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# PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

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

Falsely Accused



Pastoral  
Visitation with  
Stroke Patients



A Scientist Takes  
Steps Along His  
Damascus Road

*"The true light that gives light to every man  
was coming into the world."  
John 1:9*

# PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

DECEMBER / JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1998-99

VOLUME 74 • NUMBER 2

## 3 A Scientist Takes Steps Along His Damascus Road

A look at what the Bible has to say about the gift of tongues

K a r l G i b e r s o n

## 28 Falsely Accused

A sermon on the parable in Matt. 22:1-14

J o h n B a i l e y

## 42 Pastoral Visitation with Stroke Patients

Common myths that impact the behavior of ministerial families

G e o r g e R . R o b i e

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## EDITORIAL

- BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR .....2  
*Randal E. Denny*

## FEATURE

- A SCIENTIST TAKES STEPS ALONG HIS DAMASCUS ROAD .....3  
*Karl Giberson*
- MEMORIES, MOVEMENTS, AND MEASUREMENTS OF GRACE .....6  
*Bud Reedy*
- SMALL-TALK YOUR WAY TO A SUCCESSFUL CAREER .....10  
*Patricia L. Fry*

## GREAT HOLINESS CLASSICS

- THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH'S MASTER .....13  
*Paul S. Rees*

## EVANGELISM

- CANDLES AND ROSES .....17  
*Ernest McNaught*

## CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS

- IMPLICATIONS OF THE INCARNATION .....18  
*David Hoffman*
- CHRISTMAS BLESSES SMALL .....21  
*J. Grant Swank Jr*

## CHURCH MUSIC

- HYMN STORY OF THE MONTH—PART THREE .....22  
*Keith Schwanz*

## PREACHING

- ATTITUDE CHECK.....23  
*Jim L. Wilson*

## PASTOR'S PERSONAL GROWTH

- CHILDREN WITH A GLASS LIFE: A REVIEW OF THE NEEDS  
 OF A PASTOR'S CHILD .....24  
*Kara Murphy*
- WHAT IS YOUR LIFE EXPECTANCY? .....26  
*Wayne M. Warner*
- ONE OF MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORS.....27  
*Arthur G. White*

## CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

- FALSELY ACCUSED .....28  
*John Bailey*
- PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN THINKING: THE IMPORTANCE OF  
 MINISTRY COVENANTS .....30  
*Dean G. Blevins*

## THEOLOGY

- LOOK-ALIKE DOESN'T EQUAL SPEAK ALIKE.....34  
*John Conlon*

## SOCIAL CONCERNS

- IS SOCIAL DRINKING ACCEPTABLE FOR THE CHURCH MEMBER?  
 PART 2 .....36  
*William K. Westafer*

## PASTORAL CARE

- HOW SMALL CHURCHES CAN MINISTER TO SINGLES .....40  
*Mary Legner*
- PASTORAL VISITATION WITH STROKE PATIENTS .....42  
*George R. Robie*

## STEWARDSHIP

- SMART INVESTING: DON'T TRY TO TIME THE MARKET—  
 THE ODDS ARE AGAINST YOU .....45  
*Board of Pensions and Benefits USA, Church of the Nazarene*

## PASTOR, BE ENCOURAGED

- ENJOY YOUR SUCCESSES! .....46  
*C. Neil Strait*

## PICTURE WINDOWS FOR PREACHING

- PICTURE WINDOWS FOR PREACHING .....47  
*Compiled by Derl G. Keefer*

## CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

- OF CHURCH MOBS AND CABBAGES AND KINGS.....48  
*William W. Hull*
- PRAYER POWER: HOW TO GET IT .....50  
*J. Grant Swank Jr.*

## TODAY'S BOOKS FOR TODAY'S PREACHERS

- TODAY'S BOOKS FOR TODAY'S PREACHERS .....51

## ARK ROCKER

- TOP TEN HAZARDS OF LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY .....53  
*Alice Jones*

## WORSHIP AND PREACHING HELPS

- WORSHIP AND PREACHING HELPS .....54  
*Virgil Mills*

## HIGHPOINT

- HIGHPOINT .....81  
*Derl G. Keefer*

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# Beautiful Savior

Looking up at a crucifix outside a church in Paris, Thomas Carlyle shook his head and said, "It's very well, old Fellow, but You've had Your day."

Has Jesus come and gone forever? Is Jesus simply another vanquished hero who died a tragic death? The Christmas season gives every preacher a fresh opportunity to give a convincing examination of our Savior. The Bible says, "Consider him" (Heb. 12:3). Consider Jesus, our beautiful Savior.

## Jesus is our Creator

**Christ.** The Bible says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Behind the creation stands the Creator: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . ; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16).

The Bible starts out, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). God spoke, and His will was carried out: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:3).

Our Lord created you. You are not here by chance. He knows you. He knows your name: "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3).

**Jesus is our compassionate Christ.** The Bible says, "He went around doing good" (Acts 10:38). Jesus' compassion stands

out: Jesus healed many people. He looked at the hungry and had compassion, so He fed them. He came upon blind men and lepers and, having compassion, He healed them.

We live in a world filled with problems and diseases. Jesus' compassion puts Him in the middle of human need.

## Jesus is our crucified

**Christ.** What is the greatest evidence of Jesus' love and compassion? The Cross! The Cross defines Jesus' mission. He came to die for our benefit. Yes, Jesus would have died for you if you had been the only person.

A society organized to study comparative world religions. On its letterhead are printed pictures of the founders of world religions. These pictures portray the leaders in characteristic poses. Some are praying, some are sitting with hands folded, some are speaking. Only One is hanging on a cross—Jesus!

## Jesus is our conquering

**Christ.** People in Jerusalem shouted, "He is dead!" The Bible says, "He was buried" (1 Cor. 15:4). On the third day devoted followers walked to the tomb, but an angel posted there announced, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said" (Matt. 28:6).

Jesus proclaims: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18). Jesus assured us: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he

dies" (John 11:25). The New Testament mentions Jesus' resurrection 108 times.

If Jesus is not raised from the dead, this human race has no hope: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor. 15:17-19). Paul affirms, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (v. 20). Jesus' victory is our victory too.

**Jesus is our contemporary Christ.** Jesus died for you so He can live in you. He not only forgives past sins but also will dwell himself in your heart as a sacred guest. Jesus desires fellowship today. He has done His works of grace in order to be your Partner in life here and now.

Jesus strengthens every good impulse, every noble ambition, and gives His strong arm to lean upon. Day by day you may draw upon the wisdom and guidance of our contemporary Christ. He promises, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20).

## Jesus is our coming

**Christ.** Jesus promised, "I will come back" (John 14:3). When He came the first time, angels announced His arrival to shepherds. He is coming again. That's the next great event in God's plan of redemption. He will keep His promise to return.

The mosque of St. Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, was originally a Christian church. Muslims painted over the Christian symbols and inscriptions. Standing under the great dome, E. Stanley Jones noticed, bleaching through the covering paint, a picture of the ascension of Jesus, His arms outstretched in blessing. Dr. Jones exclaimed: "Jesus is coming back. You cannot blot Him out forever!"

Christmas provides a special season to talk about Jesus, but let's keep doing so around the calendar. Our world needs Him. PA

BY RANDAL E.

DENNY

Editor

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON



# A Scientist Takes Steps Along His Damascus Road

On May 3, 1995, in historic Westminster Abbey an obscure Australian physicist named Paul Davies was inducted into a select group that includes Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Chuck Colson, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, and 20 or so other leading religious figures from around the world. That group comprises those individuals selected each year to receive the prestigious and lucrative Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

The Templeton prize is intended to be a Nobel prize in the field of religion. Financed by one of the few Christian billionaires, mutual fund guru John Templeton, the prize is the largest in the world, currently just over \$1 million (U.S.). Its value is set each year to be just above that of the Nobel prize, reflecting John Templeton's conviction that we should celebrate those who advance religious understanding even more than we celebrate those who advance our understanding in physics, chemistry, economics, literature, and so on.

Unfortunately, when Alfred Nobel set up the now famous prizes that bear his name, he did not include religion in the mix, for he did not have an adequate appreciation for the significant role that religion plays in our lives. Nor did he create a prize for the field of mathematics, since he did not appreciate that his wife was having an affair with a mathematician!

BY KARL GIBERSON  
Professor of physics,  
Eastern Nazarene  
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QUINCY,  
MASSACHUSETTS



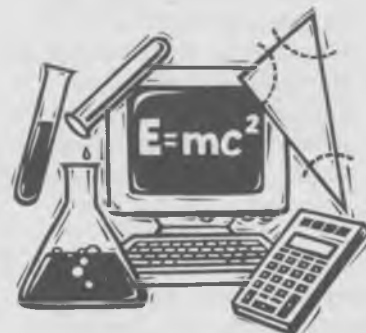
The Templeton prize is awarded each year to the individual who has contributed the most to the progress of religion and is intended to "encourage the concept that resources and manpower are needed for progress in spiritual knowledge." "Progress in religion" is understood in a variety of ways by the Templeton Selection Committee. It can be progress in evangelization, as in the case of Billy Graham and Bill Bright, who have brought the gospel message to literally millions of people; it can be progress in our theological understanding, as in the case of Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance, who has written a number of significant books exploring themes from the Trinity to the relationship of science and religion; or Mother Teresa, who has shown a highly visible Christlike compassion to people in need and reminded the world that Christ calls to ministry. The Templeton award has also gone to people like Dr. Inamullah Khan, secretary-general of the World Muslim Congress. Even though John Templeton has personally and openly embraced the Christian faith, he believes that there is value in all religions.

So how did an Australian mathematical physicist who specializes in an esoteric field like "quantum gravity" contribute to "progress in religion? Certainly not through his discovery of 'acceleration radiation,' his primary professional claim to fame!" No, Paul Davies won the 1995 Tem-

pleton prize for a series of significant books in which he has argued with great and almost unparalleled eloquence that the universe is designed. And that this design points to a Designer.

## The Anthropic Principle

The idea that the universe is *designed* is as old as humankind's speculation about the universe. We find it in the creation accounts in Genesis and Job; it is sprinkled through the Psalms and elsewhere in Scripture; and it has long been a central feature of the Christian tradition, perhaps reaching its zenith in the "natural theology" of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. During the scientific revolution thinkers like Kepler, Descartes, and Newton argued that the newly discovered mathematical laws of nature pointed toward a Designer. These arguments, which used the intricate design in nature as evidence for an intelligent Creator, continued for about two centuries until religion fell out of fashion among scientists. This occurred, in part, because many of them assumed







Mind. And, of course, some are prepared to identify that Mind with God. And, of course, some are vehemently opposed to this marriage of science and theology, preferring to stick with Bertrand Russell's gloomy scenario.

Paul Davies's first exposition of the design argument known as the Anthropic Principle was *The Accidental Universe*, published in 1982. This was followed by an exploration of the theological implications of science titled *God and the New Physics*, published in 1983. This book displayed a curious ambivalence to religion, with many antireligious comments interspersed with the discussion of ideas from science that were supportive of belief in God. Nevertheless, it did communicate to the world that Davies had an interest in theology—a revelation that apparently involved him in a number of interesting conversations. He reports that he has since been “astonished to discover how many of my close scientific colleagues practice a conventional religion”; and how some “make strenuous and sincere efforts to bring their science and their religion into harmony.”<sup>3</sup> Davies was pleasantly surprised to discover, not only that there was very little antireligious sentiment among his colleagues, but also that many of them were actually practicing Christians! This offers a rather different picture of the scientific community than that of the popular science versus religion image so often portrayed in the media.

These personal experiences and his further study of the universe led Davies in 1992 to publish *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*. In this far more serious work he argues unapologetically that belief in a rational Creator is no longer the fantasy described by Bertrand Russell in the quote above.

Through my scientific work I have come to believe that the

physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. . . . Furthermore, I have come to the point of view that mind—i.e., conscious awareness of the world—is not a meaningless and incidental quirk of nature, but an absolutely fundamental facet of reality. . . . I believe that we human beings are built into the scheme of things in a very basic way.<sup>4</sup>

Davies makes it clear that he is not (yet?) a Christian, and his religious orientation can perhaps be best described as deism. Nevertheless, he is now quite comfortable with the traditional Christian belief in a rational Creator. In fact, as he stood in Westminster Abbey receiving the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, he invited “those theologians who share this vision to join me and my scientific colleagues to take the message to the people.”<sup>5</sup>

# Full Circle

Modern science began in the 17th century with men like Galileo, Newton, and Kepler—all of whom believed that science was only possible because the world was the product of a rational Creator, and human beings had been created in the image of that Creator. This belief—the primitive faith of the original scientists—has now been rediscovered by contemporary scientists like Paul Davies. This bodes well for the future of both science and religion and is an occasion for celebration and an optimism about what is yet to come. **PM**

1. John Brockman, “Paul Davies: The Synthetic Path,” in *The Third Culture* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1995), 305.

2. Louise B. Young, *The Unfinished Universe: A Radical New View That the Universe Is Perfecting Itself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 183-84.

3. Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 15.

4. *Ibid.*, 16.

5. Paul Davies, “Physics and the Mind of God: The Templeton Prize Address,” *First Things*, August/September, 1995, 31-35.

## Cosmologists ask the biggest questions in science.





# Memories, Movements, and Measurements of Grace

Nearly every Sunday morning at the Stillmeadow Church of the Nazarene, York, Pennsylvania, a group of lay leaders gather in the sanctuary one hour before the first worship service begins to pray with me, the church's senior pastor. This unique prayer experience reflects our Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. This prayer time has meant much to me, to my prayer partners, and to the congregation.

## Memories

I remember quite well my father's participation in the preservice prayer meeting at the Hollywood, Maryland, Church of the Nazarene, the church I attended from my infancy through my adolescence. At 7 A.M. the pastor of this small rural Wesleyan-Holiness church would enter the sanctuary and pray at the altar for a Spirit-charged, Spirit-led worship service, the salvation of souls, and the entire sanctification of believers. These prayer meetings were promoted in the church bulletin as a regular service, though few attended. However, the handful who did attend, including my father and our pastor, Joseph Hoopengardner, were quite faithful. As I reached the age of 12, my father encouraged me to attend, which I did upon occasion. My heart is filled with wonderful memories of these rich prayer times. Those prayer warriors offered prayers for the sick. They prayed for people in spiritual need. I remember

most the fervent prayers offered up for the pastor: "We love our pastor." "Thank You for sending this man to Hollywood to be our pastor." "O Lord, anoint our pastor with power from on high today." "Give him the words to say, dear Lord." "Lord, move in the hearts and lives of our people." These prayers not only encouraged our pastor's heart but also united the early morning prayer group around the pastor, contributing to the unity of the church. I remember feeling quite close to Pastor Hoopengardner and the prayer partners after these times of prayer. I sensed, in some small measure, that my presence and prayers made a difference. Clearly I remember my pastor taking my hand, looking me in the eyes, and saying, "Buddy, thank you for standing with me in prayer today."

Pastor Hoopengardner was an outstanding pulpiteer. He preached with confidence and compassion. In the 27 years he served as pastor of Hollywood, Maryland, Church of the Nazarene, it grew significantly, both numerically and spiritually. I have always connected these prayer times with his ministerial effectiveness. These memories contributed greatly to my desire for similar prayer experiences at York Stillmeadow Church. It reflects my desire to be the best preacher I can possibly be. Phineas Bresee, the founder of the Church of the Nazarene, editorialized nearly 100 years ago a similar sentiment:

Any great continuous religious movement depends quite largely upon its preachers. Ordinary preachers cannot do this work. They must be [people] burning with holy fire, [people] who have come to their Pentecost, who live under the anointing glory of the Holy Ghost, whose vision is so clear—looking through clear hearts—that God in Christ redeeming the world, means salvation from all sin, and the revelation of Christ in the Soul . . . [people] who when they preach, the people realize that [he or she] is leading [people] to the bosom of God, into the abundance of [God's] life and the fullness of [God's] love. Friends and foes will always recognize, no matter what [his or her] theme, that [he or she] is preaching holiness.

There is no place in the Church of the Nazarene for ordinary preaching.<sup>1</sup>

It is my desire to be an extraordinary preacher. The preservice prayer time reflects that desire in both me and my prayer partners.

## Movements

The preservice prayer time at York Stillmeadow Church has evolved to include distinct, observable movements. In this regard, preservice prayer is not unlike a song. Most musical compositions contain distinct structural units known as "movements." Movements have their

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YORK, PENNSYLVANIA



own tempo, cadence, rhythm, volume, key, and theme. Each movement can, at any moment, elicit from both listener and participant a wide array of responses: sorrow, joy, anger, peace, etc. Each movement can stand on its own too. However, that is not the composer's intention. The composer hopes these movements, considered together, will form an extended meaningful musical experience.

