunday after a Communion service, the wife came to Dane and said she wasn't able to focus on the Lord's table that day because she spotted two teenagers with caps on. "I gave them a dirty look," she

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said, "so they would know how unhappy I was with them before I took Communion."

How ironic that this woman would use Communion—the most meaningful symbol of Christian unity—as an occasion to express her disdain for other members of the Body of Christ. When Paul warned the disciples not to take Communion in an "unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27), he wasn't talking about the clothes they were wearing. He was grieved over the divisions that existed among the people (v. 18).

If anyone was taking Communion unworthily that morning, it was this woman with her hateful, judgmental attitude. I honestly think she would still be in our church today and be very happy if we would just quit accepting people the way they come to us and enforce a dress code. Never mind if anyone ever discovers that God loves them and sent His Son to die for them.

Love Is the Starting Point

We are committed to discipling people and helping them "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). If you don't love people as they come, you never get a chance to help them become what God wants them to be. Unconditional love is the starting point.

When a man named Ryan started joining his wife at our Sunday morning services, she warned Dane not to talk to him. "If you say anything to him, you'll scare him off," she said. So Dane started loving this person by avoiding him completely.

Soon Ryan, an avid sports fan, joined our church softball team and became good friends with Eric, the leader of our sports ministry. After two years of involvement, Eric got a job transfer and had to move out of the area. Without consulting Dane, he

asked Ryan to take over the sports ministry when he left.

"He's not a Christian yet," Dane had to tell him. "He's not ready to lead a ministry."

"Then let's see him get saved before I go," Eric responded.

One night at a softball team party Eric asked Ryan to come outside with him. He asked him if he had ever become a Christian.

"I don't know," Ryan said.

"Would you like to be sure?" Eric asked.

"Yes," said Ryan. He accepted the Lord that night and took over the leadership of the sports ministry two weeks later. Dane took Ryan through our New Christians Training program and continued to meet with him on a month to make sure he was getting grounded in his faith.

After a few months Dane heard word that beer was being served at church softball parties. He met with Ryan and explained why it would be a good idea not to serve alcohol, especially since many people in our church had problems with drinking and were trying to quit. Ryan understood completely and agreed to have alcohol-free parties from then on.

Encouraging a ministry leader to switch from serving beer to serving root beer was not one of the challenges Dane and I expected to face in the ministry. But it is part of the wacky world of ministering to the unchurched. We agree with C. T. Studd, who said:

*Some wish to live within the sound
Of chime or chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.*

When you work so close to the border between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of light, ministry can be messy, uncomfortable, and unpredictable. But when you get to see people transfer in and become new creatures in Christ, it's worth it all.

Ministry: By Gender or by Gift?

No girl has ever been president," stated the six-year-old boy, directing his comment to a girl working at the same table. "In Canada we have a prime minister," corrected a nearby adult, "and we have had a lady prime minister." Oblivious to being corrected, the boy was intent on arguing his point. He began naming all the things he could think of that girls are incapable of doing. This, of course, started a battle of words between the two children, who seemed determined to settle, once and for all, what is for girls and what is for boys.

Behaviorists would tell us that this sort of conflict indicates that gender roles are learned at an early age. In effect, adults praise children when they demonstrate behaviors believed to be appropriate for their gender: girls are rewarded when they take an interest in sewing, while boys are patted on the back for getting nails, a hammer, and some boards. This is only one of many arguments that seek to show how gender roles are determined. The opinions are vastly different. They range from those who claim that gender roles change according to the economics of a given era in history to those who declare that differences in their brain structures determine male and female gender roles. Sadly, the Bible is also used to support the argument that men and women have distinct roles in home and church life. This argu-

ment generally says that women are not to be leaders; rather that the men lead in both the home and church (1 Tim. 2:11-15) and that women are to keep silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

Whether one agrees with any of the above arguments or not, the differences between people on this issue are intense. The secular world has made some gigantic leaps across gender lines. A man is just as likely as a woman to be hired in the laundry department of a hospital. No longer are we shocked when we meet a lady who is climbing the corporate ladder. The church, in comparison, has taken only small steps toward addressing this matter. Could it be that progress is slow because things need to be seen from a different perspective altogether? A new model for ministry is needed! What would happen if the criterion for service in the church, both lay and professional, was based not on gender but rather on one's spiritual gifts?



BY JEANNIE
NEUFELD
Pastor, Egypt Church
of the Nazarene
Pefferlaw, Ontario

In his book *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church*, C. S. Cowles appropriately says, "Not much is going to happen to set women free until local church leaders, pastors, and denominational officials aggressively reach out and invite them to participate more actively in public ministry."* He goes on to describe how women should be included in the public reading of Scripture, ushering, and serving Communion. As well, men must be freed to serve according to their spiritual gifts and not their genders. Men ought to be encouraged to teach classes of children and serve as stewards. Qualification for service in the church ought to be determined by one's gifts, not one's gender. Maybe it's time for the church to take 1 Cor. 12:4-11 more seriously. It is significant that the spiritual gifts listed are not gender specific.

If the church ignored gender bias, people would be encouraged to serve according to their gifts. The benefits would be amazing! Individuals would find personal fulfillment serving joyously because they have been freed to use their God-given talents. Many interpersonal relationships would be enhanced, for people would be working in areas where they feel competent. Furthermore, the church would see better results in evangelism because people can more easily share their faith in Christ if they are using the very means with which God has gifted them.

Isn't it time that the church take a bold new look at ministry? God's wish for His people is that they be prepared "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12). What liberty the church would feel when ministry by gender is laid to rest and ministry by gift is encouraged! It would be a "second wind" for the church.

PM

*C. S. Cowles, *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1993), 191.

To Forgive Is to Forget

Forgiven or Forgotten?

My husband and I sat in the parsonage living room of a new pastor in a neighboring town. He had moved into a church going through a sad, devastating situation. The previous pastor had turned in his credentials, renounced the ministry, and divorced his wife. Now the new pastor and spouse had to endeavor to heal the integrity of the church in its community. Fortunately, no one had left the church, but questions still existed along with the pain, doubt, and confusion for those who remained. What happened to this minister? Would anyone bother to help him back to the Lord?

In another situation, a church leader's wife had died from an illness. Less than a year later, the leader left the ministry and turned in his credentials. According to some, he made two mistakes. First, he married another woman with too little experience in the ministry. Second, he did so too soon after the death of his first wife. Since he was still suffering from the loss of his first wife, he needed the support and patience of his church. Instead, he faced pressure and rejection. He soon resigned his position and turned in his credentials. What had begun with the tragic loss of his wife brought the even more tragic loss of his ministry. Years later, people still remember and resent him for what he did. They seldom forget.

BY RAQUEL LIZ
CINTRON-FORREST
Student, Nazarene
Theological Seminary
KANSAS CITY

I remember another pastor who had fallen into sin. When his sin became public, my family supported him, giving love in or-



der to help him up again. No matter how much we tried, he needed more than we could offer. Perhaps if more leaders and people of the church had been like Jesus toward him, he might have come back to continue in God's work. He is not in the ministry to this day.

In all of these situations, once-valuable servants of Christ not only lost their ministries but also forsook their salvation. They felt disgraced by the very churches that could have showed them grace. If leaders in a church fall, the lack of forgiveness on the part of others cuts them off from

the slightest hope of restoration. Once branded as "backsliders," they slide away even farther and faster to get away from rejection, hostility, and stigma fostered within the church.

The Biblical View of Forgiveness

We expect forgiveness from God, but it's much harder to find in His people. People brand the fallen Christian leader much like the adulteress in the *Scarlet Letter*. While we recognize sin for the destruction it causes, we must not add to it and take only active "damage control" measures. We must seek God's perspective in this.

In searching for His view, I

went to the Bible. I found some well-known verses: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2). What is so different about our Christian leaders that we can't treat them with the love of Christ when they fail? We wish that all church leaders would never fall into sin, weakness, or error. However, we realize that they are not superhuman.

Even Jesus without sin was unacceptable to religious lead-

ers. Peter denied Jesus, but he was still loved by Him and chosen to proclaim His name. No one seemed to have held that against Peter or used it to keep him from ministering to others. Peter asked for forgiveness, and Jesus forgave him and forgot his sin. Shouldn't we do the same? Why judge our fellow Christians when they need us the most? We must not turn our backs to the fallen who have repented. Let us learn to give them a loving hand! Certainly we cannot embrace their sin, but we should embrace the repentant sinner. The Bible tells us very clearly: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). Remember those verses about forgiving others that we know so well: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:14-15; see also 2 Cor. 2:10 and Mark 11:25-26, margin).

We as ministers are trying to lead our people into holiness; but how can we do so if we fail to reach out to those who have failed?

Let us look at the Bible for one last guideline on forgiveness: "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Paul obviously found a great need for comforting those who had offended the Corinthian church. He felt it vital to reach out to people in sorrow. Paul was concerned that they would not be "overwhelmed" in their "sorrow." Why was this so important to Paul? Great sorrow leads to despair that can lead to severe depression. He felt concern for people in need of comfort—the

offenders as well as those offended or upset by the mistake or sin. Comfort and encouragement resuscitate people who have failed or who consider themselves failures. Show them that we still love them and will help them get through the pain. In order for the repentant to get back on their feet and to continue serving the Lord, they need the church to "reaffirm" its "love" and encouragement.

Yes, we can quote Bible verses and religious sayings until we are weary, yet not fully realize forgiveness until we apply these verses to life. How can we show our forgiveness by our actions? Here are some ideas to get us started.

Forgiveness in Action

All our actions must begin with an inner attitude. We need to identify ourselves with the sinner. We were also sinners—saved by grace. Certainly people make individual choices that result in sin. Each individual has to take responsibility for his or her actions in order to obtain forgiveness. However, in an individualistic society we have long forgotten the idea of corporate sin that exists in the Old Testament. We "saints of the church" still have responsibilities to weep tears of repentance along with the fallen.

Though He was sinless, Jesus Christ identified himself with sinful man when He was baptized. Though He had no need to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), Jesus gladly received baptism to show us that He identifies with us. We need to build bridges into the lives of others, not separating ourselves from them. Jesus did not hold sins against the people who repented. He did not remind them of their previous sins, nor did He care to remember. Jesus simply forgave and forgot. He transformed them; the old passed away, the new had come (see 2 Cor. 5:17, NASB).

1. Tell the offending person

that you have forgiven him or her.

Don't assume that the person knows it. Matthew states: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (6:14-15). One way to ease the pressure and stress of people in the pain of regret is to make sure they know you have forgiven them (see also 2 Cor. 2:10 and Mark 11:25-26, margin). It is a good way for them to start the rehabilitation of the heart and mind and spirit.

2. Invite the offending person to your home for fellowship.

This helps to ease pain and pressure by making people feel accepted. Jesus often ate with the unaccepted of His time in order to minister to them. Use this time to talk about important things like their possible future ministry and calling.

If there are children, the fellowship can be especially good for them as well. They may feel some relief from the fear and stress that they often sense in their parents. Young children notice how we feel, even if they don't understand the situation.

If teenagers are in the family, they need to see forgiveness in action. Too many teens left God and the church at this stage because they saw the hypocrisy of an unforgiving and shunning church. By bringing an entire family into a circle of fellowship, you will possibly be helping to heal more than you will ever know.

3. Offer counseling sessions to the offending person.

(Free of charge, preferably.) This provides a fallen and wounded pastor one less obstacle in getting the help he or she may desperately need. Pain, guilt, anguish, anger, and other feelings need a place to be vented. Much of the counseling role is to listen and to allow venting to take place. Sometimes a fallen church leader needs to confide in someone.

If church
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Confidentiality is especially effective when coupled with a loving, accepting environment that allows the person to be himself or herself. For instance, counseling can be done outside the office. Try going out for a cup of coffee, to the park, golfing, or whatever makes both of you comfortable.

4. *Encourage the offending person to get back into ministering to the needs of others*—if possible, under your own ministry.

Sometimes the horrible situations they have just gone through may uniquely qualify them for a special area of service. Ministers who have gone through a divorce may eventually be able to bring healing to others going through divorce. Some pastors may have “fallen” from burnout. Perhaps later they can teach others how to reorder their lives. Somehow the truth seems to have more impact on people when it is spoken by a person who at one time has experienced the tragedy of failure.

Include the whole family if possible. Let them know that they are important and that their help is very much appreciated. Use the teens to assist in Sunday School or children’s church. The spouse may contribute to outreach or men’s or women’s ministries. Let them use their gifts under supervision. Allow the whole family to get back on their feet in ministry.

5. *Treat the whole family of the offending person in group counseling sessions.*

Unlike individual counseling, family therapy allows the whole family to work together solving problems and encouraging one another. Family problems serve as one of the leading causes of ministerial dropout and shame. Preachers’ children who fall into sexual sin, drug use, or even petty crime can bring the downfall of a family, ministry, or an individual’s soul. Group counseling sometimes brings healing to broken parsonage families.

6. *Follow up on the offending*

leaders/pastors and family according to the need.

Give them a call. Check up on them. Start routine visits between once a week to once a month. This shows them that they remain in your thoughts and hearts. It lets them know that you care. Keep a close relationship so they know to whom to turn as time passes.

7. *Show and give compassion.* Prayer; Comfort; Love.

a. *We need to pray continually for them.*

Have a prayer time with the leader or his or her family. Get others to pray for them and form a prayer chain with other leaders.

b. *Comfort them from the beginning to the end.*

Embrace them, cry with them, laugh with them. Send a note of comfort or a card. Be available when they need a shoulder to cry on.

c. *Love them.*

Don’t pretend but love them, allowing your heart to see them the way the Lord sees them. Love them with genuine love as the Lord loves us: “Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him” (2 Cor. 2:7-8).

If we want the Holy Spirit to move in our churches, we must allow Him to move us. If we would preach holiness, we must live holiness by allowing Jesus to help us forgive as He forgives, comforts, and loves them. As we strive to be more like Jesus, true holiness revivals will break out. Let the Spirit move in us first, then in our homes and in our churches. May we pray today, “Lord, teach me to love, to forgive, and to forget.”

The next time you hear tragic news that has caused a minister or ministry to collapse, let your first thought be a loving and forgiving one. Don’t simply say, “Isn’t that a shame?” Be able to say someday, “What was that news about? I forget.”

PM

We must
not turn
our backs
to the
fallen who
have
repented.

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Where Do Pastors and Mates Go for Help?

It is not a new question, but its relevancy rises every day: "Where do pastors and their mates go to regroup?" After the long battles, where is the recovery zone? When ministry seems to come to dead end, is there any hope?

There is hope! One avenue of hope is the Woodshore retreat, Port Huron, Michigan. It is specifically designed for the pastor and mate who need an "alone time" to be refreshed, encouraged, and able to seek God for their future. One pastor who went to Woodshore said after his respite, "God reassured me of His unconditional love." Hope was restored, and a ministry was salvaged.

Steve and Mary Marr are members of the Church of the Nazarene, on whose heart God has laid the burden of care for pastors. Steve worked as a chief executive officer of a large corporation. He felt led to relinquish that job so he and his wife, Mary, could devote their time and resources to the care of pastors. Mary is a licensed minister with gifts for leadership and evangelism. So they are acquainted with the stresses of ministry and the importance of providing a safe haven for recovery and renewal.

The church must come to the place where it is safe to say, "I need help." Ministry has become complicated and complex. The culture in which one is planted to minister has accumulated a multitude of problems, all of which eventually make their way

to the pastor's heart. Societal ills seem to multiply in our world, and any caring pastor feels the strain of trying to make a difference. Of course, when the pastor feels the strain, the mate and family feel it too.

The mission of Woodshore is:

... a quiet, peaceful, natural setting where pastors, missionaries, and full-time Christian leaders, who are called to lead their flocks to a close walk with Jesus Christ, experience through the power of the Holy Spirit:

1. guidance in personal and spiritual health,
2. support for ministry effectiveness,
3. help in personal crisis, and
4. empowerment to seek and care for those who are lost and hurting.

Woodshore accomplishes its mission through counseling and mentoring retreats and other options that fit the need of the individual pastor and mate.

Woodshore is adequately staffed. Rev. Jack D. Woodburn is the director, who has a B.A. in psychology and a M.A. in community counseling. He was chosen as one of 60 worldwide for the prestigious "Focus on the Family Counseling and Enrichment" program in 1992. Rev. Woodburn has pastored for 18 years. He is an ordained elder with the Missionary Church, a sister Holiness denomination.

Counseling retreats are two weeks of individual and group treatment with a maximum of

eight people. Time spent in therapy is equivalent to about six months of conventional weekly counseling to support clergy in returning more quickly to their pulpits.

Mentoring retreats are led by seasoned successful clergy who deal with practical issues often not "caught" in academic preparation such as: vision/goals, worship preparation, church staff/hiring, relationship skills, training laity, and crisis prevention.

Pastor, it is safe to say, "I need help." The sooner one gets help—when it is needed—the sooner one feels good again about ministry. Dr. Wilbur Brannon, director of Pastoral Ministries for the Church of the Nazarene, is a supporter of Woodshore and endorses its mission.

It is my belief that most district superintendents and denominational leaders acknowledge the need in many instances for pastors and mates to seek help. None of this is to deny the need for personal prayer and devotion. That is a vital part of any recovery growth process. Yet sometimes more is needed—a time of rest and retreat—to put everything into perspective.

Woodshore is a place with Wesleyan interpretation, where ministers and mates can find help and encouragement in a safe and beautiful environment. For further information about prices and dates, write to Woodshore, 125 Sturdevant Rd., Smiths Creek, MI 48074. Phone (810) 385-8887.

PM

BY C. NEIL STRAIT

*District
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GRAND RAPIDS,
MICHIGAN*



The Finger on the Doorbell

Like so many postwar brides, Jean married in the momentum and emotion of the end of World War II. At the age of 19, she had her first child, a boy they named Scott. A year and a half later came her daughter, Kelly. In the early 1950s, the little family lived in a small Veterans Administration home where Jean, like so many '50s moms, took care of the children while her husband worked two jobs to make ends meet.

Now you probably are thinking that this story is about Jean. I could tell you some great stories about Mom. However, this story tells about someone else. This is the story of a lady "with her finger on the doorbell."

When Jean opened the door, she was greeted by the warm, smiling face of a middle-aged lady. She said she was from the Minnehaha Covenant Church, which was meeting up in the old Cooper School gymnasium. Because they loved children, they wanted to invite Scott and Kelly to Sunday School. Jean was no dummy. She probably had a couple of ideas: one was her knowledge that church was good. After all, they had come up with Christmas and Easter, hadn't they? I'm sure the second thought came as she heard Scott and Kelly fighting in the background. (It must have been Kelly's fault because Scott would never tease his little sister.) The picture in her mind had to portray a quiet cup of coffee while she read the morning paper or perhaps a long, uninterrupted hot bath. So Scott and Kelly went to Sunday School.

Sunday School was a wondrous place, where they heard beautiful songs about "The Old

Rugged Cross" and stories about little boys who beat giants and a Man on the Cross. Somebody was planting seeds.

The next time the finger was on the doorbell, the kind lady invited Scott and Kelly to Vacation Bible School. "One whole week with the children gone half of each day," Jean thought to herself.

In Vacation Bible School the children heard more stories and sang more songs, but best of all were the contests. Did you know that all you had to do was memorize verses, and you would win prizes? To a child from a "pay-check to paycheck" family, this was like magic. And somebody was planting seeds.

Like most families, ours grew when Marcy was born. Eventually we outgrew the little Veterans Administration home and had to move. The new house was bigger and in a better neighborhood. But there was no church because there was no "finger on the doorbell."

When Scott turned 15, four-week-old Brian joined the family move to a different city, where Dad had been transferred. Again, there was no church, because there was no "finger on the doorbell." But the seeds that had been planted began to grow in Scott. At the age of 17, working with the Young Life organization, he asked Jesus into his life as personal Lord and Savior.

At this point, you are probably saying, "Well thanks, Scott, for sharing, but we've heard quite a few stories like this before." This story isn't over. We have more to go.

Let's move forward now to 1979. Scott, in his early 30s, has been married over 10 years to Bev, has two beautiful little girls, and serves as the education di-

rector at a Christian group home for delinquent boys. It is Christmas Eve, and he has been asked to read the Christmas story. As he goes to his bookshelf, he passes over his newer Bible translations and paraphrases and pulls out his King James Bible. After all, everyone knows the best Christmas story is the King James Version. As he opens the Bible to the front page, he reads "Presented to Scott Read by the Minnehaha Covenant Sunday School, October 6, 1957." Memories come rushing back as he holds the small black book in his hand: memories of the move from the school to the new church building, the stories, "The Old Rugged Cross," and, suddenly without reason, the name of "the lady with her finger on the doorbell:" Mrs. Hall. Now, why had that name come to him? As he pondered this, Scott felt God telling him to write a thank-you.

Calling the Minnehaha Covenant Church, Scott got the name of the pastor and the church address and wrote a letter. This letter was full of memories. It told a bit about his life, but Scott was clear that this let-

BY SCOTT READ

Freelance writer

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON



Picture Windows for Preaching

er had one very important goal: if Mrs. Hall was still around—a small chance after nearly a quarter of a century—to warmly thank her. If not, he would tell the congregation why it never hurts to invite a little boy or girl to Sunday School. The letter was posted that Christmas Eve. The Christmas story was read that night from the little black Bible.

Mrs. Hall was near death when her pastor brought the letter to her. He was later unable to describe in his letter back to Scott the look of joy and happiness in Mrs. Hall's eyes as he read it to her. Through that letter of thanks her Lord confirmed a life well lived and a "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23, cf. 21, KJV).

Let's move to 1996. Mrs. Hall went home to her Lord long ago. Scott is 49 and planning to stay that old for a long time. He has been married to Bev for nearly 28 years. The daughters have grown into wonderful Christian women, one in a Christian college, another to begin next year. Kelly is a Christian woman with a fine son, active in his church and attending a Christian college. Marcy is married to a pastor and has an international women's ministry in her own right. They have three terrific Christian children growing in the church. Brian, the family afterthought, is a graduate of a Christian college, married to a former pastor's daughter, and raising two super little boys in the church.

Lest I forget Jean, we buried Mom a couple of years ago. As her children and grandchildren gathered around her grave, they felt the assurance of two things: number one, when Mom died, she knew religion was more than just Christmas and Easter because, number two, she knew Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior.

Jean, her children, and her grandchildren all came to Christ. I think we have just begun to hear the story of "the lady with her finger on the doorbell." **PM**

Temptation

Bob Hodges, a Presbyterian minister in Rogersville, Tennessee, tells about duck hunting with a friend of his on Cherokee Lake in east Tennessee. Leisurously lying in their duck blind, Bob's friend, Riley, began asking some serious questions about his new walk with Jesus. Riley's old friends were making life tough. It was dragging him down and making it difficult for him to remain consistent in his obedience and commitment to Christ.

His old buddies delighted in trying to get him to go back into the old lifestyle. They laughed at him for the amount of time he was spending with "the preacher." Riley quizzed his pastor friend: "Why is it that I'm having more trouble since I became a Christian than I ever did when I was lost? Everything seems to go wrong. I'm having such a struggle!"

Bob Hodges assured Riley that it happens. He said: "I'll tell you why, Riley. A couple of ducks fly over, and you shoot. You kill one and injure the other. They both fall into the lake. What do you do? You have to get out of the boat and go pick up the ducks, but which one do you go after first?"

"Oh, that's easy," Riley replied. "I go after the injured one first. The dead one ain't goin' nowhere!"

Hodges said: "That's exactly the way it is with the devil. He goes after the hurt Christian. He's not going to bother with the person who is dead in sin. But the minute you give your life to Christ, you'd

better get ready; the devil is going to come after you."

Temptations are ready to destroy us if we allow them, but God wants us to be vigilant in our walk with Him. Don't give up.

"The Greatest Temptation of All," *Dynamic Preaching* 11, No. 8 (Sept./Oct. 1996), free sample issue, 6.

Glory

Joni Eareckson Tada mentions that she has learned what God is all about. His character or attributes—such as holiness, love, compassion, justice, truth, or mercy—is His glory!

Then she asks, "So how is it that you and I can glorify God?" She tells us that every day we live we reveal His attributes. "Every time you share the good news of Christ with another. Every time you reflect patience in the middle of an upsetting or perplexing problem. Every time you smile from the heart or offer an encouraging word. Whenever those around you see God's character displayed in your attitudes and responses, you are displaying His glory."

Let's remember that God's glory isn't reserved for a temple of stone, brick, and mortar. Nor is it some heavenly panorama. "It can shine out clearly while you're changing a flat on the freeway . . . or counseling an angry co-worker . . . or lying in a hospital bed . . . or balancing two crying babies in the church nursery."

God's glory is you. **PM**

Time with God, New Century Version (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1991), 435.

COMPILED BY
DERL G. KEEFER
Pastor
THREE RIVERS,
MICHIGAN



Keeping the Preaching Griddle Hot

I have been preaching just about every Sunday for a quarter of a century and can honestly confess that I still look forward to the next service's message. How so? I believe that the following guidelines have helped:

1. I start working on that sermon early in the week, usually by Monday evening. If I ever let the message theme go until the close of the week, I start to get the jitters. It is not worth living in panic. So beginning on that gospel telling early has proven best.

Further, giving myself the heart of the week to carve out the message provides me with the chances to gather illustrations, carefully crafted phrasings, and hopefully deeper insights than a quicker superficial treatment.

Being realistic with one's schedule, a pastor also never knows what unexpected turn will occur on Thursday or Friday or Saturday that surprises, absorbing the time so as not to permit many hours for sermon preparation. Using Monday through Wednesday as "seed-time" usually yields a more bountiful harvest for sermon giving by the time Sunday dawns.

2. Staying close to devotional reading continues to feed my own soul for the nourishment I seek to give my congregation. I

attempt to be a well-rounded parson when it comes to reading material. However, top priority goes to that which will aid me in spiritual deepening.

I have discovered that no matter what the sermon theme, the inspirational books that I have kept always fit in somewhere. It has been such an encouragement over the years to note the divine insertions of this snippet and that which have been clipped from the devotional insights of others.

Those others who have been especially helpful have included Amy Carmichael, Theodore Ferris, Oswald Chambers, F. B. Meyer, John Wesley, Andrew Murray, Frank Laubach, and Samuel Shoemaker.

3. Expository preaching continues to be a delight. I enjoy a topical message from time to time; however, they run their list in short order. Nevertheless, the eternal Word offers eternal delvings by going through its pages verse by verse or chapter by chapter.

The challenge of the expository presentation is to keep it from getting stodgy. This can be done by keeping current with the latest in political and social events as well as analyses of religious fads and fancies. The congregation always sits up straighter when the biblical passage lights up a contemporary happening. As a child I recall

vividly being bored by the preacher who locked me into the first century alone for 40 minutes; I try not to inflict that upon the next generation of children under my care.

Preaching expositionally also enriches my own spirit because brings me back again to the Scriptures. Fresh insights keep coming to the fore. How fortunate I am in my vocation to earn a living by poring over the Divine Writ, the Book that shines more and more with the heavenly light.

4. Keeping the sermons preached within 20 to 25 minutes helps make the yoke easy for both the hearers and the teller. I have been pleased, over the years, to be known as one who did not tire out the congregation with lengthy messages. That has always been accepted as a most prized compliment.

By realizing that the whole gospel does not have to be recited every time I get into the pulpit, I have immediately made it more comfortable for myself in

BY J. GRANT

SWANK JR.

Pastor

WINDHAM, MAINE



"running the race" toward Sunday.

When in college, I counted it a privilege to get into Boston's Trinity Church on a Sunday morning when I could hear the preaching of Dr. Theodore Parker Ferris. One of the first observations I made about this respected orator was that he could say so much, so simply, in so little time. "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37, *KJV*), I preached to myself upon leaving his sanctuary.

5. Using a variety of sermon outlines has kept the preparations fresh. Sometimes I can get by with simply a few scratchings on a slip of paper. That is usually slid into the Scripture lesson's page as a bookmark, ready for the delivery.

On other occasions the notes may be quite full, going on for three or four half pages. Having to settle for this much support has never bothered me, as if I were to feel guilty for moving in another direction rather than keeping to the trim outline of a short piece of paper.

Once in a while the word-for-word manuscript creates itself as I pull my thoughts together. I know that there are some preachers who disdain a manuscript while bragging on rarely using a note.

All of this boasting has seemed useless to me. I could never get the gist of it, for various moods in preparation and delivery have called for various helps in the pulpit. This has simply reflected the variety hopefully communicated to a church who has to listen to that same voice year upon year.

6. Not strapping myself to a series has kept each week open. I realize that some preachers have used one series after another quite profitably. Certainly they are to be commended, for obviously it has worked for them.

However, thus far, the series has not attracted me. Maybe one day it will. When it does, I am sure that I will embrace it for its own worth. Nevertheless, in the

The Holy Spirit knows the hearts of the ones gathered. Therefore, it behooves the preacher to stay close to the Spirit.

meantime I have been kept in suspense week by week by the Spirit who has then revealed the coming message.

Such dependency upon His nudge, whisper, and at times obvious pointing has been one of the quickening adventures of being a preacher.

7. Maintaining a sensitivity to the moods of worship has been most enjoyable. Holiday/holy day seasons call for a certain climate, while a frosty, blizzardy winter Sunday definitely breathes another atmosphere in which to give forth with the sermon.

The Holy Spirit knows the hearts of the ones gathered. Therefore, it behooves the preacher to stay close to the Spirit to accommodate to what is needed most in the service. Some think they must always have their people singing lustily; yet there are some times in worship when the congregation needs a more gentle tone. Some pastors hold to the rigid, liturgical line at every gathering; but what about warmer, more personal moods of the Spirit that are necessary for certain healings of the heart?

8. Keeping terms simple has been exciting. Instead of using doctrinal laboratory talk, I have attempted to use the language of the marketplace. This has usually kept listeners from glazing over their eyes.

Long, drawn-out phrases and polysyllabic theological words do not impress. Jesus did not preach like that, nor did the prophets. That is why they were regarded as speaking with authority. They knew how to take eternal concepts and hand them over so that the children could get hold of them.

Putting these thoughts on paper has revved up my energy drive once more for next Sunday's message. What an honor we preachers have been given to spend a lifetime in the Word, handling it properly before our Lord.

"We are misled if we allow ourselves to forget that Christian preaching is directed primarily toward the listener's will. It is demanding of him a decision and a change of life-style. It is questioning his moral assumptions, it is challenging him to do and to be something different from what he is and does."

—Ian Pitt-Watson

PM

The Glory of God—Our Heritage and Our Hope

It was a Sunday evening service. We sang some worship choruses. The pastor read some scriptures, and there was a time of quiet prayer. In the stillness of those moments, I sensed that God was uniquely there. Nothing outwardly fantastic or profound. Simply, God was there, and I knew it! It was an experience in which we encountered the glory of God.

My thesis is that the glory of God is the church's counterpart to the witness of the Holy Spirit to the individual Christian. In other words, the glory of God may be considered in some sense as a complement in the church to the witness of the Spirit in the heart of the individual Christian. As it is the privilege of the individual believer to go beyond faith for personal salvation to the assurance of that faith, so it is fitting that the church go beyond the faith for the Divine Presence in its gatherings to the assurance of faith that comes by way of God's manifest presence—the glory of God. By "the glory of God" here, I mean the impression made upon the "soul" of the congregation whereby God causes the people gathered to be aware that, indeed, He is among them, as real to their inner spiritual sense as the physical presence of one another. To the gathered congregation, the testimony is as convincing as was the physical appearance of Jesus to His contemporaries, who could say, "What we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our

hands handled" (1 John 1:1, NASB).

Glory in the New Testament

The word *doxa*, translated "glory," has a number of meanings attached to it. Consequently, the investigation of this subject is a venture. One meaning of *doxa* that is obvious by the contents sometimes used is "praise," the apparent meaning in 1 Cor. 10:31, NASB: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory [praise] of God." There are other possible meanings of the word *doxa*, but I wish to consider its meaning as God's manifest presence or obvious or displayed closeness.

Clearly the manifest presence is one legitimate way to understand *doxa* (glory). W. E. Vine comments that *doxa* is used "of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation" (W. E. Vine, "Glory and Glorious," in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Oliphants, 1967], 153). The apostle Paul apparently has this meaning (God's self-manifestation) in mind as he says, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6, NASB). It is *doxa* with this meaning that I wish to discuss, God's realized or manifest presence. Frequently one has to look at the context in order to discover the meaning of a word that has a number of possible meanings; such is the case here.

God making known His presence to His people is the meaning of *doxa*, where of the heavenly city it is said, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23, NASB). The glory of God is associated with the Lamb; God's manifested presence is in Jesus. When Christians meet in the name of Jesus, there are times His presence is more than that which is held by faith.

Glory in the Old Testament

A number of writers point out that the word *doxa* is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament *kabod*, translated "glory." It is the case with *kabod*, as with *doxa*, that a number of meanings are possible. We limit our thoughts here to the manifest presence. The glory (*kabod*) expresses itself especially in God's presence in the sanctuary, of which we read: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34-35, NASB). What a profound truth! The glory or the realized presence of God actually had a physical effect, such that one of His chosen servants was held back from the tent of meeting. In almost every location where *kabod* is used with the meaning discussed here, the revelation has been made to the group

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rather than to an individual. An example of this is seen in 24:16-17, where it says that "to the eyes of the sons of Israel" (NASB) the glory appeared on the top of the mountain. It is important to see the ways in which the glory of God in the Old Testament is related to assurance, His confirmation of himself to His own. In 13:21-22, NASB, we find the profound words: "And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud . . . and in a pillar of fire." Clearly the glory of God affirms His promises to guide His people to the new land.

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

John Wesley made a distinctive theological contribution regarding the witness of the Holy Spirit. His statement on the witness of the Spirit is familiar to many Wesleyans: "The testimony of the Spirit [or the witness of the Spirit] is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God" (*The Works of John Wesley* [WW], 3rd ed., 5:115).

While Wesley was very clear and to the point on the fact that God gives an inner impression, very wisely he refused to psychologize this activity of the Holy Spirit. He refused to enter into speculation on the way in which this worked. "The manner how the divine [emphasis is Wesley's] testimony is manifested to the heart, I do not take upon me to explain. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me: I cannot attain unto it" (WW, 5:117). Wesley goes on to compare the witness of the Spirit to the wind, noting that in both one can hear the sound but cannot tell from whence it comes or where it goes. He makes emphatic the point, "But the fact we know" (ibid.).

The Glory and the Witness— Some Parallels

A number of striking parallels

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exist between the witness of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God—the inability to fully explain, the impossibility of making demands, the matter of assurance, and the privilege of the experience.

You cannot fully explain or describe the witness of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, you are lost for words when you try to give an explicit account of what happened when you came from church, and you were sure that God was there in the way that we are thinking of here. You'd "bet the farm" on it—that God really was there, and His presence was manifest—but you'd lose the tractor, the cattle, all the land, and your shirt if you bet that you could satisfactorily interpret the event to someone who had never experienced God's glory.

The impossibility of explaining the glory of God in the church and the witness of the Spirit to the one who has not known this sort of experience should not be a source of frustration. According to Wesley, "Nor indeed is it to be expected" that one should be able to explain the witness of the Spirit (WW, 5:122). Let's face it—with both the witness of the Spirit and the glory of God in the church, we are as sure of the reality as we are of our inability to put into words that which is profoundly real and precious to us. Wesley and others who attempted to expostulate on the witness of the Spirit found it impossible to say exactly what they meant by that term. So with God's glory in the church. Part of the difficulty in describing this work of God is the fact that both the witness of the Spirit and the glory of God relate to, but are not dependent on, human emotions. The witness of the Spirit does not depend on human emotions and at the same time is related to them. So it is with the "for-the-church witness," the glory of God.

We cannot demand, but we should have hearts prepared to receive, the glory. We do not tell

God when He should witness to us as individuals or to us as the church. Our responsibility is to make sure that nothing in our lives would hinder the Spirit in personal witness or the glory coming upon the church's gatherings. While we must prepare our minds and hearts with proper thinking and attitude, we have no right to make demands on God. He will come, to fulfill His holy purposes, not at our command, but in His time.

We find a parallel in regard to assurance. As the witness of the Spirit betokens that which we as individuals know by faith—that we are justified or sanctified, so the glory of God betokens what we as a congregation know by faith—that God is with us. Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, He is there. He promised! Many frustrations could be avoided in the church's life and in the individual Christian if we could take to heart and hold with firm conviction to the fact that salvation comes by faith and that likewise the presence of Jesus comes to the church by faith. Nonetheless, in His great and infinite mercy, God would in His time give us evidence for that to which we hold by faith, making manifest His presence—His glory. Here is assurance!

The glory is the normal privilege of the church. We should be spiritually alert and open to receive this gift of God. While the witness of the Spirit was the normal privilege of all believers, Wesley, according to Ray Dunning, "came to allow exceptions" (*Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 447). Even though he allowed for exceptions, he "never ceased to hold that it was an experience for which all Christians should seek. He wrote in 1768, 'A consciousness of being in the favour of God . . . is the common privilege of Christians fearing God and working righteousness'" (ibid.).

The glory is the normal privilege of the church. As psychological factors might momentarily hinder the individual from being

conscious of the witness of the Spirit, so various factors may at times make it difficult or impossible for the church to sense the glory of God. Pastor Clair MacMillan of Moncton (N.B.) First Church of the Nazarene, in an M.Div. seminar, Canadian Nazarene College, November 20, 1993, stated that the pastor must "create an environment in which sacredness is a given and in which the Holy may intervene." Indeed, God "may intervene." It is my conviction that, while we are not free to make demands of God to "break into" our worship times, we are to do all we can to keep the way clear so that He may come as He chooses. Some things are revered by any congregation, and this thinking must be respected. The worship leader or preacher must not offend and thus cause the atmosphere to detract from the hope or expectation of the normal privilege of the church, the manifest or realized presence of God.

Another word from Wesley regards the personal witness: "Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness" (WW, 5:133). The application of that idea to the glory is noteworthy in that churches should not rest in the fruit of the Spirit or the evidences of being the church without the glory. May God help us not to be content to go week after week and month after month while knowing by faith that God is with us, yet never coming to a consciousness of the manifest presence.

The Glory and the Early Nazarenes

The early Nazarenes were very much aware of the glory of God, and we should not take lightly what they said about this reality. There was something significant there, something that some of our congregations possibly have never experienced.

In his account of the life and ministry of P.F. Bresee, E. A. Girvin makes a number of references to times in which Bresee and other early Nazarenes believed that the

glory of God was among the people. When they lacked an elaborate church building, in Bresee's own words: "It was the fire that burned within that gilded its boards with glory, and made them shimmer and shine with the glistening light of heaven. . . . Here we have seen the Lord. . . . Here He has revealed His glory" (cited in E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel*, 109).

The *Nazarene Messenger* reported a service of May 1900 in which "the glory of God fell upon the people" (Girvin, 141). According to Timothy Smith, "Getting the glory down," as Dr. Bresee put it, was in his eyes the most important aim of every service" (*Called unto Holiness*, 1:119). Such occasions—there were many—doubtless evoked very strong and very pleasing and helpful emotions. It is unfair to accuse these early Nazarenes of simply going for an emotional high. Certainly emotions were involved; yet there is more than emotion when it is reported in April of 1890 that "wave after wave of glory swept over the people" (Girvin, 140). A proper understanding of the glory of God does not allow room for the idea that only good emotions are involved. Never! God was there! God's presence was manifest! God's glory was a precious reality.

Before and After the Early Nazarenes

The Church of Jesus Christ, of which we are a part, was not born in the 18th or 19th century. God's glory has been evident in the Church on occasions in all centuries. Because of limited space, a brief glimpse into the 18th-century Methodist revival must suffice as our historical sketch. Wesley spoke of one particular preaching event—August 1743—in which he confessed a sense of holy awe: "I could not speak. . . . We could only speak to God" (WW, 1:426). Of another event—April 1758—he writes: "We met . . . to renew our covenant with God. It was a glorious season. I believe all that were present found that God was

there" (WW, 2:439). Here we have a "sense of God," comparable to the witness of the Holy Spirit. The atmosphere created and the results brought about were of the same kind and suggests that Wesley dealt with the same sort of happening as experienced by Nazarenes years later.

Such manifestations are not limited to the past. I asked my daughter, Heather Meers, whose husband, Jon, helps as a pastor at the Nazarene home mission church in Kamloops, British Columbia, whether she had ever experienced what I speak of, and whether she could in any way explain what went on. She replied that she had such an experience and said, "Well, it's something like being in a bubble, and the world is shut out." She did not stay in the "bubble"; she's great at discipleship and evangelism! To her this was a very rare occurrence. While the times were few, the reality was beyond question!

God's glory is not limited to Nazarenes or Holiness churches. Not long ago I asked a friend, a retired pastor in the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, the same question I put to my daughter. He replied that he had probably not more than three or four times in his entire ministry sensed the presence of God in this way. He remembered himself in those moments as being "frozen, . . . afraid to move."

A faithful parishioner in a former pastorate several years ago expressed her response to what she sensed to be the glory or the manifest presence of God with the exact expression, "afraid to move." I participated in that church service too.

Some Practical Considerations

Some issues are to be kept in mind by those who would seek to be open to God's glory: the avoidance of impatience, the rejection of substitutes, and the communication of spiritual truth.

Those of us who lead church worship events naturally long for God's very best, but we must not become impatient. Many of us who place a great deal on religious ex-

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perience have been in services of which we have said, "Surely God is in this place." We know that it is a wholesome experience for all of us to be assured that God is nearby. Then we come to another service, and many of the things are the same—the prayer preparation, the expectation, some of the same hymns or choruses, many of the same devout people in attendance; we go through the service, fervently wishing to sense the Divine, yet we do not have the same sense of God, the glory in our midst. We wonder why. We agonize! As a pastor I struggled with this fact. Yet we do not tell God when the witness of the Spirit will be impressed upon us. We do not decide when the glory will appear. God decides.

All temptations to set up *substitutes must be resisted*. Speaking of glory, I do not refer to the good feeling that has sometimes been described as being "blessed." In no way do I denigrate that; however, this is not what I mean by "the glory." Likewise, I am not talking about a well-planned order of church service, as pleasing and spiritually helpful as that may be. I emphasize that glory is *not* a human construct. The glory is *God's own manifestation*. In contrast, the golden calf (Exod. 32) was a human invention, copied from others. The people wanted and produced their own type of "evidence." They wanted grounds for belief and produced it for themselves. My concern is that we may learn from the account of the golden calf that we are to always and forever be on the alert against faked representations of the presence of God in our local church gatherings, camp meetings, and so on. Make no effort whatsoever to whip up human emotion as a substitute for the inexpressible and blessed sense of the glory of God. Such manipulation can only bring God's judgment. Remember the golden calf!

Essential to the most effective *communication of spiritual truth* is a spiritual environment. Oswald Chambers shares a very helpful word: "Spiritual truth is learned by atmosphere, not by intellectual

reasoning" (*My Utmost for His Highest* [Barbour and Company, 1935], 211). Of course we must make the very best case possible for the ideas we seek to advance. All of this falls far short apart from the work of God. In the atmosphere created by the sense of the Divine Presence, God's truth comes alive. I do not suggest that people will learn spiritual truth only when we have an unusual, unmistakable sense of the divine. However, we will fall short in effectively proclaiming spiritual truth if those whom we seek to influence toward Christ have never sensed on our part a deep and strong hunger for the glory of God.

A Parting Word

For all of us, *the glory of God* is an issue of *supreme importance*. It is not the case that the church be blind to every issue other than being user-friendly. Of course, the church exists for persons outside, but this is only one reason for its existence. It is the location or the place where God's glory may dwell. Such glory will have its impact on the non-Christian, the young in Christ, the strong and mature Christian. Such impact should have the thoughtful attention of the one who would touch other lives for God.

Well-known Canadian broadcaster Peter Togni hosts a mostly classical music program that is heard from the Atlantic to the Pacific in Canada and in a number of northern states of the U.S.A. Recently this devout Christian commented: "No wonder our young people are bored. We've lost a sense of the holy and the terrible" (*Christian Week*, March 14, 1995). Too often we have concerned ourselves with the comfort and the ease of the visitor to our times of worship rather than that they encounter "the holy and the terrible." May God help us to be occupied with openness and preparedness for the glory, the manifest presence. No matter what our age or where we are on the spiritual journey, we all need occasions when we sense the glory of God.

Philip Yancey ("Masters of the Universe," *Christianity Today*, December 13, 1993) writes: "Doubt for me tends to come in an overwhelming package, all at once. I don't worry much about the nuances of particular doctrines but every so often I catch myself wondering about the whole scheme of faith." Immediately those words "grabbed me by the throat." Yancey openly confessed to that which I have sometimes felt and occasionally admitted to close friends. The problem is not that of agreeing with certain doctrines but rather holding on to "the whole scheme of faith." There are times, for some of us, when the whole business of the faith is hit broadside by the temptation—however fleeting—to wonder whether there really is anything to this thing to which we have given our lives.

For Yancey the antidote to this temptation comes with Christmas, the powerful and awesome thought that God becomes man; the Eternal takes on human flesh. There has really got to be something to this after all! Christmas has always been meaningful to me, but the answer for this horrifying temptation to doubt the whole package is not met for me as it is for Yancey.

For me the answer is found in the glory, the manifest presence of God. There have been times, thank God, albeit few, when I have met with God's people and have experienced, like the early Nazarenes, "the invisible verities" that seemed to be "nearer and more all-controlling than visible things" (Girvin, 139). Well, for sure this is our heritage.

May God help us to see that it is also our hope. We have no right to make demands of God, but my prayer is:

"O God, let there be no hindrance in my life or in the church to the glory. We do not want substitutes. We will not tell You when to come in this special way. We will ask that You would please help us to be among those who, with hearts prepared, wait for Your own manifestation." PM

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glory.

The Pastor's Bedside Manner

In the 40 years since I graduated from medical school, I've seen at least 1,000 cartoons depicting bedside manners of doctors.

But you pastors shouldn't laugh too hard! If you do any visiting and counseling in the sickroom, you must learn the same hard lessons—and bear up under the same jokes. You, too, must adopt a very special bedside manner when you approach a seriously ill patient.

Before specifics, I urge you to observe the obvious: when you enter a patient's room, you remember that you are the patient's pastor! Then everything else will flow naturally from that attitude.

Let me illustrate. In Swahili, I noted with interest that the word for "pastor" is *mchungaji*. *Mchungaji* means "shepherd." The noun derives directly from the verb *kuchunga*, which means "to protect" or "to guard." The pastor serves as the guardian of his or her flock, the protector of the faith. If you will remember this, you can forget nearly everything else.

In the sickroom, you must be a pastor in a very special way. Yet, isn't this true of all the other things you do? You wouldn't go into a jail and counsel a teenager the same way you counsel a middle-aged matron with marital troubles.

So, you tailor your approach, not only to the needs of hospital patients in general, but also to each individual patient.

For the young man having a

hernia operation or the young woman who has gone through a cancer-negative breast biopsy, you will have little trouble.

But your role differs vastly in the case of a patient of any age in the hospital with a serious illness. You have a role to be learned, but not a role to be feared.

Many of you do fear it. I know because your faces and body language tell me. You feel out of your element. You sense that the doctor and the nurse are completely at home in the hospital. You are at home in the pulpit, in your study counseling, in the home of a parishioner. But you often feel on foreign territory in the hospital, dealing with an individual who may have not only mental, emotional, and religious problems but also a serious physical illness.

So to you young pastors and counselors still struggling with fears of visiting the very ill patient, I would say: Admit it. Don't be ashamed of it because you have lots of company. Study yourself to discover where those fears seem the greatest. Tackle them as you would any other personal problem.

Now let's see if I can help you overcome those fears with some positive ideas. I have an interest in what you do and say. The patient may be mine. When you minister to him or her, either you come into conflict with my treatment, or you augment it.

You must learn something about that patient before you go

in to see him or her. Often this is easy. Sometimes it is not, so you must do a bit of research. If you know the doctor and can talk to him or her, call and speak of your concern.

Because of the doctor's desire to honor privileged communication between himself or herself and the patient, there may be justifiable reticence to give you much information. Almost certainly he or she will not want to give you a detailed chart on the illness, surgery, and so on. However, you may be given an answer when you put the request like this: "I'm going in to see Mr. Jones this afternoon, Doctor. I know he's very ill, but what I don't know is how ill. If I knew, I'd be better equipped to help him."

If this fails, call on close relatives. The spouse perhaps or, if the patient is elderly, the children may be an even better source. You walk the razor's edge here: you can't afford to antagonize the doctor and relatives by appearing too inquisitive. On the other hand, you can't adequately serve as the pastor unless you know what's going on.

The head nurse on the ward is another source of information. Don't stop any nurse who happens to be walking by. Ask to speak to the head nurse, preferably in his or her ward office. Identify yourself. Assure the nurse that anything told you will be kept in strictest confidence. Explain why you want to know. If you receive such information, keep it confidential. Build a reputation for yourself as a pastor who can be told things. I had a pastor once who actually talked about his parishioners' illnesses in open meetings—not just that Mrs. Jones was sick and would appreciate visitors, but that she had hemorrhoids or had had an abortion or was dying of lung cancer from smoking too much. I never told that preacher anything about my patients.

You've done your homework, perhaps looking up medical terms unfamiliar to you. Now

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you're ready to enter the sick-room. What should you do, and what should you say?

First, be cheerful, but not overly frivolous, jovial, or breezy. Don't overdo it. Some of you are like that by nature. Tone yourself down a bit. At this stage of the illness, the patient wants friendliness, sincerity, and warmth. He or she doesn't think being sick—at least to this extent—is the least bit funny. This is something many of us, including me, need to remember.

My own pastor recalls being in a hospital room one day when an extremely cheerful nurse came in, threw open the drapes, and cried out, "It's a wonderful day. . . ." After she left, the patient said to his pastor, "Doesn't she give a [expletive] for how I might feel?" Perhaps the patient needed just that jolt, but he didn't think so. He wasn't ready for such openhanded cheerfulness.

Second, convince the patient that you have come only to see him or her. Don't stand there peering at the patient from the end of the bed. Go to the side of the bed, lean forward, say hello, pull up a chair, and sit down. Take the patient's hand and hold on to it until you sense *he or she* wants to let go. No matter how long you stay, the patient will get the feeling that you have come just to see and talk with him or her. Too often I've seen a pastor come in, stand around, uncomfortably anxious to get away, and showing it.

Third, if another patient is in the room, ask him or her to leave if at all possible. You cannot talk to a patient, person to person, about one's illness or life and death if strangers are present. Request privacy if possible. If the other patient can't leave, pull the curtain across, and try to shut that one out by pretending you're in your own little room. If your patient can't feel at ease with the other patient listening, then you have a problem for which I can't give you a ready solution.

Fourth, it's important to ask

relatives to leave also, with the possible exception of a spouse or a very close adult child. Not every time, but on those occasions when you feel some very profound discussions may take place. Often you'll find visitors on the verge of going anyway. They find it difficult to come in at all, will stay as long as propriety dictates, and then get away as soon as feasible. I know this is true because it happens to me all the time.

With the room cleared, you have the patient's attention, and you're ready.

First, let's look at some things you won't say.

Try to fend off questions of a medical nature if you possibly can. Perhaps the patient is an old friend or a longtime parishioner, and you do know the patient and the illness well enough to give answers to those questions. But I think you'll have trouble eventually if you do so routinely. In most cases, you should say: "Well, yes, I was told such and such, but you'd better ask the doctor." If the patient is having trouble talking to the doctor—a common problem and usually the doctor's fault—perhaps you should talk to the doctor and say that Mr. or Mrs. Jones really is anxious about what's going to happen.

Never indicate to the patient less than total faith in the doctor. To do otherwise is just devastating. This may be tough if you've heard uncomplimentary things about that doctor. But always remember that what you know about that doctor is hearsay, and your "knowledge" may be faulty. If you really question a doctor's care, what can you do? The best thing to do is to suggest to the family a consultation with another doctor. You're dealing with the doctor's pride, it's true, and you may wound it, but I consider this a minor thing compared to having the patient and family feel secure.

Do not use unjustified statements to the patient as you leave: "So long; everything is going to be fine," and other clichés.

Maybe you don't mean to sound indifferent, but the patient may interpret it that way due to knowing he or she *isn't* going to be all right.

*Second, what **are** you going to say to a very ill, perhaps dying patient?*

I won't be presumptuous and put precise words in your mouth. But as a concerned layman rather than as a doctor, and somewhat hesitantly, I offer the following.

Remember that you *are* this patient's pastor, the shepherd. You are not regarded as just another visitor who dropped in to talk about last night's football game. *You are his or her pastor.* You are a special type of visitor and at the same time a part of the hospital team, whether the patient knows you as the hospital chaplain or the pastor from the nearby church.

When you talk to a patient at this stage of illness, please don't blunt your faith with platitudes. Oh, yes, use your Gospel, or your Old Testament, or whatever source you want; use prayer to bring the patient closer to God and God closer to the patient; but don't try to blunt his or her faith. You should not use words that somebody else has said—no matter how great they might be—except as a means of getting into or out of the conversation. Use your own words because the very ill patient wants to hear something directly from *you*—and platitudes are not enough.

So, pastor, please, when you are visiting a seriously ill patient, be yourself, be true to yourself, do your homework, sit down with the patient in private, talk of the person's faith and yours, shore up any insecurities, be honest with him or her, and remember first and last that you are the patient's pastor, the shepherd.

Give a bit of thought to these suggestions, and I think you'll find that they'll help you come closer to the ideal of the Good Shepherd.

PM

Parent Education in the Church

They discussed discipline, the high call of parenting, their favorite children's books; laughed about embarrassing behaviors; asked questions; and learned about a child's first impressions of God. They were parents who came to my "Parenting the Young Child" series during Vacation Bible School (VBS)!

Two churches, one Baptist, one Nazarene, invited me to teach a parenting series during the VBS week. Being a parent educator, teaching early childhood development and parenting skills, and having worked with young families for six years, it seemed like a natural to offer parents' classes the same week at VBS.

Combining parent education with a program like VBS means parents save on gasoline, get acquainted with the pastor, and network with other parents while gaining more confidence in their child-rearing abilities. What a ministry!

Both churches sent press releases to newspapers, displayed VBS banners outside, talked about it in church, and announced it in their bulletins and newsletters. Everyone prayed, prepared, and anticipated that God would do great things through this innovative family approach to Vacation Bible School. God blessed their labors!

The Baptist church, averaging 35 people, welcomed three new families to VBS because of the parenting series. Not only did

children come, but now their parents stayed as well. The pastor was encouraged as he sat in on the parenting classes, becoming acquainted with new families in his community. When asked how they learned about the parenting series, one responded, "In the newspaper." Another said, "The VBS banner" caught her at-

tention. A third learned by word of mouth. These parents grew closer each night as they learned and shared common experiences.

On Wednesday I overheard a young mother ask the pastor about singles ministry. By Thursday every family made commitments to return for the children's program. On Friday they unanimously voted to repeat the series. "Very helpful!" exclaimed one. "Sometimes you don't know there may be a better way to handle what you are doing," said another. A dad responded that he liked learning "different methods or options of discipline," adding he "would recommend the series to a friend." His wife shared, "It helps to be reminded now and then that the way your children act is normal!"

Weeks later, I listened as the

BY BRENDA NIXON
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Baptist pastor excitedly shared how VBS attendance was the highest recorded in recent years. He went on to say that one of the new families had been attending every Sunday since VBS and live in the neighborhood. What none of us could have known but God was that these parents, along with their two young sons, had been searching for a church home. Months have passed, and I hear the family is still faithfully attending. Praise God!

Overland Park Church of the Nazarene Children's Minister Kim Purl coordinated and publicized the family VBS concept. She made sure all parents, even those expectant ones, were encouraged to attend. Pastor Purl broadened the appeal to VBS by inviting Jack Barnell, family life counselor at Overland Park Church, to teach "Parenting the School-age Child" the same week.

Acting as my host couple, Brian and Julie Taylor, of Overland Park Church, faithfully attended my parenting series, enthusiastically greeted other parents, joined in discussion, and made sure we had our cookies.

Toting their toddlers and preschoolers, five wonderful families from the Overland Park Church came to "Parenting the Young Child." The week began with "The High Call of Parenting," followed by topics from discipline to toilet training. Some nights we drew curious onlookers with our laughter and "war stories." By midweek Pastor Purl reported a high level of enthusiasm among the parents and said VBS was going great. "Informative, reinforcing, affirming," exclaimed one parent about the series. By weekend, a mother told me she came away "with a much better understanding" of her child and not feeling "alone in this business of parenting." One requested that we "meet every week on Wednesday."

To close the week and to show my appreciation for each parent, I presented "Very Special Parent" certificates signed by the pastor. All agreed the "series should be offered again next year during VBS."

Afterward, Pastor Purl shared that one of the parents who had never attended Sunday School came for the first time after this

VBS. She wrote: "Our fringe parents that attended . . . made significant contact with our church member parents. These fringe parents are now plugged into Sunday School, and our class of three-year-olds has grown from three children up to eight kids."

What a blessing to see her rejoicing in our Lord, to watch His perfect timing unfold, to have Him use my skills and spiritual gifts to advance His kingdom. I was glad to be a part of the winning team of Vacation Bible School.

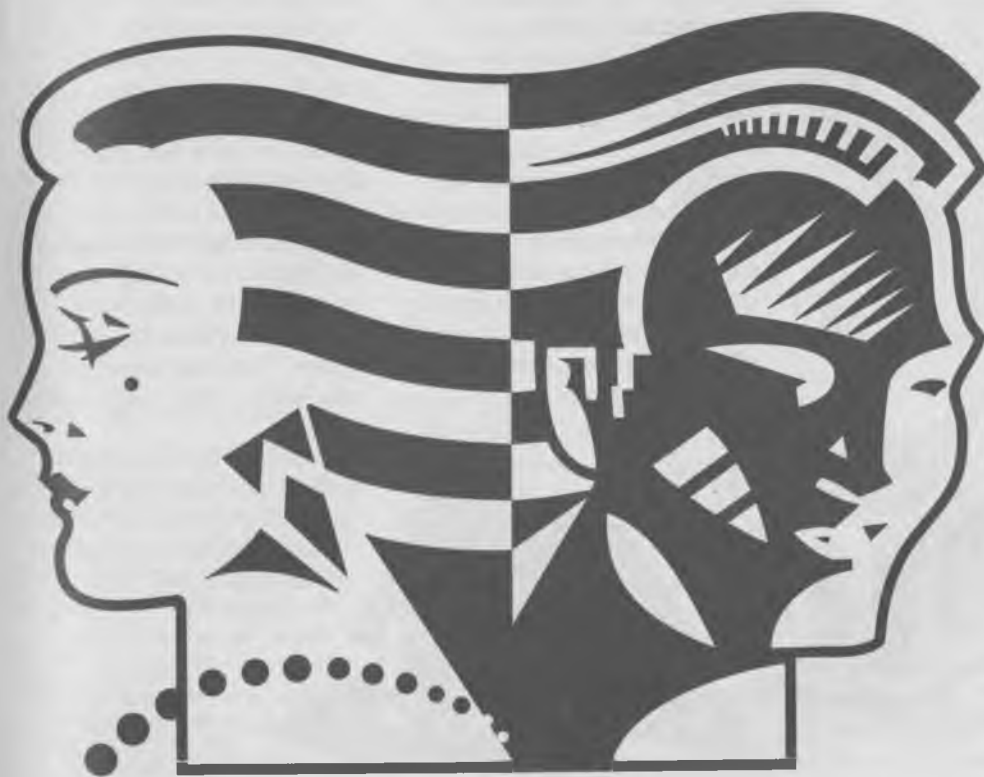
PM

Author's Update:

When this article was written, I had worked with two churches. The following summer, four churches invited me to teach parenting classes during their VBS. The idea is contagious!

For a second summer, I spoke at the Baptist church and taught a parenting class at the Overland Park Church of the Nazarene during VBS. Afterward, Rev. Kim Purl sent a letter to the education pastor at Grove City Church of the Nazarene, Grove City, Ohio, where I would be speaking as their VBS finale.

The letter from Rev. Purl shows she has caught the vision for parent education in church. She writes: "What an outreach opportunity! It's obvious that parents need to be affirmed that they are capable of parenting. . . . [This] is definitely a ministry to parents, helping the church to be the church to families."



Lessons from the Small Church

Fresh out of seminary, I pastored a tiny church of 4 members, worked part-time at the Illinois statehouse cafeteria, and drove a truck-tire repair van. I stayed at that church a year and left 22 members. Following a series of similar small churches, I "graduated" to an inner-city church of 40 members here in Los Angeles, and after 18 years I currently pastor more than 3,400 members. So I feel deeply the pleas of the small-church pastor.

Every year I make it my business to minister to small churches. Although I do preach in large churches, conventions, and camp meetings, I make sure smaller churches get most of my attention.

Here are a few lessons I learned in the small churches that have helped me succeed in a growing church:

1. I never referred to my church as small. It was a mission church, a pioneer church, a frontline church, or a church with great potential. But since it was an integral part of the awesome Body of Christ, neither its size nor its vision nor its potential was small.

2. I learned to preach to 2 persons on Sunday morning (I was my wife) just as diligently and passionately as I preached to 20 or 2,500. Everyone who comes to worship Jesus deserves the best from the pastor.

3. Yes, I boldly invited great men and women to come and

minister to my flock. When God "bumped their hearts," some came. Many did not. But I learned that big names and great personalities do not really build churches. A church grows because of the faithful ministry of the pastor and other lesser-known gifted men and women of God. God sent us who we needed.

4. Growth, in the final analysis, is a sovereign act of God. Some church settings have greater or less potential. Some men are growth producers, some growth consolidators, some growth maintainers. Others pastor faithfully during autumn and winter cycles in the life of a congregation. In my latter two churches, God placed me in the pastorate after a period of decline and problems. After a long winter, both churches were ready to welcome God's spring. However, I cherish two faithful pastors who ministered to those churches before I did. Without their "winter ministry" (and changing the season was entirely beyond them), I would have had no church to grow. God alone gave the increase.

5. Today I still wonder from Sunday to Sunday whether there will be enough money to sustain us. Small or large, many churches minister with much faith and struggle. My wife and I (and the church) had to trust the Lord for daily needs when we made the princely salary of \$25 per month. We must still trust Him with a salary many times that amount. We have found that God will provide the money for what He wants done. When it runs out, I check to find out what we are doing that He has not proposed.

6. Pastoring tiny churches for so many years gave me a tremendous sense of the value of *one individual member*. So often members of my present church are amazed that I remember their names. That skill began back in those days when if three people failed to show up or left the fellowship, that was half the active membership!

Our task is to share the Word, nurture the flock, reach out to the community—whether we occupy a large or a small place in God's great scheme of things.

Among the last words my father said to me (he never pastored more than 100 people in 50 years of ministry): "Son, be faithful. Don't try to be the biggest, the best known, the most successful. Be faithful, and Christ will give you a crown of life." I believe one of heaven's gentle ironies will be the multiplied thousands of crown-wearing pastors who—unknown, unapplauded, and unrecognized—labored in small places, hard places, "less important" places, and helped bring in the kingdom of God.

Pastor, be faithful. You are making an impact for God, and you shall get your crown along with "all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8, KJV).

BY BENJAMIN F. REID
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Scriptural Retirement Planning

Does the Bible provide any guidance for financial planning for retirement? Yes! In fact, Scripture contains five key concepts that apply to our financial planning for retirement.

1. Plan Ahead by Saving

The Book of Proverbs continually admonishes us to seek wisdom. This wisdom leads us to plan for our future needs and not to consume all of today's resources without thought for future uncertainties (6:6-8; 10:5; 20:4; 21:20). We should save some of our current earnings for use in the future when our ability to earn becomes limited or nonexistent.