So, too, the preservice prayer time at York Stillmeadow Church has four distinct, observable movements. Each has its own tempo, rhythm, volume, and theme. Each movement could stand on its own as a separate and meaningful prayer experience. Yet, taken together, these four movements form a unique prayer concert that has touched participants at different levels and in different ways. Each movement occurs at a different place, speaks to a different grace, and reveals a unique trace of God's activity in the church.

#### The First Movement

The first movement begins as a quiet prompting of God's gracious Spirit. God places within the heart of a few people the desire to come to the church an hour before the congregation arrives and to pray. I have often wondered why this handful of people come out of the comfort of their homes in all kinds of weather at significant inconvenience to pray with me an hour before the first worship service. I have begun to understand this drawing to prayer as a particular expression of God's grace in their hearts. Brennan Manning observes:

There are varying degrees of discipleship. Shortly after my conversion, I began secretly to envy the generosity of spirit, the profound prayer, and the spiritual gifts of others in the community. It was an unforgettable experience of deliverance and liberation when, one day in prayer, my eyes fell on

There is no  
place in the  
church for  
ordinary  
preaching.

The altar is  
a part of  
our  
Holiness  
heritage.

the words of the Baptist, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (John 3:27).<sup>2</sup>

Manning concludes:

The gift of radical discipleship is pure grace to those who have no claim to it, for the deepest desires of our heart are not in our control. Were this not so, we simply would will those desires and be done with it. The courage to live as a prophet and lover is beyond human reach. Without the grace of God we cannot even desire God. Without the grace of God I cannot talk the talk of Christ and the kingdom lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>

This understanding of how God graces a particular people for a particular expression of discipleship is quite consistent with how one lady has prayed so often in our preservice prayer time: "Lord, You have put within our hearts a desire to enter this sanctuary and pray." This desire, this "want to," this expression of God's grace has been identified. It has a history. It has a name: "prevenient grace."

Traditionally, Wesleyans have developed the idea of prevenient grace exclusively in terms of soteriological considerations, and ultimately . . . it must focus there. But Wesley himself treated it in a broader way . . . as an ontological as well as an epistemological principle of interpretation. In this way it becomes . . . the crucial element in several doctrines, including the doctrine of revelation . . . though . . . not . . . elucidated in this way by much popular Wesleyan theology.<sup>4</sup>

Broadly understood, preventing grace prepares the will. It antecedes human responsiveness. It prepares the soul. It draws persons closer to God. It lessens the blindness to divine remedies. It strengthens the will to accept revealed truth. Thomas Oden quotes the ancient Tertullian: "Only when assisted by pre-

venient grace can persons begin to yield their hearts to cooperate with subsequent forms of grace."<sup>5</sup>

The Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus attests the classical conciliar reception of the teaching of preventing grace:

God is the author of all good dispositions of mind, and also of works, and of all zeal and all virtues by which from the beginning of faith we tend towards good; and we do not doubt that all the merits of man are preceded by His Grace, through whom it is brought to pass, that we begin both to will and to do anything good.<sup>6</sup>

The first movement in this prayer experience must be interpreted as an expression of God's preventing grace. It also has its special place: It is a movement out of the world into the sanctuary of God. The sanctuary is a place set aside for prayer, proclamation, and praise. It is a place resplendent with memories of a particular people's encounters with a holy God. We had held our preservice prayer experience at locations other than the sanctuary. It did not feel right, and the preservice prayer participants let me know it! Entering God's sanctuary in response to the prompting of God's Spirit is worship from the heart, joining "inner reality with outward expression."<sup>7</sup> Some graces have their own places of expression. These concrete, geographic locations become reminders or traces of God's divine activity among us.

#### The Second Movement

In cooperation with the Holy Spirit who calls us into prayer, my prayer partners and I enter into the sanctuary and make our way to the public altar to pray. This movement to the public altar seems quite natural for those of us in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Sometimes referred to as an "old-fashioned mourners' bench," the altar is a part of our

story, our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage. A call to the altar to pray remains a part of almost every public worship experience. It is, as Leslie Parrott suggests, "a place to encounter God."<sup>8</sup> For Wesleyan-Holiness people, the altar is a place of confession, consecration, intercession, and adoration. Prayer at the public altar is important to Wesleyan-Holiness advocates because we identify our salvation, consecration, and sanctification with the altar. Parrott observes:

Identifying the presence of God with a geographic spot strikes a deep cord in the human spirit. Places where we have watched beautiful sunsets, places where lovers have made promises to each other, places where an idea struck, fields of victory, mountains of achievement, and places of deep relaxation and peace are only a few of the geographic locations that add emotional meaning to our lives. But, nothing is more significant in our spiritual pilgrimages than the places where God has met with us.<sup>9</sup>

The public altar at our church is such a place. So we come, kneeling, praying, "offer[ing] . . . our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—[a] spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1). In Wesleyan-Holiness circles, such prayers are known as prayers of consecration. In the Old Testament, the verb "to consecrate" is "used frequently for the induction of a person into sacred office, e.g., a priest, prophet, [or] king. . . . 'Consecration' indicates the act by which a person or thing was set apart for sacred use." In the New Testament, the idea of "consecration" most often means to "dedicate" or "make new." The idea appears often in the theology and praxis of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Wesleyan-Holiness pastors frequently "call upon their parishioners to consecrate, or re-consecrate, themselves to serve God more faithfully in their daily

living." Consecration is a "pre-requisite to the experience of entire sanctification,"<sup>10</sup> whereby the Lord cleanses the heart of inbred sin and fills the heart with perfect love. Consecration is an act of discipleship, a lifelong offering ourselves to God for His purposes. For Wesleyan-Holiness advocates, consecration is a prerequisite for both the instantaneous and progressive expressions of God's sanctifying grace.

With these theological affirmations firmly imbedded in our memories, we move to the altar for prayer.

*Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.  
Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love.*

—Frances R. Havergal

This familiar hymn expresses the theme of this second movement: consecration.

We gather at the altar and offer ourselves to God for His purpose in preparation for the anointing of His Spirit upon the messenger.

#### The Third Movement

After 15 minutes of consecrated prayer, I call on my prayer partners to move from the altar to the pulpit: "Let's gather around the pulpit for a time of prayer, please." It's a dramatic moment as my prayer partners rise from their knees, climb the steps to the platform, and move to the center of the chancel where the pulpit is located.

In Wesleyan-Holiness circles, the location of the pulpit at the center of the chancel is a visible reminder that for us, preaching is the central event, the high-water mark of every worship experience. Praising and praying have their place. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper has great meaning too. They are indeed means of grace. But Wesleyan-Holiness people believe: "The proclaimed Word is the Incarnate Christ Himself. . . . The preached Christ is the historical Christ and the present Christ . . . working through His congrega-

tion as the Word."<sup>11</sup> Proclamation is central to the Wesleyan-Holiness worship experience.

Upon arrival of the prayer partners, I stand before the pulpit as if to preach, with my Bible open to the passage I will be preaching from that morning. My prayer partners move in as close as they can and lay their hands on my shoulders and back. They begin to pray, declaring Jesus to be Lord over the church and praying for His presence and influence over all of the activities of the day. Mostly, this prayer centers on the anointing, the unction of the Spirit, upon me as I preach. "Hide Pastor Bud behind the Cross, O Lord." "May Your Word become his words, dear Jesus." "May the Word go out with authority and find its mark in the hearts of Your people." "Anoint Pastor Bud from on high, O Heavenly Father."

Urgency fills their prayers. There are tears and "Amens" of agreement. This prayer movement is absolutely electric with the presence of God's Spirit.

Of anointing or unction, H. Orton Wiley writes:

*The Anointing with the Spirit* is a further aspect of [His sanctifying] grace—that which regards it as a conferring of authority and power. It refers, therefore, not to the negative aspect of cleansing, but to the positive phase of the indwelling Spirit as "empowering the believer for life and service."<sup>12</sup>

Wilber Dayton observes:

With the "unction from the Holy One" we have valid knowledge in the things of God (1 John 2:20). As the oil was poured out of old upon selected individuals, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us [as well] (Acts 2:17). As Jesus was anointed to preach the gospel (Luke 4:18), we are established, anointed, and sealed to live and speak for Him (2 Cor. 1:21-22). Anointing, or unction, is a spiritual enablement.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing is  
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in our  
spiritual  
pilgrimages  
than the  
places  
where God  
has met  
with us.

For five and one-half years, my prayer partners and I have prayed together in this way. In that time period, my preaching has been lifted to a new level. I preach with greater confidence and clarity. Many persons have come to know Jesus Christ. Believers have been entirely sanctified. The church has almost doubled in size and giving. Something supernatural is going on! I am convinced that this 20-minute, preservice prayer experience has played a significant role in spiritual victory. One layperson gives leadership to the church's prayer ministries. Another layperson coordinates the preservice prayer time. I preach the Word. However, the Lord Jesus by His Spirit anoints and empowers the people through God's sanctifying grace to perform works of service. Praise be to God! To God be the glory!

#### The Fourth Movement

It is now 20 minutes past the hour. In 40 minutes, the first session of worship and Christian education begins. I lead in worship; three prayer partners teach adult Sunday School classes; four prayer partners will greet people as they arrive; and another one will usher. We all participate in the worshiping life of our church, in one way or another. Soon we will scatter to perform the ministries God has called us to do. Now that we have prayed together, we feel better prepared for these tasks.

But before we depart from this place of prayer, before we move down the steps and out of the sanctuary into the four corners of the church, we grace one another. There are handshakes, hugs, words of appreciation, and smiles. These expressions of love and appreciation serve as a means of grace. We Wesleyan-Holiness people do not believe that there is "one exclusive set of means through which Divine Grace is provided"<sup>14</sup> but that God uses what John Wesley called or-

dinary channels for conveying grace.

Wesley was convinced of the effective communication of God's grace through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist . . . liturgy and formal prayers. . . . Yet, like the Reformers (and Eastern Christianity), he refused to confine grace to such official channels. Indeed, one of the central features of the Methodist revival was Wesley's expectation that his people would avail themselves of both traditional means of grace present in Anglican worship and such distinctive means as class meetings, love feasts, and covenant renewal services.<sup>15</sup>

The handshakes, hugs, smiles, and expressions of love that we share with one another are quite ordinary. Yet, through them, God extends His extraordinary grace to us, "an invisible reality finds a visible embodiment, and what is transcendent comes to us in matter."<sup>16</sup> What a sacred mystery and marvelous blessing!

#### Measurements

To measure something is the attempt to determine its dimension, its capacity. The amount of something is ascertained by measuring. Much to our frustration sometimes, a great deal of what we do in parish ministry defies measurement. Can the grace of God be measured? Can grace be assigned dimension? No, God's grace has no measure. One can only trace movements of grace, recall one's memories of grace, and search for "the truth embodied in grace-revealing events."<sup>17</sup> The preservice prayer time at our church has evolved in response to God's gracious activity among us. It has become a means of God's prevenient, sanctifying, and empowering grace. No, the effect these prayer experiences have had on our church cannot be measured. Even so, I know I preach with greater confidence because of it. I know a special bond exists between me

and my preservice prayer partners. I know our prayers have contributed to our church's growth. And I am "confident of this, that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Then we will comprehend fully the memories, the movements, and measurements of His grace. **PM**

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God's  
grace has  
no  
measure.

# Small-talk Your Way to a Successful Career

Small talk is the most commonly used form of human communication available to us. Most people, however, consider this sort of casual conversation a waste of time. They think of small talk as shallow, mechanical, meaningless chatter.

What these people don't know is that effective managers, dynamite marketing personnel, and other accomplished communicators often begin their more successful and productive conversations with small talk.

A period of small talk before a business meeting helps you:

- Build confidence.
- Learn something about the other person.
- Establish a sense of unity.
- Set the mood for a discussion.
- Gain support for your ideas.
- Create a bridge to more meaningful dialogue.

## How Small Talk Benefits You

Small talk is a natural prelude to any serious discussion. It provides you and everyone else involved the opportunity to size up and evaluate the situation.

Even animals in the wild take this "look before you leap" approach before getting down to business. When an animal comes upon an unfamiliar situation, territory, or other animal, for example, it moves toward and around it very slowly—carefully checking things out before becoming involved.

Small talk is the human's way of sensing a situation before

jumping in. But its effectiveness is not just in the words you use. Small talk is most effective when your other senses are also on alert.

Through small talk, you can:

- **Put people** at ease while creating a smooth transition from the initial greeting to the business at hand. Diving into a business discussion without a preamble makes people uncomfortable and results in a more strained interaction.
- **Persuade people** to be more receptive to your ideas.
- **Encourage others** to reveal aspects of themselves.
- **Initiate professional opportunities** in situations even

outside the structure of the [church] setting.

## Some Tips for Success

To be successful at small talk, however, you must have something to say.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Be informed.** Read newspapers and watch television news. The daily news is an excellent conversation starter, and by staying informed, you'll always have something of value to say.
- **Be prepared** with topics useful to your cause, interest, or business. Maybe you're looking for a particular antique, shopping for a new car, or . . . need direction. Small talk is a natural networking opportunity.
- **Practice speaking** on a variety of random topics. Either ask someone to throw topics out while you speak on each subject for three minutes, or drill yourself on topics of your choice.
- **Develop a list of topics** you're comfortable talking about.
- **Ask questions.** If someone is speaking on a subject that

Accom-  
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tions with  
small talk.

BY PATRICIA L. FRY  
Freelance writer  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA





you know little about, ask and learn.

- **Find out about the other person.** Those who are most admired for their small-talk skills are those who encourage others to talk about themselves.

- **Locate common ground.** Does this person share an interest in boating, country music, woodworking, bicycling, or hiking, for example? Is she a grandmother? Is he from your home state? Become clever at discovering little commonalities with people you meet.

- **Listen so it shows.** Listening is at least as important in small talk as speaking. Demonstrate a sincere interest in what the other person has to say. It could make the difference between a successful [relationship] and a failed one.

- **Expect to learn.** Look at small talk as an opportunity to learn something new. Learn by being interested in what the other person has to say.

#### Some Topics to Avoid

When small talk is frivolous, meaningless, and ineffective, it isn't the fault of small talk, but rather the purveyor of the small talk. As with any form of communication, there are taboos.

Avoid the following in small talk:

- **Go-nowhere topics.** Until you become proficient at changing the subject or leading the conversation, avoid topics—like traffic or the weather—that don't go anywhere.
- **Big topics** that go on and on and on. Keep small talk small

by avoiding subjects that require wordy explanations. Learn to put otherwise lengthy dissertations in a nutshell.

- **Controversial subjects.** Stay away from politics . . . and related issues with people whose opinions you don't know, particularly in [church] settings.
- **Cliches.** Try to avoid repeating the old tried and overtried phrases that pop out of our mouths automatically during small-talk opportunities.
- **Criticism.** When you don't know the person you're talking to, don't criticize anyone else. The "overdressed hag" across the room might be his wife. The "backstabbing over-achiever" may be her favorite nephew.

#### Improve Your Small-Talk Skills

Once you understand the importance of small talk, you'll be much more aware of what takes place during these casual conversations.

Here's how to improve your skill:

- **Practice, practice, practice**—with friends, family members, store clerks, strangers at the bus stop, etc.
- **Join organizations** where you receive training in speaking: Toastmasters, for example. Or enroll in a class or seminar in communication or interpersonal relationships.
- **Socialize.** Accept more invitations, join a trade organization or a club that is in line with one of your hobbies or interests. Or go out and mingle in public places. Being with strangers who have similar interests provides the perfect arena for small-talk opportunities.

#### Make a Smooth Transition

When small talk is a prelude to business, it will be necessary at some point to draw it to a close and begin the meeting. The best way to do this is through a purposeful transition. One way to learn to recognize good transitional points in the process of small talk is to watch television talk-show hosts in action. Most of them have impeccable timing and great style in making transitions.

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Learn to lead.** Although knowing how to follow is vital to successful small talk, leading is equally important, particularly when the transition depends on you.
- **Recognize an opening and jump in.** Say: "Let me tell you what we're going to do in the interview." "Shall we get on with our meeting?" [etc.]
- **Stop monopolists in their tracks.** If possible, wait for them to take a breath or a pause. Then break in with a comment about their topic, and immediately lead the conversation in the direction that you want it to go.

*This bonus item was compiled from interviews with William S. Swan, owner of Swan Consultants, Inc., a New York-based consulting firm specializing in training managers and executives in conducting more effective interviews; Murial Bryant, executive director of International Training in Communications, a California-based nonprofit educational organization that offers training in communication and leadership; and Lana Antione, past president of Prospeaker's Toastmasters Club in Ventura, California.*

PM

Listening is  
at least as  
important  
as  
speaking.