In the New Testament, Jesus used the parable of the 10 virgins—5 wise and 5 foolish—to teach an important scriptural truth (Matt. 25:1-13). But, while learning that spiritual lesson, don't overlook the obvious mundane lesson—the wise ones planned ahead and saved their resources.

2. Be Persistent in Saving

The Book of Proverbs tells us, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit" (21:5). Current investment wisdom builds on this concept when it recommends using the method of "dollar cost averaging"—the purchase of investments over time. The diligent investor will use this very prudent investment strategy by putting money regularly into invest-

ments that vary in value. Investing regularly and persistently in a plan like a tax-sheltered annuity will yield profound results over the long term.

3. Diversify

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14 ff.), Jesus tells us of the man who gave his riches to others to manage. This wise man divided his wealth among three managers and gave varying amounts to each. Eccles. 11:2 also advises us to diversify: "Give portions to seven, yes to eight." Typically, in a retirement plan like a tax-sheltered annuity, you

will have various investment options. Some probably will have fixed-return guarantees, and others will have variable returns. You may want to see that your funds are invested in a wide range of options.

4. Discipline Against Early Distribution

Prov. 13:18 tells us, "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame." If you are saving for retirement and find yourself tempted to use your retirement funds for something else, question yourself regarding the nature of the need. Would a little discipline today save you from poverty tomorrow?

5. Be Cautious of Get-rich-quick Temptations

Prov. 28:20 reminds us, "One eager to get rich will not go unpunished." Overly eager investors always take the short-term view with their retirement funds. They chase the latest, highest-yielding investment. Unfortunately, when they do that, they frequently leave steady yields in favor of those that have almost topped out. After management or trans-

fer fees or both are assessed, the ones who make money on the deal are the salesmen or the brokers—not the eager investor. Current conventional wisdom reminds us, "It is not timing the markets, but time in the markets" that yields long-term results.

Scripture always has words of honor for those who exemplify wisdom. You can be wise by using your retirement income plan and its investment vehicles as they were intended and designed. Your earthly future, and that of your family, will be improved by doing so.

PM

BY DON WALTER
Director, Pensions and
Benefits USA, Church
of the Nazarene



How the Ministry Kept Me from Jesus

Four years ago I began having an affair. It changed my life. It was a love affair with Jesus Christ. I'd been a pastor for 14 years before I came to realize the shallowness of my relationship with the Lord. I'd worked hard in a rapidly growing church, and by all human accounts I was a successful minister; but one day I sat down and did a mental analysis of my life. I discovered three things:

1. I was tired.
2. I was frustrated.
3. I was very tired of being frustrated!

Where is the peace and joy? I asked myself. Why does the ministry seem like such a terrible burden?

I decided to ask our elders for some time off, and they graciously granted me a six-week leave of absence. It was during those days of solitude and self-examination that I discovered four fundamental ways the ministry had kept me from Jesus.

An Improper Definition of Success

Like most ministers, I'd always believed that success was a result of *what I did* rather than *who I am*. My self-esteem was all wrapped up in budgets, attendance figures, and the approval of parishioners. "If I can build a successful church," I reasoned, "then I'll be a successful man."

So I worked more and prayed less, while doing my best to please everyone. I knew it was wrong, but it seemed to work!

My goals are simpler now than they used to be.

BY GARY E. BLACK
Associate pastor,
Southland Christian Church
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY



Fortunately, God, in His grace, showed me that I had been serving myself more than Him. I suspect that's true of many in the ministry.

An Inadequate Relationship with Christ

I believe that the best lessons in life are learned in solitude, but unfortunately solitude is very much a stranger in the lives of most preachers. During my days of solitude I learned that Jesus had been more of a boss than a friend. I was not intimate with Him because I had treated Him more like a system than a person. I read the Bible systematically, prayed systematically, and related to Jesus systematically, content to give Him a brief segment of my time each day.

Suddenly I came to realize that I knew the words to the song, but not the music. I knew all *about* Jesus, but there was little, if any, depth in our relationship. I could not say with Paul, I "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), or "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Thus, at the age of 39, I came to realize that, even as a pastor, I knew very little about an intimate walk with the Lord.

A Superficial Demonstration of Power

The real test of the Christian life is being like Jesus. For years I really didn't understand that. As a strong leader and an effective

orator I learned to substitute *my* strength for His. In reality I was one big bundle of flesh. I spoke with skill and authority, but I was devoid of real spiritual power.

There is a place for ego in the ministry—the bottom shelf. But it's difficult to crucify the ego because of all the positive strokes we receive from others who appreciate our ministry.

In 1 Cor. 3, Paul says that many of the works we do will be burned up on the day of judgment because they're not *really* done for Christ. He also says, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (2:4-5).

As I continued to examine my life and ministry, I came to realize that true spiritual power depended much more on Him than on me. It didn't come from sermons and systems; it came from the indwelling Spirit of Christ. "Without Me you can do nothing," said Jesus (John 15:5, NKJV). Though I'd read that verse hundreds of times, it wasn't until I really fell unashamedly in love with Jesus that I understood its truth. I determined to stop doing more and more for a Lord I'd known less and less. I determined to find strength in my relationship *with* Him rather than my performance *for* Him. It was the best decision I ever made. As someone has wisely said, "When Jesus is all you have, you'll discover that Jesus is all you need."



A Poor Example at Home

During my days of self-evaluation, the Lord showed me that my most important ministry is my family, not my church. He also showed me some tremendous inconsistencies in that area of my life.

As a pastor I had been positive and pleasant; at home I had been melancholy and morose.

As a pastor I continually solved problems; at home I often created them.

As a pastor I was patient and compassionate; at home I was quick-tempered and insensitive.

Clearly I was missing God's best for my family, and I determined to change. I prayed that God would give me back the years the locusts had eaten, and graciously, He has.

After informing my congregation that my family would no longer take a backseat to ministry, I set about the task of living a more balanced life. I committed myself to a day off each week, and three nights at home. Except for emergencies I have not deviated from that plan, in spite of *anyone's* objections! God has blessed. I am grateful. He has restored beauty from ashes. I now remind myself frequently that the only thing I have that I can take with me to heaven is my family. I'm determined to do just that.

Epilogue

My goals are simpler now than they used to be. As I awaken each day, I remind myself to live His life, not my own (Gal. 2:20). Four primary goals occupy each new day:

- Lord, help me to *love* You, with all my heart, mind, and soul.
 - Lord, help me to *share* You with others.
 - Lord, help me *enjoy* the journey, not endure it.
 - Lord, help me to *never again* allow the ministry to keep me from Jesus.
- Amen.

PM

Enjoying the Struggle

It happened while I was eating my peanut butter and jelly sandwich Sunday evening before going to choir practice.

The children were out playing, and my wife was napping. By myself at the kitchen counter, I began to contemplate what my life was all about. I thought I would write a book about it called *Enjoying the Struggle*. It will not sell many copies because the poor will not buy it—what is there to enjoy? The rich will not either; where is the struggle? It will talk about people like me: middle class with children to send to college.

One chapter will be on family life, including how a working man with a moonlighting job can squeeze time in for recreation and teach his values and beliefs to his children. There will even be a few paragraphs on the evils of television with alternatives for low-budget entertainment.

A short section will speak of views on the desire for possessions and how they help or hinder during the struggle.

The best chapter will be called "Living in the Present, Planning for the Future." I know we will have arrived at last when the car is paid for, when we can afford orange juice for breakfast every morning, and when we can give away chocolate bars at Halloween instead of bubble gum.

The standard of living always

I began to contemplate what my life was all about.

remains a hot topic among us middle classers. In fact, my friend's wife recently complained to him about his job. He said, "Well, it is a living."

She replied, "You call this living?"

Since things are so financially tough on us, there will be advice on budgeting, saving, tithing, dealing with Uncle Sam [government and taxes], preparing for the children's education, and even retirement. Can't you see how the middle class folk will love this book?

The concluding chapter will explain setting and achieving goals. It will discuss personal goals, financial goals, and goals for Kingdom building. It might even include an illustration or two about how it is really not that desirable to be rich. Solomon said they worry too much about hanging on to it anyway. Can you imagine how your life would change if you inherited a million dollars? You would lose all your friends and find long lost relatives. They even say there are no winners with these state lotteries.

My promise to myself is to write the book when the children get through college. So, to make this book as sincere as possible, I will continue to enjoy the struggle. Why shouldn't I? Peanut butter is not all that bad, after all—is it?

PM

Today's Books for Today's Preachers

Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution Against Christians in the Modern World

by Paul Marshall
with Lela Gilbert
(Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997),
321 pages, including
7 appendices and 528 endnotes.
(PA084-994-0206, \$12.99)

As you read these words, 200 million people in countries throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America awaken each day in fear. Many live in mortal danger. In cities and villages across the globe, the aged, the sick, the pregnant are herded into "peace camps" awaiting torture and execution. Women and their daughters are gang-raped. Men are disemboweled or beheaded while their families look on in horror. Children are snatched from their mothers' arms and sold into slavery. Why?

Because they are Christians.

Their Blood Cries Out is not a cataloging of wild rumors and "Christian bashing" hysteria. The authors document hundreds of eyewitness and personal accounts of the atrocities committed against Christians by governments and organizations inflamed against these people of faith. In places such as China, Cuba, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, horrors rivaling the Nazi holocaust occur with increasing frequency and ferocity. Worst of all, this savagery remains un-

challenged by Western nations committed to human rights.

In this balanced yet impassioned exposé, the authors describe not only *what* is happening to Christians around the world but *why* the West turns blind eyes and deaf ears to their cries. Perhaps most important, *Their Blood Cries Out* also provides an answer to the question that naturally arises while reading this book: What can be done—what must be done—to stop the bloodshed?

Through this book, Marshall and Gilbert call upon governments, human rights organizations, churches, and individuals to force an end to the slaughter. The authors make the point well: Either human rights are for all of us, or they will be for none of us.

Their Blood Cries Out is not light reading to be perused at bedtime or over morning coffee. But it is one that demands to be read by anyone deeply committed to human rights.

—by Richard Maffeo
San Antonio

The People Principle

by Stan Toler
(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press
of Kansas City)
(PA083-411-6642, \$9.99)

Pharaoh and Egypt endured the 10 plagues of God's wrath. Pastors and churches endure their own self-made plagues induced by lethargy and indifference. How can churches transform plagues to

praise? What life-transforming, dynamic change can erupt from the stagnant church life that dominates local congregations?

Stan Toler has produced a positive book that step-by-step helps the church into becoming a clean, clear congregation championing Christlikeness that gives off an aroma of God's Way.

This book is for you!

Based on eight biblical truths that bring people and churches into the Word and world, Stan teaches through example, illustrations, stories, charts, and graphs. These strategies for success will help any congregation of any size to grow by developing laypersons into lay leaders.

The eight life-change people principles include:

- The Evaluation Principle—evaluating where the church is and where it wants to go.
- The Leadership Principle—visioning that connects plans and people focused on the needs.
- The Lay Ministry Principle—Empowering and equipping laypersons to minister to their local churches and our world.
- The Marketing Principle—love motivation reaching out to a lost world in need of Jesus.
- The Assimilation Principle—following up discipleship through intentional planning.
- The Caring Principle—people caring for people through programs of love and concern.
- The Giving Principle—the basics of generous biblical stewardship for giving time, talent, and money.
- The Celebration Principle—tips on what and how to have an exciting worship service in celebration of Christ.

As Zig Ziglar wrote on the cover of Toler's publication, "A book for everyone who is serious about doing things God's way." Well worth the money!

—by Derl G. Keefer
Three Rivers, Michigan

What Pastors' Wives Wish Their Churches Knew

I had just nestled into the horizontal position for my afternoon siesta when the phone rang and I heard Ina's fluttering voice on the other end. (She told me that her heart was racing uncontrollably.) She asked to speak to my husband—her pastor—who was not at home. So she settled for talking to me about that day's ailments.

Ina was an elderly, nervous widow who called incessantly asking for prayer for something—usually a perceived illness related to her racing heart or shortness of breath. You had to love her, with her ruby-red lips that spiked beyond the lip-line and her penciled-in, over-arched eyebrows that crowned her wrinkled brow. Once after church she came through the receiving line to greet my husband and me with her brow furrowed and distorted as she muttered how she was sure she had contracted AIDS. She didn't know for sure, but her nephew whom she thought might be gay had kissed her on the cheek at a family wedding, and she hadn't felt well since.

The call that interrupted my siesta that afternoon was of a

There is more to who I am than that smiling face next to my husband.

different sort. This time she had an unbearable burning sensation related to her female anatomy. She asked for prayer. Now, I'm a praying woman, but I couldn't help asking—*Lord, how am I supposed to pray for this?* Well, I prayed and managed to say it right, because Ina was so grateful. The next church day she floated up to me in the receiving line, throwing her hands up in ecstasy and telling me that she was "Oh, so much better. Praise the Lord!"

Ministry. When the church called my husband to serve as their shepherd, whether I was prepared for it or not, I received a call too. Sometimes it means that my afternoon siestas are interrupted with calls from hypochondriacs with strange prayer requests, or sometimes it means sitting in the pew, sinking fast, while my husband proclaims from the pulpit while preaching from the Song of Solomon: "Your breasts are like two roes!" ("How could you undress me in front of the whole church?")

The call of the pastor's wife is both consecrated in its place of privilege and complicated in its emotional ambiguities. (I say "wife" because husbands of female pastors don't seem to share the same set of congregational expectations as wives of male pastors—what church wouldn't expect that he would have full-time employment outside the church?) There is a certain blessedness in the mantle bequeathed to her by virtue of her intimate connection to the shepherd of the flock.

Answering the phone, in and of itself, ushers her into the inner recesses of the soul of the congregation. She becomes both listener and transmitter of deeply personal messages, some that break her heart: "Would you tell



BY WENDY MURRAY

ZOBA

Pastor that my boy has been picked up for drugs again; that we would appreciate it if he could try to talk to him?" She can also be the lightning rod for "messages" that are not so sublime: "What does Pastor think he's doing changing the time of the evening service?" Whether with choked-back tears or gritted teeth, the pastor's wife responds with kindness: *I'll be sure he gets back to you.*

But this role can get complicated. Maintaining emotional wholeness and equilibrium can be a delicate dance when it comes to a wife's relationship with the church, her friends, her husband, and even herself.

A Painful Moment

Take the experience of my friend Miriam as an example. Her husband, Edwin (not their real names), had been pastoring a small church for five years. Edwin had, by means of his relational appeal and aggressive visitation outreach, succeeded in bringing Sylvia, a neighbor, and her three children into the fold of the church. (Sylvia's husband was an agnostic who worked too much to care about church.) Over time, Miriam and Sylvia had become friendly, and Miriam frequently chatted with her over the back fence. When Sylvia's mother died, Miriam joined her husband for his pastoral call at the funeral home.

There, Miriam quickly saw a new side to Sylvia. When they arrived, Sylvia darted over to greet them and pulled Edwin in the direction of her father. "Daddy," she said, "this is Pastor Ed. You know how much the kids are always talking about Pastor Ed."

"Oh yes," her father said. "I've heard all about Pastor Ed."

"The kids always want to know when Pastor Ed is coming for another visit," Sylvia continued. "Oh, and they love his children's sermons! Haven't the kids told you how much they love Pastor Ed's sermons?"

To whom
does
Miriam
turn when
she feels as
though a
member of
the church
has a
"crush" on
her
husband?

Sylvia gushed unabashedly over Miriam's husband throughout the entire visit, while barely acknowledging Miriam's presence.

Who does Miriam turn to when she feels as though a member of the church has a "crush" on her husband? And with whom does she share her sense of betrayal that Sylvia fabricated a friendship with her for the sole purpose of getting nearer to him? Miriam's anguish over this highlights the complex network of emotions that the wife of the pastor contends with and that must never be aired—or even hinted at—in the context of the church.

Miriam liked Sylvia; she thought Sylvia was her friend. So when it became apparent that this friendship was driven more by Sylvia's interest in her husband than in an authentic friendship with her, Miriam began to fear that anyone who befriended her had an ulterior motive. Of course, that was not true. There were lots of good people in the church who were sincerely interested in Miriam's friendship. But Miriam could not overcome her sense of isolation.

Three Needs

This episode highlights what a recent survey sponsored by *Just Between Us* (JBU, a magazine for pastors' wives) confirms: *The number one need of wives of pastors is for friendship and community, due to an acute sense of loneliness.* One woman said in the survey, "While we can't reveal deep hurts, confidences, wounds, and such . . . we often feel separated from other women." Another said, "I'm not sure who to trust with my feelings. Sharing frustrations can backfire." And another said, "It seems like once I entered the ministry with my husband, I couldn't have a close, true friend."

How could that be, one may ask, since the pastor's family is so revered and in such demand

for social engagements, informal gatherings, and quick chats after church?

Many pastors' families, when they move into a community to assume a call, are perceived as outsiders. "Everyone else was part of the history of the church and the traditions," says one wife, adding that among the deepest struggles attendant to her husband's call was the "intense loneliness" she felt for the "first five to seven years." "We had families who went back years and years. When we came, we were outsiders and newcomers. And there was little sensitivity to the fact that we seldom saw our families."

Another told me how she and her husband and children would leave immediately after the Christmas Eve service to drive all night in order to spend Christmas with her parents in the South. ("We had one Christmas dinner sitting in our car, eating 7-Eleven pizza," she said.) Once, when they returned after the holidays, they learned that there was a movement afoot in the church to disallow the pastor any travel during the holidays. "They have their families right here in town and so are never alone on the holidays," she said. "But they resented our wanting to leave so that we could be with our families."

The second-greatest need for ministers' wives, as delineated in the JBU survey, was finding a sense of self-worth. The problem shows itself in a number of ways. For example, one morning in church I noticed a new family I hadn't seen before sitting in the pews. So I approached them to greet them.

"Good morning," I said, shaking their hands. "Welcome."

They nodded.

"Where are you from?" I asked. They mumbled something I didn't catch and seemed to communicate that they would prefer to be left alone.

"My husband is the pastor," I added.

"Oh!" they said, and their eyes lit up. "It's so nice to meet you."

Why couldn't they respond to me that way before they knew I was the pastor's wife? I was the same person; my greeting had been heartfelt. Why the change in their demeanor? Did my association with "the pastor" make a difference in what they thought of me? Does being *his wife* give me more value than just being a nice person greeting them in the pew?

There is a flip side to the fabricated importance we enjoy by virtue of our husbands' honored role. Often, whether in receiving lines or in social settings, wives of pastors are walked past and edged out, though nobody means to do it. Once, at a wedding rehearsal, the mother of the bride introduced the pastor to every member of the wedding party without so much as a nod to his wife, who was standing right next to him.

Jill Briscoe protests, "She has a name." (And it is not The Pastor's Wife.)

My friend Miriam's self-worth suffered when she tried to bring up the "Sylvia problem" with her husband. The isolation she already felt magnified her need for him to respond in an affirming manner. When instead he told her she was "confused," Miriam recoiled in resentment: Does he tell all his counselees they're "confused"?

That, in turn, triggered more vain imaginings in Miriam's mind, which, in turn, put more stress on their marriage ("You love the church more than me!"), which unleashed Miriam's pent-up resentment toward the church, which only isolated Miriam further and diminished her sense of worth.

The third need most expressed by pastors' wives is for clear and healthy expectations. The perceived reality is unstated and ambiguous expectations put upon her in her role.

A survey taken by *Leadership* journal in 1992 reveals that 94

percent of ministers feel pressured to have an "ideal family," while 77 percent said their spouses felt pressure to be "an ideal role model for the Christian family."

This can be hard on the ministry wife. She is supposed to fulfill the role of "the good wife" (by any number of possible definitions) while her children rise up and call her blessed, though PKs (preacher's kids) tend to have an unusually high rate of church disaffection (and sometimes defection). Richard Wil- lowby writes in his article "Prodigy PKs" (*Pastor's Family*), "If teenage PKs feel they must sing in every youth group concert or live flawlessly because they exist in the spotlight . . . they may want to escape the glare of expectations." He adds, "The evening and weekend nature of church life can make ministers seem like absentee parents who don't have time or energy to be involved with their children or provide oversight."

In addition to family pressures, at times the ministry wife is expected to be her husband's proxy at social functions, and she is looked to for guidance and input the way her husband would be if he were there. I was called upon once at a wedding shower, without forewarning, to lead the group of 30 women in a Bible study devotional. So while others sipped punch and popped cashews and mints, I sat in a corner scribbling notes on a napkin about marriage principles derivable from Philippians 1. One woman in the JBU survey said that she wishes she could be free "not to do ministry" every time she is with people.

But there are other, more subtle expectations. An acquaintance once said to me, "You don't act like a pastor's wife." When I asked her, How does a pastor's wife act? she said that her pastor's wife always "just stood there with a blank look on her face, like a mannequin."

I know that look. The com-

ment surprised me and reminded me how easily misunderstood the pastor's wife is. Sometimes it is difficult when a wife hears her husband preach, to hear the "prophetic word" over the voice of the man who gets ticked off when she leaves the bathroom light on. Sometimes she can't get past the spot on his tie or the funny twirl in his hair. And she has heard that joke at least twice before.

That is not to say she can't be blessed by her husband's messages. But it takes more overcoming before the clear voice of the prophet can supersede the voice of the man she put through seminary.

Who does she go to when she feels the need for marriage counseling? (Who does she even tell of that felt need?) How does she get past the dysfunctions of her youth when she has no pastor to whom to unburden herself? (To her husband, these are sometimes more of a threat to his ministry.)

So while the wife is *expected* to be poised and wise, on the inside she may feel emotionally unresolved, relationally embattled, and spiritually lost. Sometimes standing there with a blank look takes every ounce of strength and resolve she can muster.

In addition to the expectations from the church, the ministry wife also receives signals from the larger believing community about who (or what) she should or should not be. I read an article recently in a leading Christian journal by a respected, best-selling author and revered speaker. She wrote that she was "shocked" to learn, when speaking to a group of pastors' wives, that 80 percent of them worked full-time outside the home. She asserted that Scripture nowhere suggests that "womanly responsibilities" included the "ambitious agenda" of working outside the home. Women in general, and pastors' wives in particular, the author asserted, ought to function as

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"WOTT" (Women Of Titus Two).

I looked up Titus 2: "Teach the older women to be reverent . . . not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine. . . . Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands" (vv. 3-5). I couldn't decipher how working outside the home precluded these virtues. Pastors' wives feel plenty bad about the fact that, in many instances, the church doesn't pay them enough to live on. "Ambitious agenda" has nothing to do with the cost of tennis shoes and car insurance.

Sometimes the ministry wife simply feels incapable of leading other women in the art of godly womanhood. One wife responded in the JBU questionnaire that she needed someone to function as a WOTT-mentor to her.

Syndicated columnist Terry Mattingly wrote recently that the divorce rate for U.S. pastors rose 65 percent in the past 25 years. Eighty percent said their ministry has "a negative impact" on their homelife, while one-third said "the pastorate has been a 'hazard' to their families."

A radio host recently asked the guest for that day what she thought would be a wonderful way to minister to the pastor's wife: "Maybe offer to clean

Maintaining emotional wholeness and equilibrium can be a delicate dance when it comes to a wife's relationships.

house for her, or something like that?" he said. The cows will come home before a pastor's wife wants a church member digging socks (and who knows what else) out from under her kids' beds. The radio guest, to her credit, made a better suggestion. "If that's something they want to do, it would be best to pay for a cleaning service to come in." (But then, of course, the wife is haunted by the thought that the people in the church must think she can't keep her house up.)

Upward Trajectory

There is no sure formula to guarantee a healthy environment in which the ministry family can grow and thrive. But I have learned through personal experience, and through many friends and associates who are married to pastors, that there are some key factors that help set the preconditions for success in marriage and ministry. My friend Caroline's experience offers a model for a positive church environment in which the ministry wife can flourish.

During the candidating process at their second church, the elders and their wives invited her husband, James, and Caroline to a cookout, which would be followed with the intensive three-hour Q & A session. To Caroline's surprise, the elders invited her to participate in the in-

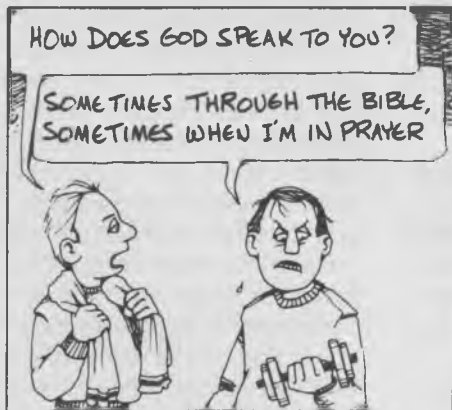
terview. When the meal was over, the men shuffled papers and dug folders out of briefcases while the women carried dishes into the kitchen, inviting Caroline to join them. She excused herself from kitchen duty, deferring to the invitation of the men to join her husband for the interview.

She kept quiet except when James asked for her input. At one point, the elders turned the questioning to her. ("I don't play the piano," she wanted to say up front.) They asked her what she perceived would be her role in the church. She answered, "I guess I'd like to grow into that role, without any preconceived expectations or ideas about what I should do," she said. She added that since her kids were getting older, she thought it might be a good time for her to go back to work.

James chimed in. "The way we try to look at it is that the church is calling me. Anything that my wife adds to that is up to her."

The elders eventually accepted James's candidacy, and they likewise accepted Caroline on those terms—that is, no terms. And just as the bizarre episode in the funeral home entangled Miriam in a web of negative emotions, so this gesture had an exponential positive effect for Caroline. She felt free to take her time in deciding how and where she would function in the church

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1987 Roger Judd

without fear of subtle recriminations from the church leadership or membership. This—coupled with the fact that her children were in school all day—opened for Caroline the possibility that she might pursue her own vocation. (She got a job.) This (to her surprise) caused many of the members of the congregation—especially the women—to laud her example: she struck the right balance between maintaining a healthy homelife and finding her place in her vocation. In fact, she was nominated for the Board of Elders (she declined), and one woman even asked her why she couldn't be the pastor with her husband.

This affirmation spurred her sense of purpose and calling with the women in the church. She started a 7 A.M. women's breakfast Bible study for those, like herself, who longed for spiritual food before the workday began. (On those mornings, James got the kids off to school.)

Three Key Factors

The action of the elders in this instance illustrates the first of three ingredients needed for the health and wholeness of the ministry wife. These include: clear and healthy attitudes within the congregation, trusted friendships, and a solid relationship with her husband.

The Church. The elders gave Caroline a blank slate on which to write her job description, which, in turn, had the effect of winning her heartfelt involvement in the church and in the lives of the women there.

The leadership in James's church exercised other forms of active support for Caroline. When the time came for James's contract to be renewed, for example, the chairman of the elders invited him out to lunch to discuss pertinent matters. "Ask Caroline to come too," he said.

At the table, he said up front that he thought it was always a good idea to ask the pastor's wife whether or not the family

was making it on the salary they were giving him, and if everything was all right with the parsonage. In that moment, whether or not they were "making it" on James's salary didn't matter so much to Caroline (though she didn't hesitate to interject her opinions). And, while there was plenty that needed fixing in the parsonage (which Caroline rattled off by memory, to even James's astonishment), she carried no resentment about it. What mattered to Caroline was that someone had asked, and that this dear elder had the wisdom to free James from the awkward position of having to lobby for more money from the church for his family. The elder made that Caroline's job! She gladly took it on.

Friendship. Other surprising events began to unfold for Caroline during this new season at their second church. It so happened that the church parsonage stood two houses down from the home where some former missionaries lived. Their first day there, the missionary wife welcomed Caroline to the neighborhood with a loaf of homemade bread.

Though the missionary did not attend their church, she continued to reach out to Caroline. The two began to walk together in the mornings. This evolved into a desire between them to pray together. Before the first year was over, Caroline had a friend—the second critical ingredient for nurturing a healthy ministry wife. And because her friend was not an integral part of the church family, Caroline felt much more freedom to share and confess her struggles, irrational or otherwise. Suddenly, she no longer felt trapped and isolated.

This trusted new friend freed Caroline to love her church family in a new way. Rather than recoil inside herself, emotionally bound and stewing about dysfunctions and hard moments, she and her friend prayed about them and then let them go. In

this way, Caroline found release and genuine longing to participate and relate to others in a healthy way. And it freed her to serve with joy: She sang in the choir; she taught the teenagers' Sunday School class; she wrote the church newsletter; she set up the Communion table—not because anybody expected these of her, but because she genuinely grew into the place where this was where she felt called to function. She was happy to do it.

Her Husband. Even more critical than having clear and healthy expectations from the church and good friendships is the third factor in nurturing the healthy ministry wife: her relationship with her husband.

Shortly after we moved to our first church, my husband and I decided to visit some of the other pastors in town. The first home we went to seemed strangely deserted. The curtains were drawn, and nobody answered the door after several knocks. We turned to leave when the door slowly opened. A woman peered out at us with eyes bugged out. She didn't speak, but only stood there clutching the door. The house was dark inside.

We put on our best faces and introduced ourselves, suggesting that we should get together for dinner sometime.

"All right," she said. We mumbled one or two other awkward attempts at small talk, but soon she pushed the door shut until it latched.

There is something not right with this picture, my husband and I thought, as we stood dumbfounded on the stoop.

We came to learn, many years after that encounter, that this poor woman's pastor-husband divorced her and left the church in shame. He spent so much time with his counseling practice that he was never home, day or night, and had compromised himself more than once in inappropriate behavior toward some of his female counselees. The

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church ended up changing the locks on the building to force his departure.

That sad story made me wonder how many pastors' wives are crouched behind doors, waiting for their husbands to come home, and feeling swallowed up in everybody else's needs.

A manual for pastors' wives in the 19th century offered this nugget of wisdom: "The keystone in the fabric of the rectory system is . . . a happy and harmonious marriage." Forty years ago, the standard was the same: "One is impressed by an unruffled, spiritually sublime, and socially tranquil countenance [of the minister's family]" (from *Clergy Families*, by Paul Mickey and Ginny Ashmore). Beyond 19th-century rectory "keystones" and mid-20th-century "unruffled countenances," David Goetz in "Why Pastor Steve Loves His Job" (see p. 12) still maintains that "satisfied pastors are married to a satisfied spouse."

But it can be a very fine line between the "satisfied" spouse and the lonely, troubled woman lurking behind closed doors.

My husband never forgot that image. When we stand together in the receiving line after the service, before the crowds descend, I'll brush back that twirl in his hair. He'll hand me his bulletin while he fixes his tie. As people come by, even as he chats, he will put his arm around my waist now and then. When someone comes through who might step past me, he interjects, "Have you met my wife?"

These are little things. But they add up to something much bigger. His hand on my waist tells me that I, no one else, belong with him. The passing introductions assure me that, even if some might pass me by, my husband knows I'm there; he knows my name.

When you are in it up to your neck, you don't always see how high and how good the call of the pastor's wife can be. There is a degree of suffering attached to

this role, and no small measure of sacrifice. But there is also the privilege of sharing the trust of hurting people who depend upon you, whether you deserve it or not—like Ina's confidence that someone would pick up the phone at the pastor's house and take a minute to pray for her. There is also the privilege of participating in sacred moments when the human heart cries out for the face of God—like the time a friend in our church learned that her sister had been murdered and asked me to help break the news to her mother. The hard points and the sacred moments, in tandem, are the brick and mortar of Kingdom building. The pastor has been entrusted with the soul nurture of the Bride of Christ, and with or without her assent, his wife is part of that trust. With every phone message she takes or relationship she risks,

God is finding a foothold in the heart of another person.

Not long after the call I received that interrupted my sista, Ina called yet another time, asking for prayer. This time, however, she wanted my husband and me to come and lay hands on her. She was happy to see us, though she looked altogether different in her bathrobe and slippers, minus the red lips, arched brows, cheap jewelry, and false teeth. She stroked her cat, asking if we minded, as we came close to lay our hands on her for prayer. We petitioned the heavens regarding whatever it was that afflicted her that day, and she felt pleased that we came. We chuckled as we drove home.

She died the very next day. I was glad I had been invited. **PM**

Christianity Today, 1997. Used by permission.

Sometimes
the
ministry
wife feels
incapable
of leading
other
women in
the art of
godly
womanhood.



I know God loves you, Robert,
but sometimes I wonder why!

The Man of God

Framed in the light of a stained-glass cross, the massive figure of the preacher appeared larger than life. Filling the heavy oak pulpit centered on the platform, he inspired awe in those gathered for the Sunday morning service. Wearing the mantle of spiritual leadership like a well-tailored suit, he looked very much the part of the man of God. Unquestionably in his element, he commanded reverence and respect as his thunderous voice boomed with authority: "Thus saith the Lord. . ."

Warming up to the message, the preacher's thick neck bulged as he passionately delivered his sermon. Trickle of sweat meandered through well combed hair and dropped onto his damp collar. Nostrils flared and face reddened with emotion, he tugged at the knot in his tie as he gulped in air and made a final plea. Penetrating eyes scanned the faces of his unmoving audience searching for one who would respond. Three stanzas of "Amazing Grace" and a brief benediction concluded the service.

An early morning phone call roused me out of a deep sleep and reminded me of the plans we had made. Having accepted an invitation to go fishing with the reverend, I found myself in the passenger seat of an old Buick swaying on weak shocks. The cool damp scent of daybreak rushed through half-opened win-

dows as we sped toward our destination loaded with gear. Brief attempts at conversation were handicapped by the lingering fog of drowsiness. It was too early for anything except fishing.

In the nearness of the car, the rising sun revealed features of the minister on his day off. Thick gray hair, tousled by sleep, stuck out in defiance to the single pass of a comb. Dark stubble of a heavy beard roughened his face. His faded blue single pocket T-shirt, worn thin near the belly, sported a small hole at the end of a threadbare runner. Up close, the man of God did not appear nearly so imposing.

On a secluded farm two turns from the main gravel road, we found the promised land of fishing ponds. A heavily weathered dock protruding from the grassy shore offered an ideal platform for well-placed casts. Stately old trees rimmed the banks in a large semicircle stretching farther than we cared to walk. Beyond the trees, tall reeds spiked with cattails swayed in a gentle breeze. It was the perfect fishing spot.

Choosing the sun-drenched dock, the preacher readied two poles and cast his lines into the water. His legs grew tired waiting for elusive catfish to respond to the bait. Resting his bulk on the rough-hewn handrailing, weatherbeaten boards sagged under the weight. All was quiet as red and white plastic floats slow danced to the rhythm of

shallow waves. Practiced eyes searched for any indication of a bite.

Suddenly, with a loud crack of snapping timber, our silence ended. Body outstretched, his hands clutching at anything and nothing in particular, the preacher flopped backward, disappearing into the murky brown depths. A thunderous splash was followed by the sound of water rushing back to the pond. Bobbing to the surface, he gulped for air and sputtered unintelligibly. His laughter belched out water and echoed across the pond. Wading to the dock, he managed to roll onto its planked floor. Facedown, a puddle quickly forming around him, his whole body shook with uncontrollable laughter.

Several minutes passed before he attempted to stand. Water-soaked clothing clutched and dragged at his body as he hauled himself upright and hobbled toward dry ground. When he returned to the platform moments later, I got my first glimpse of the reverend in a new and unexpected light.

He was a large man filled with fried chicken and Sunday roast as well as the Holy Spirit. Casting his line in a new direction, his heavy chest threw a shadow across an ample belly. Black socks and dark canvas shoes starkly contrasted the white on white of basic briefs and untanned flesh while a stringer of wet clothes drip-dried in the sun. Rivulets of water coursed through matted hair and dropped onto his bare shoulders. Little about the scene suggested the pulpit of Sunday morning.

It was a revelation of sorts. Behind the trappings of the office was a man. Underneath it all, the man of the cloth was plain white cotton. The preacher's laughter rumbled as he looked my way. In the harsh glare of sunlight reflecting off the water, he no longer looked formidable. He was a man of God to be sure; no less a man of God, he was no more than a man.

BY GARY SHANK
Freelance writer
OLATHE, KANSAS

Worship and Preaching Helps

Preaching is an act of worship. God is the Speaker. He reveals himself through His Word so that we can respond. He sovereignly elects to utilize human agents as His mouthpieces to persuade and prompt His people to action. Therefore, we must not substitute sales pitches for persuasion. In the overarching providential process of intertwining the text of Scripture with the text of life, only His supernatural power can instill the motivation for persons to be in relationship with himself. God is the Announcer in the divine-human encounter!

Our responsibility regards the message and ministry of reconciliation. Sermons that reflect the divine involvement in life open the way to reflections about one's participation in that revelation. The minister assists in interrelating the two. Since God initiates the communication, our role is one of incarnational influence and integration. Ministry must be incarnational to be effective. Four components have shaped my thinking or philosophy of ministry in relating with people: (1) intentional involvement and investment in the lives of people as a "significant other" and spiritual confidant, (2) development of interpersonal relationships by means of communicating rapport and trust as

an approachable friend, (3) honest striving to embody and exhibit Christlikeness by integrity and transparency, as well as (4) sharing of one's energies as a personal caregiver and promoting common goals. We essentially influence and impact others by our character and credibility when we enfold the presence of Jesus while walking alongside others.

A sermon serves as a catalyst to enable the listener to be more receptive to the voice of God, via the internal Word of His Spirit, who reminds us of the life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of the Son. We simply serve as instruments of the eternal, Living Word who became incarnate to reveal the Father. This series of sermons focuses on the seven last statements of Christ on the Cross, an Easter message, pastoral messages for encouragement during the special holidays in May, and special emphases on the Holy Spirit as our Paraclete and Source for empowerment.

PREPARED BY DAVID
A. HOFFMAN



SELECTION OF SERMON SERIES

The series of sermons contained herein focuses on the "Seven Last Statements of Christ on the Cross," an Easter message, pastoral messages to encourage your people during the special holiday events in May and a special emphasis on the

Holy Spirit as our Paraclete (One called alongside us as well as to reside in us) and Source for empowerment. The intent is to provide continuity from Passion Week to Pentecost Sunday. May you be blessed in the process of intertwining the text of Scripture with the text of life during this series.

A sermon serves as a catalyst to enable the listener or worshiper to be more receptive to the voice of God. The internal communication of the Spirit in conjunction with Scripture reminds us of the life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The eternal and living Word became incarnate to reveal the Father. We also are His instruments to share the spoken word in the medium of preaching, but God truly is the Announcer in the divine-human encounter!

MY PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

To pattern after our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ministry must be *incarnational*, therefore a minister must model or display a Christlike lifestyle. Ministry is both foremost and fundamentally an interplay of personal encounters.

Our Lord has privileged us with a tremendous responsibility. He entrusted us with both the message and the ministry of reconciliation. Sermons that reflect God's ongoing activity and optimum involvement in our lives provide incentive and inspiration for people to participate and to respond appropriately to that revelation. Preaching is actually an act of worship!

PM

March
April
May
1998

Jesus' Pardoning Prayer for Persecutors

by David A. Hoffman
Luke 23:26-27, 32-41

INTRO

For the next two months we will study in a series dealing with the "Seven Last Statements of Christ on the Cross."

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).
2. "Dear woman, here is your son" and "Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27).
3. "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
4. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).
5. "I am thirsty" (John 19:28).
6. "It is finished!" (John 19:30, NASB).
7. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

A person's last words prior to death are memorable due to their long-lasting effect and lifetime impact on loved ones. In this series we will marvel at Jesus' model of compassion and mercy. Also, there is a tremendous focus on the spiritual and physical needs of others as well as an emphasis upon His relationship with His Heavenly Father.

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:26-27, 32-41

The text for today is Luke 23:34. It is Jesus' first statement on the Cross in the form of a prayer. He prays a prayer of forgiveness for His persecutors. Note how He pardons His mockers—the large number of people, self-righteous religious rulers, unruly ridiculing Roman soldiers, and even one of the criminals who hurled insults at Him.

This certainly is not the last prayer of His ministry, nor even the final prayer that He prays on the Cross, which is "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (v. 46). Incidentally, Jesus prayed many significant prayers during His earthly ministry. Luke records more about Jesus' prayer life than any of the other Gospels.

Jesus spent the night in prayer before selecting His disciples, taught them the model Lord's Prayer in reply to their request, and later prayed repeatedly in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done" (22:42). John's Gospel also records His high-priestly prayer.

However, this is a prayer for pardon in the midst of His own painful death. He offers intercession for indignity and compassion for contempt.

A great preacher of the 19th century was asked what he would do differently if he had the opportunity to begin again. He replied, "I'd preach more on forgiveness." The word "forgiveness" is mentioned 145 times in the New Testament.

Jesus exchanges the intentional injury of words from the lips of aggravated, angry assassins determined to murder Him for His acceptance and acquittal. Rather than demanding justice, deciding to get revenge, or dooming them with retaliation, Jesus instead spoke in their defense and prayed to His Father for mercy on their behalf.

Alexander Pope, greatest English poet of the early 1700s, stated, "To err is human, to forgive divine."

Forgiveness! What a wonderful freedom, or release, for both the recipient—the one who is forgiven—and the forgiver. It requires letting go. Let's look at the example of our Lord. Remember His words: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

I. FORGIVENESS MEANS SEPARATING THE OFFENDER FROM THE OFFENSE (VV. 32-34)

In the context of the passage, verses 26-27 point out the procession of Jesus carrying the Cross to Calvary, or Golgotha, "the place called the Skull" (v. 33). Simon from Cyrene is seized and summoned to carry the Cross behind Jesus. The Romans made it a spectacle while our Lord struggled and staggered from the extreme physical weakness and exhaustion of the previous night's examination ordeals before the Sanhedrin.

Barclay describes the scene in his book *The Mind of Jesus*.

When the place of crucifixion was reached, the cross was laid flat on the ground and the criminal was then laid on top of it. . . . As the criminal was stretched upon the cross, the nails were driven through his hands. Frequently at that moment victims cursed and swore and shrieked and spat at their executioners, but it was then that Jesus prayed: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34 [KJV]). Then in a moment of searing agony the cross was lifted up and set in its socket with the victim hanging on it (p. 241).

Barclay elsewhere comments, "Love can go no further than to think more of the heartbreak of the man who wronged it than of the hurt that it itself has received."

ILLUS. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 displays this principle so well. Of course, the true focus is on the unconditional love of the father for the unruly life of his son. The runaway rebel remembered the generosity of his father to the servants. The faithfulness and loving-kindness of the father's character prompted him to respond. Consequently, forgiving grace is when someone believes in you, even though you have behaved disgracefully. The parable says, "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate" (v. 24).

ILLUS. Bob Benson, of the Benson Music Company in

Nashville, came home one evening to find a note left by his sleeping son. It read: "Father, please forgive me. I did something bad today."

Bob told his wife, Peg, "There's nothing he could ever do that would make me love him any less."

Forgiveness is possible only by grace. It is offering to an offender one's kindness, even though it is truly undeserved. Forgiveness is a gift to the guilty. Instead of humiliation God gives honor for true humility. God hates sin, but He loves sinners. Gratitude appropriates forgiving, pardoning grace.

Jesus separated the offenders from the offense: "Father, forgive *them*, for *they* do not know what *they* are doing" (emphases added). The rulers "sneered," the soldiers "mocked," and one of the criminals "hurled insults" at Him (vv. 35, 36, 39). In return, Jesus prayed for pardon and interceded for His persecutors.

II. FORGIVENESS MEANS REFUSING TO SAVE ONESELF (VV. 35-39)

A straightforward statement has been attributed to Napoleon: "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires, but upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his kingdom upon love, and at this day millions of men would die for him" (Harmon, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 603).

Force versus forgiveness. The former produces rancor, while the latter provisionally and potentially results in reconciliation. The former brings resentment, while the latter breeds respect. Jesus' resolve is to love others, not to leash them nor to lash out at them.

Notice the suppositional doubt and coarse conjecture of each of the persecutors in conjunction with their own hidden agenda. They condemn Jesus for rejecting self-preservation.

The rulers said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One" (v. 35).

The soldiers said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (v. 37).

One of the criminals hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (v. 39).

However, the other criminal rebuked his fellow felon in crime. Instead of sarcasm and ridicule, he pronounces his holy reverence for the innocence of Christ. He points out the unjust punishment Jesus has received. It was probably Jesus' pardoning reply that softened his heart and made him tender toward God! The choice is ours as well.

I am reminded of a quote the teens once displayed on our church sign in an earlier pastorate: "God considered you in His plans; why not consult Him in yours?" God provisionally included each of us in Jesus' pardoning prayer, but we must respond by His prevenient (going before) grace to be involved in His redemptive plan. Later, we will deal with the second criminal's request: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (v. 42).

On one hand, we are all awakened to the guilt in our lives by how we scorn the love of God. On the other hand, we are also attracted to the grace of God because of His love and willingness to forgive and save us. If He would have saved himself, then we would certainly be doomed for eternity. Instead, we can spend eternity with Him because Jesus decided to "save others," not himself.

III. FORGIVENESS MEANS SETTING THE PRISONER FREE (VV. 40-41)

I once read a statement on a coffee mug: "If you love something, set it free! If it comes back to you, it belongs to you. If it doesn't, it was never yours to begin with."

Truly, God loved His creation enough to sovereignly limit His power. A paradox exists between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Yet divine foreknowledge acknowledged the risk of rebellious rejection. God continues to enable mankind to respond to His unconditional freeness of grace offered in the atoning death of Jesus. Grace is optimistic!

Prisoner! Wait a minute! Wasn't Jesus the Prisoner? Well, yes and no. To be politically correct, He was a prisoner temporarily under Roman rule and Jewish conspiracy, but not spiritually. It was His own voluntary constraint as well as compulsion to die a criminal's death on the cursed Cross.

There is a tenderness in Jesus' prayer. He extends to you a gracious invitation: "Father, forgive _____ [fill in your name], for he or she does not know what he or she is doing."

Simply respond, "Jesus, I accept Your offer of forgiveness and prayer of pardon. I know I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. Thank You, Lord, for revealing Your love for me by Your death and resurrection. I believe You are alive! Come and live in my heart. Amen."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	Eph. 4:29-5:2
Hymns	"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
	"To God Be the Glory"
	"And Can It Be?"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Chorus	Sing "The Lord's Prayer" Together
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Music	
Sermon Series	Seven Last Statements of Christ on the Cross
Scripture	Luke 23:26-27, 32-41
Message	"JESUS' PARDONING PRAYER FOR PERSECUTORS"
Chorus	"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
Closing Prayer for Forgiveness from God, for Others and Oneself	
Benediction	2 Cor. 5:19

A Last Will and Testament

by David A. Hoffman

John 19:16-27

INTRO

Last week we reflected upon the first statement in the series on the "Seven Last Statements of Christ on the Cross."

Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), were actually a prayer for those who had cruelly had Him crucified! He was willing to pardon them for their punitive acts. He showed them mercy in spite of their mocking. He had compassion on them despite their cynicism. He refused to retaliate with a vengeful spirit. When hostility against Him exhibited its worst, His compassion counteracted with its best.

Today we shall consider Jesus' second statement while on Calvary's cross. Actually, it is a combination of a pair of short statements to both His mother, Mary, and to His beloved disciple, John. The two are compacted with compassionate thoughts of His family members.

First, we will compare and contrast the attitudes and activities of the characters in the Crucifixion story as recorded in this passage. There exists a vast difference in priorities between the calloused Romans and the compassionate Redeemer. Compare Pilate and the four soldiers with Jesus and the three women alongside John. We will also highlight two vital principles.

I. THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE IS INDIFFERENCE (VV. 16-24)

Undoubtedly Pilate ordered the inscription of the words "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (v. 19) to be attached to the Cross. He intentionally irritated the Jews with his choice of words on the notice. The Jews predictably objected to the statement. In fact, they had just insisted at the tribunal that they had no king but Caesar, partly out of fear but primarily out of manipulation to coerce Pilate to pronounce the death penalty.

The Jews repeatedly protested, but Pilate refused to alter his official notice. He responded, "What I have written, I have written" (v. 22). In fact, "the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek" (v. 20). The message was certainly a clear gouge at the religious conscience of the citizens gathered at Jerusalem for their Passover feast. Pilate intended to communicate his message to a universal audience across the empire.

Next, note the attention John gives to the clothes, particularly the seamless robe, of Jesus in relation to the soldiers. The Bible states, "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one

for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it'" (vv. 23-24).

It was customary for a Jew to wear five articles of clothing: shoes, turban, girdle, tunic, and outer robe. The four soldiers rolled dice for four of the items and then again to decide who would become the owner of the robe, since they did not want to cut it into quarters.

In *The Mind of Jesus*, Barclay explains: "Now there was a Jewish custom in regard to the great outer robe. It was not in shops that clothes were bought in those days; they were made at home. It was the mother who wove the cloth and cut and sewed and shaped it; and usually, before a son left home to go out into the world, his mother's last gift to him was a great outer robe, woven and made with her own hands" (p. 242).

The apathy of the soldiers' actions makes one aghast! Allow the lack of emotion and interest on their part to saturate your soul. It is a pathetic feeling, a moment of pathos to us: "No picture so shows the indifference of the world to Christ. There on the Cross Jesus was dying in agony; and there at the foot of the Cross the soldiers threw their dice as if it did not matter. . . . The tragedy is not the hostility of the world to Christ; the tragedy is the world's indifference which treats the love of God as if it did not matter" (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Volume 2 in the Daily Study Bible Series [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955], 254).

II. THE OBJECTIVE OF LOVE IS INTIMACY (VV. 25-27)

What a vivid contrast! Pilate and Jesus. Calloused Roman ruler and compassionate Redeemer. Apathy versus affection!

Christ has provided the access or entrance into the very presence of God's throne room. He offers us intimacy with the Father by His loving sacrifice on the Cross. Sinful mankind could never approach a holy God in any other way. Paul also says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Someone has said, "God has no grandchildren." That is a statement reinforcing that a relationship with God through His Son Jesus is personal and intimate. It is God's objective in love. Therefore, He must never be relegated in our lives as a "rabbit's foot Redeemer" when we need a good luck charm or desire to have a wish fulfilled. Perhaps that is what the movie *The Robe* portrays regarding the soldier who wins it in the dice game. For Pilate, Jesus was the "ace in the hole."

Pilate and the soldiers were self-serving because they were indifferent to eternal and spiritual matters. They were only concerned about temporal and material matters. However, Jesus was self-sacrificing because of an enlarged perspective.

The disciple John, whom Jesus loved, turns his attention to those who were standing with him as eyewitnesses watching the crucifixion of Jesus. Four women are identified—his mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. John focuses on the tenderness of Jesus' love for His mother. They shared many memories together

including birth, childhood, home in Nazareth, and His itinerant ministry, beginning with the miracle at Cana in Galilee.

Jesus was affectionately concerned about the welfare of Mary. Tradition tells us that Joseph was already deceased. Furthermore, Jesus became the "firstborn" of the family, both theirs and God's (Col. 1:15). Mary's weeping communicated her anguish and grief about His imminent death. From the Cross Jesus empathized with her excruciating pain, so He spoke to John and requested that he console her as a surrogate son.

Incidentally, the plight of the widow in biblical times had especially created this genuine concern for her well-being. Jesus' request of John reiterated the hope that God heard the lament of the mourner. John honored His request and recorded his loyalty: "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (v. 27).

Widows in the Bible came under God's special care. Note God's symbolic use of widowhood in Isa. 54:4-5, referring to the nation of Israel: "Remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer."

The writer utilizes metaphorical language to express God's covenant promise of unfailing love to encourage the nation of Israel. Several other scriptures where God pledges to protect the widow include Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; Pss. 68:5; 146:9; Prov. 15:25; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:3-7; 1 Cor. 7:8; 1 Tim. 5:3, 4, 9-10; James 1:27. Acts 6:1-7 records how the early apostolic church looked after the widows, especially the Grecian widows, after a protest regarding oversight.

For example, in retrospect remember Naomi and Ruth, her daughter-in-law, were both widows in the Old Testament. God's gracious plan of the kinsman-redeemer came to their rescue.

Also, recall the story of the widow of Zarephath and her son. God summoned Elijah to Sidon, saying: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food" (1 Kings 17:9). In the providential timing of God, He sent Elijah to her in a desperate moment of need. The widow was gathering a few sticks to take home and prepare the final meal for herself and her son, "that we may eat it—and die" (v. 12).

However, God replenished her last resource by promising, "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land" (v. 14). Afterward, a daily allotment was always available.

Some time later her son became ill, his health rapidly deteriorated, and he died. Elijah trusted God to resuscitate the boy and bring him back to life. Three times he stretched himself out on the boy and prayed to God, and the boy lived (cf. vv. 17-24).

Another familiar widow in the Old Testament is recorded in 2 Kings 4. Her husband belonged to the company of the prophets. Upon his death a creditor attempted to take the two sons as slaves. Such servitude was permitted un-

der Mosaic law, but Elisha was inspired by God to advise the woman to collect empty jars from her neighbors. Afterward, she continued to pour oil out of her own vessel into each container until every jar was filled. She sold the oil to pay her debts. The miracle demonstrated God's mercy. Jesus displayed the same mercy on the Cross.

Later, Paul also captured the true essence of Christian love: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He understood the last will and testament of his Master!

Although Mary perhaps thought that children are supposed to outlive their parents, Jesus was thinking more of the sorrows of others, especially Mary, than of His own sorrows. He knew He could not commit her to the care of His brothers (cf. list in Matt. 13:55), "for even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5).

Of course, we do learn in the Book of Acts that at least one brother of our Lord, James, did confess Christ as Lord and later became the leader of the Jerusalem Council as well as author of the Epistle of James in the General Epistles.

In conclusion, Jesus entrusted His mother to the care of John. After all, John was Jesus' cousin, being Salome's son, and he was "the disciple whom he loved" (v. 26). Mary and John would mutually comfort each other in their heartache, grief, loss, and loneliness.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	Ps. 103:8-18
Choral Introit	"It's Time to Praise the Lord"
Hymns	"At Calvary"
	"I Know Whom I Have Believed"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Hymn	"God Will Take Care of You"
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Music	
Sermon	"A LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT"
Scripture	John 17:16-27
Close with Family Units Praying in Circles	
Benediction	2 Tim. 1:12

PASTORAL PRAYER

Use the poem "One Solitary Life." It can be obtained from your local Christian bookstore.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CLOSING PRAYER

Have families meet in groups to petition God that none of the circle will be broken. Invite singles, single parents, widows, divorced persons, and so on to join a group of their own choice, most likely including someone they are closely associated with. Each unit should have a season of prayer for lost loved ones and relatives who do not know Christ as Savior because of attitudes of indifference, resentment, or hostility.

A Crook in Paradise?

by David A. Hoffman

Luke 23:39-43

INTRO

Ted Bundy. Terrified Florida community. Serial killer. Product of pornography. Violence led to innocent victims. Finally a solid suspect. Arrest and arraignment. Trial. Conviction. Verdict of death penalty. Justice will be served. He'll receive what he deserves.

Fears alleviated. Unmerciful murderer will be executed and exterminated. Suddenly, news is released of his confession of repentance and restitution. He pleads for an interview with Dr. James Dobson prior to his court-ordered date with destiny. Bundy appeared genuinely sorrowful on videotaped interview. Could it be true? An executioner's death would be exchanged for eternal life due to a divine merciful Judge!

Jesus' life and now His impending death tended to polarize people. Case in point. Two criminals on crosses, one on each side of Jesus. Different responses—rejection and reception.

Initially, both criminals "heaped insults" on Him, according to Mark 15:32.

One of the criminals reflected on his eternal destiny and on the eternal One. If Jesus was willing to pardon His persecutors, then perhaps He would pardon him if he were penitent.

I. THE CRIMINAL RECOGNIZED JESUS' TRIUMPHANT ROYALTY

The criminal expressed trust in Jesus by verbalizing his belief, both to his fellow felon and to our Lord.

First, he rebuked the other criminal: "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (vv. 40-41).

The "sentence" was the death penalty! Capital punishment had been perfected by the Romans in the cruel form of crucifixion. It was certainly a painful and, usually, prolonged type of death. It exemplified the fate for vigilantes, mercenaries, and rebels. After all, fear is usually a deterrent to crime. Otherwise, criminals would suffer the consequences at their own peril. However, he insisted on Jesus' innocence.

Second, the criminal addressed Jesus with a personal plea: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (v. 42). Something in Jesus' character spoke to the second thief. He sensed a compassionate, instead of a cantankerous, spirit, gentleness rather than grudges, reserve in place of restlessness, mercy instead of a maverick mentality, boldness but not being belligerent, and humility, not haughtiness.

The plea was personal: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Leon Morris comments on the phrase "into your kingdom" as "in the glory appropriate

to royalty" (Tyndale, 328). The criminal revered Jesus' royalty. He refers to Him as a King, not a con artist or crook like himself. Jesus' rightful place is reserved on a throne, the throne of our hearts. Truly, His kingdom is spiritual rather than spherical. Although Jesus did suffer an agonizing death, He is sovereign as the Almighty.

As a last chance to be changed, the thief offers a prayer request. Even though all he had was a prayer, he had finally met the One to whom he should pray. Paraphrasing his words, he essentially asked, "Any chance You could put in a good word for me when You enter Your kingdom?"

Jesus, in response, basically replies: "Consider it done. You'll be with Me today in My glory." In essence, the criminal was convinced that death was not final. He believed Jesus would triumph.

II. JESUS REWARDED THE CRIMINAL'S TRANSFER OF LOYALTY

Most of us are skeptical about deathbed conversions and last-minute loyalties attributed to our Savior in the midnight hour of life. Many of us would scoff and doubt the sincerity of the penitence from such Mafia personalities or mobster crooks as Al Capone. Likewise, the majority of us would question and repudiate any source who claimed that Adolf Hitler made his peace with God prior to committing suicide.

However, in this instance of the criminal on the cross, Jesus honored his humble plea for help. He heard his S.O.S. distress signal. Jesus extended His mercy and offered him eternal fellowship in the family of God.

Note the vocal address of the criminal in referring to Him as "Jesus" (v. 42). Earlier the crowd, rulers, soldiers, and thieves sarcastically insulted the Lord as "the Christ of God, the Chosen One," "the king of the Jews," and "the Christ" (vv. 35, 37, 39). In contrast, Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "the Lord saves." Recall Matthew's record of the angelic message to Joseph regarding Mary's maternity: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (1:21).

Wow! Jesus rewarded the criminal right away with an assurance. He answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (v. 43). The promise was based on Jesus' personal authority. The phrase "I tell you the truth" is translated from the Greek word "amen." It expresses both a positive and affirmative response. In other words, "Yes, so be it; you will be with Me eternally."

Eternal destiny for humanity was a beginning. Jesus reassured the criminal with the word "today." When anyone realizes what is at stake spiritually, then God allows one to be able to partake. Eternal life begins in a moment of time. Of course, the thief experienced its reality in his last few dying moments.

Similarly, the apostle Paul later stressed this truth to the Corinthians: "Now is the time of God's favor; now [today, *tlb*] is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). The first half of Paul's statement deals with *kairos* time, that is, appropriate time, right timing. It is not sequential or chronological time. Instead, it refers to a sense of urgency and relevancy. Again, the Bible says, "Let us then ap-

proach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time [eukairos] of need" (Heb. 4:16). The criminal's confidence in Christ came in the nick of time. It is an expression of God's grace, but it should be the exception.

Compare the mercy of Jesus' statement with the strict scriptural warning in the Old Testament, repeated in the New, that states, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts [as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert]" (Ps. 95:7-8; Heb. 3:7-8, 15; 4:7). The first criminal, by his sarcasm and unbelief, displayed such stubbornness as the Israelites did at Kadesh-barnea.

III. JESUS RESPONDS TO TRANSPARENT NOVELTY OF CONFESSION

The second criminal confided in Christ as his only Hope. He trusted in a gracious God, therefore he received mercy.

Why would Jesus pardon someone who wasted his whole life and, at the last few minutes prior to death, have mercy on him? Fundamentally, Jesus' love is never conditioned or ever dependent upon what we do. The criminal had intrinsic value as a person created in the image of God. He was certainly not worthy, but he did have worth.

One's perspective of God, which is usually distorted or skewed, enters here also.

ILLUS. For example, a seminary student once wrote, "I see God the Father as a very large person approximately 2,000 times the size of a human. I see Him as an old man. His hair is white and His face is wrinkled. I see Him as stern and austere, rather than gentle and loving; and yet there is a certain amount of distant kindness in Him" (James D. Hamilton, *The Faces of God* [Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1984], 9).

Dr. Hamilton, professor emeritus of pastoral counseling at Nazarene Theological Seminary, declared, "The mental image we have of God determines how we will relate to Him. Thus, we give God a face, and it is how we see His face that determines the nature of our religion [or personal relationship with God]" (ibid., 8).

Occasionally, someone will say that he or she is so bad, corrupt, or sinful that God could never forgive the past. Unfortunately, the focus is faulty. God's character, not one's corruption, will adjust one's perception and "felt concept" of God. Grace, not guilt, portrays a compassionate Lord. Obviously, conviction is a part of God's awakening process to draw people to himself.

The second criminal exemplifies the truth that Jesus is the face of grace! He sensed Jesus' love, compassion, gentleness, and mercy. His was a novel or newfound faith in a forgiving God.

IV. COMMITMENT TO JESUS REMINDS US OF THE JOVIALITY OF LIFE'S CONSUMMATION

The convicted criminal understood and became con-

vinced that there is life after death. His confidence in Christ, then resulted in a personal commitment. He believed in Jesus' royal Lordship. With spiritual eyes he received a vision of the spiritual Kingdom. This inferred the Resurrection before it became a reality or, at least, faith in eternity.

"Today you will be with me in *paradise*" (v. 43). "Paradise," a Persian term originally. The word was associated with garden settings such as a stroll with royalty to commune in privacy and close intimacy. Availability and accessibility enhanced personal communication. Jesus' promise was authentic to the criminal then and to the Christian today.

In conclusion, Lloyd Ogilvie said: "God graciously divided our life into days and years so that we could let go of our yesterdays and anticipate our tomorrows. For the past mistakes, He offers forgiveness and an ability to forget. For our tomorrows, He gives us the gift of expectation and excitement."

The criminal deserved hell, but he received heaven or paradise. This is not justification for procrastination! No. This is justification for justification by grace through faith. We are all crooks except for the life-changing, transforming power Jesus Christ brings to our lives. We do not deserve His love either, but God graciously gives us the personal promise that we can be with Him again forever.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and FellowshipChurch Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	
Choruses"This Is the Day"
"I Will Enter His Gates"
"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
Songs"Heaven Came Down"
"In the Garden"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Music	
Message"A CROOK IN PARADISE?"
Closing Chorus"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"
Benediction2 Cor. 5:17

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

The church is never true to itself when it is living for itself. If the church is chiefly concerned with saving its own life, it will lose it. "The nature of the church is such that it must always be engaged in finding new ways by which to transcend itself. Its main responsibility is always outside its own walls in the redemption of common life. That is why we call it a redemptive society" (Elton Trueblood).

"The attitude we take and the adjustments we make have everything to do with the atmosphere we create."

Fear of Feeling Forsaken

by David A. Hoffman

Ps. 22:1-18; Matt. 27:45-49

INTRO

In reading Ps. 22, we are confronted with the consciousness of a sufferer. As a messianic prophecy of Christ's crucifixion, it stands also as an emotion-packed, detailed description of His execution.

Do you feel the impact of the alienation and abandonment Jesus experienced?

"My God, my God, *why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt. 27:46) implies you too! Emphasis added in the phrase in order to understand the true agony He felt.

Jesus not only encountered the awfulness and ugliness of rejection and rebellion by humanity but also sensed the trauma of the loneliness and separation from His Father.

While He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus realized this aspect. However, the actual separation was excruciating. Previous isolation and denial had only originated from His disciples and the religious rulers. Maybe He did not consider that His Father would have to turn His head and look away. Nevertheless, it was more than our Lord could handle.