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# The Holy Spirit and the Church's Master

**F**orty years ago I first heard Paul Rees preach. I can almost reproduce the message, not because my memory is exceptional but because his outline was so clear, his exposition so precise, and his manner so compelling. He is justly regarded as a prince among preachers. When you hear him, you are persuaded that he has prepared his soul as carefully as his sermon.

The son of pioneer Holiness preacher Seth Cook Rees, Paul Rees comes by his preaching skill and zeal honestly. While less polished than the son, the father preached with clarity and power that were eloquent and persuasive.

Paul Rees gained international recognition as a preacher while serving as pastor of First Covenant Church of Minneapolis, an assignment he faithfully fulfilled for two decades. His pulpit, radio, and writing ministries attracted increasing numbers of people, instrumenting—under God—the conversion and sanctification of thousands.

Dr. Rees has labored fruitfully, also, with a number of parachurch ministries, including World Vision and the Billy Graham crusades. Often he has been tapped for the serious responsibility of preaching to the preachers, in the interest of deepening their spiritual lives and improving their homiletical skills.

He began his ministry in 1917 and was ordained in the Evangelical Mission Covenant Church of

America. At numerous conferences, conventions, crusades, and colleges around the world his expanded ministry has borne rich fruit.

He served the National Association of Evangelicals as president and for many years, since leaving the pastorate, has done the work of an evangelist with consummate ability.

His books, models of clarity wedded to passion, have informed and shaped the preaching of hundreds of his brothers in ministry.

Now in his 90s, he continues to travel and preach, signally honored by the Lord to whom he is utterly committed.

*"The Holy Spirit and the Church's Master"* expounds the ministry of the Holy Spirit in its convicting effect upon the world and its sanctifying effect upon the Church. He comes to convict of sin, to exalt the Savior, to grace the Christian, and to guide the Church, as Jesus had promised.

Placing under tribute the thoughts of other exegetes and preachers, and drawing illustrations from history and nature, Dr. Rees fleshes out a choice outline with equally choice substance.

## **The Holy Spirit and the Church's Master\***

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you

(John 16:7, all KJV unless noted).

Do we as Christians have only the treasured memories of Christ as they are written down in a Book, or do we have the real presence of Christ as our divine Companion along the trail of life's going? The answer to that question, whether we are aware of it or not, brings us squarely up against the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

"It is expedient for you that I go away," said Jesus to those perplexed and affrighted disciples of His. It is "to your advantage," is the way Weymouth translates it. "My going is for your good," is Moffatt's rendering. That He did go away is a fact well known to all of us. But how could He say that His going would be a good thing?

Frankly He could not have said it unless He had been prepared to assure them that His withdrawal in physical form was going to mean no grievous and gaping absence but rather His presence on a higher level. Earlier in this conversation He had said to them, "I will not leave you comfortless" (literally, "orphaned") (14:18). Now He assures them that the answer to their fears of loneliness will be found in the communication of the Holy Spirit. In this revelation Christ's presence will be experienced with a new and astonishing inwardness and intimacy. He shall "be in you," said the Master. He shall "abide with you for ever" (vv. 17, 16). He shall "glorify me." He shall "guide you into all truth" (16:14, 13).

Can anyone doubt that this was "good news" to those anxious and ill-equipped men upon whose ears fell the Master's words? Then it was, and is, what some have called the "gospel of the Holy Spirit." It answered certain vast and urgent needs that Jesus, more than others, understood in that hour of His approaching depart-

PAUL S. REES  
(1900—)

ture. What were those needs, and how does the Holy Spirit meet them?

***I. The world must be gripped with conviction of sin: the Holy Spirit is the Answer to that need.***

Consider the words that follow our text: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

Someone ought to set up a "Bureau of Missing Words." If we had such an institution, somewhere on the dust-laden shelves would be found the word "sin." It is the forgotten word of proud 20th-century man. We are so sure we have outgrown it that we would rather go to hell than to admit we are plagued with it. There is simply no end to the lengths we will go in building a silky vocabulary that leaves out the serpent-hissing word—sin. The quack religionists are ready to lend a hand: they smilingly remind us that sin is merely a "delusion of mortal mind." The highbrowed sociologists offer their assistance: they would sum up all that ails under the innocent-sounding phrase "the cultural lag." The superpatriots have a neat little suggestion too: they rise up self-righteously to declare that one or two madmen, like Hitler or Mussolini or Khrushchev, are to blame for all this devilishness that has loosed itself upon the world.

The one thing that most of us are stubbornly unwilling to do is to locate the troubles of human society where they really are—inside our own prideful, peevish, perverse hearts, with their subtly persistent unbelief that turns away from God's Christ and serves other gods instead. Not long before he died in the period of the Second

World War, the archbishop of Canterbury said a thing that contains more moral insight and Christian wisdom than nine-tenths of the speeches and articles that are heard in Congress or published in newspaper columns.

This terrible war, said Archbishop Temple, is simply "the latest, most violent manifestation of an all-pervasive element in the nature of unregenerate mankind." In other words, all of us are in on it in the measure that we have not allowed the redeeming Christ to save us from our self-centeredness, our callousness toward others, and our guilty failure to give God first place in our lives. It was the convicting Spirit of God that spoke through these plain words which the archbishop uttered.

In the history of the Great Wall of China there is a parable of life that you and I might well take to heart. The wall was built for reasons of security. It cost a gigantic sum in money, time, and labor. Behind the completed barrier the Chinese people felt comfortably secure; yet in the first few years after it was finished, it was breached three times by the enemy. But the thing to note is this: it was breached not by crashing the wall, but by bribing the gatekeepers. It was the human factor that failed. The wall failed to work only because the men who guarded it failed. The material massiveness was insufficient; it needed moral character to support it.

It is time we listened to the Holy Spirit on this matter. We have built our walls, as individuals and as nations. We have put our confidence in scientific inventions, in mass education, in industrial and commercial organization, in political and social arrangements and, latterly, in military power and superiority. Everything has failed. Nothing we have tried has given us a happier and more secure world. Nothing will until we turn our

eyes in the one direction where most of us do not want to look, which is straight down into our own spoiled hearts where our dishonesties, evasions, sensualities, hatreds, and jealousies lie coiled up like so many red-tongued serpents with pretty designs on their backs but with deadly poison in their fangs.

It is *our sin now*—not our neighbor's or our ancestors' sin—but ours—which the Holy Spirit is dragging out into the light of honest day. It isn't murder, you say. Perhaps not. Only, remember that in God's sight and in the statement of God's Word, he that "hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). It isn't immorality, you say. Perhaps not. Only, remember that, according to Christ, there is an immorality of the voluntary thought-life which is equivalent to adultery. It isn't racketeering, you say. Perhaps not. Only, remember that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10), and a loveless heart, though it never go criminal, is before God only a gangster in evening dress.

So we may go on through the list of crimes from which we would fain excuse ourselves. But the Holy Spirit will not be put off so easily. Christ is not done with us until He has confronted us with this: "He will reprove the world of sin . . . of sin, because they believe not on me." Call it the top sin, if you will, or the bottom sin; in any case it is the sin of sins, this refusal to bend low before Christ and accept Him as the "Immortal Love" who suffered, died, and rose again that He might bring us to God, forgiven and transformed. When the Holy Spirit has been allowed to grip us with this conviction, we shall be ready for our next step.

***II. Christ must be glorified as a universal Savior: the Holy Spirit is the Answer to that need.***

Another area of the Spirit's activity, declares Jesus, con-

cerns Me—My person and My work—"He shall glorify me" (v. 14). Joseph Parker, commenting on this phrase, makes the luminous remark that "what light is to the earth, the Holy Ghost is to Jesus Christ." And he adds, "The work of the Spirit is revelation, not creation. He does not make Christ, He explains Him."

As one aspect of this glorifying ministry of the Spirit of God, take the way in which He makes universally available the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The historical Jesus, whom we meet in the Gospel records, was confined within a human body. He worked within a human body. He worked within the limitations of time and space. He was on the Mount of Transfiguration with three fascinated disciples one moment, and at the foot of the mountain with a distressed father afterward. He was not accessible in both places at the same time. He was in Galilee when His friend Lazarus died and in Judea, at the graveside, four days later. He was not present in both places at the same time.

What was true of space was also true of time. Jesus lived 33 years. Suppose He had lived on in that body which He took to himself through the mysterious process of the Virgin Birth. By the time He was 500 years old, He would have destroyed His claim to be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). On the other hand, when He dies, rises again, and ascends into heaven, He must leave with men something more than the memory of His brief pilgrimage among them. Even that memory would cease to have any vivid meaning when death had removed the last man who had seen His face or heard His voice. Then we should have only a written record.

All of which argues eloquently for the Christian doctrine of the

Holy Spirit. Only, be it noted, what we find in the New Testament is more than a doctrine—it is a series of glowing facts that are set on fire in the souls of men. We have, for example, Paul's profound insight. Christ, he says, "ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10). "That he might fill all things"—all time, all space, all churches, all homes, all trusting hearts, all kingdoms and continents.

But how? Peter had the answer. He gave it to us on the Day of Pentecost, when he, too, caught sight of the glorious plan by which Jesus of Nazareth was to swing out from the cramped boundaries of little Palestine and lay hold of the souls of men under every sky to redeem them to God. "Therefore," cried Peter, concerning his ascended Lord, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

You ask, "What is 'the gospel of the Holy Spirit'?" It is the gospel of Christ, the gospel of God's redeeming love, universalized. All men need our Savior. All men may have Him—actually have Him in a living experience of His forgiveness and regeneration—through the Holy Spirit. All doors are now open. All barriers are down. All boundaries are overleaped. On a heathen temple in India is a sign that reads: "Low-castes and dogs not allowed." That is the exclusivism of paganism. It could even be found in Judaism in our Lord's time. Alas, misguided Christians sometimes duplicate it. But Calvary and Pentecost broke it forever.

And now what? In that same India it happened one day a prominent Hindu woman came to a Christian worker. She brought with her a *devidasi*, a poor, bedraggled, abused temple girl. "I bring this girl to you to be saved," said the Hindu to the

Christian. Then she explained, "I once heard my husband read a story from your sacred book, of a woman taken in adultery and what Jesus said to her and how He saved her. We have no such story in our books, so I bring the girl to you."

God be praised that we *do* have such a story in our sacred Book. But God be praised also that, because of the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the story can be reproduced anywhere and everywhere, as aching hearts reach out with trusting hands to touch the Christ who died for them.

### ***III. Christians must be graced with Christlike qualities: the Holy Spirit is the Answer to that need.***

For, says Jesus, "he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (v. 14). In the light of these words we can agree with Schleiermacher that "the fruits of the Spirit are the virtues of Christ." According to Paul they are: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Don't dismiss that list too lightly. Don't say, "Oh, well, every Christian has these graces in his life, and all he needs to do is to take time to develop them." That is just where some of us go clean off the track. True, all Christians have these qualities of Christlikeness more or less in evidence in their lives. True, also, these plants of spiritual beauty require time for full growth. But every gardener knows that if his soil is being taken by weeds or if his plants are not healthy, he needs something besides *time* to produce a lovely garden. Something drastic, like weeding or spraying, needs to be done. Then luxuriant growth and fragrant loveliness will follow in due course.

Pentecost came to the early Christians as a definite and drastic crisis in their career as Christians. "Suddenly . . . they were

all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:2, 4). They were searched, sanctified, humbled in one high hour of meeting with the Spirit of Christ. Other blessed hours followed, but this was decisive. It moved them over from the marginal waters to the central current of the stream of the Spirit. And all of this was somehow vitally related to a certain Christlikeness of disposition that they were normally to demonstrate.

Be sure of this, my fellow Christians: Any experience of the soul that makes us other than Christ-minded is not an experience of the Holy Spirit. It may be some other spirit—pride, hysteria, clannishness, sensualism—but it is not the Holy Comforter of whom the Master was speaking when He said, "He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:14).

A friend of my father was one day addressing a body of ministers on "the fullness of the Holy Spirit." At the close of the message a minister came forward, deeply moved. His cheeks were wet with tears. He held one of the leading pulpits in that conference. "Your reading today broke my heart," said he, as he searched the face of the brother-preacher who had spoken. "I have been preaching Jesus, but I know I am not at all like Him. I have been cross to my wife, and to my children, and to my people. The past year has been a hard one; I cannot, I cannot try to preach Christ another year, unless I can have the 'mind' of Christ."

This, as it turned out, was the beginning of a short, sharp struggle within himself. Would he let go of himself and resign his whole being, his affairs, his future, his gifts, his family, into God's controlling hands? It was not settled easily, but it was settled. That day, and far into the night, the battle raged. In the small hours of the morning the flag of absolute surrender went up. The sovereign Christ, by the

power of the Holy Spirit, took over. The result? Ask his wife. She testified to the new gentleness that was there. Ask his church officers. They testified to the new humility and winsomeness that were there. Ask his congregation. They testified to the new radiance and power that were there.

Here, it seems to me, in the everyday world of human relationships, is the kind of fulfillment that our Lord's promise of the Spirit requires: "He shall receive of mine"—My love and goodwill, My patience and peace, My compassion and courage—"and shall shew it unto you."

**IV. The Church must be guided into all truth: the Holy Spirit answers to that need.**

Listen again to the Master in the context: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (v. 13).

In whatever measure any man is honest with himself and his God, in exactly that measure does he long hungrily for truth. For in the realm of truth the mind and soul of man are in commerce with reality—the underlying reality that we may easily miss if we are occupied only with the facts that appear on life's surface. A botanist, analyzing a rose, gives you all of the dry facts about the stem, the stamens, the calyx, the petals, and all the rest. When he is through, you have something about as exciting as the multiplication tables. But the *truth* regarding a rose gathers up all the subtler things of form and fragrance and color, then flings them into your beauty-ravished soul like a very gift of heaven.

Now it is the business of the Holy Spirit to make us lovers of truth and then to lead us into ever new and fuller appreciation of that incomparable One who is himself the Truth. In Christ we have the Truth—the truth about God, the truth about man, the

truth about sin, the truth about salvation, the truth about the meaning and goal of life, the truth about heaven, hell, and destiny.

Does this mean that we know all there is to know about these matters that are so freighted with importance? Not at all. Christ gives the *key*. That key is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and we, giving ourselves up to His guidance, are led into a progressive understanding of what it all means. The Spirit uses our minds; He stimulates our affections; He sharpens our intuitions; He enables us to interpret our experiences; He speaks to us through the testimony of others; He enriches us by the pooled wisdom of the whole community of believers. In all of these ways He is guiding us, slow and dull as we may be, into "all truth."

Let me add one word to that last sentence. Most of us Christians are much *more* "slow and dull" about spiritual realities than we should be. It is because we have never been to Pentecost for *our* invasion and inundation by the quickening, cleansing Spirit of God. The late Dr. Jowett looked at the early Christians before Pentecost and then at those same men and women after Pentecost, and he lifted his eyes to say that one of the differences which the fullness of the Holy Spirit made was "an extraordinary power of spiritual apprehension." God was overwhelmingly real to them. Christ was so utterly dear and adequate. Eternal things were so much more important to them than the temporal. Prayer was so simple and natural. God's control of their affairs was so close and continuous and all-satisfying. Life was so radiant and conquering. And all of this in spite of innumerable privations, difficulties, and challenges.

They were being guided into all truth, and together they were being used by God to

# Candles and Roses

guide others. Which is precisely what the Church should be and do in this befogged and bewildered world.

The pilot of a Flying Fortress in World War II wrote to a friend of his in Texas, describing the experiences he had in bringing back his ship from many missions over Germany. He was based in England. "A striking characteristic," he wrote, "of an English landscape as seen from the air is the incredible number of churches which the country boasts. These churches have tall, stately spires and they afford excellent landmarks. When the weather is bad, we use these churches as guides to lead us home. We have become so familiar with them that when we let down through an overcast and see a church beneath us, we can immediately determine whether or not we are on our course. Believe me, it is a very comforting sight to see them appear out of the mists."

What suggestiveness in that sentence. "When the weather is bad, we use these churches as guides to lead us home"! Ah, my friends, in a far deeper and wider sense than that lieutenant meant it, the weather of this morally befogged world is bad. And the Church of Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the signpost of the eternal God, pointing, ever pointing, the way Home!

*Come, Holy Spirit, come,  
Let Thy bright beams arise;  
Dispel all sorrow from our minds,  
All darkness from our eyes.*

*'Tis Thine to cleanse the heart,  
To sanctify the soul;  
To pour fresh life in every part,  
And new-create the whole.*

*Dwell therefore in our hearts,  
Our minds from bondage free;  
Then we shall know, and praise,  
and love*

*The Father, Son, and Thee. PM*

\*Source: Paul S. Rees, *Stand Up in Praise to God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960).