I. OUR LORD IDENTIFIED WITH HUMAN FEELINGS

The writer to the Hebrews shared that as our Great High Priest, Jesus was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (4:15, KJV). Not just the facts, but with the feelings. He could identify with our weaknesses, frailties, insecurities, anxieties, and emotional shortcomings. Abandonment was one emotion He had not yet experienced. However, Jesus had to "feel" this, or He would not be able to relate to our suffering.

Imagine several situations that people face when they feel disoriented. They sense that perhaps God's protective presence has been withdrawn (e.g., life of Job in the Old Testament).

- Divorcé feeling a part of life is torn away.
- Someone lying in a hospital room facing major surgery with only a 50-50 chance of a successful operation.
- Elderly person in a nursing home feeling alone.
- Orphan living in a convalescent home or one who has moved frequently from one foster home to another.
- Widower or widow missing the companionship of his or her spouse.
- Parents losing a baby due to miscarriage or an incurable disease or transmitted fatal infection.

- Person waiting in the cancer ward of a hospital or clinic for the inevitable day.

Can you hear their screams, whether silent or sounded? Cries of "Why?" "Where are You?" The response of silence is even more deafening! Feelings of loneliness and abandonment.

ILLUS. A newspaper reporter from the *Miami Herald* captured a story that stunned the coastline of Florida. Judith Bucknell, a 38-year-old woman, was murdered by being stabbed seven times and strangled in the summer of 1980.

Judy was attractive, respectable, and successful. She wore designer clothes. She hosted parties by the bay. She was not a social outcast and had never been in trouble in her life.

She had many acquaintances but very few friends. She was extremely lonely! Her diary read: "Who is going to love Judy Bucknell? I feel so old. Unloved. Unwanted. Abandoned. Used up. I want to cry and sleep forever."

Loneliness is a cry, a moan, a sigh! Sadly, for some it is a way of life. Maybe some have fooled others as Judy Bucknell did. No one really knows just how lonely you are. On the outside everything seems OK. Your smile is quick, your job is stable, your calendar is full, your clothes are in style, and your talk is impressive. But in the mirror you cannot fool anyone. The loneliness reflects back from your face.

God created humans to be social and spiritual beings. We thrive in the context of relationships with significant others. Our felt need is a sense of belonging. Everyone needs to love and to be loved. We feel the need for intimate fellowship with others and especially with God. Reuben Welch pointed out, "We really do need each other." John Donne wrote, "No man is an island."

II. OUR LORD IDENTIFIED WITH HUMAN FEAR

James Dobson highlights, "Emotions are powerful forces in the human mind." Fear particularly haunts our emotional and mental constitution.

Our adversary and enemy, the devil, enjoys creating chaos in us emotionally. Again Dobson says, "Satan is effective in using weapons of guilt, rejection, fear, embarrassment, grief, depression, loneliness, and misunderstanding." It is difficult to remain objective at times and to use our reason and will in times of distress.

Intellectually, we have heard slogans such as the one that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt formerly made popular, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Normally we overcome fear with confidence and a persistent determination to conquer it by continuing in an activity that numbs or paralyzes us. Another slogan says, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." Despite such macho mottoes, there are still moments in which we are immobilized by fear emotionally and spiritually.

Why are we so afraid? What is fear? We are familiar with its crippling nature. Briefly, fear is the feeling of being on our own. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, defines it as a "strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; anxious concern; reason for alarm; painful agitation." Synonyms include

"dread; apprehension; fright; distress of mind." Fear runs rampant when there is an involved risk. Fear is more specifically fear of failure. In this passage, however, I prefer to emphasize fear as being "on our own." Matthew deals with the cosmic question of suffering alone.

ILLUS. During World War II, J. B. Phillips, who paraphrased the New Testament for his youth in London, had frequent bouts of depression. His wife had died, leaving him a widower. He began corresponding with many people during his pastorate there. He dealt with depression by recreation, seeing humor in everything, keeping a balanced mind, consciously living a day at a time, and not taking himself so seriously.

III. OUR LORD IDENTIFIED WITH HUMAN FORSAKENNESS

Philip Keller, in his book *Elijah*, says: "There are times we forget the faithfulness of the Lord. God seems to become remote and far removed from our struggles. . . . We focus on frustrations of the present."

Jesus had been on the Cross for several hours, from 9 A.M. until 3 P.M. (the ninth hour). The Bible says: "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

Barclay comments in *The Mind of Jesus* on the biblical customs as well as the scene at the Cross: "The 12 hours of the Jewish day were counted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. . . . When the sun was at its zenith, instead of the brightness of noon there came upon the land a darkness as of midnight, settling on Jerusalem for the next three hours (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44 f)" (p. 243).

The sky had become very dark since noon. Although it was midday, it appeared to be nighttime or midnight. Suddenly, Jesus' despair became darker than the black sky.

Max Lucado writes in his book *Six Hours One Friday*: "The King turns away from his Prince. The undiluted wrath of a sin-hating Father falls upon his sin-filled Son. The fire envelops him. The shadow hides him. The Son looks for his Father, but his Father cannot be seen. 'My God, my God . . . why?' The throne room is dark and cavernous. The eyes of the King are closed" (p. 103).

Approximately 2000 B.C. Abram, the forefather of the Jews, was approached by God himself. God sovereignly chose to establish a covenant with him, his descendants, and all who would believe in Him as their God. A blood sacrifice was required. God ordered Abram to cut several animals in half so that a blood channel would serve as a reminder of His promise to keep His covenant. Darkness came over Abram because he knew if he walked through the blood path, he undoubtedly would be a dead man. God entered the setting with His torch to light the way and promised on oath by His own character to always keep the covenant. Jesus honored Abram's part by sacrificing His own life in his place (cf. Gen. 15).

Lucado explains, "And when human hands fastened the divine hands to a cross with spikes, it wasn't the soldiers who held the hands of Jesus steady. It was God who held them steady. For those wounded hands were the same invisible hands that had carried the firepot and the torch 2,000 years earlier. They were the same hands that had brought light into Abraham's thick and dreadful darkness. They had come to do it again."

So, the next time that obnoxious neighbor walks in, escort him out. Out to the hill. Out to Calvary. Out to the Cross where, with holy blood, the hand that carried the flame wrote the promise, "God would give up his only Son before he'd give up on you" (*Six Hours One Friday*, 58-59).

Jesus' cry from the Cross was gut-wrenching! God was silent! From His own experience He communicates a depth of personal compassion. Imagine Him listening to your heart's cry with such empathy that no one else can compare. His pierced hand brushes away the tears from your moist eyes. He also was once alone, fearful of being on His own. He understands the heartache you feel and the fear you experience in feeling forsaken.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Chorus	"Family of God"
Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	Joshua 1:1-5
Songs	"My Burdens Rolled Away"
	"He Never Has Failed Me Yet"
Choruses	"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
	"His Banner over Me Is Love"
Pastoral Prayer	
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Drama Skit	
Special Music	"His Eye Is on the Sparrow"
Scripture	Ps. 22:1-18; Matt. 27:45-49
Message	"FEAR OF FEELING FORSAKEN"
Chorus	"Be Still and Know"
Altar Call Prayer for Emotional Healing	
Benediction	Heb. 13:5

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

DRAMA SKIT

Consult the Nazarene Publishing House catalog for drama resources. The object is to identify the brokenness that occurs to all of us with a single specific situation.

CLOSING PRAYER

Encourage those who feel rejected, abandoned, and forsaken. Be sensitive to such needs. Anoint persons with oil as the Spirit directs. Gather your spiritual leaders around them to enhance their sense of support and belonging. Show affirming love to them.

I Thirst . . . for Thee

by David A. Hoffman

John 19:28-29; Ps. 42:1-5

INTRO

Physical thirst is one of the strongest, most powerful desires a person has. It is vitally important to keep enough liquids in the body, or it dehydrates. Since the body is composed of 70 percent water, an extremely high percentage, it must be replenished with H₂O.

An individual can go long periods of time without food, but not without water! Examples in the Bible include Moses and Jesus. Both fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Modern examples include Gandhi of India, who peacefully protested against British colonialism. A few years ago a man from New Mexico protested the proliferation of nuclear weapons at the nation's capital in Washington, D.C.

Most of us have seen pictures of marathon runners handed something to drink at crucial intervals during a race. The grueling 26-mile race can quickly drain a body's fluids due to excess perspiration.

I once heard a physician say that the events of Jesus' life within His last 24 hours were equivalent to running a marathon. Since Jesus had "sweat . . . like drops of blood" at Gethsemane (Luke 22:44), had been interrogated by the Sanhedrin at night as well as by Pilate and Herod in the morning, and afterward was beaten, scourged, and crucified by the Roman soldiers, His body had to be dehydrated.

I. PHYSICAL THIRST IS A THIRST FOR REPLENISHMENT

Earlier Jesus had refused to drink the drugged wine that was offered to Him at the beginning of His crucifixion. The purpose of the wine vinegar, prepared and dispensed by the soldiers, served to dull the pain and agony of the physical suffering. However, Jesus wanted to remain coherent and feel the full impact of sin's curse, so He chose to reject the drug.

The reason Jesus requested a drink of wine toward the end was to enable Him to speak the last two statements from the Cross. Those were:

"It is finished!" (John 19:30, NASB). (A triumphant shout of victory.)

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). (Repetition of a prayer taught to every Jewish child by the mother to symbolize peace and rest while protected in God's hands.)

Actually, Ps. 22:15 is a prophecy of Jesus' physical thirst: "My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth." That's dry, very dry!

In the southern and central United States one phrase used by farmers when thirsty is, "I'm so dry I could spit cotton." Of course, those were the ones who had spent long hours in the fields handpicking cotton in the past before mechanized equipment came.

When Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (v. 28), one of the soldiers took a reed plant and soaked a sponge in the wine vinegar and moistened Jesus' lips in order to hear what He had to say next. This act also fulfilled Ps. 69:21, "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst." The vinegar would burn His lips.

However, in Jesus' statement, "I am thirsty," it is very important to realize it was not just physical thirst He felt. His thirst was much deeper!

II. SPIRITUAL THIRST IS A THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Spiritual thirst is a craving for fellowship with, and being in the presence of, God!

In His prior statement, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus alludes to the feeling of abandonment and alienation due to His first experience of feeling separated from His Heavenly Father. In those last few hours on the Cross, He vicariously assumed all the sinful wickedness of humanity as our Sin Offering. Sin was totally foreign to Him.

Jesus was innocent of wrong and not guilty of any crime or sin whatsoever. Yet He was made a Sin Offering for us. He died for us as a sacrificial Passover Lamb. John records in two previous places in his Gospel that Jesus was "the Lamb of God" who came to take away the sins of the world (1:29, 36). Jesus' death substituted for our own spiritual death, but He also knew He would soon be resurrected and back home with His Father.

Jesus embodied and symbolized the water of life being poured out on the earth for people who are parched and thirsty for God. We must seek His righteousness in order to have our spiritual thirst quenched.

Listen to the analogy in Ps. 42:1-2 again: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Jesus' comment, "I am thirsty," reflects His own human craving to be with God.

Jesus was homesick! He had lived among people on the earth as the incarnate God-man for 33 years. He yearned to be once again in the presence of God. Others had mocked Him, as was prophesied, by saying, "Where is your God?" (Ps. 42:3). It was fulfilled in the Gospels when the priests mocked, "Let God save Him if He really is God's Son" (cf. Matt. 27:43).

Jesus was human and experienced all the emotions we encounter, so He could identify with our plight. He became discouraged when everyone forsook Him at the point of death to die for the sins of the world. Ps. 42:5 says: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"

Gratefully, the story does not stop there! The psalmist adds, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Augustine prayed, "Thou hast created us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Jesus' resurrection followed shortly. Because He lives, we have hope.

Have you been thirsty lately? What are you craving? Thirsting for the spiritual things of God? The good news is what Jesus said in the Beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst [contin-

ually—present tense] for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

You probably have already experienced circumstances that caused you to thirst for God. Life is filled with heartaches, disappointments, misunderstandings, and fear. These things cause us to experience desert times in our lives. God has promised to make streams in the desert. He has promised that He would fill our cups so we do not thirst but are filled to overflowing.

Neither possessions, prestige, power, popularity, nor pride will ever satisfy our longing to intimately know the Lord. The only true test for fulfilling such craving is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. By sacrificing His own perfect life, Jesus offered to purify us from sin.

The songwriter depicts it so beautifully:

Ho, every one that is thirsty in spirit!

Ho, every one that is weary and sad!

Come to the fountain; there's fullness in Jesus,

All that you're longing for. Come and be glad.

—Lucy J. Rider

As we close singing, come to Jesus. Let Him give you living water so you may never spiritually thirst again!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Chorus	"More of You"
Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	Responsive Reading
	"Thirsting for God"
Choruses	"Bless His Holy Name"
	"Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"
	"Spirit of the Living God"
Hymn	"Satisfied"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Choir	"In the Garden" Medley
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Music	"Fill My Cup, Lord"
Scripture	John 19:28-29; Ps. 42:1-5
Message	"I THIRST . . . FOR THEE"
Benediction	"Everyone who drinks this water will
	be thirsty again, but whoever
	drinks the water I give him will
	never thirst. Indeed, the water I
	give him will become in him a
	spring of water welling up to
	eternal life" (John 4:13).

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Share about an incident in which you were severely craving liquids. Physical thirst is one of the strongest desires in human survival. Spiritual needs also abound. Spiritual thirst is desirous of seeking to be with God and sharing intimacy with Him. Augustine once prayed, "Thou hast created us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Jesus said: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38). Let's appropriate His promise by drinking in His fullness today!

The Good News of Good Friday or It Is Finished! . . . Mission Accomplished!

by David A. Hoffman

John 19:30-37

INTRO

All of us enjoy completing projects that we start. Think of the satisfaction of a job well done after much persistence and perseverance, especially in spite of hardships and major obstacles attempting to defeat you and prevent progress. Here are some examples:

- Building a home or doing an addition to a house
- Remodeling, landscaping, or painting projects
- Pursuit of an educational degree or certificate for vocational training
- Mechanical repairs on an automobile
- Sewing a garment or upholstery for furniture

However, we tend to quit too soon, to stop short of our goal, to abandon the project prematurely. Unfortunately, we don't always stick to something until it is done.

Our inability to finish what we start is evidenced in small matters. For instance, a partially read book, letters begun but never finished, an abandoned diet, broken New Year's resolutions, a half-finished garden, a partly mowed lawn, and so on.

More serious matters include:

- A child orphaned or abandoned by parents
- A marriage that ends up on the rocks
- A home or car repossessed that was almost paid off

At times each of us would like to throw in the towel when just short of reaching our goal. We feel like quitting before achieving victory.

In the fall of 1981, I had a situation in which I almost quit nine months short of completing something I had started. I had already been ministering faithfully for 2 years as an associate pastor under the godly and capable leadership of a veteran senior pastor with over 30 years of pastoral experience.

My wife and I were driving 300 miles round-trip on the weekends. We would leave on Friday evening to commute to our destination and return late Sunday night. I knew God had called us to invest our lives there. We were in the

center of His will. At the same time we both had jobs and were in the process of working on our master's degrees. Exhaustion and fatigue factors started to drain our energy.

We would drive up on Friday nights, work all day Saturday preparing for an adult Sunday School class, children's church, and teen activities on Sunday, as well as call on prospects. Once or twice a month we also fulfilled responsibilities on the district level with Bible quizzing. On Sunday I drove the church bus, taught classes, shared devotions with the teens for NYI hour, and preached once every month on Sunday evening.

However, we became disillusioned when results did not occur as quickly as we had hoped. I intended to resign and be available for pulpit supply across the district. I rationalized that I would still be involved in preaching, but I became very discouraged!

The pastor, also my father-in-law, spoke to me with much discernment when I shared my plans with him. He looked at me and simply said, "Quitters never win, and winners never quit!" The truth of his statement hit me like a bullet. Maybe I really had not prayed through on the decision. Perhaps I was trying to do ministry to which God had called me in my own strength rather than relying on Him as my Source of help.

Also, I learned a valuable lesson not to make an important decision while I was discouraged. The next week I prayed fervently for God's will and wisdom. On the following Saturday, God said, "If you will stay here, I will bless you." And He did bless! That last nine months were wonderful. We experienced a turnaround on our investment in people's lives.

Remember Elijah! Tired, weary, discouraged, and fearful, he took matters into his own hands by fleeing from Jezebel's threat to have him murdered. He tried to make decisions at a time when he most needed God's strength.

I. JESUS' DEATH WAS A TRIUMPH, NOT A TRAGEDY

Better yet, remember Jesus?

Jesus' atoning death is good news regardless of all the bad propaganda. He turned a perceived tragedy into triumph. He turned darkness into dawning. He turned the Crucifixion into a coronation. Truly, the forces of good are stronger than the forces of evil. Love is stronger than hatred. Life is victorious over death.

ILLUS. How insightful a five-year-old boy named Eric was when his mom asked him, "What is Easter?"

In his childlike faith and understanding, he replied, "Mama, did you know that Friday is when Jesus was nailed to the Cross, Saturday is when He died, and Sunday is when He arose from the dead?"

His mom asked further, "Eric, why did Jesus die?"

Eric answered, "For my sins."

Again, she inquired, "What are sins?"

He said, "When you do something wrong, then tell Jesus you are sorry; and since you can't hear Him say, 'It's OK,' that's why He died!"

II. JESUS WAS THE VICTOR, NOT A VICTIM

Jesus did not die a martyr's death! He is not a dead Christ. He is alive! His passion for us should never war-

rant pity from us. There is a note of victory in His sacrificial death. It was fully voluntary. Jesus displayed incredible courage.

Jesus' mission was to fulfill His Father's will. Earlier in His itinerant ministry, He remarked to His disciples, "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus states, "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50).

Barclay, in *The Mind of Jesus*, notes, "Again and again we are confronted with the fact that at no time did Jesus seem a broken figure, a victim of circumstances; at all times He carried Himself like a king" (p. 248).

The Synoptic Gospels graphically record that Jesus uttered "a loud cry" prior to His death (Mark 15:37; cf. Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46). Matthew and Mark mention that Jesus received a "drink" on a sponge (hyssop) to touch His lips before He spoke.

Leon Morris explains: "It would appear then that the loud cry was, 'It is finished.' Jesus died with the cry of the Victor on His lips. This is not the moan of the defeated, nor the sigh of patient resignation. It is the triumphant recognition that He had now fully accomplished the work that He came to do" ("The Gospel According to John," in *NICNT*, 815).

Someone may still remain skeptical and cynical, believing that things have not really changed but are only worse. The best illustration I can give to demonstrate the good news of that Good Friday is from World War II.

ILLUS. D day preceded V-E Day! D day occurred on June 6, 1944, at 12:15 A.M. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower coordinated Operation Overlord. Within six days, on June 12, the Normandy invasion was complete. In comparison, within only six hours in A.D. 29 or 30 the work of salvation to atone for the sins of the world was completed!

D day the Allies established a beachhead and prevailed against the Nazis' entrenched and bunkered troops. They began to reclaim Europe from Hitler's aggression and domination. Obviously, many more months of fighting would follow that day before final victory would be realized. Increased bombing attacks would continue, but the Allies were convinced that victory would be obtained within a matter of time. In fact, the Nazi General Rommel agreed to plot Hitler's assassination. Even the Germans knew the tide of war had turned. Eventually the Third Reich and its goal to promote a super Aryan race to control the world would crumble.

This shift of momentum did not prevent setbacks, such as the Battle of the Bulge. However, the Allies never lost focus or perspective that they would triumph in victory.

Tony Campolo writes in his book *It's Friday but Sunday's Coming*: "The decisive battle fought on D-Day enabled them to hope with the hope that transcends wishful thinking, even in the midst of the most desperate of conditions. They always knew that V-Day would come." He refers to Oscar Cullmann's comments by saying:

We Christians must recognize that we too are living between a D-Day and V-Day. God's D-Day was two thousand years ago on a hill called Calvary. There the God who had invaded His lost creation through His Son Jesus Christ confronted the awesome powers of

darkness in the most crucial battle in cosmic history. When that terrible Friday had ended, it looked as though the demonic host had triumphed and that the Prince of Glory was sealed and defeated in a borrowed tomb. But that was Friday. Three days later Jesus rolled the stone away and became *Christus Victor*.

In other words, the work of salvation was accomplished, but the witness of salvation continues today! The achievement of salvation was accomplished, but the activity of salvation still has never ceased! The doom of evil is no longer an eternal dread for the Christian, but the demise of evil does linger on the earth.

The climax of salvation was accomplished, but the consummation of salvation is still yet to come. The Greek word Jesus used for "It is finished!" (NASB) is *tetelestai*. It is in the perfect tense, meaning that an action was completed with continuing ongoing effects. Praise God!

Let's all stand and rejoice as we sing together the hymn "Victory in Jesus." Jesus has forever conquered His and our foe, the devil himself. Satan is actually a limping lord because he knows that his end is imminent in the pit of hell's flames.

If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior and do not have spiritual victory in your heart, then come and pray at the altar until you receive His victory.

Let's sing and lift our praise to our living Lord!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	1 Cor. 15:58
Chorus	"This Is the Day"
Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Choir Special	"Adoration Medley," Arr. Dick Bolks
Hymns	"At the Cross"
	"The Old Rugged Cross"
Choir Special	"What a Savior" Medley
Special Song	"I Will Glory in the Cross"
Chorus	"Something Beautiful"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Chorus	"The Longer I Serve Him"
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Music	
Scripture	John 19:30-37
Message	"THE GOOD NEWS OF GOOD FRIDAY" OR "IT IS FINISHED! . . . MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!"
Closing Song	"Victory in Jesus"
Benediction	

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Special Palm Sunday Presentation with palm branches. Have children and adults enter in tone of celebration.

"Hosanna!" means "Save, we pray, Lord!" It is a shout of celebration to commemorate Jesus as the eternal Lord and King of Kings. Today is a joyous occasion to honor the royalty of Jesus as the Anointed One. It is a time of rejoicing because He is our Prince of Peace. It is also a humble acclaim to His deity and promise to be our Savior. He reigns in our hearts.

Mary Magdalene

Easter's First

Eyewitness

by David A. Hoffman

John 20:1-18

INTRO

Can you imagine the sheer horror you would feel to visit the grave site of a loved one recently buried and discover that someone had tampered with the grave? You would be angry at such disrespectful actions, especially if the tombstone was removed or if someone unearthed the dirt. How dare someone disturb a deceased body! Anyone buried should have the right to "rest in peace."

Now try to imagine that same loved one standing nearby, alive and talking to you, to comfort you in your sorrow and shock. That's the scene on that first Easter Sunday morning.

Mary Magdalene was returning to the tomb where Jesus had been buried on Friday afternoon. She intended to complete the burial process, since it had been done so hastily prior to the beginning of the Sabbath, which began at 6 P.M. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped the body in burial cloths and applied spices, but they could not adequately finish.

So Mary came "early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark" (v. 1). However, it would be the dawning of a new day for her!

Every Gospel mentions Mary Magdalene in the Easter narrative. Mark wrote, "Jesus . . . appeared, first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons" (16:9). Other women are mentioned in each account, but Mary Magdalene is singled out, particularly by the apostle John. One reason: Jesus dramatically transformed her life.

Mary Magdalene was definitely the first eyewitness to see the resurrected Lord. Jesus had changed her life and made a difference. Now she wanted to honor Him in death as He had honored her life despite what others might say or think. Billy Sunday said: "Reputation is what people say about you. Character is what God and your spouse know about you!"

John is emphatic about describing Mary Magdalene as a bona fide eyewitness. He uses the verbs "saw" or "seen" six times in the passage, twice in reference to Peter and John himself, designated as "the other disciple, the one Jesus loved." Also, twice he uses "looked" or "looking." In fact, Mary told Peter and John about the empty tomb, ex-

cept that at the time she assumed someone had stolen His body (v. 2).

Have you ever been an eyewitness? If so, you probably underwent a lot of scrutiny. Others attempt to discredit an eyewitness by intermingling objective fact with subjective feelings to create suppositional doubt.

Verse 8 indicates: "The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." He had faith, and the full understanding came later. Augustine once used an expression of "faith seeking understanding" to describe the relationship between faith and reason. Verse 9 states, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."

The objective reality remained in the integrity of biblical prophecy as well as Jesus' predictions of His passion and suffering. G. Curtis Jones remarked, "Easter is not an argument for immortality; it is an affirmation of the Resurrection." John records it as a historical supernatural fact but also for personal and supernatural faith.

Let's look at three observations in this passage: Mary wept, worshiped, and witnessed.

I. MARY WEPT (VV. 10-14)

One historian said, "History is no more than news from the graveyard." However, regarding Jesus' resurrection, history is *His story*. He is alive!

Initially, Mary's shock became apparent in that she only expected to see a grave. She never anticipated she would actually see the Lord's glory. After seeing the stone rolled away, she immediately thought the worst.

Four times John mentions Mary crying. Verse 11 contrasts the disciples returning to their homes, whereas "Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb." The double reference here reinforces the fact.

The angels afterward ask her, "Woman, why are you crying?" (v. 13).

Jesus, whom Mary mistook to be the gardener, inquired, "Woman . . . why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (v. 15).

This was really Mary's second visit to the tomb on that first Easter morning. Her grief and bereavement concerning the death of Jesus is natural. Loss affects all of us emotionally. Even Jesus was moved by Lazarus's death, as John records for us as the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (11:35). The tears had blurred Mary's vision. Grief distresses and distracts us from acknowledging Jesus' presence.

What made that ordinary day the Easter we all celebrate? It was a day of sorrow, dead hopes, and dreams. What made the difference? The sunrise did not make the deciding factor. Neither did the fact that the stone was rolled away. An open tomb did not. The presence of angels did not solidify the day as Easter. Even the abandoned graveclothes (vv. 6-7) made the morning all the more mysterious.

The change in Mary's countenance is attributed to the fact that she saw the Lord! That's why Christianity is much more than a world religion. It is a vital and intimate personal relationship with Jesus. Easter assures us

of the most important factor, the "Who?" question! On that day, seeing was believing, but for us, as Jesus told Thomas later, believing is seeing. Martin Luther said, "Faith is the 'yes' of the heart." Mary Magdalene stated with confirmation, "I have seen the Lord!" (v. 18). Paul records in 1 Cor. 15 that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people altogether.

II. MARY WORSHIPED (VV. 15-17)

Besides seeing her Master, Mary Magdalene heard His voice calling her by name (v. 16). His address is so tender and so gentle. Mary expected condemnation, but she received compassion instead. Don't we all love to hear our names spoken? Put your name in place of Mary's, and visualize Jesus calling out your name (say several names of your people gently).

What a contrast thinking Jesus was the gardener to realizing He was her "Rabboni" or Teacher. He had cultivated spiritual truths in her heart by discipling her after forgiving her of sin and casting out the demons. In fact, Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (v. 17). She was clinging to Him, determined to not let Him ever leave her sight.

The King James Version of the verse, "Touch me not," does not depict a proper picture for us. Also, a few verses later, Jesus tells Thomas: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (v. 27). Jesus encouraged empirical proof for Thomas's sake.

Luke 24:39 reports that Jesus commands the disciples to "handle" Him (KJV) to convince them that He was flesh and bones. Matt. 28:9 records that, when the women met Jesus, He greeted them. Then "they came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him." So a better translation is in order here; otherwise Jesus would be contradicting His practice between Mary Magdalene and the women as well as His disciples, specifically Thomas.

The Greek construction is in the present imperative mood (i.e., a command). Barclay translates the meaning as: "Don't go on clutching me selfishly to yourself. In a short time I am going back to my Father. I want to meet my disciples as often as possible before then."

Well-known missionary to India E. Stanley Jones said: "The last word of God is not the Cross—His last word is the Resurrection—victory! I could not worship a dead Christ except with a dead heart. In that case, the chords of my worship would be a sigh instead of a song. But with the bursting of the tomb, there is a bursting of my heart—with joy."

The song "I've Just Seen Jesus" captures the essence of Mary's worship because she truly would never be the same again.

III. MARY WITNESSED (V. 18)

The measure of a person is not how great his faith is, but how great his love is. Mary Magdalene loved her Lord. The encounter and dialogue rekindled her love even brighter. Her loyalty and allegiance were indis-

putable. She alludes to the depth of her love in the address, "Rabboni," Aramaic for the Greek abbreviated version, "Rabbi." It actually referred to a relational manner of addressing God in prayer.

A lot of great teachers have lived upon this earth. Those who have inspired followers of world religions include such names as Confucius (b. 551 B.C., d. 479 B.C.), Buddha (b. ca. 563 B.C., d. ca. 483 B.C.), Muhammad (b. ca. A.D. 570, d. A.D. 632), and Jesus (b. 5 or 4 B.C., d., buried, but resurrected in A.D. 29.) The others have monuments at their graves, but Jesus is the Lord who lives eternally!

Mary had earlier convinced Peter and John of what she saw. Now she had the incentive of her Lord's message to go and tell "my brothers." She had seen and conversed with Him firsthand. She encouraged others to see the empty tomb and to share the good news.

Mary's story is a story of grace. Easter is continually a celebration as well as a hope for people to change. It shares the news of forgiveness from the past, joy for the present, and hope for the future.

Since Jesus loved us enough to die and to be resurrected for us, then let's love Him enough to live for Him. He knows you by name. He desires that each of us witness for Him by allowing others to see His life being worshipfully lived out in us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Fellowship	"The Family of God"
Chorus	"He Is Lord"
Choral Introit	"Risen" Medley and "Rise Again"
Call to Worship	Responsive Reading "A Living Hope"
Song	"He Lives"
Hymn	"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Chorus	"Because He Lives"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Special Music	Choral Medley: "Way of the Cross" and "I Will Glory in the Cross"
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Scripture	John 20:1-18
Message	"MARY MAGDALENE: EASTER'S FIRST EYEWITNESS"
Celebrating Communion at the Lord's Table	
Closing Song	"I've Just Seen Jesus"
Benediction	Rom. 10:9

PASTORAL PRAYER

Share the thought, "Do you ever wonder what heaven is like at Easter?" Help your people imagine the rejoicing that occurs when lives are changed and spiritually transformed. Remind them of the story of salvation and how the Resurrection event is most likely retold by the Father to those in heaven. God can create a spiritual hunger in the hearts of those in attendance who do not know Him. Recall the names of persons who are recent converts.

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

by David A. Hoffman

Luke 23:44-49

INTRO

An Alfred Hitchcock TV episode depicted a wicked woman sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. She concocted a plan to escape. After making friends with an old inmate who assisted in the burial of prisoners who died, she bribed him to help her get out. Next time she heard the toll of the bell that signaled the death of an inmate, she was to slip down to the workroom where he made the caskets, locate the casket in which he had placed the corpse, quietly slide herself into the same casket, and pull the lid down tightly. Early the next morning the old man would roll her, along with the corpse inside, on an old cart, through the gate to the cemetery just outside. Next day he would return and let her out.

Late one night she heard the bell toll. She slid off her cot, crept to the dimly lit room, spotted the coffin, squeezed in beside the corpse, and pulled the lid down tightly. A few hours later she could sense the wheels rolling, feel the box lowering, and hear the dirt hitting the top of the casket. Though sealed beneath the ground, she would soon be released.

Her elation slowly faded as the hours went by. Where was the old man? In panic she lit a match. She was terrified to discover that next to her was the old man himself who had died. Doomed, she would soon die. In the meantime she would be the living among the dead.

This woman vainly planned and attempted her own escape route. She took matters into her own hands.

What a contrast when our innocent Lord suffered at the hands of men who conspired His death, yet He victoriously placed His life into the hands of His Heavenly Father. Note the magnificent model and example of Christ's ease when His earthly life was extinguished on the Cross. We gain several valuable insights from Him. Specific influences resulted from His manner of accepting death.

I. TRUSTING IN HIS HEAVENLY FATHER PORTRAYED INTIMATE AFFECTION

Jesus died with a prayer on His lips! It eloquently expressed His trust in His Father. He actually quoted Ps. 31:5: "Into your hands I commit my spirit." It represented the prayer every Jewish mother taught her children before going to bed each evening. Its central message is very similar to what we teach our children today:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

The importance of the prayer becomes clearer in view of the background cultural setting. Darkness of night horrified the Jews. Darkness became associated with death, grief, loss, sorrow, and mourning. The people consoled themselves with the reminder that God was their Refuge, Fortress, and Rock. They gained strength from this fact. Ps. 31 contains several such references. Also, Ps. 91 is known as a trust psalm: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'" (vv. 1-2). No wonder each Jewish parent read this promise before retiring to bed at night.

The Pharisees had long, flowery prayers with many adjectives to impress God.

Jesus' prayer was simple, direct, and tender! "Abba," meaning "Daddy," was a nursery term. In essence, Jesus prayed, "Take Me home, Dad!" His relationship to Him is direct and filial. Ours, on the other hand, is derivative through Him.

How do you address God in prayer? "Our Heavenly Father" or "Lord Jesus." We are His children, so He wants us to commit (hand over, give, surrender) whatever it is we are struggling with to Him. He is intimately and affectionately trustworthy!

II. TRUSTING IN HIS HEAVENLY FATHER PROVIDED IMMEDIATE ACCESS

The curtain (veil) of the Temple was torn in two. Not only did Jesus provide greater access in the Father's presence, but also He communicates the accessibility of God to initiate spiritual communion.

In the Temple there were certain compartments. They were separate areas or rooms that designated barriers to distinguish who could enter. This divided people by ethnicity, gender, and function—Gentiles from Jews, women from men, priests from people, and the high priest from other priests. The areas were named the court of the Gentiles, court of the women, holy place, and the most holy place, or holy of holies. The latter formed a perfect 15' x 15' x 15' cube.

The holy of holies contained the ark of the covenant, on which sacrifices were offered on the gold mercy seat only once a year. Winged cherubim statues stood on either end as symbols of protection and sanctity. Inside, the ark of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, and a jar with manna. The high priest entered only once a year. They tied bells to him and a rope to his ankle in case he died in the presence of God.

When Jesus died, the thick linen curtain was torn by God. No bureaucracy or red tape. It was a symbol of access, the way in or entrance into His glorious presence by the avenue of Jesus' atoning, once-for-all sacrifice. It required a sinless human sacrifice. Jesus represented the only eligible candidate to fulfill the divine mandate.

The Temple in Jerusalem was no longer God's dwelling place. Stephen later spoke, "The Most High does not live in houses made by men" (Acts 7:48). God's plan included the "temple" or sanctuary of our hearts. It refers to spiritual, not material, occupancy.

III. TRUSTING IN HIS HEAVENLY FATHER PROMOTED AN INTENSE ASSURANCE

Contrast Jesus' peaceful death with the surrounding circumstances. The Bible states that darkness covered the land for three hours during the middle of the afternoon, from noon until 3 P.M. (v. 44, NEB). The Bible says, "The sun stopped shining" (v. 45). It was not a solar eclipse, because the Passover is always the time of the full moon. When the clouds surfaced overhead, Jesus committed himself to His Father.

Do you ever feel that the radiance has departed around you?

If you have ever stood beside the bedside of a loved one dying, you know death is the inevitable termination of one's physical life here on earth. Burying a loved one's body brings out the reality of death.

Heb. 9:27 reminds us that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." Reiterating this biblical and spiritual fact should not foster intimidation, however; but it should renew our compulsion for intimacy with our Creator. Although there is not a guarantee of tomorrow in this life, there does exist a guarantee of tomorrow in eternal life with Christ. Jesus' calm assurance serves as our model.

Even Jesus had to die! Since He was human as we are, He also was mortal! His heart stopped beating temporarily just as ours will someday.

More than the physical suffering and death by execution, Jesus died of a broken heart. He personally accepted the rejection, rebellion, and unrighteousness of all mankind upon himself.

The damage of sin is not simply due to man's violations, infractions, trespasses, or transgressions of the laws and principles of God. No! Much more central is the fact that we break the heart of God when we insist on our own way. God's remedy for humanity's sin problem is reconciliation. Paul says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). His desire is to restore.

During times of illness, grief, and loss, it is the calmness of character and strength of one's silence that impacts loved ones and friends. Jesus exemplified that calmness when He committed His spirit to God with special assurance.

ILLUS. My grandmother endured 17 major surgeries in her lifetime and battled cancer for 12 years. In 1965 a kidney was removed. Doctors told her she had only 5 years left to live. Instead, because of her strong will and faith in God, she outlived the doctors' schedule by 7 more years. She said she would make it to my high school graduation even if she had to go in a wheelchair. However, the cancer went in its last stages. The doctors, two or three months before her death, did exploratory surgery and immediately sewed her back up when they discovered her entire body had been consumed by the cancer. She had yellow jaundice very severely. The chemotherapy treatments only dulled the intense

pain. She was being so strong for us. She never complained.

I remember the moment she died just as if it were yesterday. My mom, an uncle, and I were in the room with her at the time. They decided they wanted a carbonated beverage to drink, so I rode the elevator to a Coke machine. When I returned to the room, my mom and uncle were talking. I looked over at Grandma, and she was very still. I noticed her lungs were not moving, so I told them I didn't think she was breathing anymore. They felt her wrist; she had no pulse. She had gone to be with Jesus!

As my grandmother passed away peacefully, so also does Luke record Jesus' death as being peaceful. The manner in which John and Luke describe Him, as He "bowed his head" and "breathed his last," denotes resting His head back on a pillow.

Jesus' words, "Father, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT" (NASB), were like a sigh of joy. He probably died with a smile on His face! It was as if He reclined back into the loving arms of God. His death completed the end of His role as the Suffering Servant. God's rescue operation was completed, so Jesus released His spirit.

What do you need to release into God's care today? Why not follow the example of our Lord? Commit yourself to Him by casting all your care upon Him.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Chorus	"Come into His Presence with Thanksgiving"
Extend the Right Hand of Fellowship	
Call to Worship	Ps. 46
Hymns	"I Know Whom I Have Believed"
	"Blessed Assurance"
	"Take My Life, and Let It Be"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	
Special Song	"My Life Is in Your Hands"
Scripture	Luke 23:44-49
Message	"NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP"
Closing Chorus	"He Is Able"
Benediction	1 Pet. 5:7 and 2 Tim. 1:12

PASTORAL PRAYER

Prior to the pastoral prayer, instruct the people to prepare their minds, hearts, emotions, wills, and spirits by cupping their hands together palms up. Guide them in visualizing their burdens, pressures, anxieties, apprehensions, cares, and so on, being purposefully placed in their hands and raised upward toward God.

Next, lead them in praying a prayer of release as they turn their hands over. Remind them that it is impossible to grasp heavy objects with the hands in such a position. We will eventually always drop those things despite tightly holding such with a firm grip. Due to close reliance upon God, we then reverse our hands to palms up once again, but this time for the purpose of receiving from our Lord what we lack. He replaces our confusion, tension, and frustration with His consolation.

Love's Power Equalizes Life's Pressures

by David A. Hoffman

2 Cor. 4:1-18

INTRO

We live in a pressure-packed world with meetings, deadlines, appointments. We have people to see and places to go. Our impatience in the midst of busy schedules tends to place us in a state of frenzy.

Dr. Hans Selye devoted a large portion of his life to research and investigation on the subject of stress. He separated people into two creative categories:

1. Racehorses—those who thrive on a fast-paced life, who are highly motivated, competitive, aggressive, and long for challenges, adventure, and even danger.
2. Turtles—individuals who are slower paced, methodical, who require peace, serenity, and quiet, and are cautious.

Racehorses are impatient with turtles. They enjoy life in the fast lane and dread it when slow-moving objects obstruct their paths. It is difficult to get the two in side-by-side starting gates. Racehorses become frustrated and pass judgment on turtles. Their motto says, "You don't belong in the race if you can't keep the pace." The contrast continues.

Racehorse—everything has to be done yesterday.

Turtle—anything can wait until tomorrow.

Half of the people in the U.S. are racehorses; they run a mile a minute. However, they suffer from insecurity. After all, someone may beat me to the finish line and receive recognition. Racehorses have frequent dissatisfaction with life and struggle with overloaded schedules and hostility.

Forty percent of the people are turtles—less demanding, more adjustable, and adapting fairly well. Performance is less crucial. They are more cooperative than competitive.

Ten percent of the people are both types.

Type A (racehorses) experience high blood pressure and other health-related symptoms.

It may be encouraging to someone here today that the majority of Jesus' disciples were Type A. In fact, some were probably AA, eager for immediate changes—for example, Peter and the Sons of Thunder, James and John. They were very energetic and task-oriented.

Jesus had the task of training them and tempering their energies. Yet He lived on His own agenda by making

time for prayer and meditation. He refused to be manipulated or rushed. Jesus Christ lived in total dependence on the power of God the Father flowing through Him to enable Him to be a servant. Jesus instinctively planned times for relaxation. This prevented the possible panic syndromes of fight, flight, or fright.

The apostle Paul exemplified the racehorse lifestyle as well. He was heavily involved in religious zeal as a persecutor of the Christians in the Early Church. To his surprise, one day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. His life was never the same afterward. The needs of today's church are no different.

Let's look at three principles Paul is sharing in 2 Cor. 4.

I. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE INADEQUACY OF OUR OWN LIMITED RESOURCES IS VITAL

This awareness leads to a process of reevaluation of our perceptions regarding ministry, so we can be released to do God's work.

"Through God's mercy we have this ministry" (v. 1). His kindness, compassion, and love are central. Not "I," but "we." He identifies with the Corinthians.

Paul "renounced . . . shameful ways" (v. 2) or deceit. *The Living Bible* paraphrases as, "We do not try to trick people into believing—we are not interested in fooling anyone."

Instead, credibility and integrity insist that we stand in God's presence and preach the Word without watering it down. However, ministry is teamwork due to a sense of ownership and accountability to our Lord. Pastor and people are both under God's authority. Many people are burned out and weary of church work. They are "heart deep" in the Lord's work but assume a depth of responsibilities beyond their capability (Sunday School class, choir, church board, prayer chain, committee assignments, etc.). The shortfall comes when we attempt to be self-sufficient, utilizing our own personal resources.

Paul previously said, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (3:5). Self-confidence must be replaced with confidence in Christ. Jesus Christ is exalted by our self-emptying.

We are ministers of a new covenant based on grace, not on the legalism of the law, "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6). Paul appealed to the covenant and to conscience.

Satan, the "god of this age" or the one whom this world has made its god, "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (4:4). He enjoys his crafty work of deception and disillusionment. Paul warns that Satan appears as an "angel of light" (11:14). Paul attested, however, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (4:5).

When Christ is rejected, one rejects God and His love. Paul alludes to spiritual blindness: "If our gospel is veiled" (v. 3). How does that happen? Some suggestions include: (a) Hurts—a sense of rejection. Paul emphasizes the importance of love, acceptance, and forgiveness in place of injury. "The love of Christ constrains us" (5:14,

NKJV) or "compels us." (b) Hate and resentment can cause bitterness unless we cry out to God for deliverance and help. Then we can draw closer in intimacy with Him.

We cannot confess to God what we do not acknowledge to ourselves. We need His help. We are inadequate in ourselves.

II. ARTICULATION OF THE ADEQUACY OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL (VV. 4-9)

The only adequate and ultimate source to meet my personal need and for doing ministry is a divine source. The word "God" has eight references in this passage. Also, "Christ" is mentioned three times, and "Jesus" is used seven times.

Verse 7 is the key to understanding the contrast of inadequacy and adequacy. Paul states, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." We are fragile and our efforts are futile without the divine dynamic of God's grace, Resurrection power, and His presence in our lives.

We articulate our reliance upon God by reversing our sense of self-dependence or independence to true trust in God. God desires to remove the "veil" so we may catch the vision of Jesus. The man born blind testified in John 9, "I was blind but now I see!" (v. 25). Otherwise, we are guilty of the same blindness as the Pharisees.

Paul highlights the first creedal confession of the Early Church, "Jesus Christ as Lord" (v. 5). The Lordship of Christ always takes precedence over self-sovereignty. Also, God shines His light into our hearts. The Creator of the universe wants to re-create an undivided loyalty in our hearts. Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (5:17).

God is familiar with our frailty. Paul uses the analogy of "jars of clay" (4:7) or "earthen vessels" (KJV).

Paul admitted his shortcomings and yet defended his call of apostleship because it came from God. He did not protect his reputation or try to control the perceptions of others. He allowed the Lord to do that. Paul uses the metaphor of a soldier or gladiator scarred in battle by referring to Jesus' revelation in his mortal body.

1. V. 8—"hard pressed on every side, but not crushed."
2. V. 8—"perplexed, but not in despair."
3. V. 9—"persecuted, but not abandoned."
4. V. 9—"struck down, but not destroyed."

Paul's pain is real, not imagined. Frustration? Yes! God is forever faithful in the midst of adversity and affliction. Jesus, too, was once a victim of others' choices. Nailed to the Cross, Jesus suffered unjustly. He experienced the same emotions and feelings. He is involved and identifies with us. Jesus lived a dangerous and perilous life.

III. APPROPRIATION OF GOD'S GRACE, FAITHFUL PRESENCE, AND ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE IS CRUCIAL AND BENEFICIAL (VV. 10-18)

We are renewed by God's resurrection power (vv. 10-14). Our identification is with the Lord's death, but His

revelation is in the power of His resurrected life. Jesus' life is revealed in our mortal body (vv. 10-11). God "will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence" one day (v. 14).

God's grace will be beneficially magnified in thanksgiving. The purpose and result are "so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God" (v. 15). Grace is hereby extended and expanded in further relationships.

Paul adds, "Therefore we do not lose heart" (v. 16). This is the second time he emphasizes this phrase—first in verse 1 and then here in verse 16. Paul alludes to inward renewal. He can cope with life's pressures because of divine hope. His confidence rests in God's power. Paul could persevere to achieve His God-given goal to proclaim the gospel because of renewal.

The vision of God's glory drew him onward. An eternal reward awaited him. His "citizenship" was "in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), so his conduct reflected on the country's destination. There is an awesome contrast in the weight between the "light affliction[s]" (KJV) and eternal glory "that far outweighs them all" (v. 17).

Focus your thoughts on God's love, power, hope, and grace. Otherwise, when the glow fades, the vision dims!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude

Processional "Our God Is an Awesome God"

Chorus "I Will Enter His Gates"

Call to Worship Lam. 3:19-27

Welcome and Fellowship Church Family News and Notes

Hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Choruses "Great and Mighty"

"Praise the Name of Jesus"

"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"

"We Have Come into His House"

Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar

Chorus "I Love You, Lord"

Child Dedication or Infant Baptism

Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings

Special Music

Scripture 2 Cor. 4:1-18

Message "LOVE'S POWER EQUALIZES LIFE'S PRESSURES"

Response "To God Be the Glory"

Benediction 2 Tim. 1:7

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CHILD DEDICATION

Make this a special bonding time with the parents and immediate family. Compensate the reality of life's pressures in raising children with the reinforcement of God's love and adequate resources. God wants us to raise Christians, not just children. Remind the parents and congregation of the privilege of nurturing our children with a personal knowledge of our Lord Jesus.

Life's Crossroads and the Lord's Companionship

by David A. Hoffman

Deut. 31:1-13; Josh. 1:1-9; Heb. 13:5

INTRO

ILLUS. Elizabeth, our youngest daughter, was sick for one week with a bad cold. We were "surfing" the television channels when we came across a *Sesame Street* program. Normally, we never watch *Sesame Street* because Elizabeth is hooked on "Barney" episodes. The scene showed someone imitating Rod Serling. The man commented in a matter-of-fact manner about a place where there was traffic, cars honking, red lights, green lights. He said, "You've entered the crossing zone." (Akin to *Twilight Zone*.) The message he was trying to get across to children was this: "Never cross a street without an adult."

Life has many crossroads for adults as well! (Not just railroad crossings or crossovers on a highway.) We also should not cross without our closest companion, the Lord Jesus Christ!

[Read Deut. 31:1-13 with emphasis on vv. 3, 6, 8.]

When was the last time you stood at a crossroad in your life? How did you feel? Alone, anxious, apprehensive, asphyxiated?

Setting: Moses, Joshua, and the Israelites are camped along the east side of the Jordan River at Shittim, just north of the Dead Sea and directly opposite the Canaanite walled fortress of Jericho. The Jordan River is at flood stage. They have wandered in the desert of Zin nearly 40 years after the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea.

Here Moses shares with them his final speech before his death. Deut. 32 contains the "Song of Moses." In chapter 33 Moses blesses the tribes. In chapter 34 his death is recorded. Notice his encouraging words about following Joshua's leadership. He is preparing the people for the new transition.

V. 3—"The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you."

V. 6—"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

V. 8—"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

How could Moses be so positive? We shall look closely

at both Moses' and Joshua's crossroads. Then we will consider a few principles for our own crossovers.

I. MOSES EXPERIENCED SEVERAL CROSSROADS/ CROSSOVERS DURING HIS LIFETIME WITH THE LORD'S COMPANIONSHIP

A. Moses' life was spared at birth. His name "Moses" means "drawn out of the water."

B. At 40 years of age Moses took matters into his own hands and killed an Egyptian mistreating a Hebrew slave. He fled into the desert of Midian. This became a crossover into a nomadic shepherd lifestyle. He learned patience keeping sheep. This experience for the next 40 years enabled him to learn survival skills needed for the desert later when leading Israel.

C. At 80 years old, Moses had the burning bush experience, when God made himself known as "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. 3:14, KJV). The eternal and perpetual Almighty One commissioned him with a mission and promised to be with him as well as display His power.

D. Moses saw many miracles in the desert—water, manna, quail. The soles of the sandals of the children of Israel never wore out.

ILLUS. "Where God Points, God Provides."

"And as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25, KJV).

It is not the great achievement of the Red Sea crossing by Moses and the Israelites that is so stupendous and miraculous. The awesomeness of the wilderness journey is the fact that approximately 3 million people were sustained for 40 years in a small, dry, fruitless desert. Have you thought of what it must have been like to merely exist from day to day with every human means for survival out of reach?

E. Moses, at the time of the passage, is currently 120 years old. He informs the people, "I am no longer able to lead you" (Deut. 31:2). The reason was not physical age or disability due to ill health but a consequence of moral disobedience and presumption by striking the rock at Meribah to bring forth water. "Meribah" means "quarreling."

Nearly 40 years earlier at Massah, meaning "testing," God told Moses to strike a rock (Exod. 17:1-7). He acted in obedience then. However, the murmuring and complaining spirit of the Israelites incited him to sin near Kadesh in the Desert of Zin (Num. 20:7-13; 27:12-14). Moses and Aaron dishonored the Lord's holiness before the people. Moses ("drawn out of the water") this time took matters into his own hands to draw out water by striking instead of speaking.

No leader is indispensable in God's sight! If we are not willing to be obedient to God's commands to accomplish His purpose, He will use someone else. This was a period of theocracy—"God is Ruler."

II. JOSHUA ALSO EXPERIENCED CROSSOVERS AND THE LORD'S COMPANIONSHIP

The Bible says, "The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the LORD said" (Deut. 31:3).

Verse 7 adds that Moses prepared the people for the new

transition in leadership: "Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their forefathers to give them.'"

The task was tremendous. The challenge of the conquest of Canaan loomed as an enormous one. Now the faithful patriarch would no longer guide them as he had in the past. The great lawgiver or receiver of the divine covenant would soon be gone. Joshua stood on the verge of serving as God's next leader in the role of a mighty military general. However, the strategy and plan for conquest would unmistakably be the Lord's prerogative.

Since Moses had earlier experienced reluctance and much hesitancy at the burning bush, he encouraged Joshua and the people with a message of God's promised presence: "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (v. 8). Then Moses commanded, comforted, and cautioned them simultaneously with words from the covenant.

God told Moses to take Joshua to the Tent of Meeting, that is, the Tabernacle, so He could commission Joshua. God's Shekinah presence met with them in a pillar of cloud. Imagine the content of that conversation. No negotiation, just affirmation of God's personal presence. We have a hint of God's initiation of Joshua by the message that he shares in Josh. 1:1-9.

A. After Moses' death, God reminded and reinforced His promise to Joshua. Note especially the words, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (v. 5). In the Hebrew, "never" is emphatic as the first word of the statement. Next, note the repetition of the command, "Be strong and courageous." Three times (vv. 6, 7, 9) God reminds Joshua to be brave, "for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (v. 9).

B. The crossing of the Jordan was preceded by thorough spiritual preparation and by careful military calculation. God wants us to be prepared before we start the task He has commissioned us to do. He prepares and equips us with everything we need. Special emphasis is made to the Book of the Law. It is God's instruction, wisdom, and perspective. The Scriptures enable us to know Him intimately.

We must count the cost. It is a cooperative effort. We must be willing to pay the price to let God's promise become a reality. It takes discipline in the Word and meditation. When the pressures come and the heat is on, then we will have poise under pressure.

C. Joshua relinquished control and relied on God's strategy for victory. The crossing of the Jordan River, the battle at Jericho, and further conquests were all testimonies to this fact.

III. OUR CROSSOVERS ARE ALSO ACCOMPANIED BY THE LORD'S COMPANIONSHIP

A few principles remind us to trust God's leadership also.

- A. Every obstacle is an opportunity for God to work.
- B. In the presence of God there is nothing to fear.
- C. Bridges were lacking in the ancient Near East. Bibli-

cal Hebrew has no word for a bridge! There was no bridge at the Red Sea to cross and no bridge at the flood stage of the Jordan River to cross. God providentially, miraculously, and sovereignly led His people in the crossovers! He will lead us, too, if we will faithfully follow.

D. God says: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). This repeats the Old Testament promise to Joshua in Josh. 1:5. God's presence and companionship are great consolations.

ILLUS. Winston Churchill was asked to return to his old school to speak during World War II. Everyone was excited about hearing the words of wisdom from their national statesman. When he stepped to the lectern to speak, he simply stated: "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never give up!"

I encourage you to commit the crossovers or crossroads of your life into God's hands. That includes your future, family, finances, and fears. You can only do so by faith and confidence in our Lord's companionship. He is our Father!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Prelude
- Choral Introit "God Will Make a Way"
- Welcome and Fellowship Church Family News and Notes
- Call to Worship Responsive Reading
"I Will Be with You"
- Hymns "How Firm a Foundation"
"God Leads Us Along"
"Trust and Obey"
- Chorus "Got Any Rivers?"
"I Know the Lord Will Make a Way"
- Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar
- Chorus "Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace"
- Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings
- Special Music
- Scripture Deut. 31:1-13; Joshua 1:1-9; Heb. 13:5
- Message "LIFE'S CROSSROADS AND THE LORD'S
COMPANIONSHIP"
- Hymn "Where He Leads Me"
- Benediction Phil. 1:6

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

INVITATION

This service can be a special focus for sending people from your congregation, including high school graduates who will be attending college in the fall, or sending someone assigned to a mission field, or sending someone called into Christian service.

The invitational response could be worded as follows:

I am especially curious today whether God might be calling someone into full-time Christian service. Perhaps He already has spoken to your heart, but you have questioned Him out of your own sense of insecurity and anxiety, just as Moses and Joshua did. God's promise is readily available for you today as well. He is the same credible Companion now as He was then. You can trust an unknown future into the hands of a known God.

From Womb to Wounds: The Compassion of a Caring Mother

by David A. Hoffman

Isa. 49:15; 66:13; 1 Thess. 2:7

INTRO

Thomas Edison remarked: "My mother was the making of me. She was so true and so sure of me. I felt that I had someone to live for—someone I must not disappoint. The memory of my mother will always be a blessing to me."

The memories of our experiences with our mothers are normally deeply touching, whether the moments we remember were either comforting and reassuring or confrontational and a renewal of our respect for her. A mother's compassionate love and care definitely include more than anything sentimentally written in a greeting card.

What exactly is a mother? To her child, she is everything such as comfort, inspiration, security, support, an example, identity, guide, nurture, and the meaning of home! Recall the comforting hugs your mother shared with you from your childhood. She also kissed those stinging scrapes and wiped away the tears from your eyes.

Eight times in Scripture (two in the Old Testament; six in the New Testament) we read the command "Honor your father and mother." Interestingly, although the image of God as Heavenly Father predominantly prevails in Scripture, there are metaphors of God as mother also.

"Mother"—the most endeared word in the English language to our hearts and memory. When my son, Joseph, was only three years old, he walked into the kitchen while my wife was preparing a meal. He wanted to share with her a startling discovery he had made. He said, "Mommy, guess what?!"

She asked him, "What?"

Joseph replied, "I'm a boy."

Barbara then said, "That's right, Joseph, you are a boy, and Mommy is a girl."

Puzzled, he shook his head and said, "No! Mommy is Mommy!" He actually honored her with a compliment in his naive comment.

A mother's presence is second only to God's presence. There are at least two reasons.

I. THE BIRTHING PROCESS PRODUCES BONDING BETWEEN MOM AND CHILD

God's design of a woman's anatomy included the womb. Someone described it as similar to a "kangaroo pouch on the inside." It is certainly elastic for stretching to accommodate the growth and development of a child or children from conception to delivery. A baby has limited freedom of movement, can kick, and even do somersaults.

The "butterfly" feeling is the first awareness that a mother has of her baby's presence. A baby can hear the heartbeat of the mother as well as learn to recognize her voice and the touch of her hand. The normal nine months of pregnancy serve as a preparation period for the new transition.

The psalmist David was divinely inspired to write: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Ps. 139:13-14).

Immediately after birth, with some exceptions, the obstetrician places the baby on the mother's tummy for a sense of security. The mother also feels compassion and intimacy with the newborn. It is just "what the doctor ordered" and, more importantly, what God prescribes.

Isaiah records the Lord's rhetorical question: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (49:15). Occasionally, babies are aborted or maybe released for adoption or abandoned by a mother. She may no longer be the caregiver and guardian, but the memory of her mandatory responsibility for a dependent life remains. The promise that the prophet shares is that God will never abandon His people.

The Hebrew word for compassion originates from *rechem*, or womb. It symbolically means "to carry one." Of course, the mother normally does not carry a child in the womb any longer than is necessary to allow the organs to develop. Due dates are not always the guaranteed indicator, as women know who undergo premature labor or miss the date with extended time.

Emotionally a mother also must not carry her children any longer than is feasible and reasonable. She must gradually release the child as that one is ready and when a particular period permits, for example, starting school, leaving the "nest," and marrying a life partner. However, once a mother, always a mother.

II. CHILDREN CHERISH TENDER LOVING CARE

Besides the bonding of the birthing process in the womb, a mother's love helps to "bandage" our wounds. A compassionate mother will empathize or feel with her children's needs and try to ease any suffering. We all have bumps and bruises. Age is irrelevant at this point.

God says, "As a mother comforts her child" (Isa. 66:13). Paul compared his concern for the new Thessalonian converts with a mother's care by saying, "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children" (1 Thess. 2:7). Gentleness is a special characteristic

of motherhood. She communicates her love with tenderness and "tough love," warmth, and affection.

A survey was conducted on a group of elementary age boys, asking whom they would most likely consult if they had a problem. Some 23 percent said their dad, but 77 percent of the boys responded they would prefer to confide in their mother.

ILLUS. A nine-year-old girl in the third grade once wrote an essay to express her fond feelings for her grandmother. She titled the essay "What's a Grandmother?" Here is what she said:

A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own. She likes other people's little girls and boys. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys, and they talk about fishing and stuff like that.

Grandmothers don't have to do anything except to be there. They're old so they shouldn't play hard or run. It is enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is, and have a lot of dimes ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars. They should never say, "Hurry up."

Usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth and gums off.

Grandmothers don't have to be smart, only answer questions like, "Why isn't God married?" and "How come dogs chase cats?"

Grandmothers don't talk baby talk like visitors do, because it is hard to understand. When they read to us, they don't skip or mind if it is the same story over again.

Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don't have television, because they are the only grown-ups who have time.

In her simplistic and childlike manner, she described the importance of tender loving care by expressing how she enjoyed being together with her grandmother. The overall emphasis in her perspective is relationship.

ILLUS. My friend and longtime faithful, tenured evangelist in the Church of the Nazarene, Gary Haines, told me about the unconditional love, affirmation, and confirmation his mother, Edith Haines, invested in him. Gary was struck by polio as a child. His mother cared for him with her compassionate love. She shared and identified with his struggles until her death in October 1996.

They had bonded so closely that Gary would call her every Saturday from his motel room in whatever city in which he was conducting a revival meeting. She believed in her son to the point of sharing his physical and emotional pain. She truly became his spiritual confidante as well.

Think of the ramifications of tender loving care (TLC). A mother carries her child close to her heart in the womb. After birth she cuddles the child in her arms with a warm embrace, nurses when it is hungry, bathes the child when it is helpless, clothes it when it is naked, rocks and sings lullabies so the child can sleep securely.

She holds the child's hand when it learns to walk, kisses away the hurt of scrapes and bruises, laughs with joy, glows with confidence and expectancy, cries during times of sorrow, and teaches a child how to pray at the bedside.

She is a faithful companion to offer strength during moments of utter weakness, and she reassures with courage in place of despair.

A mother has incredible influence! She often feels as if she is getting nowhere, but over a period of time permanent impressions are made that are life transforming. If you ever watch college football, notice that the athletes usually say, "Hi, Mom!" when the camera zooms in for a close-up shot.

A final thought: When God wanted to send His Son Jesus into this world, He chose a woman/mother to work His miracle.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Happy Mother's Day!

Chorus "Family of God"
Welcome and Fellowship Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship Prov. 31
A Special Moment with the Youngest and Oldest Mothers
and the Mother with the Most Children Present
Choruses "I Will Sing of the Mercies"
"Jesus, We Just Want to Thank You"
"Find Us Faithful"

Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar

Honoring All Our Mothers

Hymn "To God Be the Glory"

Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings

Special Music

Scripture Isa. 49:15; 66:13; 1 Thess. 2:7

Message "FROM WOMB TO WOUNDS: THE
COMPASSION OF A CARING MOTHER"

Benediction Prov. 31:27-28

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Have a number of children read the verses from Prov. 31, depending upon how many your church has. Also, use visual object lessons such as a child sewing, cooking, cleaning, and so on, with attire to match the verse being read.

FAMILY ALTAR TIME

Have all mothers come forward and kneel at the altar for a special prayer of blessing. Be sure to mention those who have deceased mothers, foster mothers, surrogate mothers, and so on. Pray also for single-parent mothers, working mothers, divorced mothers, mothers who have experienced a miscarriage, and so on.

Share this devotional thought prior to prayer—"A mother is her infant's concept of God, her toddler's confidence, her child's counselor, her teen's conscience, and her husband's companion."

You may ask families to stand or kneel behind the moms for loving support if there is adequate room.

Immediately afterward distribute sweetheart roses or another special flower of your choice to each mother. [Be sure to place your order with a florist early to ensure delivery as well as adequate supply on a busy holiday weekend.]

If time permits, ask for volunteers to share memorable thoughts about their mothers' influence in their lives.

Exalting Christ by Emptying Self: Stephen's Servant Heart

by David A. Hoffman

Acts 6:1-7; Phil. 2:5-8

INTRO

Have you ever noticed how television commercials teach an underlying philosophy of life? Due to the Western mind-set and an overemphasis on individualism, here are some of the subtle messages we repeatedly hear in the Western world.

"Have it *your* way."—Burger King

"You deserve a break today."—McDonald's

"Do *yourself* a favor."—Hardee's

"You owe it to *yourself*."—Anthony's

The messages communicate a common theme: "Look out for number one, *numero uno*."

Jesus contrasted selfish preoccupation with servanthood: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45).

Meditate for a moment on this statement: "The great leader is seen as servant first" (Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 7).

What enters your mind when you hear the phrase "servant leader"? Does it sound like an oxymoron to you? The combined words initially seem contradictory. One may argue that it is either/or, but the apostle Paul describes it as both/and.