Keeping the main thing the main thing in a church sometimes presents a challenge. Too often programs consume time and energy, demanding and diverting the church from one of her major purposes: leading people to the Lord. Here is an idea that helps our church focus on winning the unsaved.

In one pastorate we placed a yellow rose on the altar, symbolizing a new convert that week. A woman placed that first rose when her mother accepted Jesus Christ after many years of witnessing to her. The mother accepted Him shortly before her death. The daughter wanted to celebrate her birth into God's kingdom and asked if she could place some yellow roses on the altar as an expression of gratitude for her mother's salvation.

In my current church, I use a lighted candle. We lit the first candle at Honolulu First English when Allen Ikeda mentioned he had led his Buddhist mother to the Lord. He had shared his faith with her for many years. Allen gave his testimony to the church, and we lit a candle in her honor, for she was in the hospital at the time. We have lit several candles since.

A lighted candle represents a person who has come into the Kingdom as a direct result of the ministry of our church. We celebrate when we learn that any person has come to Christ; but we light a candle only if an attendee was directly involved in either witnessing the conversion or facilitating it.

Just before pastoral prayer time, having already asked per-

mission, my wife or the person who has witnessed the conversion lights the candle while I explain whom it represents and a little of the story. Most often converts have been in the service. That always makes it special. I usually refer to Luke 12:8 when I suggest to the new convert that one of the public services would be a good time to declare his or her newfound faith. This gives excellent opportunity to tell of our tradition so it is not a surprise. When the conversion is genuine, the new Christian is eager to let it be known. Being careful not to embarrass anyone, I welcome the convert to the service. Some have raised their hands to let the people know who they are. One man stood immediately. It is exciting to see the smiles on their faces when we honor their entrances into the kingdom of God.

A calligrapher prints the new Christian's name and the date converted on a small card that we place on the Communion table near the lighted candle. I suggest that someone consider signing his or her name on the card after the service, committing to pray for the new convert. My wife and I then deliver the card to the new convert in the home soon after. At that time we invite the new Christian to join the new Christians' class and other follow-up programs, programs created specifically to strengthen new believers. Introducing people to Jesus Christ and discipling them—that is "the main thing"! Programs serve people; people are "the main thing."

PM

BY ERNEST

McNAUGHT

Freelance writer

CHENEY, WASHINGTON





# Implications of the Incarnation

Undoubtedly the most concise and precise scriptural statement regarding the Incarnation is recorded in John 1:14. Succinctly it states, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (emphasis added). Eugene Peterson uses modern expressions to translate the idioms of the original Greek: *"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish"* (TM, emphasis added).

Leon Morris highlights the verse's uniqueness by referring to such special features as (1) the intentionality of the usage of the verb "became" in the aorist tense (punctiliar event or point in time in history), (2) reference to human nature by the term "flesh," (3) the recollection of God's presence in the temporary Tabernacle, and (4) linking an association between "dwelling" and Shekinah. Morris comments, "In one short, shattering expression John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity that the very Word of God took flesh for man's salvation. . . . Jesus was the unique embodiment of the glory of God. Because of His character as the Word we see in Him the divine glory."<sup>1</sup>

During the Advent season, I enjoy annually sharing the story

God lived  
in the  
"skin" of  
humanity.

BY DAVID HOFFMAN  
Pastor  
COLORADO SPRINGS



about a three-year-old's difficulty in falling asleep one night. After the most ritualistic routine of bedtime prayers, goodnight hugs and kisses, drink of water, and last trip to the rest room, the father attempts to convince his toddler that his nocturnal fears are unwarranted. Once again, he reassures the boy that the Lord promises to be near for protection.

Feeling confident that his lecture on the Lord's continual presence alleviated his son's fears, Dad retires to bed. However, the parents are awakened by their little boy's sobbing. In response to the inquiry of what is wrong, he replies innocently, "I bumped my head on my pillow." After more futile explanations by Mom and Dad that there is nothing to fear with God so near, the child insightfully comments, "I wish God had skin."

Similarly, anyone can feel overwhelmed with a sense of the surrounding spiritual darkness in our world. Feelings of insecurity and loneliness can arise at any moment. If only God himself could be tangibly present, one sincerely believes that anxiety would vanish.

## Fulfillment of the Father's Promised Sacred Presence

John 1:14 underscores that God lived in the "skin" of humanity in the word translated "dwelling," or "tabernacling." Literally, "by the play on *skēnē*, *eskēnōsen*, St. John implies that Christ as the Word made flesh

was the true Shekinah, the true presence of God with men."<sup>2</sup> Also, "The place of His dwelling is the flesh of Jesus. . . . All the ways of tabernacling of God in Israel had been transitory or incomplete; all are fulfilled and superseded by the Word-made-flesh and dwelling among us."<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Hebrew understood the word "mercy" to be "living in one's skin." Native Americans speak of "walking in someone else's moccasins."

David McKenna comments: "Either image, a tent, or a tabernacle is Incarnational. The pitching of the tent suggests Jesus' identification with the nomadic nature . . . of the people in Israel. Tabernacling, however, suggests His sacred Presence in the midst of their spiritual wandering."<sup>4</sup>

In essence, God revealed himself to humanity in the most profound manner in which He would possibly be comprehended. He became human! In the First Advent, God entered His creation in actual flesh—skin and bones. He intensified and maximized His identity by such self-disclosure. He activated His new special revelation to be more credible than ever, since He became tangible to touch and sight, as eyewitnesses have documented in the Gospels.

Jesus substantiated God in face-to-face authentic physical encounters. He provided humanity with a much clearer perspective of God. As the climactic mode of communication, the Incarnation may be described as "body language." Jesus embodied the presence of the living God. God's speech became descriptively pictorial in His Son.

The definitive word of God was spoken in His Word, or the Christ event. Jesus became His presence. Simply, God spoke in His Son! In the 1970s a musical group called Bread coined a very descriptive phrase in one of their songs: "If a picture paints a thousand words, then why can't I paint you?" In this case, our

Heavenly Father did paint himself in Jesus. Christ was not just a vignette or a print; He will forever remain the genuine Masterpiece and unique stroke of a master artist.

#### Faithful to His Father's Image

Sometimes a person will say that a child is the "spitting image" of his or her father. In other words, a distinct reflection bears an identical resemblance. Heb. 1:1-3 says:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. . . . *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (emphasis added).*

The quality of God's "speech" in His Son contrasts with the variety of speaking through the prophets. The superlative, singular, special revelation of Jesus Christ is compared to the multiplicity of prophetic mouthpieces. Essentially, Christ became the superior Messenger, embodied the superior message, provided superior mercy, and reigns as superior Monarch!

Not only does Jesus fulfill the prophetic office, but also the priestly and royalty offices belong to Him. Jesus' mediatorial role as priest explains another rationale for His incarnation. Heb. 2:14-15, 17-18 states:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. . . . For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in

service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Jesus graciously balanced His humanity and deity by being both "merciful" to mankind as well as "faithful" to God.

Scriptures abound with examples of theophanies or divine appearances. For example, in Moses' life alone, God appeared to him on Mount Sinai in the burning bush encounter and by carving the Ten Commandments, as well as in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night and His Shekinah presence in the Tabernacle.

The coming of Jesus Christ forever stands as the most explicit theophany ever known to man. It was God's most personal and vital appearance. The purpose of God is supernaturally revealed in this planned strategy. The incarnation of God as Jesus, from conception to crucifixion to coronation, displayed His intention to unveil the master blueprint. Jesus is God come down to our level of comprehension because we could not come up to His.

Rob Staples, in *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, refers to the Incarnation as "the strongest argument for 'sacrament.' Jesus Christ is the supreme 'Visible Word.'"<sup>5</sup> Paul shared the essence of this truth with the Colossian believers:

He is the *image of the invisible God*, the firstborn over all creation. . . . For God was pleased to have *all his fullness dwell in him*, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (1:15, 19-20, *emphases added*).

The New Testament portrayed a fascinating concept of "image." Note also 2 Cor. 4:4. Christ is the perfect Expression. Jesus' own words announced, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). William Barclay explains that a diminutive form of

*eikōn* (*eikonion*) was the root word for "portrait" in the Greek. It nearly equals our contemporary word "photograph." Regarding its usage in legal circles, Barclay explains, "When a legal document was drawn up, such as a receipt or an IOU, it always included a description of the chief characteristics and distinguishing marks of the contracting parties, so that there could be no mistake."<sup>6</sup> Jesus was the "portrait" of God!

#### All God's Fullness Enfolded in Bodily Form

In Col. 1:19, Paul also says that Jesus is the *plērōma* or "fullness" of God. He is God in complete revelation. The totality of the eternal Godhead is realized in bodily form (Col. 2:9). His body was flesh and blood just like ours.

To further apply this truth, Christians must realize that Christ intends to continue His incarnation in and through us. The Church Universal is Christ incarnate. Believers are an extension of His incarnation. Oswald Chambers notes in his book *My Utmost for His Highest* that "we are not turned into spiritual mediums, but into spiritual messengers; the message must be part of ourselves. The Son of God was His own message. . . . As His disciples our lives must be the sacrament of our message."<sup>7</sup>

Paul points out, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10, *emphasis added*). Jesus originally taught this, as one sees in reading His words in John 14:20, 23; 15:4-5; and chapter 17. David McKenna aptly observes, "The same Spirit of God who brought to life the divine Word in human flesh is able to bring to birth the likeness of Christ in our humanity."<sup>8</sup> His ministry is perpetually ongoing until the expected *parousia* is fulfilled. "The incarnation is not an isolated event in human history. It is a continuing act of cre-

Our  
Heavenly  
Father  
painted  
himself in  
Jesus.

ation by which we can gain the integrity of character which qualifies us for Incarnational leadership."<sup>9</sup>

## Identification with Feelings and Facial Expressions

God chose to be Immanuel, God with us. God's love is not only propitiatory but also participatory. Henri Nouwen wrote: "In Jesus, God's compassion became visible to us. . . . In and through Jesus Christ we know that God is our God, a God who has experienced our brokenness, who has become sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21).<sup>10</sup> Truly, one encounters both elements of intimacy and solidarity in the Incarnation. Again, "Compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there."<sup>11</sup>

Society encourages mankind to remake God "in our own image" rather than realizing or reinforcing that we are created "in the image of God" (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). Nevertheless, our Lord Jesus portrayed God's "facial expression." Paul wrote, "For God . . . made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Consequently, we never need to project our own image upon God, since He revealed and provided His own perfect image of himself through His Son.

## My Favorite Advent Story

Another one of my favorite stories to share during Advent revolves around a setting that occurred on Christmas Eve.

A gentle snow was falling outside as the family hurried to get ready to attend the Christmas Eve service at church. The father, however, tried to become inconspicuous, since he was planning

to stay home. Christmas was just another holiday to him. "Why all the hype about a baby born 2,000 years ago?" he thought to himself. As the family drove away, he settled in his recliner chair to read.

Within a few minutes, the lonely silence was broken by a pecking on the window. The father soon noticed a bird trying to escape the accumulating snowfall by repeatedly flying into the windowpane. "They must be cold and hungry," he mumbled. Suddenly, he planned to rescue the birds outside his home by opening the garage door to relieve them from the elements of the weather.

However, they flew away, frightened at his presence. Next, he tried to lead them into safety by spreading bread crumbs in the direction of the garage, but the birds were only suspicious of his intentions. The descending snow buried each crumb. Finally, in a sense of desperation, he attempted to chase the birds into the garage, but they only scattered. The man expressed his exasperation by saying, "If only I could become a bird, so I could lead them out of the snow and into the safety of the garage!"

At that moment, he heard the church bells signaling the beginning of the church service across the valley. All at once, he understood the meaning of Christmas. Truly, the birth and coming of Jesus Christ meant God becoming a person like us humans in an attempt to lead us from danger to safety.

## First and Foremost the Revealed Representation of the Heavenly Father

Once again, the meaning of the Incarnation is condensed and concise: "The Word became flesh

and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, RSV). Bonhoeffer notes:

Strictly speaking we should not talk of the incarnation, but of the incarnate one. . . . The incarnate one is the glorified God—"The word was made flesh and we beheld his glory." God glorifies himself in man. . . . The trinitarian God is seen as the incarnate one. [In other words,] The incarnation is the message of the glorification of God, who sees his honor in becoming man. . . . The incarnation is first and foremost true revelation, of the creator in the creature, and not veiled revelation. Jesus Christ is the unveiled image of God.<sup>12</sup>

As the Revelation and Representative of the Father, Jesus made God present and visible. He brought Deity to the forefront of the consciousness of humanity. This resulted in God becoming concrete and relational rather than abstract and impersonal.

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 102-5.

2. Ibid., 104, quoting W. Nichols, *Jacob's Ladder* (London: SPCK, 1958), 19.

3. Ibid., quoting A. M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1949), 59 f.

4. David L. McKenna, *Power to Follow, Grace to Lead* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 41-42.

5. Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 53.

6. William Barclay, *Colossians*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 118.

7. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour and Co., 1935), 50.

8. McKenna, *Power to Follow, Grace to Lead*, 35.

9. Ibid.

10. Henri Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 15, 17.

11. Ibid., 27.

12. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 105.

# Christmas Blesses Small

In an age of monster houses and humongous malls, it is a breath of fresh air to come upon Christmas.

In a time of church growth regardless and humans turned into stats, it is such a break from the religious strain to come upon Christmas.

After all, Christmas offers nothing but small.

There is a loft at the end of a horse parking lot outside a nondescript tourist home. Nothing impressive, really.

There are inside that loft a few roosters and chickens, some hay rats playing tag, and a few donkeys ignoring it all. Not all that chic.

There is alongside the donkey a cow's trough filled with sticky straw, scratchy and all that to the human flesh. Not all that bed-and-breakfast variety, actually.

There is inside that cow's trough a tiny baby—making funny faces, sleeping on occasion, crying some, goo-gooing into His mother's kind eyes and then scanning this foster father's rough beard. Not really a royal Kodak moment.

There is nothing Trump Tower about this whole scene, let alone Crystal Cathedral nor St. Peter's in Rome.

Nevertheless, there it is—plain and simple—and small, small, small.

Which brings to my memory a little church atop a village hill in Nova Scotia. Plus a suburban church outside Boston where a couple dozen gather faithfully.

Still another typical New England sanctuary in hamlet Monson.

Not much on the charts. Not much to report for the figures. Not much to write up in the annals of numerical catalogs.

Just a humble spot here and there—small.

It is not that small is more holy than large. It is just that God has a particular liking for small. And humble. And out-of-the-way. And at times even downright scuttlebutt, like Nazareth.

Yet what marvel is wrapped up in small when God takes hold of the trimmings! From a manger comes the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. From the stable comes the name Mary, a Jewess remembered for all time for her lowliness. Plus a carpenter Joe

who has been especially revered by men world round—generation upon generation.

It reminds me of people I've met in my own sojourn. They were usually the peasant types, poor and not that much into worldly power or prestige. You might call them small.

Yet out of those broken, nobody-from-no-place lives have come such utter kindness, sacrifice, and wisdom that would set any Bethlehem head a-spinning.

That's why I tend to gravitate toward the border people, that is, those who are often lined up against the wall, sometimes even dumped out because they don't count.

I find them particularly jeweled inside, where it counts. I have discovered that God does too.

So the next time that you are tempted to be enamored by the large, big, blown-out-of-proportion religious this-or-that, why not count yourself out for a change?

When you do, you may just find yourself all the way back to Bethlehem. And what a blessing you will come upon—roosters, shepherds, hay, and all.

Please start this Christmas. In so doing, you will come upon God's real Christmas—your reason for breathing.

PM

BY J. GRANT  
SWANK JR.  
Pastor  
WINDHAM, MAINE



# Hymn Story of the Month—Part Three

This is the third article in a series of four in which I provide a hymn story for each month of the year. For a more complete introduction to this series of articles, see "Hymn Story of the Month—Part One" in the June/July/August 1998 issue of the *Preacher's Magazine*. All hymns listed in this series of articles are found in the *Sing to the Lord* hymnal, and hymn numbers are provided in parentheses following the title.

After telling the hymn story, I offer ideas for creative worship, often linking the hymn story and hymn with other songs, Scripture, testimonies, and/or prayer. If a particular suggestion isn't a good fit with your congregation, use it as a catalyst for your own creative thinking. If you like one of the ideas, try it with other songs of worship not discussed in these articles.

At the end of each monthly section, I list a few sources that may be consulted for more information on the hymn story. Bibliographic citations of these resources appear at the end of the articles.