Paul states, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but *made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*, being made in human likeness . . . and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8, emphasis added). Jesus modeled the lifestyle of a servant leader.

Look at the model of Stephen in the Early Church. In Acts 6 the apostles addressed a potential church-split situation regarding the care of Grecian widows.

There are fundamental principles by which we may follow the example and "attitude" of our Lord Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

I. GOD'S WORK IS CARRIED ON BY SPIRITUAL POWER AND CHARACTER, NOT BY PERSONAL CHARM

A Christian must understand that leadership on behalf of Christ does not exist due to one's title or position but rather due to one's disposition. Observe how the apostles handled the selection of leaders to resolve the conflict: "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3-4).

References to Stephen emphasize the true source of his ability to be a servant leader.

Stephen certainly was a man of integrity because of his good reputation, full of wisdom and full of the Spirit. He was a Christlike model and had a servant's heart. He was also willing to "wait on tables" (v. 2, NRSV) or to serve. Humility is not degrading oneself but forgetting oneself. In other words, I put myself in the background so that someone else might be serviced by me.

Leighton Ford remarks: "In Jesus we see authority and humility wonderfully coupled together. . . . Humility is not denying that one possesses a gift; it is recognizing the source of that gift . . . that our gift comes through us and not from us" (*Transforming Leadership*, InterVarsity, 233).

Stated another way: Christian leadership is not "a leadership of power and control but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest . . . leadership in which power is constantly abandoned in favor of love. It is a true spiritual leadership" (Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections*, Eerdmans, 1982, 108).

II. GOD'S WORK IS CARRIED ON BY INTIMACY WITH CHRIST'S PRESENCE AND CREDIBILITY, NOT BY PERSONAL CONTROL

Like Stephen, a servant leader will discipline himself to dwell in the presence of God. Jesus keeps us accountable by asking us the same questions He asked the apostle Peter: "Do you truly love me . . . ? . . . Do you truly love me? . . . Do you love me?" (John 21:15-17). You must never lose the romance and sense of intimacy. It is too easy to fall in love with the applause and praise of people or to substitute your labor of love on behalf of the Kingdom for love of God himself. Too often fickleness or criticism will make us bitter, defensive, and resentful.

Luke records that Stephen "looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55, emphasis added). As the first Christian martyr, Stephen experienced the intimacy of our Lord's support prior to his stoning. The Lord normally "sits" at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us and to represent His completed act of atonement in providing salvation.

Stephen attracted people to Jesus. He desired to magnify Jesus in his mortal body. He focused on relationship with the Father. Such vulnerability allows you to glimpse at people and to gaze at Jesus. Jesus and Stephen displayed what Henri Nouwen calls "downward mobility" in

contrast to the world's standard of "upward mobility." Stephen concentrated on Christ.

What a contrast to the world's perspective of coercion, intimidation, and manipulation! Leo Tolstoy wrote in his book *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*:

Men are so accustomed to establish and defend their existence by violence, by bayonets, bullets, prisons, and gallows, that it seems to them as if such an arrangement of life were not only normal, but were the only one possible. Yet it is just this arrangement and maintenance of the commonwealth by violence, that does most to hinder people from comprehending the causes of their sufferings, and consequently from being able to establish a true order (p. 451).

In comparison, "all the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the kings who ever reigned have not affected the history of mankind as did the life" of our Lord Jesus (*One Solitary Life*). In fact, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* contains more entries (20,000 words) on Jesus than any other event or person ever known to humanity.

Robert Greenleaf surmises that in servant leadership the people are learning "to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways. . . . The only authority deserving one's allegiance is . . . freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader" (pp. 9-10).

ILLUS. I shall never forget the impact that an assistant manager of a grocery store made upon my life. His name was Sam. His tall and stocky frame automatically drew one's attention; however, his gentle spirit and kind mannerisms won people's admiration and respect. Employed in my first public job, I worked as a courtesy clerk sacking and carrying groceries to customers' vehicles as well as assisting persons bringing items into the store.

One particular holiday, Independence Day as I recall, we were extremely busy. Multiple advertisements and various special coupons provided impetus for families to shop who were celebrating the Fourth of July with cookouts in their backyards. In spite of scheduling additional employees for the busy day, the store was so busy that routine closing procedures of filling sacks, racking glass bottles according to brands, sweeping and mopping, restocking dairy and produce items, and so forth had not even begun.

After bringing a cartload of various sizes of sacks to the checkout stand, I proceeded to fill each slot. At that point Sam instructed me to work on glass bottles, and he would fill the paper sacks. I retorted, "But Sam, that is not your job."

His reply, which I will never forget, taught me the best lesson on servanthood I have ever learned. He said, "David, I try never to ask anyone else to do something I would not be willing to do first of all myself."

I admired Sam even more after that incident.

Obviously, Jesus understood this principle. John 13 reveals Him training His disciples about the ministry of the

towel. As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is a sign of service! The radical nature of Jesus' teaching was not reversing the pecking order. Instead, He abolished it. Leadership is not authority to manipulate and control. Rather, it is an authority of function, not status.

Richard Foster writes in *Celebration of Discipline*:

"Whenever there is trouble over who is the greatest, there is trouble over who is the least. That is the crux of the matter for us, isn't it? Most of us know we will never be the greatest; just don't let us be the least."

Greatness is measured by service! Harry Bullis, former chairman of the board of General Mills, used to share this advice with his salespersons: "Forget about the sales you hope to make, and concentrate on the service you want to render."

Who is more important—the waiter or the dinner guest? It really is a rhetorical question by now. Jesus modeled the principle that leadership is not flashy public relations and platform personality, but humble service to the group on behalf of our Lord. Interestingly, out of Jesus' three and a half years of ministry, the Gospels record only a maximum of 34 days. What did Jesus do the rest of the time when He was not preaching, teaching, or healing? He served!

Stephen also had a servant's heart. Our devotion must be equally selfless by magnifying and exalting Jesus Christ in our lives. Begin each day by praying, "Lord Jesus, help me see someone today whom I can serve."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Skit on Servanthood (Check NPH resources)	
Chorus	"Make Me a Servant"
Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Call to Worship	Isa. 52:13—53:7
Hymns	"O to Be like Thee"
	"Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated"
	"The Servant Song"
Agape Love Feast	
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings	2 Cor. 8:9
Special Music	
Scripture	Acts 6:1-7; Phil. 2:5-8
Message	"EXALTING CHRIST BY EMPTYING SELF: STEPHEN'S SERVANT HEART"
Closing Chorus	"I Will Serve Thee"
Benediction	

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

AGAPE LOVE FEAST

Prepare bread slices and Communion cups with juice for an agape love feast. First, have your people come forward to obtain a bread slice; then instruct them to share a piece from their bread with others in the congregation. They should relate personal remarks of appreciation, encouragement, and gratitude for one another and also offer any ability to serve.

Rabbi Sends Resident Teacher: Perpetual Schooling by Christ's Spirit

by David A. Hoffman
John 14:15-27; 15:26; 16:5-15

INTRO

While Jesus traveled during His three-year itinerant ministry, His disciples and some people among the crowds addressed Him as "Rabbi." It was a title of honor.

Rabbis in Jewish culture trained followers to carry on a special tradition of learning. A rabbi's students studied diligently and loved to pick the brains of their esteemed teacher. Afterward, they would become the representatives, or messengers with the wisdom of their instructor.

Jesus, however, was very unique. Rather than passively handing down the past traditions and varying opinions on any given topic, Jesus would state, "You have heard it was said, but I say to you . . ." His authority was active.

The rabbi and his disciples not only traveled together and discussed pertinent issues but also lived in close proximity to benefit the learning process. The pattern of the teacher was equally, if not more, as important as his passing down precepts. Students revered the character of the teacher as much, if not more, than the content of his teachings. Thus, a resident rabbi had a tremendous impact on the lives of his students.

I. THE SPIRIT OFFERS CONSOLATION AS OUR COMPANION (14:15-24; 16:5-7)

Jesus knew He had to ascend to the Father in heaven after His death and resurrection. His physical body, like ours, was limited to space and time. So He began to prepare His disciples for "another Comforter" (14:16, KJV) or "Helper" (NASB). He did not want them or us to struggle in life all alone. The Spirit can be with anyone at all times in all places.

Jesus' familiar words of comfort in 14:1-3 occur in the context of His readying His disciples for His departure. Jesus had celebrated the Passover meal with them in the Upper Room and had washed their feet to model servanthood. Afterward, in response to Peter's, Thomas's, and Philip's inquiries about where He was going and request

to "show us the Father" (v. 8), Jesus replies with teaching about the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord provided good news for the grief-stricken followers on that day as well as in our day. Jesus walks beside us in the adjustments, transitions, changes, and crises of life. He provides the ultimate referral for us. The Spirit constantly abides in us. His eternal counsel is internally applied. His help is personal, since He is the Third Person of the Trinity.

Chapters 14-16 in the Gospel of John are commonly called the Paraclete (*paraklētos*) passages. It is derived from the word *parakaleō*, meaning to call alongside for aid or assistance. The term is unique in its application of the Spirit. Although it is difficult to translate, the closest designation would be "Helper" (NASB, NKJV, PHILLIPS), "Advocate" (NEB, NRSV), "Counselor" (NIV, RSV). Some versions use "Comforter" (KJV, TLB) or "Friend" (TM).

Jesus reassured them, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another *Counselor to be with you forever*. . . . You know him, for *he lives with you and will be in you*. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (14:16-18, emphases added). He would not abandon them or us—"Someone else to stand by you" (PHILLIPS).

Also, Jesus reminded them of a reward for their love and obedience: "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and *make our home with him*" (14:23, emphasis added). He will be *resident* in us.

The Spirit is "Someone who is called in." Why? There are several reasons. He serves as our Witness; our Advocate to plead the cause of one accused; our Consultant to offer advice; our Encourager to instill fresh fortitude to one's will, emotions, and heart; as well as our Helper in time of need.

As our Counselor and constant Companion, the Spirit enables us to cope with circumstances. He consoles us and helps us in dealing with our inadequacies and weaknesses. He restores confidence that we are not alone. God loves us and desires the best for us. That is comforting!

The apostle Paul was well acquainted with this truth. In 2 Cor. 1 he uses the verb *parakaleō* or the noun *paraklēsis* a total of 10 times in verses 3-7. Our God is compassionate!

II. THE SPIRIT OFFERS INSTRUCTION, ILLUMINATION, AND INTERPRETATION AS OUR TUTOR-COACH (14:25-27; 15:26; 16:13-15)

I read a statement on the marquee of an Oklahoma university, "Live as you learn, and learn as you live." Sometimes we even feel like a professional student. That's all right because it is vitally important that we remain lifelong learners and possess a teachable spirit.

ILLUS. A committee of ministers in a certain city was discussing the possibility of having D. L. Moody to serve as the evangelist during a citywide evangelistic campaign. Finally, one young minister who did not want to invite Moody stood up and said: "Why Moody? Does he have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?"

There was silence. Then an old, godly minister spoke up, "No, he does not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on D. L. Moody."

The veteran minister understood that Moody was pliable in the hands of God. Moody opened his life to the prerogative and divine will of our Lord. He yielded to divine wisdom and was flexible enough to relinquish control and to rely on God's strategy. He did not have a hidden agenda.

One of Israel's prophets significantly comprehended this truth when he wrote: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 4:6). The Spirit grants us insights into God's truth. Spiritual things can only be known sufficiently and specifically by the Spirit and Scripture. He is "the Spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

In other disciplines, on the other hand, an astronomer can communicate greater understanding of stars by the telescope; a chemist shares information on the interaction of chemicals by the microscope; a medical doctor learns about many functions of the body by a stethoscope; a dentist and radiologist determine needs by an x ray; a musician can keep us spellbound with the combinations on a musical scale by a symphony orchestra.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2 that the message of wisdom is revealed by God's Spirit: "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. . . . We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (vv. 10, 12, 14). Allow the Spirit to tutor and coach you!

ILLUS. Several years ago a bright Yale graduate named Christopher Edwards became a victim of one of the most insidious modern-day cults, the Moonies, in northern California. He became brainwashed in a three-step process: (1) deprogrammed and convinced that everything he had been taught in the past was all wrong; (2) complete submission of his will and reason so that his mind was put into neutral; (3) reprogrammed and indoctrinated with a concentration of intensive teaching to replace the old concepts with new ones.

It is essential that we study the Scriptures and sensitize ourselves to the Spirit's instruction, illumination, and interpretation concerning Christ and His Word.

III. THE SPIRIT OFFERS CONVICTION TO US AS A COMPASS (16:8-11)

There are definitely two spiritual things the Spirit teaches us. He both convinces us that Jesus is the Son of God (15:26; 16:13-15; 1 John 5:5-13) and also convicts us of sin (16:8-11). On the latter, "He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me" (vv. 8-9).

Sin is simply unbelief, not intellectual doubt but a moral and volitional refusal to trust in Jesus Christ. Only God's grace can soften and remedy the hardness of humanity's heart. Otherwise, rebellious defiance and delib-

erate disobedience will finally condemn a person. Our adversary continues to work on believers as well as to lure them into backsliding or apostasy.

A. W. Tozer prudently described the dilemma as follows:

The doctrine of the Spirit as it relates to the believer has, over the last half century, been shrouded in a mist. . . . A world of confusion has surrounded this truth. . . . This confusion has not come by accident. An enemy has done this. Satan knows that Spiritless evangelicalism is as deadly as Modernism or heresy, and he has done everything in his power to prevent us from enjoying our true Christian heritage ("How to Be Filled with the Spirit," in *Keys to the Deeper Life* [Zondervan, 1964], 26-27).

The Spirit serves as our moral Compass to direct, to remind, and to guide us into all truth. He disposes of deception beforehand.

Jesus personally promised His disciples that He would send the Paraclete, or Helper. His promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit would dwell in them when Jesus himself departed to heaven. We also may have His indwelling. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of truth.

The Holy Spirit offers consolation, instruction, and conviction. He is our Companion, Coach, and Compass. He knows our needs as the "resident Rabbi" or "resident Teacher."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choruses	"Father, I Adore You"
	"Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"
Welcome and Fellowship	Church Family News and Notes
Honoring All Our Teachers	
Hymns	"Sweet, Sweet Spirit"
	"The Comforter Has Come"
	"He Abides"
Chorus	"Come, Holy Spirit"
Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar	
Receiving God's Tithes and Our Offerings	
Special Music	
Scripture	John 14:15-27; 15:26; 16:5-15
Message	"RABBI SENDS RESIDENT TEACHER: PERPETUAL SCHOOLING BY CHRIST'S SPIRIT"
Hymn	"Have Thine Own Way, Lord"
Benediction	"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

HONORING TEACHERS

Honor public school and Christian school teachers on all levels, college and university teachers, vocational-technical skilled instructors, and all Sunday School teachers. Share a story that will inspire everyone, and provide a gift of appreciation.

A Cry for a Clean Heart or A Prayer for a Pure Heart

by David A. Hoffman
Ps. 51:1-12

INTRO

As a child and young man, David was a man after God's own heart. He was the youngest son of Jesse and later anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king over Israel. He became a national hero by killing the Philistine giant Goliath. He was a musician, composer, poet, writer, soldier, and an ancestor of our Lord Jesus.

However, later in life, due to weakness and succumbing to temptation, he became an adulterer, a murderer, a sinner. His moral values eroded and resulted in compromise and corruption. He had everything—success, possessions, power, fame, family. He had it all, but he wanted more.

King David did not go out to an adult video store to rent an R-rated or X-rated movie prior to this. He just happened to glimpse from the roof of his palace and see Bathsheba bathing in her private courtyard. Nevertheless, Victor Cline says there are steps in the progression of pornography for anyone who is struggling with that sin. They are listed below.

1. Addiction—akin to heroin, cocaine, or other substance abuse. Stimuli keep people coming back for more to obtain new sexual highs. Dr. James L. McGough at the University of California (Irvine) comments, "Experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase." (See his article in the *N.F.D. Journal*, Nov./Dec. 1985.)
2. Escalation—sexual highs become more difficult to attain and lead to stronger, brutal levels of stimulation.
3. Desensitization—what was initially shocking, repulsive, and disgusting becomes commonplace. The association of pain and degrading of others become trivial matters.
4. Participation—people actively do what they have seen portrayed as pleasurable.

The heart of the issue is the issue of the heart. That's exactly why David cries for a clean heart and prays for a pure heart.

[Read the scripture passage.]

I. CONFESSION OF SINS COMMITTED BRINGS A CLEARING OF ONE'S CONSCIENCE AND GUILT (VV. 1-4)

In verses 1-4 David pleads guilty for his wrongdoing. He admits his sin and asks for mercy. The word "mercy"

in Hebrew literally means "womb." He actually says that God has given him birth or life as a mother, therefore he seeks compassion.

Later, his son Solomon wrote: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

In the New Testament John states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The Greek word for "confess" here is *homologeō*. It means to "say the same word" or to "agree." David agreed with God's indictment.

David appeals to the character of God—"mercy," "unfailing love," "great compassion" (v. 1). He seeks pardon from God because the law did not allow atonement for the sins of either adultery or murder. The priest could not offer a sacrifice to cover for either violation. The usual punishment was stoning.

Note David's request: "Blot out my transgressions" (v. 1); "Wash away all my iniquity" (v. 2); "Cleanse me from my sin" (v. 2). He demonstrates spiritual remorse because the scar of his sin remained. He violated the law by coveting another man's wife.

The imagery is of a papyrus scroll on which God recorded David's sinful acts. Since kings kept records on their people, David knew that God had record of his wrong. He requests forgiveness, but even more so, he longs after God's wholeness and to again be a man after His heart. *The Living Bible* translates verse 2 as "Let me be pure again."

David admits his shameful deed. It haunts him day and night: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (v. 3). His sin was premeditated. He realized the depth of his sin by acknowledging, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (v. 4). Of course, David had violated Uriah and his family, but ultimately he sinned against God.

ILLUS. A man had an argument with his wife and left home. He went to a bar and met a lady. They engaged in conversation and afterward checked into a motel. The next morning he awoke, but she was already gone. He walked into the bathroom to wash his face. On the mirror he saw written in red lipstick the words, "Welcome to the world of AIDS."

Imagine how his sin would continue to haunt him.

David's confession recognizes the scope of his sin. All sin defiantly opposes, deliberately disobeys, contradicts, and confronts the holy nature of God. David agrees with God that "you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge" (v. 4).

II. CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE ROOT CAUSE LEADS TO THE ROAD OF RECOVERY (VV. 5-6, 8-9)

David's and our central problem is inherited depravity. We are all born with a sinful nature. John Wesley referred to it as the "bent to sinning." Sin is in our "inmost being." It is the attitude of rebellion, defiance, and contempt.

This is different from actions. Not only are we sinners because we commit acts of sin; but also we sin, since we are sinners.

Note how David describes this dilemma: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (v. 5). He is not faulting procreation or conception due to sexual intercourse as the cause. Instead, David alludes to the curse from the Fall, loss and deprivation of the original righteousness of the image of God.

The psalm deals with integrity in the "inner parts" and how God teaches us wisdom in the "inmost place" (v. 6). It is the secret chambers of the heart. God desires truth here, which will prevent us from committing sin. David prays, "Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity" (v. 9).

The psalmist indicates the beginning of God's remedy: "Let the bones you have crushed rejoice" (v. 8). Rejoice? How does one rejoice with broken bones? It signifies pain. Much of the answer can be gained from the Native Americans, particularly the lifestyle of the Navajo shepherds.

ILLUS. In the spring, lambing season occurs from four to six weeks in the month(s) of March (and April). The ewes birth their lambs. As the lambs are gradually weaned, there is invariably one lamb determined to exercise independence. It strays from the flock and its loving shepherd (Isa. 53:6). Then it becomes lost.

The shepherd searches for the lamb. When he finds it, he carefully breaks its front legs. Then he gently places the lamb on his shoulders, where he carries it until it heals.

During the weeks the lamb's bones are healing, it learns the smell, gait, and voice of the shepherd. The lamb develops a trust in its shepherd. Their relationship develops, so that when the lamb thoroughly heals and is ready to walk again, the shepherd places a bell around the lamb's neck so that it becomes the leader of the sheep.

God "crushes" us as a sign of hope that He wants to use us in His service.

While I was enrolled in seminary, President Gordon Wetmore shared with us students these thoughts:

- What God claims, I yield.
- What I yield, He accepts.
- What He accepts, He cleanses.
- What He cleanses, He fills.
- What He fills, He uses.

III. CLEANSING OF ONE'S HEART IS COMPULSORY
(VV. 7, 10-12)

David pleads for cleansing, "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (v. 7). Hyssop was used in ritual cleansing. It is like our sponge. A leper was cleansed by sprinkling seven times with the sacrificial blood into which the hyssop was dipped (Lev. 14:6-9). Also, there was a ritual for cleansing those who had come into contact with a dead body (Num. 19:16-19). In either case the priest pronounced, "And he will be clean."

In both those contexts, the word for "purge" or "cleanse" meant to "de-sin." Afterward, the person washed his clothes and body. David adds the words, "and I will be whiter than snow." Later the prophet Isaiah picks

up on this thought by saying, "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool'" (1:18, emphasis added).

David prays for purity. He pleads to God for a miracle: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10). Also, David comments that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (v. 17). The priest could not offer a sacrifice to atone for David's sin, so David goes directly to God. God requires confession, and only He can truly cleanse the heart.

David also prays that God would not cast him away from His presence as the Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul earlier (v. 11). David humbles himself before God with a broken and contrite spirit. Contrition is out of love, whereas attrition is out of fear. He appeals to God's love.

May we also commit our secret closets to Christ and cling to Him. Allow Jesus to purify your heart and make you as clean as He can possibly make you. Let the Lord search and cleanse you.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Choruses "I Will Enter His Gates"
"He Is Lord"
- Welcome and Fellowship Church Family News and Notes
- Call to Worship Responsive Reading
"Purity of Heart"
- Hymns "The Cleansing Wave"
"Jesus Paid It All"
"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"
- Song "Cleanse Me"
- Pastoral Prayer and Family Altar
- Receiving God's Tithe and Our Offerings
- Special Music
- Scripture Ps. 51:1-12
- Message "A CRY FOR A CLEAN HEART" OR "A PRAYER
FOR A PURE HEART"
- Invitational Hymn "Whiter than Snow"
- Benediction Matt. 5:8

PASTORAL PRAYER

In preparation for prayer, have a few moments of silence to allow your people to commune with God. Instruct them in the waiting time as follows:

- "God, I feel Your love today, especially in the area of . . ."
- "God, search my heart, and see if there be any hurtful or harmful way in me" (Ps. 139:23-24).

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

OFFERING

During the offering prayer, use the words from the chorus "We Are So Blessed," or sing the chorus after the offering has been received.

Highpoint

Sunday Night Preaching Resources

When does the high point of the week occur? For some, it may be the weekend itself—those days when one's time is one's own. For a growing number of people there is the awareness that a time is needed when there is opportunity to focus on the coming demands of the new week. Sunday night is that time when many people hunker down within the cocoon, squeezing out the last minutes of freedom in the comfort of home. But for many others, it is a time when they begin preparing their response to the challenges of the coming week. Sunday night church is seen by many pastors as a time to help equip their congregations for effective living. *Highpoint* provides busy pastors an excellent array of sermons and ideas for transforming Sunday night into the high point of the week.

A Fresh Breeze from Heaven

While pastoring in Wichita, Kansas, I learned to sail. Unusual? Not really. Just miles from the Kansas state line is a beautiful body of water known as the Kaw Reservoir. On its waves sail boats of varied description. Surrounded by miles of unbroken prairie, Kaw Reservoir is the ideal spot for city dwellers to stand behind the helm of a sailboat and discover the power of the wind.

One of the members of my parish had a lovely, 26-foot sailboat rigged in the design of a sloop. It had a galley, slept four people comfortably, and had a large, roomy cockpit. Neither its owner nor I had any real experience by the mast. Of course, I had read the *Annapolis Book of Sailing* and many wonderful sea stories in novel form. My grandfather had sailed a two-masted vessel up the Chesapeake Bay from Tangier Island, Virginia, to Tilghman Island, Maryland, as the family moved northward in search of better oystering grounds in the bay. As far as sailing experience, I was less than a novice.

The wind taught me much as I tried to learn the fine art of sailing. I learned the wind could just as easily broach our boat as push us along on a reach. The trick was to keep the vessel headed correctly into the wind. Sailing too high a point could put the boat in irons, which simply left us with flapping sails and motionless in the water. Sailing with

too loose a hand on the sheets or not adjusting the jib quickly enough could lead to real challenges for novice sailors.

As I write these words, I have just finished listening to an interview with Benny Hinn, sometime televangelist, pastor, and author. He offered a cryptic statement in response to penetrating questioning regarding some questionable activities surrounding his ministry. He said, "Sometimes the anointing can be a blessing . . . other times, it can be a curse." Provocative words, aren't they? The truth is we need the anointing of God. Our people need the presence of the Holy Spirit. We don't need the hype, the hysteria, or the homeboy showmanship. What we need is a fresh wind from heaven.

While I do not agree with Benny Hinn regarding the anointing, I do believe the breath of the Spirit is something precious, gracious, and remarkable. It is not something to be trafficked in. It is a profound gift from God to every believer.

In this series of messages, Tim Stearman, pastor of Denver First Church of the Nazarene, carefully and simply opens God's Word to show us the divine Wind that blows upon the hearts of God's faithful. He shows us how to trim our sails, awaiting the fresh breezes of God's Spirit. He teaches us how to respond to the tug of God's Wind on the sheets (ropes) of our lives.

As you prepare to use these

sermons from *Highpoint*, you will note three special sermons that will enrich your preparation and thinking. Note the variety suggestions, and implement them as you see fit.

Tim Stearman is a preacher, teacher, and shepherd. He has built great churches wherever his ministry has taken him. He and his wife have two lovely daughters. Their ministry has touched multitudes through Tim's service in Nazarene Headquarters as director of Adult Ministries and as pastor in Kansas, Oklahoma, and now in Colorado. May these messages, coming from the warm heart of a parish pastor, touch your heart and mind as you prepare for Sunday night at your church.

March
April
May
1998

DAVID FELTER
Editor
KANSAS CITY



Let the Wind of the Spirit Blow

God is always at work in His Church. That is no surprise for those who are expecting to see the evidence of His handiwork. Every once in a while, however, there are those special moments that seem to punctuate the particular greatness of God's work in His Church. I think of the Asbury revival that stirred college and university campuses across North America. I think of the profound effect produced by the stories of the bravery and courage of Jim Elliot and his four friends as they witnessed to the Auca Indians in the Amazon jungles of South America. In both instances, God used these living parables to bring a powerful awareness of His desire to invade the lives of His people with power and purpose.

Tim Stearman pastors a large church. For many of our readers, Denver First Church of the Nazarene is synonymous with the archetypal megachurch. The first local church in our movement to experience rapid growth to over 2,000 in attendance, it blazed new patterns of community impact through its Saturday Nights in Denver programs under the leadership of Don Wellman and his competent staff. It is the church to which delegates to the General Assembly turned when it came time to select a general superintendent, and Pastor James Diehl was elected.

Tim Stearman is no novice. With roots deep in the heartland

and spiritual heritage rich in the history and tradition of the Holiness Movement, Tim understands the needs of the local church. From a small-town parish, to a city changing its economic posture, to a large city congregation, filled with all the variety big cities attract, Tim Stearman knows that the success of each situation depends largely on the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Highpoint features the insightful record of the movement of the Spirit across the landscape of Tim Stearman's heart and mind. These sermons catch the mysterious breeze of the Spirit in thought forms ready for adaptation into personalized messages anywhere.

Sermons for Sunday Night

TIM STEARMAN
Senior Pastor
DENVER



SERMON 1
The Lost World

SERMON 2
On the Potter's Wheel

SERMON 3
Dyn-o-mite

SERMON 4
Attitude and the Holy Spirit

SERMON 5
Holy Spirit Dos and Don'ts

SERMON 6
Holy Spirit, Be My Guide

SERMON 7
The Significance of Pentecost

SERMON 8
The Holy Spirit's Effect on Our Lifestyle

SERMON 9
Don't Put Out the Fire

SERMON 10
Yielding to the Holy Spirit

SERMON 11
A Reputation Under Inspection

SERMON 12
Sunday Night—The Service We Can't Do Without

SERMON 13
Sunday Night—The Service We Can't Do Without (Continued)

THE LOST WORLD

Jer. 50:4-7

INTRODUCTION. As strange as it may seem, we find it impossible today to look in any direction without seeing dinosaurs. They're on soft-drink cups, cereal boxes, Happy Meals, billboards, newspaper ads, and toy shelves. They make Beanie Babies stand up and take notice.

I. THE LOST WORLD

- A. A loving God created a perfect world. A place where the sun could shine without fear of melanoma. A place where vegetation grew organically and produced fruit that was full and sweet. A place where mosquitoes didn't bite and disease didn't cripple and death didn't exist. It was literally heaven on earth.
- B. A treacherous enemy asked the garden inhabitants, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

That sentence planted a seed. A seed of doubt and temptation that grew in the heart of a woman and a man. Grew until the thrill of disobedience outweighed devotion to the divine.

II. THE LAST WORD

- A. What did God say? Why was He leaving us here alone?

In John 14, while preparing His disciples for His ultimate departure, Jesus said this: "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will *teach* you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (vv. 25-26, emphasis added).

In Acts 1, Jesus prepares to ascend into heaven, and He returns to that same theme: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (vv. 4-5).

- B. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the

Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (vv. 7-8).

He was not leaving us alone. Just as Jesus came to point us to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to point us to Jesus.

- C. In Acts 2, that promise is kept as the Holy Spirit descends initially on 120 believers who had gathered in an upper room.
- D. The *last words* of Jesus had been the promise of the Holy Spirit. God in flesh (Jesus) became God in Spirit, able to teach, empower, and abide with us today.

Coming from our lost state and hearing "The Last Word"—this promise. It is natural that many would ask, "What is the Lord's will in all of this?" "What does He want me to do?"

III. THE LORD'S WILL

- A. 1 Thess. 4:3: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified."

When we take the Greek word for sanctification apart, we realize that it's rooted in the word "holy." Sanctification is the process of being made holy. "Holy" means set apart, belonging to God.

- B. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ in us and to enable us to grow in His likeness.

Sanctification is a moment of commitment and a lifetime of growth.

The Holy Spirit wants to sanctify our spirits, give us minds that are focused on Christ. Let me tell you something. Eph. 4:23 says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (KJV). I'm inclined to suggest that our spirit is in our mind.

The Holy Spirit wants to sanctify our soul. The word "psyche" is what Paul used for this element. It represents the invisible part of a person. It's perhaps helpful to think of the influence of the soul in terms of our character and personality.

—Our character = values and patterns that determine our behavior

—Our personality = who we are—what makes us distinct

- C. The Holy Spirit wants to sanctify our bodies. Paul asks, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20, NKJV).

CONCLUSION: In this entire sanctifying process, the Holy Spirit's greatest concern is to help us remember that we belong to God and are programmed for greatness—to be made like Christ.

You see, the world may be lost, but *you* don't have to be.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 1

Children's programs, plays, or musicals.

Nothing draws a crowd like a performance by children. If your church has a children's choir, active Sunday School, or children's church, you have the potential for a children's program. There are countless (seasonal and other) dramas and musicals available through Christian bookstores and publishing houses. An imaginative church member could also put together a clever program that would delight children and adults.

ON THE POTTER'S WHEEL

Rom. 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

- A. The term "Holy Spirit" is almost frightening to some. In many ways it's due to the excesses that we've seen on TV and the behavior that few of us understand. The Holy Spirit gets blamed (or credited) for a lot that, I believe, makes God shudder.
- B. John 4:24 tells us that God is Spirit. When Jesus walked the earth, we are told that He was God incarnate. What does "incarnate" mean? God in the flesh.

But God is no longer in the flesh. He is here in Spirit. Wouldn't that be a "Holy Spirit"?