## December

### "His Name Is Wonderful"

**HYMN STORY**—Audrey Meier sat in the sanctuary of the church where her brother-in-law was the pastor. She anticipated that morning of the children's Christmas program. A teenage girl played the part of Mary. Several young boys portrayed the

The church  
at its best  
cannot be  
contained  
within a  
building.

BY KEITH SCHWANZ

Pastor

PORTLAND, OREGON



angels. A doll represented the Christ child.

As Audrey looked around the congregation, she saw little children enthralled with the holiday enchantment. She noticed senior adults lovingly watching the children.

Then the moment of inspiration came. "The pastor stood up and slowly lifted his hands toward heaven and said, 'His name is Wonderful!' Those words electrified me. I immediately began writing in the back of my Bible." That evening Audrey taught her new song, "His Name Is Wonderful," to the teenagers of the church. Since that time, Christians around the world have sung this song in dozens of languages.

**HYMN SINGING**—Tell the hymn story, then sing "His Name Is Wonderful" (149). While the pianist or organist or both continue to play, have several people read scriptures suggested by the song. You might also use a comprehensive list of the descriptive names of Jesus, such as the Word, Savior, Redeemer, and so on. Then sing the song a second time.

**HYMN STUDY**—*Amazing Grace*, p. 365; *Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns*, pp. 42-46.

## January

### "All for Jesus"

**HYMN STORY**—From a very young age, Mary James was "all for Jesus." She was saved at age 10 and sanctified at age 12. The

Sunday School superintendent of her home church asked her to teach a class of six little girls when Mary was only 13 years old. At first Mary refused because she felt she was too young for such a responsibility. Yet the superintendent, the pastor, and other adults, recognizing Mary's spiritual maturity, urged her to reconsider. Decades of Christian service started when Mary became the teacher of that class of six- to nine-year-old girls.

Mary's 60th birthday was filled with spiritual victory. In a New Year's letter to friends at the beginning of 1871, Mary wrote: "I praise Him for the grace given me to do more than in any former year of my life. I have written more, talked more, prayed more, and thought more for Jesus than in any previous year, and had more peace of mind, resulting from a stronger and more simple faith in Him. My realization of His presence and guidance has been deeper, fuller, and sweeter than ever before. In working for Jesus, I have felt less burden, more perfect self-abandonment, more reliance on the blessed Spirit, and more conscious help from above, so I must call the year 1870 the best year of my life" (Joseph H. James, *The Life of Mrs. Mary D. James*, 199).

As Mary reflected on the year just past, she recognized that the fulfillment she felt was a result of her total consecration to God. In that context she wrote "All for Jesus" as a personal resolution for the New Year.

**HYMN SINGING**—Tell the hymn story. Ask each person to turn to "All for Jesus" (470) and read the text, choosing a phrase that best states a place of spiritual growth for him or her. Sing the hymn with each person standing as his or her selected phrase is sung. By standing at that moment, the person is offering a public prayer of commitment. Following the hymn, with everyone standing, invite several persons to lead the congregation in prayers of consecration.



# Attitude Check

**HYMN STUDY**—*The Birth of a Hymn*, pp. 24-27.

**February**

**"God of Grace and God of Glory"**

**HYMN STORY**—Harry Emerson Fosdick looked out over the Atlantic Ocean. He was vacationing at his home on Mouse Island off the Maine coast near Boothbay, but his mind was back in New York City. Construction of a new church building would be completed in a few weeks, a facility financed by John D. Rockefeller Jr., a member of the congregation. As the pastor of that congregation, the Riverside Church, Fosdick recognized that the church at its best cannot be contained within a building.

One of Fosdick's favorite hymn tunes was REGENT SQUARE, the tune usually used with "Angels, from the Realms of Glory." While thinking about his congregation, and humming REGENT SQUARE, Fosdick wrote "God of Grace and God of Glory" while at his vacation home during the summer of 1930. Fosdick's hymn was sung at the February 9, 1931, dedication of the Riverside Church as a prayer that the congregation that called the building home would be one filled with God's power.

**HYMN SINGING**—Fosdick was not happy when his hymn was "divorced" from REGENT SQUARE and "remarried" to the hymn tune CWM RHONDDA. After telling the hymn story, sing "God of Grace and God of Glory" (720) to the tune REGENT SQUARE (192), just as Fosdick wrote it.

**HYMN STUDY**—*Songs of Glory*, pp. 90-91.

## Hymn Study Resources

*Amazing Grace* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1990).

*The Birth of a Hymn* by Keith Schwanz (Lillenas, 1997).

*Songs of Glory* by William J. Reynolds (Zondervan, 1990).

*Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns* by Lindsay Terry (Baker, 1990).

PM

Jim, I can tell you really hate sin; maybe one day you'll learn to love sinners." I was a young, know-it-all, hellfire-and-brimstone youth evangelist; he was a retired denominational worker.

I'd really "let 'em have it" that night. People walked the aisle. I was feeling quite good. I didn't pay much attention to his comments; after all, I was the hot-shot evangelist. He didn't know what he was talking about.

If he was so wrong, why do I still remember his words 20 years later?

Recently, I thought about his comments again after I had a phone conversation with a surgeon. "The pathologist's report is in; it was positive."

"What? It was what . . . what does that mean?"

"Dr. Wilson, you have cancer." He told me the type, the cure rate, and the proposed treatment.

"Thank you, Doctor; I appreciate your call."

It was undoubtedly the worst news anybody ever told me. Why did I thank him?

That the doctor wasn't happy I had cancer, I could tell by the tone of his voice. He was happy, however, that he had some good news too. My type of cancer has a 90 percent cure rate. I thanked him for the bad news because it saved my life. Today, after surgery and radiation treatment, I am cancer free.

It is not bad news that offends people; it is bad attitudes that turn them off. What I said didn't offend the retired preacher, it was my attitude that bothered him.

I was right to preach on hell and warn people of the judgment that awaits them. Preachers can't preach on pleasant doctrines exclusively. We're not spiritual anesthesiologists, helping to sedate people in their pain. People need a cure, not sedation.

Though my words were right, my attitude was wrong. I enjoyed the feeling of power the subject gave me. It made me feel so right to tell others they were so wrong.

With time, I've learned to preach on hell with a tear in my eye, not a smirk on my face. Today, broken lives break my heart.

Gospel preachers deliver good and bad news. The bad news is that hell's fires are real and permanent. The good news is that we can promise a 100 percent cure rate to those who believe. Jesus paid the price for sin and holds the keys to hell in His nail-scarred hand.

Churches need courageous preachers that will tell the truth about an unrepentant sinner's eternal destiny. But courage isn't enough. They need compassionate preachers that will stain the Bible with their tears while they warn their congregations of the place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

PM

BY JIM L. WILSON  
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# Children with a Glass Life: A Review of the Needs of a Pastor's Child

**L**et's face it: Pastors' children are known for going to extremes. It seems they either commit wholeheartedly to God and the church or else reject them with every part of their being. Why is this so?

Pastors increasingly make an effort to establish an atmosphere in their churches whereby their children are treated like all the others. In spite of this, the unique needs of those whose parents are pastors will never disappear.

While one cannot make a blanket statement that encompasses the life of every minister's child, several characteristics factor into the life of most. Their responses to these factors may vary from one extreme to the other. However, there is value in stepping into their shoes to take a look at life.

From the perspective of pastors' children, life may be rather confusing. Four aspects of life encompass this confusion.

**First, due to their unique experiences, they may have difficulty understanding the nature of God.**

They may have been taught since they can remember that God is extremely important—and they may agree. Or they may not, if God hasn't been there for them from their points

of view. Their view of God is based, in large part, on the other three aspects that are part of their perspective.

**The second aspect is how much the people who comprise the church personally affect them, positively or negatively.**

Church may be "home No. 2." They may feel extremely at ease checking out the rooms, closets, and cupboards in any church building. It also may represent a group of people who expect the impossible out of them. Furthermore, they are very aware of the human problems of this "holy" group of people.

**Third, home may not present them with the kind of support they need.**

In fact, it may add to the problem. First of all, rather than a place of refuge, it may be more like a glass house. People stay "tuned in" to the latest in the life of the pastor and his or her family members. Second, Mom and Dad may have higher expectations than anybody else. This quickly breaks down any communication between parent and child. Finally, Mom or Dad may not practice at home what she or he preaches at church. This problem in particular seldom goes unnoticed and becomes a real part in the children's under-

standing of God and religion.

**Fourth, people outside the home and church are aware of who the child of the minister is.**

They tend to keep this information in mind when they observe his or her every move. If a "bad decision" is made, the fact that the parent is a minister gets brought up quickly.

All these factors add up to comprise the life experience of the child of the minister. Many, though not all, may feel like a pressure cooker turned up to "High" by the time they reach their teenage years.

Whether conscious of it or not, the teenagers usually make one of what they believe are the only two choices.

**First, they commit to the Lord and everybody else.**

They do an incredible job of stepping up to the challenge of trying to meet everybody's expectations of them. These "superkids" get burned out and may not have a clue about where they stop and everybody else starts.

**Second, they may become overwhelmed by their problems and give up.**

What's the use of trying? Those who fall in this category tend to reject all they were ever taught in an attempt to find

BY KARA MURPHY  
*Pastor's wife*  
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some breathing room and a bit of themselves. They also tend to assume that God's expectations are just as unrealistic as everybody else's.

We must acknowledge that it will always be a challenge for ministers to find a balance between church work, ministry, and family life, which also is ministry. Also, we will never be able to stop the entire community from having expectations of the ministers or their family members. So what can the ministers do?

Both my parents were ordained elders. As I watched a few of my peers, I thought rejection of it all was a terrible thing. Then again, I was the over-achieving "superkid." Now I know that these are not the only two options.

In order to become whole persons, individuals must come to an understanding that God loves them unconditionally—warts and all! God has given them permission to be unique. To do this, they make decisions on their own about life that are not based on the expectations of others. They also have come to a place in their relationship with God that their souls can be at peace in spite of the turmoil of life.

One key word comes into play: BOUNDARIES!

**The minister must establish boundaries around his or her home that he or she will protect from the outside.**

The pastor will respect the privacy of each member of the family when preaching, visiting, or in any other conversation with any other individual. Children

should not be embarrassed in public.

**The minister must establish boundaries within the home that allow all members of the family to feel secure as a family unit.**

A regular family time must be set aside that no one can interrupt. It is very frustrating for family members of the minister when they feel he or she always scoots them to the back burner. Also, the rules parents establish must be reasonable, realistic, and very consistent. The consistency of consequences directly translates to the security the child feels in the child-parent relationship.

**The minister must establish boundaries that will protect his or her own personhood.**

What does this have to do with the child? The "superpastor" is not aware of his or her own boundary issues. He or she can meet everybody's needs, is only a phone call away for any problem any time, and quite often does not lead a balanced life. *Translation No. 1:* The minister is caught up in being a pastor and not a person. *Translation No. 2:* The minister probably is putting the family on that back burner and expecting them to be "superfamily" the rest of the time. The pastor may not realize that his or her ministry is based on works and not on grace. To establish one's own boundaries is to allow family members the same privilege.

**The minister much teach the children to establish boundaries of their own.**

Nobody can ever stop the community from having expectations of the minister's child. It is a fact

of ministerial life. But children of the pastor must be taught to have strong, healthy boundaries. They must be allowed to have their own opinions, to not be caught up in everyone's opinions of them, and to say no when they aren't interested in teaching that Sunday School class or anything else that doesn't infringe on the home boundaries. Learning to establish personal boundaries will be a gift the minister's child will take into adulthood. The minister must bend over backward to respect the boundaries of the child, however trivial they may seem.

It is possible for the most "successful" pastor to have the most neglected children. It is also possible for the most loving parent to offer his or her child as an eternal sacrifice to the church. Neither of these are what God wants.

Evaluate how your children may perceive life. If their tendency is to be "superkids," remind them to lead balanced lives by exploring their interests. If your child is in the process of rejecting it all, evaluate the boundaries listed earlier. Stick to them. Without pressuring the child, let him or her know that no matter what he or she does, you love your child with no strings attached—and God does too.

It is a frightening process to take our hands off and allow children to have opinions, to fall, to explore, to disagree. Establishing reasonable boundaries allows for individuality, emotional safety, and a clear understanding of God's kind of love—no strings attached. This is what every person needs—pastors' kids included.

PM

The unique  
needs of  
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# What Is Your Life Expectancy?

There is only one thing that age can give you, and that is wisdom," claims Dr. S. I. Hayakawa.

"Age does not depend upon years," insists Tyron Edwards. It seems, admits Edwards, "some men are born old, and some never grow so."

Perhaps you and I, as pastors, church leaders, or other ministry oriented persons, need to surrender some of our stereotyped ideas about aging and being active. It may, in fact, be time for some of us to admit we are as good or better in some respects at 60 than we were at 40.

Howard McClusky, nationally known gerontologist, supports this idea. The University of Michigan aging expert suggests, "We're capable of much more than we think." In 1776 only one American in 50 was 65 years of age. In 1900 life expectancy reached 47; today it is pushing past 76.

Anyone reaching 65 in 1984 still had an average life expectancy of 16.5 years. Within 35 years, at least one American in five will be 65.

Senility and living in the past are no longer considered a necessary part of life when past 60, insists McClusky. To accent this truth, he points to the wealth controlled by older people, the number of older students in college, and the widespread increase of "gray power" everywhere.

Though all of us have been ag-

ing since the day we were born, most of us can well afford to upgrade our life expectancy. There are, in fact, those whose spirit and influence we would do well to keep among us as long as we can.

I began to consider this as I approached my 65th birthday. About that time, I read the success story of an older minister whose achievements in his post-65 years challenged me greatly.

Having turned 65, he led a dying inner-city church into a highly visible period of spiritual vitality and congregational growth. Having accomplished this, he accepted retirement at 70 only because it was mandatory in his denomination.

"If he can do that, so can I!" I thought to myself. Being in good health and wishing to continue, I readjusted my aim, lifted my focus, and opted for 70. On reaching the 65 mile-marker, I simply stayed on the freeway.

I continued in my role as senior pastor of a small church in which I saw potential for continuing with approval from a loving congregation. I also worked with a heightened awareness and appreciation for the privilege of remaining active.

This did not stop my being confronted with that oft-repeated question among friends, "When are you going to retire?" Thus, I also become acutely aware of those opting out.

Later, I learned the United Methodist Church allowed an-

other friend, I'll call John, to continue past 65. They still mandated retirement at 70, but allowed John to change congregations and remain a full-time pastor. With his change of locations, John and I found ourselves again enjoying our working together in the same community after a separation of 20 years.

As mile-marker 70 came into closer view, my wife and I realized it would be better for our congregation and for us to terminate our 17-year pastorate. Now I'm looking for the best way to move on.

It is not yet time to exit the freeway, but when that time comes, I want to be of the spirit of Washington Gladden. Upon retiring from his Columbus, Ohio, charge, he became pastor emeritus. He continued attending regularly but only preached on occasion.

One frosty day in January 1918, a Columbus visitor learned Dr. Gladden would fill the pulpit that day. And fill it he did! Having served 32 years, preaching, teaching, writing, and influencing people, Gladden proclaimed the wrongness of fiery hate and frothing malice.

This particular January found people hating each other and ministers denouncing America's enemy with flaming fire in their voices. World War I had not yet ended, and the public was not hearing a lot of God's love and forgiveness. That visitor heard the distinguished retiree candidly and positively vocalize his different application.

Following worship that morning, the visitor chanced to overhear two elderly ladies confiding in each other as they made their way to the exit: "We did a wise thing when we kept Dr. Gladden among us as pastor emeritus. If he did nothing but just lived his life here where we can catch his spirit, the influence of his presence alone makes it worthwhile."

Back home a short time later, that same visitor read in his local

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# One of Mr. Rogers' Neighbors

Apparently Fred Rogers and I both learned the same kind of things in seminary: biblical languages, church history, theology, preaching. It appears we wisened up in other ways as well.

The story is told (*Christian Reader*, January 1995) of the time Mr. Rogers and his wife were worshipping in a little church with friends while on vacation. During the sermon, Rogers mentally ticked off every homiletical mistake the elderly preacher was making. When the interminable sermon finally ended, Rogers turned to one of the friends, intending to say something snide about the sermon. But he stopped when he saw tears running down her face. She whispered, "He said exactly what I needed to hear."

"That was a seminal experience for me," said Fred Rogers (later to become host of television's *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*). "I was judging and she was needing, and the Holy Spirit responded to need, not judgment."

In my case, I was the preacher—still a seminarian—in a tiny church in Tenants Harbor, Maine, where my wife and I were on vacation with my entire

family. Proud relatives filled two of the eight center pews. My sermon was titled "Jonah, a Man like You and Me."