- C. The Holy Spirit is God in the *present tense* (Rom. 12:1-2).
- D. We have the opportunity to choose to be His holy people. And that's where the work of the Holy Spirit begins to be most visible in the life of the born-again believer.

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS

- A. John 16:7-8: "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will *convict* the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (emphasis added).

I'm praying for the Holy Spirit to convict unbelievers:

—Those involved in affairs, physical and emotional

—Those stealing from their employers

—Those abusing their spouses, their children

—Those robbing God, ignoring Him, insisting on living in their sin

- B. But that conviction shouldn't end when we are saved. The Holy Spirit is now forming us, shaping and reshaping our values and morals. He's purging us and convicting us of such things as pride and self-centeredness.

II. THE SPIRIT CONFIRMS

- A. Eugene Peterson paraphrases the final verses of Gal. 5 like this: "Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. *Each of us is an original*" (vv. 25-26, TM, emphasis added).
- B. The Holy Spirit helps us know that we are known and owned by the Lord. His assignment is to make us sure of our salvation and to give us security in Christ.
- C. The Holy Spirit is present to guarantee that we will receive all the rest of our inheritance.

Our insecurity in this area is so often caused by a brief or prolonged return to self-reliance; we're trying to "work our way" to salvation.

III. THE SPIRIT CONFORMS

- A. When God first thought of you and me, He had in mind our being formed into the image of His Son. The Holy Spirit presses into the clay and shapes it to make us more and more like the One who owns us.
- B. J. B. Phillips expresses this in his very popular paraphrase: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God's good, acceptable to him and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

CONCLUSION: Are you more like Christ now than you were the day you were saved?

God is faithful to do His part. But will you grow be-

yond your salvation experience? Not unless you plan to. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you and cleanse you and make you, to convict and confirm and conform.

Are you willing to invite God the Holy Spirit to place you on the Potter's wheel?
Song: "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

Variety Ideas for Sermon 2

Handbell concert. Blessed is the congregation who has a handbell choir. They are not only beautiful to hear but also fascinating to watch. If your church does not have a bell choir, contact a church that does. Handbell choirs are usually thrilled to share their ministry with other churches.

DYN-O-MITE

Acts 1:1-8

INTRODUCTION. Our text tells us two things. One, that the Holy Spirit dispenses power; and two, that we are to be witnesses.

Please note that it's *two* separate and distinct statements.

1. You will receive power.
2. You will be witnesses.

In this message we want to consider the idea of power, more specifically the power of the Holy Spirit and what that means to us.

I. SPIRIT POWER DEFINED

- A. The Holy Spirit's strength (power) is for service. Being filled daily by the Spirit is NOT for our enjoyment or warm fuzzy feelings or even our private piety. The Holy Spirit wants to equip us for ministry.
- B. We are inundated today by claims that the Holy Spirit is going to make us healthy, wealthy, and wise. If that's the case, isn't it strange that all the disciples but one died a martyr's death and penniless?

II. SPIRIT POWER DEPLOYED

- A. What can the power of the Holy Spirit mean to a life and to a church?
 1. It means constant renewal, daily revival, and rapid obedience.
 2. The power of the Holy Spirit deployed is power to conquer sin, to love others, and to witness for Christ.

We value notoriety above character and achievement more than personal worth. God is pleased to have us *be like Him*.

- B. The Holy Spirit gives us the *power* to be holy—power to make us pleasing to God and to be like God. Heb. 2:11 says: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."

Can God say that about you and me?

- C. Have we invited the Holy Spirit to take up residence in us?

III. SPIRIT POWER DENIED

- A. It would be the understatement of the year to say that many of our churches are without the power of the Holy Spirit as was known in the New Testament Church.
 1. Jesus said, "You shall receive power" (NKJV). The Greek word for power in this verse is *dunamis*, from which we get the word "dynamite."
 2. There is a correlation between the power promised and the witnessing assigned. The dynamite of God in our lives and in our churches will be evident when we are willing to witness for Christ (though it mean martyrdom).

CONCLUSION: Though the preaching of our day may be much in need of improvement, the main reason for the lack of power in our services on Sunday is the absence of personal sharing of Christ during the week.

We fail to use the power; therefore it's denied.

D. L. Moody once said, "I want a faith that has legs and can run."

Variety Ideas for Sermon 3

Musical groups. Invite a special musical group to share a full evening of worship and praise with you. Colleges and universities have ensembles (vocal and instrumental) that are willing to travel and lead in worship. Other churches and communities also have local talent that might be willing to lead your congregation in a worship service.

ATTITUDE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ezek. 36:24-32

INTRODUCTION. What are the spiritual possibilities available to believers?

God says that He will "put a new spirit" in us (small s, v. 26), meaning "attitude." Then He says, "I will put *my* Spirit in you" (v. 27, emphasis added), meaning the Holy Spirit.

The implication clearly being that the Spirit of God indwelling us will have an impact on our human spirit—our attitudes.

Eph. 4:30-32 picks up on that theme.

I. A NEW SPIRIT

- A. When you read God's promise to His people in Ezekiel, you begin to think that if God can remake such lives as those, surely there is hope and help for me.
- B. The wonderful news of the gospel is this: God not only forgives our sins but also changes our bad attitudes.
 1. It is through His indwelling presence. God's Spirit has always been with His people in some measure. But since Pentecost that Presence has been unique.
 2. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

II. A NEW REALITY

A. New freedom

Because we are "centered" (an old Quaker term) in Christ and His will, we feel freedom to venture out in all directions to study, investigate, feel, and relate.

B. New motives

A cleansing of the inner life will change our motivation.

Because everything is open to the Master's jurisdiction, we find a new happiness and relaxation in our lifestyles.

C. Peace

III. A NEW LOVE

- A. First John 4:8 says, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (KJV).
- B. Gal. 5:22-23 reminds us that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (KJV).

It is often pointed out that the word "fruit" is singular, meaning that all these virtues are different aspects of love.

S. D. Gordon says:

"Joy is love singing;
peace is love resting;
longsuffering is love enduring;
gentleness is love's touch;
goodness is love's character;
faith is love's habit;
meekness is love forgetting itself;
temperance is love holding the reins."

CONCLUSION: This life of love is only possible while there is daily surrender and daily faith (yes, sometimes it's pretty weak).

Our prayer must be, "Lord, show me any attitudes that are unchristlike."

Search me, O God, and know my heart today.

Try me, O Savior; know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.

—J. Edwin Orr

Variety Ideas for Sermon 4

Talent night. How about a fifth Sunday talent night? Your own congregation has members who have gifts they can and would delight in sharing. Singing ensembles and solos, recitations, instrumental groups and solos, and skits are only a few of the ways your congregation can give glory to God through the talents He has given.

HOLY SPIRIT DOS AND DON'TS

Acts 11:19-26

INTRODUCTION. So often we speak at length about the Holy Spirit, we often fail to convey what the Spirit is supposed to do in the life of a believer. Does the Holy Spirit make any difference in my day-to-day existence? If so, how? And what should I expect?

I. WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT DO FOR US

- A. The Holy Spirit does not destroy the self. We sometimes hear it said that if complete yielding to God takes place, I must "die to self." That thought, though true, needs clarification.

My "self" is who I am. It is my personality, and that uniqueness of "me" is not to be destroyed. That's not the purpose of the Holy Spirit. *However*, God wants you to get over who you are, whether that's thinking too little of yourself or too much.

You see, when sin entered the human arena, it tarnished self. The Holy Spirit only wants to cleanse that self.

- B. The Holy Spirit will not make us infallible. We will be sadly disappointed if we expect Him to have us to the point of perfection in this life.

The Word of God says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7, KJV). And not until we get to heaven will we be able to exchange the earthen vessel for sterling or, better yet, gold.

- C. The Holy Spirit will not put us beyond the reach of temptation. And we should never assume that the Spirit-filled person reaches a place where he no longer feels Satan's severe attack.

1. Temptation is NATURAL. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is *common* to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13, NASB, emphasis added).
2. Temptation is NEUTRAL. Temptation is itself not sin. "For we do not have a high priest who

cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15, NASB).

Temptation becomes sin only when the will decides in favor of the suggestion of the tempter.

3. Temptation is NECESSARY. "Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and *temptations*? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete" (James 1:2-4, TLB, emphasis added).

II. WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL DO FOR US

- A. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us better persons. Luke simply says of Barnabas, "He was a good man" (Acts 11:24). If the Holy Spirit does anything for us, He makes us good.

And that goodness is not of ourselves, the hymn writer penned: "Not our own righteousness, but Christ within, / Living, and reigning, and saving from sin" (Lelia N. Morris).

- B. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us more humble.

The Holy Spirit will not reside in the same heart with stubborn, proud, selfish ambition.

- C. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us more realistic.

He knows our limitations and wants to help us recognize them.

- D. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us more optimistic.

Like Stephen, Barnabas was full of faith. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw the evidence of God's working, "he . . . encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts" (v. 23).

- E. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us more joyful!

Luke tells us that when Barnabas found the church at Antioch prospering, "he was glad."

Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto

you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11, KJV).

- F. We may expect the Holy Spirit to make us witnesses.

Barnabas and the others had been faithful to Christ's command, and He was honoring their obedience as He said He would: "And the hand of the Lord was with them" (Acts 11:21, KJV).

CONCLUSION: Richard Halverson said, "If one is filled with the Holy Spirit, his witness will not be optional or mandatory. It will be *inevitable*."

Variety Ideas for Sermon 5

Youth night. The youth of your church are tomorrow's leaders. How about giving them the opportunity to lead your congregation in worship? They can give testimonies, do fun skits, sing, and take the responsibility of adult leaders (usher, pray, read scripture, preach) for an evening.

HOLY SPIRIT, BE MY GUIDE

John 10:1-6

INTRODUCTION. The Scripture teaches us the importance of God's will.

John 14:26: "The Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things."

James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (KJV).

The Word of God teaches, or at least implies, two things.

1. That God will not play games with us concerning His will.

2. As His sheep, we will recognize His voice.

How can we know God's will? The Holy Spirit is assigned the duty of helping us.

I. BE ACQUAINTED WITH THE WORD OF GOD

In so many broad principles of Christian living, the Bible leaves no doubt as to God's will.

If you choose the Bible as the Guide of your conduct, you will find that there are many specifics beyond the broad principles: lying, stealing, adultery, gossip, slander.

A. Don't make major issues out of incidental decisions. (Differences of opinion)

B. Be honest with yourselves. Rom. 14:5, 12 says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. . . . So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (KJV).

C. Always guard your influence.

D. Do not treat questionable things and places lightly. "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (v. 23).

The most casual reading of the Bible reveals God's will for many areas of our living. But if the Scriptures are not always clear in your particular problem, there are other sources of helping in determining God's will.

II. ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO ILLUMINATE YOUR JUDGMENT

Common sense is a standard by which we may deter-

mine that our will is in line with God's will.

What is the wisest thing to do?

III. SEEK THE GODLY COUNSEL OF OTHERS

A. God will often work through the counsel of godly pastors or older Christians who can pray and then advise from a wide background of experience.

B. Timothy often sought *and accepted* the advice of Paul.

IV. BE AWARE OF THE OPEN DOOR

A. Doors of service are often closed. But this, too, may be God's providence. On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul went through this kind of experience. Luke tells about it in Acts 16:6-8.

B. Paul knew that a closed door may be God's will as definitely as an open door.

V. LISTEN TO THE INNER VOICE

There are three simple steps to seeking this inner direction from the Holy Spirit.

A. Will to do His will.

—Without reservation; decide that you're going to follow God's will completely.

Paul says it in Eph. 6:6, "Obey . . . not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart."

—God doesn't reveal himself completely to those who are unwilling to follow Him.

B. Seek God's will earnestly.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

C. Rest your case in Him.

—"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt" (James 1:6).

Paul was called to Macedonia. No building, no parsonage, no congregation. But he never wavered. The four men began their work in a prayer meeting outside the city, on a riverbank.

When Paul was beaten and jailed, he didn't waver or doubt God.

CONCLUSION: So these things tell us how we can discern the will of God in the everyday ebb and flow of life. Now, in general terms, let me remind you about God's will for all of us.

1. We have learned from 1 Thess. 4:3 that it is God's will that we be holy people. The word in that verse used to define holiness is "sanctified"—conformed more and more to Christ.

2. We have learned that to be perfected in love is the ultimate goal of being holy people.

John of the Cross said, "In the twilight of our lives, we will be judged on how we have loved."

The hymn writer penned:
*My Jesus, I love Thee; I know Thou art mine.
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign.*

—William R. Featherstone

Augustine says: "All evil comes from disordered love, for it is love that moves me where I go. Love is my gravity . . . I go where my love moves me."

3. Christ perfected love . . . by the Holy Spirit's abiding presence, makes doing the will of God in every other part of our lives that much simpler.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 6

Connect with the seasons. Is there a seasonal emphasis you can connect with during this series of sermons? Community and cultural events often provide windows of opportunity for working with dynamic relationships that can enhance Sunday night church. Follow local, regional, even national holidays and events, and establish a natural link or connection that can illustrate your preaching.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-4

INTRODUCTION. In reading these verses, there are several questions that usually enter a person's mind. Most of the questions center around the *fire*, the *languages*, and the *wind*. Since this was an official introduction of the Holy Spirit, and these symbols are said to portray Him, it's logical that we should consider them in any series on the Holy Spirit.

I. TONGUES OF FIRE

Probably a large blaze, at first visible in the center of the room, which then divided and went in all directions until a portion of it rested on each of those present.

—I can't explain that phenomenon.

—I think I do see what it symbolized: *purity* and *cleansing*. A work of the Spirit in the personalities of those gathered.

II. OTHER LANGUAGES

Verse 4 records that they "began to speak with other tongues" (KJV).

A. The Greek reads "other languages" (margin), indicating a known dialect, a language they had not learned.

B. This is not the same as the "tongues" described in 1 Corinthians.

C. We have tried to simplify this miracle. In the process we have perverted the gifts of the Spirit and polarized the church. Almost exclusively because of this gift we have become seekers of the gift instead of the Giver.

D. In this instance, the miracle could have been as much a gift of hearing as it was a gift of speaking.

E. It symbolizes the fact that the gospel was universal and that the Jew could no longer consider God an exclusive commodity. It says to me that the Holy Spirit will never be without the ability to communicate with those in need.

III. SOUND OF WIND

Verse 2, "Sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" (KJV).

—Like the reverberating roar of a tornado.

—Symbolized the power of the Holy Spirit.

In many large cities we are familiar with smog. But we also know that a good wind will blow it away.

I like to think of this "sound . . . of . . . wind" as having the effect of sweeping away the spiritual pollution.

When the Holy Spirit comes, the spiritual pollution and confusion is blown away.

IV. THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

These other things (fire, languages, wind) are all right. They have a meaning—but without the first part of verse 4 they are meaningless.

A. "They were all filled with the *Holy Spirit*" (NKJV, emphasis added). That's the real miracle of Pentecost.

That's why those 120 in that Upper Room could thrust their feet into sweat-stained sandals and march out to conquer the world.

B. They had no visible swords, no visible shields, no visible commander; but they marched with matchless unconcern into the gates of prison, through the valley of persecution, and even into the jaws of death.

The rhythm of their marching feet echoes down the centuries, a steady throbbing of sound, a background for their battle cry: "*Emmanuel! God with us!*" (cf. Matt. 1:23).

C. Most of them died tragic deaths. Tradition says: Matthew by the sword in Ethiopia; Mark beheaded; Luke hung in an olive tree; John in exile on Patmos; James had his head cut off; James the Less was beaten to death with a fuller's club; Peter was crucified upside down.

Yet they marched and the Church grew. When will 21st-century Christianity recapture that spirit of self-abandon to the will of God?

CONCLUSION:

—When will we tarry in the Upper Room?

—When will we wait on the promise of the Holy Spirit?

—When will we be "filled with the Holy Spirit"?

For then we will possess the *power*, *purity*, and the *desire to tell others about Jesus*.

And we, too, will join that marching throng. Marching

from the portals of Pentecost and shouting, "*Emmanuel! God with us!*"

And we will conquer our world for Jesus.

Song: "A Glorious Church"

Variety Ideas for Sermon ?

Films. There are many wonderful Christian films that can be viewed by a total congregation. Many of these films are evangelistic in nature. The Billy Graham organization has many of these available for rental.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S EFFECT ON OUR LIFESTYLE

Acts 2:14-16

INTRODUCTION

- A. The Holy Spirit is God dwelling in believers to actually carry on the work of sanctification and holiness in their lives.
- B. On the Day of Pentecost, when the multitude saw the Early Church filled with the Spirit, they asked, "What does this mean?" (v. 12).
Peter replied, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16, *KJV*).
After his sermon the listeners asked, "What shall we do?" (v. 37).
- C. From the very beginning, there has been an awareness that being filled with the Holy Spirit will have an impact on our *behavior*. That's what I want to talk about today.
If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will know the meaning of the word *conviction*.

I. CONVICTION

- A. We will sense a profound conviction of sin. We will become familiar with the idea of confession and *forsaking* of sin.
 1. Sin is too often simply dismissed in our society as immaturity, arrested development, or biological growing pains.
 2. Parents no longer think their unsaved children are lost. But that word still designates the kind of people Jesus came to seek and to save. Your child may be a good boy or girl, but so was the rich young ruler mentioned by Jesus in the New Testament.
 3. Vance Havner said, "Old-fashioned sinners are harder to find these days than whooping cranes."
 4. Prodigals are not returning home confessing, "I have sinned." They are being rehabilitated.

5. We can't expect God to put away our sins by forgiving them if we are not willing to put them away by forsaking them.

II. CONVERSATION

- A. First Pet. 1:15-16 says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in *all manner of conversation*; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (*KJV*, emphasis added).
- B. Let's talk about our conversation. Are you comfortable to let God in on all that you say? He hears, you know. I'm talking about the vulgarities, the profanities, the gossip.

III. CONDUCT

- A. Phil. 1:27 says, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."
Dr. Marlin Howe made an interesting statement: "Whenever stress hits the family system, pathology will always take precedent over theology."
What is pathology? It's the nature or characteristics of (a disease) a person.

IV. COUNTENANCE

- A. Gal. 5:25-26 says, "Let us . . . walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (*KJV*).
 1. This isn't a suggestion, it's a command. If I have the Holy Spirit living in me, I am to walk in the Spirit and to allow God to use me in the lives of others for His glory.
 2. The opposite of walking in the Spirit is to "be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."
- B. The opposite of walking in the Spirit, then, is the lack of humility.
 1. We are indwelt by the Spirit. Terrific. Then "let us also walk in the Spirit."
 2. What will this mean? How will it be displayed?
 3. The great universal sight will be the love, the joy, and the peace. And it will be a *contrast* to envying one another, desiring vain glory, wanting those highest rooms, seeking the leadership, wanting power, using our own flesh to our own praise.

CONCLUSION: This is what it means to know some-

thing, even in a small way, of walking in the Spirit.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 8

Special services, recognitions, awards. Let your whole congregation participate in honoring adults, teens, children, and groups by organizing formal recognition and awards services. Design a service (music, praise, sermonette) around the event. Follow this special milestone by honoring the recipients with a time of fellowship.

DON'T PUT OUT THE FIRE

1 Thess. 5:12-28

INTRODUCTION. My father and my uncle grew up in the panhandle of Oklahoma in a small town called Hooker. That's bad enough, but when you combine that with the name of the school mascot, it's really weird. Whereas I attended West High School in Wichita and we were known as the Pioneers, in Hooker they were known as the Horny Toads. That's the truth.

Back in the late '30s, the Hooker football team was playing the neighboring town of Optima. The score was 66 to 0. With three minutes left in the game some of the Hooker fans were so disgusted that they started to leave. Climbing out of the stands, they made their way to the field where their old cars were parked. As one of them started his car, the old Model A backfired. When it did, the Optima team thought the final gun had sounded, and they ran off the field. Well, Dad's team decided this was their chance. *Three plays later they scored—on a field goal—that was partially blocked!*

Brother, when you see boys with that much optimism, I say, "*Don't put out the fire.*"

There are five exhortations (or directions) given in verses 19-22. They are given as a means of safeguarding the manifestations of the Spirit in power and purity and liberty. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit and *our awareness*, the church becomes dreary and ineffective.

I. WE GRIEVE AND QUENCH THE SPIRIT WHEN WE IGNORE HIS PRESENCE WITHIN OUR HEARTS.

A. First Cor. 3:16 says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"

1. The Holy Spirit is hindered from doing His mightiest work when we ignore His presence.
2. To be unaware of what He is trying to do automatically makes cooperation with Him impossible.

II. AN ATTITUDE OF DISOBEDIENCE TO HIS LEADERSHIP IS AN ACT OF QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

A. Acts 5:32 says, "We are witnesses of these things,

and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those *who obey him*" (emphasis added).

B. The Holy Spirit must have our cooperation if He is to accomplish the work for which He entered the world and the Church.

III. LIVING FOR THE FLESHLY NATURE GRIEVES AND QUENCHES THE SPIRIT.

A. Gal. 5:16-17 says, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature."

1. The Holy Spirit enters the heart of every believer to lift that person *above* an earthly or fleshly level.

2. Christ forgives you; the Holy Spirit lifts you.

CONCLUSION: DON'T PUT OUT THE FIRE.

Don't rain on someone else's spiritual parade, and *don't allow the fire to burn low in your own life.*

Variety Ideas for Sermon 9

Missions night. All congregations need to be reminded of the importance and responsibility they have toward missions. Invite a missionary to speak to your congregation. Perhaps the evening can be preceded or followed by an ethnic meal.

YIELDING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 Thess. 5:19

INTRODUCTION. Over my E-mail this week I received a listing of "letters to God."

Let me share just a few.

Dear God, in school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation?

Dear God, are You invisible, or is that just a trick?

Dear God, is it true my father won't get into heaven if he uses his bowling words?

Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't You just keep the ones You have now?

Dear God, who draws the lines around the countries?

Like children, we, too, have questions of God and about God.

The key word that will open the door to understand God's very best for us is the word "yield." The dictionary states that yield means "to give up, to surrender, to give place to." What, then, is God's very best for us? It is simply the discovery of the divine plan and purpose God has outlined for our lives, beginning in the here and now and continuing throughout eternity. We do not arrive at this magnificent discovery as a result of the efforts of human ingenuity. Rather, God unfolds His will and purpose for our lives *as we yield ourselves to His Holy Spirit within us.*

I. GOD'S PROPOSITION

A. Listen carefully to the proposition God makes to us through the words of the apostle Paul: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:1-2).

B. Paul indicates that there are two areas that should be affected by this yielding.

1. He calls for a dedication of the whole body as a living sacrifice to God. This is a dedication,

not a consecration. Man dedicates; God consecrates.

2. Paul also tells us how this dedication of our bodies is maintained: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This happens as the Holy Spirit moves in, and Christ is able to "think through us."

II. GOD'S PATTERN

A. Jesus' human body was the vehicle by which He carried out His Father's will while He was on earth.

1. Likewise, the believer should think of his or her body as the vehicle God has provided through which he or she carries out the will and the wishes of the Heavenly Father.
2. Certainly we are not perfect like Jesus was, nor will we be completely. The issue is being willing to let God do through us what we could never do ourselves, by yielding to His Spirit within us.

B. Because Jesus was dedicated to His Father's will, three things happened in His life.

1. He was willing to go where His Father chose.
2. He was willing to be whatever His Father chose for Him to be.
3. He was willing to do whatever His Father chose for Him to do. Obedience unto death.

III. GOD'S PURPOSE

A. There is a purpose behind it all.

1. Why are we to yield to the Holy Spirit within us?
2. It is to understand every day that we live the will of God for our lives.

B. How are we to yield to the Holy Spirit?

1. God will lead us, by His Spirit, if we are willing to do what He chooses for us to do. Someone has said, "God will speak loud enough for a willing soul to hear."
2. God's leading will always be in accordance with the Scriptures. It is never true with God that "the end justifies the means." There is no such thing as "sacrificing a minor principle" in order to accomplish an ultimate goal.
3. This divine leadership is provided by *the Holy*

Spirit who indwells us. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, then increasingly we come to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). We start to think as God thinks.

C. Sacrifice simply means "doing another's will."

CONCLUSION: There may be some pain along the way, to be sure; but the prevailing atmosphere will be that of joy, and the blessing of God in one's life will be that of peace.

Isaiah said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (26:3, KJV).

Variety Ideas for Sermon 10

New member presentation and fellowship. Honor new members with a service in which they are commemorated. Have them and their families sit in a place of honor. Have another member give a short biography. Present them with a corsage or other small gift. Invite the congregation to join the new members in a fellowship following the service.

A REPUTATION UNDER INSPECTION

Rev. 3:1-6

INTRODUCTION. Sardis was a major city of commerce. It was on a major Roman road, and the people had constructed huge buildings for worship, entertainment, and education. The city was built upon a bluff, and there was only one way into it—the front door. Since it was built upon a bluff and the cliffs were sheer and steep, the presumption was that no one could get through the back door.

In 549 B.C. Cyrus deployed a climber to ascend the perpendicular cliffs of the mountain fortress. The climber entered the city, opened the city gate, and the army led by Cyrus captured the acropolis. Three centuries later the city was captured the same way.

Anytime a city claims to be safe and secure, it is possible it could lose its alertness, thus inviting disaster. Anytime a country boasts to be the most powerful, that power will be challenged. Anytime a Christian loses the spirit of alert awareness, that Christian courts disaster.

To His church, Jesus is saying, “I know your deeds. I know your reputation, your image, the good things people say about you; but you are *dead!*”

I. WAKE UP—BE WATCHFUL (Rev. 3:2)

- A. This is where the history of the city comes into play: If only they had been watchful in 549 B.C., Cyrus would not have defeated them.
- B. If only they had been watchful in 216 B.C., the armies of Antiochus the Great would not have defeated them.

II. TITLE

I don’t know what gets your attention the most, but the call of God is to be watchful! “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.”

III. THE DANGER OF PROCRASTINATION = GREAT BEGINNINGS—NEVER FINISHING

Sardis had a temple of Artemis. Year after year it never was completed. That attitude spilled over into the Christian world, and Christ sees what they’ve been doing.

Verse 1: “I know your deeds.”

Verse 2: “They are complete.”

Verse 3: “If they do not repent, Christ will come as a thief.”

CONCLUSION: Close with Matt. 24:42-44.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 11

Block party. Invite the neighborhood or community to a block party sponsored by your church. Feature singing groups, food booths, information booths, face painting, antique cars, balloons, community helpers, clowns, petting zoos, fun, and games for all ages—all *free*. To create a prospect list, have your “guests” register for periodical drawings (Bibles, Christian books and tapes, etc.).

SUNDAY NIGHT—THE SERVICE WE CAN'T DO WITHOUT

INTRODUCTION. We just can't do without the Sunday night service. At a time when there is broad discussion about the usefulness of that service, I am discovering that, for us, it is not only productive but essential.

I. IF IT'S NOT ON PURPOSE, IT'S AN ACCIDENT

- A. The starting place for a discussion of the Sunday night service is not Sunday night. Each church and pastor should develop an intentional strategy and purpose for the full schedule of the public services of the church. What we do on Sunday night is closely connected to what we do on Sunday morning. The different pieces of the "puzzle" of public worship should fit into a purposeful whole.
- B. Who are we trying to reach in each service? What are we attempting to accomplish? How does this fit into our broader mission as a church? How do we need to complement this service if we are going to fulfill the full purpose of our ministry? These are the type of questions each church needs to ask. The answers will vary, depending on the mission and congregational character of each church. But the questions should be posed for every worshiping community.

II. A DISCIPLESHIP SERVICE FOR DISCIPLES

- A. Our Sunday evening service functions as a complementary balance to our Sunday morning service. In our worship strategy, the Sunday morning service is intentionally "seeker-inclusive." That is, although the service is addressed to believers, it is designed in such a way that it includes outsiders. We try to create services where the setting, music, language, and message will be accessible, relevant, and meaningful to those who do not bring any prior Christian commitment or understanding. We hope that the person who walks through our doors with no knowledge of the Bible, no understanding of Christian faith, and only a tenta-

tive interest will find the content and character of our service to be understandable and meaningfully relevant to the issues of their life. We believe that the biblical Christian faith contains direction for life, and we want to do our best to help the outsider receive that transforming truth.

- B. When we focus our Sunday morning service in this way, we realize that there is a balance that needs to be brought to our corporate worship. The commitment to being inclusive of the outsider on Sunday morning means that there are issues we cannot easily address and language we cannot use. In order to bring balance to our worship, we have intentionally designed our Sunday evening service to be our discipleship service. In this service, we focus our attention on the maturing disciple. Our content, language, and even forms are shaped by this participating audience and the conviction that God wants to bring us not only into a saving relationship with Him but into maturity in Christ. This service is for maturing disciples.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 12

Seasonal canata and musicals. Enjoy your church choir for more than just one presentation in the morning worship service. Give them the opportunity to present a special evening of music at Christmas, Easter, or Fourth of July. There are musicals available for choirs of every size and ability.

SUNDAY NIGHT—THE SERVICE

WE CAN'T DO WITHOUT (CONTINUED)

INTRODUCTION

I. I'M PRESSING ON THE UPWARD WAY

Focusing a service on maturing disciples means that I am more free to speak in their language to their issues and to engage them in worship in ways that are effective and meaningful for them. This means that I can (a) address issues that are specific to them, (b) use tools and language that are meaningful to them, and (c) use forms of worship that are especially appropriate for them. Let me briefly draw a picture of how these may be applied.

A. Issues—Some issues assume a level of maturity and understanding to be addressed effectively. For instance, developed treatment of theological themes and doctrinal affirmations are needed for maturing disciples but may require significant background knowledge. Issues of churchmanship can be addressed at a more mature level. Spiritual disciplines can be taught at a level that assumes some maturity. The Bible can be studied at a deeper level, satisfying maturing disciples' desire for "meatier" study.

B. Tools and Language—This setting offers an opportunity to use a range of hymns that are difficult to use in an outsider-sensitive service. Hymns sometimes use traditional language that is meaningful to disciples but confusing to outsiders. "There Is a Fountain," for instance, speaks profoundly to those raised in the church but could be disturbing to someone unfamiliar with our language. (A fountain filled with blood?) "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee" expresses the heart longing of a mature believer but may not be meaningful to a visitor who has only a tentative interest in discovering what Christianity is all about. These hymns and others like them are important to us and express dimensions of our walk with Christ that need to be celebrated. Our discipleship service allows us the opportunity to do that.

C. Forms of Worship—Two examples of worship forms that can be effectively incorporated in a Sunday evening discipleship service are the Lord's Supper and extended times of prayer. Of course, the Lord's Supper can certainly be used in a Sunday morning service. This is especially true because of Wesley's use of the Supper as a "converting ordinance." Still, the Lord's Supper is primarily a sacrament for disciples. We try to celebrate the Lord's Supper each month. By incorporating the Lord's Supper into the discipleship service, we can treat it with a depth that is difficult on Sunday morning. It can be an effective part of the maturing lifestyle of the believer. Extended prayer is another element of worship that is helpful, even necessary, for maturing disciples but difficult for a marginal or outsider audience.

II. A SERVICE WE CAN'T DO WITHOUT

Our discipleship service fills an important role in the worship life of our church. We literally can't do without it. We need to do the things that our discipleship service allows us to do. We also need to do the things that our Sunday morning, seeker-inclusive service helps us to do. The Sunday evening service allows us to move beyond the problem of either-or to the celebration of both-and. It has not been uncommon for a mature believer to tell me that the discipleship service is their favorite service. It is supposed to be. It is also not uncommon for a mature believer to say that having a discipleship service makes it easier to accept a Sunday morning service that is "outsider-sensitive." It is also rewarding to watch the new or nominal believer make the journey to maturity, assisted by the discipleship service. All of these come from a Sunday evening service for maturing disciples. We don't know what we would do without it.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 13

Testimonial services. Christians need the opportunity to share what God is doing in their lives with other Christians. After a time of musical praise and prayer, open the service to those who would like to give an offering of praise to God through testimony.



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