This homily had been well received by classmates and my professor of preaching. I delivered it with expression, flare, and exuberance. I even sang Fred Waring's arrangement of "Jonah Got Eat Up by the Whale." The congregation seemed attentive and responsive. My family wore wide smiles of approval; even my "born-again atheist" brothers seemed consensual.

I was basking in approval, greeting the congregants at the door. Last in line stood an elderly lady using a sturdy umbrella for a cane. She did not accept my extended hand but boosted her stooped frame as tall as she could. She announced: "You've got a lot to learn, young man. We're here to worship God Almighty, *not* to be entertained by some smart-aleck know-it-all!"

I have remembered that "seminal moment" throughout my 40-year ministry. When I was judging, she was needing, and the Holy Spirit responded with judgment—of my need.

PM

BY ARTHUR G. WHITE  
Pastor  
CLEMENTSVALE,  
NOVA SCOTIA



newspaper that Washington Gladden became ill that January Sunday and died in July. He never preached again. That January sermon was his valedictory message to that congregation and to Gladden's world.

As I soon enter my eighth decade of life, I see numerous possibilities for driving on a ways. There are green lights in every direction, but I have a genuine fear of not having the good judgment to step aside for younger leadership.

I pray that I may continually upgrade my life expectancy, but not only in the number of years. More importantly, may I keep the proper expectancy in the quality of the life I live and the service I give.

A fellow pastor retired from his 7,000-member Black Baptist church at the ripe old age of 80. That formerly unthought-of prospect now looks like a "could be—well, mmm—just maybe. . . ."

Norman Vincent Peale was still writing books when he died at age 93. Robert Schuller has retooled and revisioned for his eighth decade. My Baptist friend, Del, continues serving as an interim pastor as he turns the corner of his eighth decade.

Whether I can continue *doing* that long does not matter nearly so much as what I am *being* during the remaining time God gives me! After 45 years of feeling guilty if I didn't spend every waking moment achieving those all-important goals and doing everything possible for creating church growth, I am satisfied I have a better handle on what I should expect of myself.

I no longer have, if I ever did, the sheer physical drive to maintain the pace many congregations want. I believe I have the wisdom and, hopefully, the patience and stamina to focus on what should always be our first priority: not so much on *doing* and a great deal more on *being* for Jesus' sake.

PM

# Falsely Accused

Is that your motorcycle outside?" He was a young man, rugged, a construction worker, and he filled the doorway of my office.

I told him it was, wondering if something had happened to it. Then he asked, "Do you work here?"

"I'm the pastor. May I help you?"

He stood there for a moment, obviously struggling with conflicting emotions churning inside. But his determination overcame his timidity. He squared his shoulders and said, "I know I'm supposed to respect a reverend, but anyone who'd do what you've been doing ain't worth respect. When I get through with you—" His pent-up anger gushed out as he described how he was going to give me the beating of my life.

Keeping my desk between us, I tried to calm him down and find out what I had done that deserved such a beating. I was shocked by what I heard.

He told me that his niece and some other girls were walking home from the nearby school when a man jumped from the weeds in the overgrown lot behind the church, exposed himself to them, and then rode away on a motorcycle. Since I rode a motorcycle the same color and model and since it was parked outside the church, he concluded I was the exhibitionist.

Talking fast and praying faster, I tried to convince him that he had the wrong man, and asked

him to take me to see his niece. I was convinced that she would declare me innocent. We drove to the house. I waited outside while he went in to get them, but he soon returned saying the girl and her mother refused to come out. Again I assured him he had the wrong man and that I would go to the school the next

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BY JOHN BAILEY  
Pastor  
AUSTIN, TEXAS



day to clear up the misunderstanding. I'm not sure he totally believed I was innocent, but he was, at least, uncertain enough not to give me a beating.

During the midweek service that evening, I told our church about my afternoon visitor and asked them to pray with me. When I shared my plans for the next day, one of our deacons wisely suggested that I go first to the police station.

I followed his advice and was directed to the Juvenile and Sex Crimes Department, where a man came out of an office, extended his hand, called me by name, and introduced himself.

"How did you know my name?" I asked. "I didn't give it to anyone."

"Oh, I know who you are and probably why you're here."

I sat in stunned silence in his office as he told me what else he knew about me. He rattled off my home address, how long I had lived there, where I had moved from, where my wife worked, the schools our children attended, the model and make of our vehicles—even the license number of my motorcycle.

"You see, Mr. Bailey, we've received several phone calls about you. So has the school principal. Several people have given us your license number."

As I listened, I began to realize what a predicament I was in. Someone was threatening the children of our community, and many parents were convinced that it was I.

"What can I do?" I asked. "Apparently this has been going on for a while, and the community thinks I'm doing it!"

There was no comfort in his answer: "Well, as a pastor, you know how hard it is to stop rumors once they start. We know that you're not the man we're looking for, but I don't know how you can stop the talk."

As I left the police station and headed for the school, I wondered how I would tell my wife about the latest developments.

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We were sure God had directed us to this church. After six months we thought everything was going well. But now, how could we even hope to have a ministry here, especially among the youth, when everyone thought this of me?

But God had placed a practicing Christian as principal of the school. He realized the devastating effect these rumors could have on our church's ministry.

Then, as he told me he had been planning to send a letter to all parents, we both had the same thought: What if the letter not only informed the parents of the problem but also informed them of my innocence? We discussed how this could best be expressed. Finally he said, "You write it up any way you want, and we'll make sure every parent gets a copy."

Two hours later I returned from the local printshop with a stack of letters. Just before classes were dismissed for the day, each child received a letter to take home.

The letter described the problem and explained that among the parents trying to apprehend the man was the pastor of the local church. The letter included my name, our phone number, and a photograph of me sitting on my motorcycle. Parents were encouraged to take precautions and to report any suspicious people to the police, to the school, or to me.

When school ended that day, I was parked on the street. Several children walked down the sidewalk reading the letter. Occasionally, one would point and say to a friend, "That's the preacher."

It was exciting to see how God used that letter to turn what appeared to be a devastating situation into a wonderful opportunity. During the following weeks the attitude of the community changed radically. Children would wave and say: "Hi, Preach. You caught him yet?" Some would ask about our church and Sunday School. Par-

ents whom I'd never met would honk their car horns and wave to me. Others would approach me in the store and say, "I appreciate what you're doing for our children."

The exhibitionist was caught later that year at a school function. A girl sought me out and told me that the man was in the schoolhouse. We found the plain-clothes policeman on duty, and the girl pointed out the man. I thanked God that not only had the guilty man been caught, but also public opinion changed so completely that the girl came to me first for help.

More than a year later, I continued to receive calls from parents whom I had never met who were having problems at home. They said they remembered our church as a place that cared about children.

I praise God for the way He took what to me was a terrible, no-win situation and used it for His glory. Through this experience I learned several principles to use whenever unfounded rumors surface.

**First, I learned the importance of taking my concern to God in prayer.** My immediate response had been, "What can I do?" I had forgotten that the battle is not mine alone, but God's—and He hasn't lost a battle yet!

**Then, I learned the value of sharing the problem with a praying church.** Power comes and victories are won when God's people lift their hearts in united prayer.

Sharing with the church brought another result. I realized that I was not alone. Not everyone was against me. It's easy to have an Elijah complex and to think, "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:14). God reminded me that many of His faithful people stood ready to comfort and to support me.

**Also, I learned to seek the counsel of trusted friends.**

They may have experienced and overcome a similar problem. Certainly, their vision would not be clouded by the emotion of the moment.

**Finally, I learned that when I'm walking in obedience to God's will, I can leave the results to Him.** He knows what He is doing. He will never lose control of the situation. God is sovereign! When dark clouds of opposition threaten, God's words to Isaiah are comforting: "I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (46:9-10). **PM**



"What's the story of the Bible . . . in a nutshell?"



# Practical Christian Thinking: The Importance of Ministry Covenants

Often we hear of ministry covenants being used in lay ministry. Perhaps these covenants are seen as a necessary evil or merely a rote process for securing the allegiance of Sunday School teachers for another year. Ministry covenants, however, have importance when one reflects on their meaning and their function within the church. Ministry covenants, properly understood and articulated, can overcome two of the most important dilemmas in volunteer ministry today. This article offers a rationale for using ministry covenants in the local church. It provides a sample covenant that describes the mutual commitments that covenants should emphasize.

In emphasizing ministry covenants, note that ministry covenants have traditionally been used in the most successful churches. Often the covenants are required by a number of ministerial programs in schools and seminaries. While teaching in a particularly dynamic Sunday School, I was asked to sign and to return such a covenant yearly. In other ministry assignments, I have implemented them myself. In addition, covenants or ministry contracts were required for my field ministry assignments in Bible col-

lege, in seminary, and even in my doctoral studies.

We shall explore the biblical base that informs and motivates great churches, great church leaders, and great church organizations to use covenants.

## The Biblical Foundations

The Old Testament understanding of covenant (known in Hebrew as *berit*) has dual meaning. It could be a covenant between two people (as with David and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 18) or between two communities (similar to the treaties established by Judah and neighboring countries). The second type of covenant, a *suzerain* covenant, was between the king and his subjects. The king would guarantee governance and would demand certain acts of allegiance from his subjects.

A review of the Bible reveals many conversations on covenant: from the initial covenants of Noah and Abraham to the developed understanding of Israel's covenant in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, to the challenge and invitation of the Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, to the new covenant announced by Jesus and reflected in Romans and Hebrews. In the Old Testament, the major theme of the covenants is

consistent: the promises of God and the call to the people to accept and live in the light of those promises. Even the Old Testament prophets' challenge to the people arises out of a misunderstanding of taking God's promises for granted rather than living to the fullness of those promises. Living to the fullness of those promises meant being a covenantal people, a community, however small or large, bound together by what God would do. There was one other corrective: Living to the fullness of those promises meant taking them personally, allowing them to "be written" on our "hearts" rather than assuming them to be an automatic birthright. God's promises were given in community and received personally.

Jesus said little about covenant. Yet what, where, and how He said it speaks volumes to the Old Testament understanding of covenant and to us. Jesus spoke of the new covenant, established in His blood, during the last supper (Mark 14:22-25). God's promises extended to all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The new covenant was indeed a deeply personal covenant, born out of the grace of God. This covenant was initiated by God. Each of us are called to respond.

BY DEAN G. BLEVINS  
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University  
NASHVILLE*



It is a covenant of grace and empowerment through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

This covenant, while deeply personal, is also deeply communal. Jesus announced the covenant during the first Communion, in the midst of His disciples. Communion (or Eucharist), a sacrament that is expressly community oriented, sets the very context of the new covenant. We are not only in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but with each other as Christians. Paul recognized this communal nature in the very act of taking Communion (1 Cor. 11:23-34, cf. 33-34), and thus helps us to understand that our covenant with Jesus Christ is also a covenant with the community of Jesus Christ. It is known also as the Body of Christ, the Church. We enter into covenantal relationship with each other because of the covenant Jesus established with us in His death and resurrection. What had been reduced to a birthright in the Old Testament is now understood as based upon the grace we have received through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### Overcoming the Contemporary Dilemmas

##### Dilemma 1: Covenant or Contract?

Much of the misunderstanding of covenants in our present day comes from certain assumptions in Western culture. The first misunderstanding results from confusion around contracts and covenants. The second misunderstanding comes from the confusion of individual/institution language with personal/community language. These two misunderstandings remain at the heart of the problems many people have with covenants within the church.

Contracts are "if/then" documents. If certain stipulations are met by the party of the first part, then the party of the second part

must fulfill its part of the bargain. If either party does not meet its particular contractual requirements, then the contract may be canceled. If you fill out a business contract and fail to meet the stipulations of that contract, then you may be fired or at least not paid for your work. If your company or school does not pay you for your services, you may sue for breach of contract. Contractual arrangements can often be perceived by the least common denominator: the failure of any part of the contract, no matter how small, may invalidate the entire contract. The contract settles and limits claims the contractors have toward each other.

Covenants are agreements based upon something more than the least common denominator. Covenant language is the language of family. Covenants relate the partners as whole persons or whole communities to each other and define them as sisters or brothers. The covenants create flexible relationships where trust and faithfulness are determined through the action of the covenant partners. This is "because," not "if/then" language. "Because" you are my brother or sister in Christ, I will minister to you. "Because" of what Jesus has done for me, I will encourage and assist you toward the Christlikeness Jesus calls me to have in my life as well. Covenants are based upon mutual respect. Goals set by the covenant are mutual goals for all involved. Failure to attain one of the goals is not grounds for an automatic dismissal or dissolution of the covenant. The covenant fails only when the trust and faithfulness to each other fails, when one party wholly rejects its role in the covenant through its actions or words. Covenants are more enduring than contracts, more empowering because of the fundamental trust that undergirds and flows out of them. When people enter into covenant

with each other, trust builds upon trust.

It is important to see these documents as ministry covenants, not job descriptions nor ministry contracts. The language of job descriptions and contracts actually negates what the ministry covenant hopes to accomplish, creating a biblically accountable relationship between the lay minister and the larger church based upon the grace of God. I prefer the language of "ministry profile" to "job description," and "covenant" to "contract" for the reason that our language invokes a particular understanding of ministry. If we are serious about ministry, we will be cautious to use language that is appropriate to the biblical theme rather than to the legal world.

##### Dilemma 2:

##### Individuals and Institutions Versus Persons and Communities

The second major confusion comes from perceiving religion as an individual endeavor while consigning the church to the role of an institution. This is particularly prominent in American culture, where rugged individualism has been accepted and promoted. At the same time, big institutions are coveted in the business and social world. We tend to think of the church primarily as an institution. We speak of what "the church" needs in order to obtain new members or to be more caring or to be more effective. "The church" becomes an abstract concept with a life of its own. We tend to forget that we are the church. Covenants become those documents that "the church" imposes upon individuals in this framework.

Christianity is not based upon individualism or institutions. Christianity is, however, both personal and communal. Christianity is personal in that it touches each one at deepest levels. The Holy Spirit permeates us. Christianity is also communal

God's  
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received  
personally.

or community based. The Holy Spirit connects us to other Christians. We are part of a community of believers, throughout the world and specifically in the place where we gather for worship, fellowship, nurture, and mission: the local church. We belong to God, and we belong to each other. Jesus was very clear on this in a number of places, but no more clear than in the Great Commandment to love God and your neighbor as yourself. The apostles never saw the church as a group of individuals, but as a body with Christ as the Head. Covenants in this light are documents that arise out of the community. Covenants have a deeply personal commitment among the individuals of that community to support one another until all have opportunity to grow in Christlikeness.

One major way to overcome the artificial tension between our lay ministers and the church is to fashion a covenant that will address mutual responsibilities. Most covenants are fashioned so that the lay minister makes most or all of the commitments. Rarely is a covenant equally balanced so that the lay minister, the leadership of the church, and even the entire congregation are called to covenantal relationships. A covenant written to remind us of our mutual commitment goes a long way in overcoming the dichotomy of individual and institution.

#### **A Ministry Covenant: How It Can Be Designed**

The following covenant is written as a sample or guide. It is designed for both a personal document and a public litany. I encourage you to edit it so that it fits your congregational setting. The primary goal is to focus on each person's ongoing ministry and on the mutual covenant of the total congregation.

#### **SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRIES COVENANT**

**"But to each one of us**

*We belong  
to God, and  
we belong  
to each  
other.*

#### **grace has been given as Christ apportioned it"** (Eph. 4:7).

In response to the grace given to me by Jesus Christ and the confidence placed in me by the church in being selected as a minister, teacher, and leader within the Sunday School, I hereby covenant with this church and with Jesus Christ to continue to give my committed best:

- to follow to the best of my ability the responsibilities of this ministry;
- to guide and empower individuals to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ;
- to maintain a high standard of Christian living as an intentional witness for Christ to others;
- to cultivate my own personal growth and discipleship, to grow as a learner as well as a teacher.

I covenant, as do all members of the Body of Christ, to continue to regularly participate and support the community of believers in worship, education, stewardship, missions, service, and evangelism.

**"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers"**  
(Eph. 4:11).

The Discipleship Committee, represented by the Sunday School superintendent and its members, affirm your faithfulness and ministry. We acknowledge the importance of your ministry, and we covenant with you and before Jesus Christ:

- to provide curriculum, resources, and supplies for your ministry;
- to provide opportunities to expand and improve your ministry;
- to provide a quality educational environment;
- to serve as your advocate in the increase of your ministry.

We covenant, as do all members of the Body of Christ, to continue to regularly participate

and to support the community of believers in worship, education, stewardship, missions, service, and evangelism.

**"To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"** (Eph. 4:12).

We, the congregation, represented by our pastor and church board, acknowledge your faithfulness and ministry. We too seek to follow your example of pursuing Christlikeness, and we covenant with you and Jesus Christ:

- to uphold you in daily prayer;
- to provide support for your ministry by encouraging churchwide participation;
- to provide you with the environment necessary for your ministry and for personal growth.

We covenant, as do all members of the Body of Christ, to continue to regularly participate and to support the community of believers in worship, education, stewardship, missions, service, and evangelism.

**"Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"** (Eph. 4:13).

#### **A Ministry Covenant: How It Functions**

Finally, ministry covenants can serve three functions for those who take them. The following can be part of a teaching session with those engaged in ministry or part of a sermon outline. At any rate, merely personalizing the language provides a way of explaining how covenants can become an ongoing benefit to each minister. The three functions are:

#### **Recognition**

The covenant is first and foremost a recognition of the commitment each person has made as a teacher, minister, and leader and of the gifts you have been

given by the Holy Spirit to accomplish your ministry. It is an acknowledgment of the tremendous contribution that they make to the Body of Christ as they seek to nurture and guide us toward Christlikeness. Covenants become our way of expressing appreciation and trust in their ministry. By their very actions they become a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit operates to demonstrate the love of Jesus to others. Covenants remind others that they are important to the work of Christ within this church, and we, the whole church, recognize their important ministry.

#### Reflection

Educator Donald Griggs has identified five levels of ministry through which many teachers, ministers, and leaders may pass:

1. Committed—having a basic desire to be in ministry;
2. Coping—developing the basic skills for a particular age level or ministry need;
3. Confident—mastering the basic skills to the point that ministry (teaching) becomes much more natural;
4. Creative—supplementing the basic skills with our own creative thoughts and techniques;
5. Constructive—being able to train and mentor others to become effective ministers, teachers, and leaders.

Most ministers pass through these levels at different times of their ministry. We may have to repeat several levels when we take on a new age-group or ministry assignment. Even the most accomplished and creative adult educator can return to the "coping" level when placed into a classroom of six-year-old children! Often how well ministers negotiate one stage influences how they will do in future stages. The base line, however, upon which all of these rest is commitment, our fundamental desire to be in ministry for oth-

ers, and the commitment of the church to support that ministry.

This covenant provides an opportunity to reflect on that commitment personally in each minister's life and communally as a church. It gives a challenge to inquire of one's own commitment level and to answer in the affirmative one's desire to see Jesus in the lives of others. This opportunity allows the congregation to also reflect deeply on its commitment to support ministry and to answer in the affirmative that it is important to the community of Christ. All of us reflect that these commitments could only happen because of the grace of God through Jesus' commitment to us.

#### Reaffirmation

Covenantal reflection leads to the final function. The covenant reaffirms ministry. It reaffirms not only ministry that lay ministers have given but also the ministry they will have now and in the future. The covenant reaffirms God's will that His kingdom will grow in size and depth. The covenantors may participate in that growth. Covenants reaffirm that Jesus Christ will guide and empower all ministers as they allow the Holy Spirit to operate in them. The covenant reaffirms that we do not minister alone but as part of a community of ministers who support each other. Covenants reaffirm the trust we have for one another, the trust we have in Jesus, and, most importantly, the trust Jesus has in us as ministers of His gospel. Covenanting gives an opportunity to celebrate that trust, to allow it to grow and build within us, so we may overflow in our ministry.

When ministry covenants are used to their full depth, they can be powerful reminders to your congregation. Rather than using ministry covenants in a limited way, we can use them to teach important biblical themes and to create a congregational commitment anchored in the gospel. **PM**

# I Love to Teach

I do not know that I could make entirely clear to an outsider the pleasure I have in teaching. I had rather earn my living by teaching than in any other way. In my mind, teaching is not merely a lifework, a profession, an occupation, a struggle; it is a passion. I love to teach. I love to teach as a painter loves to paint, as a musician loves to play, as a singer loves to sing, as a strong man rejoices to run a race. Teaching is an art—an art so great and so difficult to master that a man or woman can spend a long life at it without realizing much more than his limitation and mistakes, and his distance from the ideal. But the main aim of my happy days has been to become a good teacher, just as every architect wishes to be a good architect and every professional poet strives toward perfection. **PM**

—William Lyon Phelps

Covenants  
remind  
others that  
they are  
important  
to the work  
of Christ.

# Look-Alike Doesn't Equal Speak Alike

In his book *Our Search for Happiness*, Mormon apostle M. Russell Ballard insists that followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly known as Mormons, are an essential pillar of mainstream Christianity. Mr. Gordon Hinkley, president of the Mormon church, emphasized this position during an interview with Dan Rather on a national television production of *60 Minutes*. An article published in a Provo, Utah, daily newspaper on May 17, 1996, defended Mormon "Christianity" by declaring that the definition of a Christian that has been established by its use since shortly after Christ's time has been that of a person who accepts Christ as the Messiah and who valiantly tries to live according to His teachings. There is no other criteria. . . . [The only reason Mormons are branded cults and non-Christians is] because they don't believe in the evangelical Trinity.

It would appear from this definition that there is common ground where the Church of the Nazarene and Mormons can find agreement. After all, the disciples complained to Jesus that some people were casting out demons in the name of Christ, but since they were not of them, the disciples told those people to stop. Jesus responded, "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark

9:38-40). Therefore, if we carry that principle forward, it would seem that Mormonism is simply another Christian denomination.

Then Paul came along and wrote, "If we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8, cf. v. 9). On the surface, both Mormons and Nazarenes seem to be saying the same thing. We each believe in the historical Jesus whom we call the Savior. We each believe that this historical Jesus came to earth as a baby at Bethlehem. We each believe that His sacrifice is the Atonement that paid the debt separating us from immortality in heaven. We each believe that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah of Israel. Everything would seem to point to a common ground of belief.

It is here that all similarity ends. Mormon theology presupposes a preexistence from which all human life originates. The preexistence is ruled by a Mormon god named Elohim, commonly referred to by Mormons as Heavenly Father. Elohim was once a man like you and me who lived on a distant planet. His god had also been a man who progressed to godhood before he was born. This recurring cycle of preexisting spiritual procreation has been the pattern for populating planets throughout the universe without any consciousness of time or beginning. The conditions of preexistence find each Mormon god to possess numerous wives. Through spiritual sex, their wives are con-

tinually pregnant, producing the spirit babies who account for all of the angels, as well as all of the humans who exist.

According to Mormon theology, in order to qualify for godhood, each of the spirit babies procreated in the spirit world must take on flesh and become human. One third of the preexisting spirits, those who followed Lucifer and chose to rebel against Elohim in the preexistence, are not allowed to assume flesh, but were assigned to the realm of Satan in what is referred to as the place of banishment. This place is reserved also for apostate Mormons. For those choosing to enter into human bodies, their future is determined according to their works in this life. Unless they apostatize from the Mormon religion, they will eventually qualify for one of three heavens. The three heavens are called the Celestial, the Terrestrial, and the Telestial kingdoms. Only "temple worthy" Mormons who are found deserving can achieve the upper Celestial kingdom. There they will either live with Elohim and the Savior—Jesus—or go off to their own planet, taking with them their many wives to begin the process of populating some barren planet and becoming a god of that planet. All others will be servants to those who reside in the Celestial kingdom. Only males, who achieve the higher level of Celestial kingdom, will live in the realm of deity and be eligible to become gods. Women are subject to the man's calling them out of the grave and remain subservient child-bearers throughout eternity.

With regard to planet Earth, this spiritual procreation brought into existence two brothers named Jesus and Lucifer—Satan. In contrast with Mormon dogma, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was God before His earthly incarnation and that Satan is a created angel. The Bible declares that all things, including all angels, were made—created—by Jesus before His incarnation at Bethlehem.

Grace has no meaning in Mor-

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mon theology. Mormons teach that the atonement that Jesus brought is not sufficient to achieve forgiveness of all our sins. We must each find atonement for our own sins through our deeds or the shedding of our own blood. To a Mormon, the shedding of Jesus' blood in Gethsemane is the more effective sacrifice. They teach that the Cross was involuntary, thus ineffective for the big sins. Hence, Christ's atonement is limited to achieving immortality for all humans. Salvation or eternal life is achieved only as a result of good works.

Following death, Mormons teach that all humans must be screened by Joseph Smith to determine whether they go into paradise (that part of the spirit world inhabited by righteous spirits awaiting the resurrection of their bodies) or Spirit Prison (a kind of purgatory where individuals will be taught the Mormon gospel by those who cross over from paradise to witness before those in the Spirit Prison). Accordingly, through spiritual intervention and baptisms for the dead, those who do not make it in this life will all have another chance at heaven.

Mormons do not believe that Jesus was God before His earthly birth. Thus, they deny the Incarnation. Mormon theology claims that Jesus was born much like all other humans. His spirit body came down from the spirit world to inhabit a human body conceived by sexual activity between two humans, although on this point Mormon theology is somewhat contradictory. It was through His good life that Jesus became a god. Mormons teach that the same thing is possible for each human being. All men have the potential of becoming gods, but few achieve this position.

The similarities that lure Nazarenes and other Christians to believe Mormons are simply another Christian denomination are deceptive. John warns believers not to "believe every spirit, but

test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Paul writes that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), deceiving the world into believing his charade to be the truth. What Satan says sounds and looks good. Adam and Eve discovered this to be true. The temptation that Satan put before Adam and Eve is the very same allurements that he offered Joseph Smith. Satan claimed that men may become gods. Because only gods decide what is good and what is evil, each Mormon god can make his own rules without interference from any other god. Thus, each god is autonomous in his own territory. Elohim is responsible for planet Earth, and he is the only god of this planet. For this reason, when Mormons refer to scriptures that declare there is one God, they interpret that to be the god of this earth, but reserve the understanding that many other gods exist elsewhere.

Matthew records: "Many will say . . . 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (7:22-23). These men and women of whom Matthew wrote are good men and women, doing good deeds, and even performing miracles in the name of Jesus. They seem righteous in the eyes of the world. In a similar vein, the institution of Mormonism stands today as one of the most attractive testimonies to religious wholesomeness on earth. It is an acceptable religion proclaiming nearly universal salvation while denying the terminal consequences of sin. Such doctrines eliminate the most serious objections that non-Christians raise in their opposition to the Christian faith. Mormonism advocates a rigid standard of moral and ethical conduct, yet provides loopholes

offering lesser incentives to those failing to attain the ideal standards of celestial acceptance. In this way, everyone can get into some level of heaven, even if they don't follow the rules. No matter where they end up, they're taught that it will be better than it is here.

Finally, our Lord cautioned all who claim His name: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:4-5). On two occasions Joseph Smith testified that Jesus himself stood before him to proclaim a restored gospel. The first time Smith was the age of 14 near his home in Palmyra, New York. The second time occurred in the newly constructed Mormon temple at Kirtland, Ohio. Smith championed this gospel to be a restoration of the true gospel, which had been lost in the shuffle following the death of the original 12 apostles.

During His Olivet discourse, Jesus cautioned His disciples: "If anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:26-27).

All look-alikes do not speak alike. To distinguish between truth and error, each Christian must measure all claims of truth against the real person of God Almighty as revealed in the Bible. There is no other source of truth. Jesus has warned that "false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24). It is for this reason that a personal, intimate relationship with God is essential. As we come to know Jesus in a personal way, His person becomes the standard of measurement that we can rely upon to distinguish between truth and error (cf. 1 John 4:6).

PM

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# Is Social Drinking Acceptable for the Church Member?

## Part Two

### I. Alcoholic Beverages Are Fermented Beyond That Recommended in the Bible

In fact, unfermented wine had been prominent and popular throughout history. Dr. Herrick Johnson states:

The evidence is to be found in almost any classical authority. So say Plato, Columella, Pliny, Aristotle. So indicate Horace, Homer, Plutarch. Some of these ancient writers give in detail the very processes of boiling, filtering, and sulphurization by which the wines were preserved from fermentation. Anthon, in his *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*; Archbishop Potter, in his *Grecian Antiquities*; Smith, in his *Dictionary of the Bible*; and many other competent scholars, confirm and support this position. Moses Stuart, that prince of philologists, said, "Facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wines unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor and finer quality than fermented wine."<sup>1</sup>

Much to the chagrin of drinking church members is the fact that

the art of distillation was not

even known until the ninth century. . . . God, by His direct act, does not make alcohol. The laws of nature, if left to themselves, do not produce it. By these laws, the grapes ripen; if not eaten, they rot and are decomposed. The manufacture of alcohol is wholly man's device.<sup>2</sup>

Prov. 23:30-32 expressly commands, "Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper" (NASB throughout unless noted). We are warned to

stay away from that which has a strong stage of fermentation.

***Alcoholic beverages that we know today are not the wine that remind us of the blessing of the Lord.***

Dr. Buttner says the grape contains water "purer than that from the best spring, elaborated and filtered through the walls of a multitude of vegetable cells"; and Dr. LeClerc declares "almost miraculous the chemical operations by which the water of the ground is transformed into the most delicate and healthful beverage." The fruit of the vine diminishes uric acid, reduces

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acidity, decreases intestinal fermentation, stimulates hepatic function. It is a little sanitarium in itself and therein typifies the universal, life-giving ministry of our Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Ps. 104:14-15 states, "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine which makes man's heart glad, so that he may make his face glisten with oil, and food which sustains man's heart." This is talk about creation, not stirring in more grain. Eccles. 9:7-8 echoes the same sentiment: "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head." The Scripture does "not condone the drinking of alcoholic beverages! It simply teaches that everything God created was provided for man's strength and enjoyment. When man mixes other ingredients into the wine in order to produce an intoxicating drink, God condemns it (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35)."<sup>4</sup> Look at the context.

**Alcoholic beverages are not the wine created by Jesus at Cana of Galilee.**

In John 2:10 the "best" (NIV) or "good" terms apply to the juice of the grape resulting from the sheer weight of bringing it in from the field. There was a pan underneath the vat that received this particular type of juice. It is a practice that is still common today. Though this was the best wine, it was not the most abundant.

The stone jars were large, containing about twenty gallons apiece. By the social rules of the day each guest was expected to wash his hands before eating, and a considerable amount of water would be needed for this. At the lowest estimate, 120 gallons of water would be available. If made into wine, it would supply ap-

proximately 2,000 four ounce glasses.<sup>5</sup>

For Jesus to fill 20-30 gallon waterpots with this "best" wine was a true miracle! The symbolism was the point of the miracle, not the fact that Jesus made wine. "Most writers acknowledge that in the Johannine narrative there is an implicit contrast between water used for Jewish purificatory rites and the wine given by Jesus; the former is characteristic of the old order, the latter of the new."<sup>6</sup> "Jesus had come to bring about conversion: water to wine, sinner to saints."<sup>7</sup>

The wedding guests had been drinking alcoholic wine. . . . This and this alone explains our Lord's withering words to Mary. They were directed not against herself but against her implied proposal. She was suggesting that He should use His divine power to make an evil thing. So at the opening of His ministry did He show His aversion to alcoholic wine and those drinking it. Later He represented Himself at His Second Coming as "cutting in pieces those who eat and drink with the drunken" (Luke 12:46).<sup>8</sup>

There is no proof that Jesus was a drinker of intoxicating wine, *oinopotēs* in the Greek. "Jesus did turn water into wine. But there is absolutely no foundation in Scripture to back the assumption that it was alcoholic."<sup>9</sup>

To argue that the "good wine" which the miracle of Jesus produced was hard liquor is utterly ridiculous! It is far more likely to believe that it was closer to the sweet grape juice that was so highly prized and which took special processes of prevention to preserve. This "good" or "best" wine was usually served at the beginning, while older and more fermented wine would be brought out at the end, when people would be less likely to notice the difference.<sup>10</sup>

Ernest Gordon concurs with Hocking:

It is inconceivable that our

Lord's first miracle after the reception of the Spirit should have been to make intoxicants, ever the great opponent of the life of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), or that the wine He prepared for the feast was fermented, that is decayed. . . . To the objection that the word "*oinos*," wine, is used both for the intoxicating wine of the feast and the wine Christ made, and hence that both must have been intoxicating, one can quote Abbott, "*Dictionary of Religious Knowledge*": "It is tolerably clear that the word wine does not necessarily imply fermented liquor. It signifies only a production of the vine." An analogy can be found in the New England use of the word cider as covering both sweet cider and hard cider. Certainly Christ called unfermented wine "wine" when He said, "Neither do men put new wine in old bottles."

In the Septuagint the Hebrew word for grape juice, *tirosh*, is translated at least 33 times by the Greek word *oinos*, wine, and the adjective "new" is not present. *Oinos* without qualification can then in the New Testament mean unfermented wine.<sup>11</sup>

**Alcoholic beverages are not the wine that relieves stomach problems.**

In 1 Tim. 5:23, Paul advises Timothy to consume a little wine. "It is noticeable that Paul does not advise Timothy to **drink** wine but to **use a little**, presumably as medicine."<sup>12</sup> "The medicinal use of wine (Luke 10:34) was well known (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 23.23.43; 23.25.50f), and it was recognized that wine had a purifying effect on water (1 Tim. 5:23)."<sup>13</sup> Wine was used "mingled with oil as a healing agent and with myrrh as a narcotic"<sup>14</sup> in the Gospels. "Because water was relatively scarce and often polluted in biblical times, wine was used much more extensively than it is today."<sup>15</sup>

Timothy's physical problems

God, by His  
direct act,  
does not  
make  
alcohol.

were being intensified by the water he was drinking. . . . Paul recommended wine with no evidence as to its condition. Since the nutritional value of wine . . . decreases with fermentation, it makes sense to believe that Paul was referring to the sweet, refreshing grape juice, or wine that is unfermented.<sup>16</sup>

Even today in Israel, doctors do not recommend wine but grape juice. Grape juice is deemed the best option for medicinal purposes. A recent study seems to support this finding:

Researchers at Cornell University . . . say grape juice is a teetotaler's alternative. . . . A Cornell plant scientist began testing grape juice after he identified the compound in red wine believed responsible for reducing cholesterol. Called resveratrol, it's an anti-fungal agent found in grape skins and released during fermentation. White wines contain little or no resveratrol because the skins are removed before fermentation.

Although grape juice is not fermented, Creasy found that grapes release resveratrol as they're heated in juice production. Analyzing 18 juice samples from three parts of the country, he found that juice contained more resveratrol than 60% of the wines tested.<sup>17</sup>

**Alcoholic beverages are not the wine used in the worship of the Lord.**

Deut. 14:23 describes "new wine" as that used in the presence of the Lord for tithe. *Tirosh* in Hebrew refers to wine that is less than 40 days old. Up to 40 days this "new wine" could be used for religious purposes; after that it was not acceptable. By contrast, old wine was one year old at least.

The great classical authority on agriculture, Columella, writes (Book 12, ch. 29): "That your grape juice may be always as sweet as when it is

The  
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new thus proceed. After you apply the press to the grapes, take the newest must, put it in a new container (amphora), bung it up, and cover up very carefully with pitch lest any water should enter; then sink it in a cistern or pond of cold water and allow no part of the amphora to remain above the surface. After forty days take it out. It will remain sweet for a year."<sup>18</sup>

In the Scriptures, fermentation is decay! Hence, there were strict instructions on that used for the worship of the Lord:

Fermentation begins immediately (the same day or next day) with a slight foam. Jewish tradition teaches that this initial stage makes the wine available for the wine tithe. After a week, violent processes subside and the wine is transferred to other jars or stronger wineskins. This is referred to as "new wine."

Up to 40 days the wine could be used for the "drink offering" mentioned in the Mosaic law. From this point on, the wine is deteriorating rapidly (fermentation is a decaying process) and is unacceptable for religious purposes. The rabbis of ancient times mixed the wine of Passover in the ratio of three parts water to one part wine in order to prevent any problem with fermentation or possible intoxication.

The longest time that wine was kept was three years. The term "old wine" seems to refer to that which is at least one year old.<sup>19</sup>

"Christ's few references to wine are easily understood. 'No man putteth new wine into old bottles.' This because the old wineskins are full of fermenting lees. The unfermented wine must be put into clean, fresh . . . skins to protect it from fermentation (Luke 5:36-39)."<sup>20</sup> Even Deut. 32, the Song of Moses, describes the difference between the blessing of "the blood of grapes" in verse 14 as opposed

to "the vine of Sodom," the "grapes of poison," and wine as "the venom of serpents" in verses 31 to 33.

## II. Alcoholic Beverages Are a Poor Substitute for the Wine of the Holy Spirit

This is instructed to us in Eph. 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."

Alcohol is the true *aqua mortis*. The Lord of Life would not in any way have associated Himself with it. That would have been to ruin the best symbol of the Communion. "Ye do shew **the Lord's** death," said Paul. The Lord's death differed from all other deaths in that His holy flesh did not "see corruption." His *soma*, body, never became a *ptoma*, a corpse (Acts 2:27-31). The word *ptoma* is not even once mentioned in the Passion narratives.<sup>21</sup>

Fermentation is a process that the grape experiences as it deteriorates. When the grape ferments, it becomes a corpse: "The *soma* of the grape has become a *ptoma*, a liquid corpse."<sup>22</sup> Fermentation is decay! "The fruit of the vine' is not the decayed fruit of the vine."<sup>23</sup> "Fermented wine is decayed wine. Can that be the symbol of the new life in the Spirit? His holy flesh never saw decay or corruption. The cup of the Lord and the cup of the devil are two entirely different things. . . . Christ is the Creator of life, not death!"<sup>24</sup>

"The best way to avoid the evil consequences of drinking too much is not to drink at all."<sup>25</sup> One may draw one's own conclusions, but the evidence appears to indicate that social drinking is not acceptable for the church member. It is a poor witness to the weaker brother. It is difficult to discern moderation. There is also the consideration of the context of the times. Presently, refrigeration is a modern convenience that was not available for those in Bible times. Grape juice can be pre-

served for a much longer time. Also, modern water purification is an advantage that was not prominent during the days that our Savior walked on earth.

Can you, church member, control your alcoholic urges? Under the influence of wine, Lot was the victim of incest with his daughters in Gen. 19. Noah was considered a righteous man, yet because of alcohol, he is the first example of drunkenness and attendant immoral behavior in Gen. 9:21. Prov. 23:29-35 condemns an individual that takes "mixed wine." Hos. 4:11 mentions wine and harlotry in the same thought. Isa. 28:7 describes those who drink as being set aside as useless.

Rather, we should take the opposite approach. The evidence has shown that social drinking for the church member should not be a consideration. "Christian liberty is for the purpose of glorifying God, and not for the purposes of sin."<sup>26</sup> Paul admonishes believers twice in 1 Thess. 5:6, 8, "be sober" (abstain from wine, *nēphōmen*). Abstinence assures a closer walk with God in Deut. 29:2-6. Total abstinence avoids the appearance of evil, according to 1 Thess. 5:22.

If the church member truly wishes to grow in faith and in one's relationship to the Father, abstaining from alcoholic beverages is not an option. The Scriptures indicate, both in the Old Testament and the New, that indulging in such a practice does not bring glory to the Lord.

The evidence has shown that social drinking for the church member should not be a consideration.

There just does not seem to be the overwhelming evidence that God condones social drinking.

If for no other reason, the church member should avoid this worldly practice just from the standpoint of being set apart from the ungodly. Drinking is a practice that is identified with those things of the world, and the church member should not identify with it at all. It should not be considered a gray area, open to interpretation at all. Charles B. Cousar words it well in the following thought:

Visitors from outer space would find it well nigh impossible to discern the difference between the social and political culture of North America, with its remnants of a civil religion designed to bless the status quo, and the Christian community. One could of course hope that the reason for the indistinctness derives from the church's success in transforming culture, that the social and political structures have become humane and generous as the leaven pervades the loaf. But unfortunately the reverse is often the case. It is more evident that the church has accommodated itself to the prevailing environment rather than shaped it, becoming no more than an echo of a generally accepted system of values.<sup>27</sup>

May God enable His Church to shape society rather than accommodate it. May pastors and church members not merely

echo societal mores, but instead sound a clarion call for a life that is disciplined, delightful, and different.

PM

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## Pontius' Puddle



# How Small Churches Can Minister to Singles

A pastor was recently asked how many singles he had in his church. He thought for a minute, then replied: "Oh, just a few. There's Kathy and Chris." He paused, thought a minute more, then shrugged, "That's about all."

A survey later revealed that one-third of his congregation was single.

Hard to believe? Not for a single. Singles are very much aware of other singles around them. Married people aren't. Married pastors are often not aware of singles or singles' issues at all. They tip off their ignorance as they use sermon illustration after sermon illustration appropriate to married couples only, make no reference to singles, and feature family-type programs and activities exclusively.

A few decades ago, our churches were predominantly made up of married couples with children. Times are changing rapidly. Today, singles make up from one-third to one-half of the population in the average congregation. Statistics tell us that never-marrieds are one of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population. Older singles will be the fastest-growing population in the next 25 years. Divorce is rampant. During a typical day in America, 2,989 children witness the breakup of their parents' marriages. Nearly 30 percent of American children are growing up in single-parent households today. That means our churches are filled with sin-

gle-parent families. These families have different needs than married households. (Statistics from *Single Adult Ministries Journals*, Jan./Feb. 1996, May/June 1996, July/Aug. 1996.)

There is no excuse today for our churches to ignore singles. Many large churches have had singles pastors on staff for years. That's fine for the large churches. What about the smaller churches? Not many small churches could even consider hiring a Christian education director or a youth pastor, let alone someone for singles. Are they to give up? No!

Let's explore some ideas that even small churches can do to minister to singles.

## 1. Survey

First, find out what kind of singles you have in your church. All singles are not alike. A 20-year-old college student certainly has little in common with a 35-year-old divorcee with two children or with a 75-year-old widow, other than the fact that none of the three are married.

A survey might look something like this.

### Singles Survey

In order to meet the needs of the singles in our congregation, we are asking all singles to fill out this survey and return it to the church office as soon as possible.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Please check the following that apply:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18 to 25 college student
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18 to 25 career with no children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18 to 25 career with children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25 to 32 never married
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25 to 32 divorced with no children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25 to 32 divorced with children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33 to 45 never married
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33 to 45 divorced with no children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33 to 45 divorced with children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45 and older never married
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45 and older divorced with no children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45 and older divorced with children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other. Please explain.

Please list the names and ages of your children in the spaces below.

What are the three greatest ministry needs you have from the church?

Hand out the surveys during the worship time for several weeks. Then send them out to singles in the congregation who have not turned in theirs. The information you get back from the

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surveys will help to determine future plans.

## 2. Sunday School Class

As stated before, singles may not have much in common other than the fact that they are not married. At some point, consider specialized programs. However, a Sunday School class may be a starting point for singles in the congregation to get acquainted with each other. It's also an attraction for a single newcomer. The class does not have to be taught by a single person, but the course of study should deal with singles' issues. Possible topics are: Budgeting, Cooking for One, Living a Celibate Lifestyle, or Dealing with Anger. Other ideas can be found by talking with the singles or by visiting a Christian bookstore.

## 3. Social Events

One of the greatest needs for singles is having a healthy place to socialize. It shouldn't take a paid professional staff person to plan a monthly event. A few of the singles should be able to do this. The job of the church is to be willing to provide the place and possibly help with the finances. Surely, a little money can be allocated in the budget for singles.

If there aren't enough singles in the church to provide monthly activities, find out what the other churches in the area are doing for singles. Ask to be put on their mailing lists. Then give this information to the singles.

## 4. Singles Information

Provide a section in your church newsletter and bulletin for singles' information. Ask some of the singles to be reporters. Consider giving space on a bulletin board or information table for singles. Information might include social events, baby-sitting information, information about divorce recovery pro-

grams in the area, and so on. Make sure directions are always given to meeting places. Simply saying that an activity is going to take place at Chris's house is not enough. Not everyone knows where Chris lives.

## 5. Small Groups

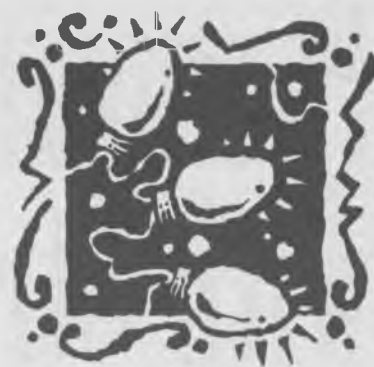
This is where you must start breaking the singles categories down by age and commonality. Don't try to lump all singles into one small group. Only form groups when there are enough of a kind to make them work. Groups that work well are college age, under 30 and never married, under 30 and divorced, career singles, single again (30 and over), and senior singles.

To start groups, find potential leaders, and give them some training. Make sure they know the basics of small-group leadership before you let them begin. Numerous books are on the market regarding small-group leadership.

## 6. Spotlight the Singles

Mention singles and singles' activities often from the pulpit. Let your singles know you recognize they are there. Keep the whole congregation informed about what is happening with the singles. A singles-friendly church is bound to attract more singles.

Singles ministry is no longer only for large churches or churches able to hire singles pastors. When you let the singles in the congregation know you care about them, you may be surprised to find leadership emerging from within. You may also find that you are able to network with other small churches in your area to provide programs and activities for singles. Singles ministry is not a fad that is going to go away in a few years. It's here to stay. Our singles population is growing. Small churches need to get involved in the ministry.



Near the Christmas holiday season, my son asked me to read him the story about the boy who was sick.

"I've never read you a story about a sick boy," I said.

"Yes, you did," he insisted.

I decided to read *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

When I came to "He went to the window and threw up the sash," Bobby exclaimed, "That's it! That's it!"

—Elizabeth R. Sphar  
Green Valley, Arizona



PM

Singles  
make up  
from  
one-third to  
one-half  
of the  
population  
in the  
average  
congregation.



# Pastoral Visitation with Stroke Patients

**T**he doctor said my husband would have trouble walking after his stroke, but why does he burst into tears for no reason at all?"

"Why can't Grandfather use his right arm?"

"I can't understand my wife when she talks; her words don't make any sense."

"Why has Mother's personality changed? Before the stroke she was outgoing and active; now she's withdrawn and doesn't seem to care."

These questions and comments indicate the depth of frustration, puzzlement, and anguish experienced by stroke patients and those who love them. Persons who have had a stroke are catapulted into a strange, new world where they feel cut off from normal daily living and isolated from significant others who demonstrate they care but do not understand the impact a stroke can have on a person. Stroke patients live between the times. The past has been uprooted and wrenched away, while the future remains hidden and uncertain. Having a stroke means to lose part of yourself and be forced to live in a frightening interlude where one never knows if what has been lost can or will be recovered. No wonder uneasiness and anxiety surface as patients, family, and friends struggle to redefine who they are, how to relate, and what to do.

Pastoral visitors—clergy and laity—cannot erase the emotion-

al pain and physical deficits that often accompany a stroke. They can use their visits, however, to help stroke patients discover and use inner spiritual resources to cope with the emotional pain and physical deficits. In order for that kind of intervention to occur, pastoral visitors need to enhance their visits by utilizing the following knowledge, approaches, and skills: (a) knowing the anatomy of strokes, (b) viewing the visit and the rehabilitation process as an opportunity for fulfillment and redemption, (c) acquiring and applying visitation skills that emphasize the intrinsic worth of the person.

## The Anatomy of Strokes

The medical term for stroke is cerebral vascular accident. A CVA affects the brain by cutting off blood to a portion of tissue, thereby causing cells to become impaired and die. Two conditions that may be present in the cerebral vascular system can cause a stroke. They are atherosclerosis and hypertension. When atherosclerosis is present, a stroke can be caused by either a thrombosis (a blood clot formed in a vessel of the cerebral vascular system) or an embolism (a floating blood clot from another part of the body which lodges in the cerebral vascular system). Hypertension (high blood pressure) causes a stroke when a blood vessel in the brain breaks and the surrounding area is filled with blood, creating what is called a cerebral hemor-

rhage. When blood is cut off to a portion of the brain, the affected area ceases to operate normally, and certain bodily functions are compromised. Because the brain and cerebral vascular system are so complex, the possible residual effects of a stroke are many and varied.

Pastoral visitors need to know that strokes do not affect everybody the same way. Poststroke behaviors and abilities depend on what area of the brain was damaged, the nature of the injury, and how recently the stroke occurred. Some areas of the brain function normally after a stroke, while others may not. As a result, patient behavior is deceptive, and appearances often mask realities. This is to say that stroke patients manifest a lot of inconsistencies in their behavior; therefore, it is important to know what effect the stroke had on the person you are visiting. If the visit occurs in the hospital, make sure to check with the nursing staff or chaplain to find out what deficits the patient has and how the family is coping. If the visit takes place in the patient's home, the information you need can be obtained from the family before the visit occurs. The point is that a pastoral visitor has to have flexibility and a willingness to use pastoral approaches that the patient can participate in and comprehend. For example, Communion at bedside is inappropriate for a patient who has swallowing difficulties.

The pastoral visitor needs to be aware that aphasia is one possible side effect of a stroke. Aphasia is the term for interference with the comprehension and use of language. Receptive aphasia means the patient can hear what is said but does not understand the words. Expressive aphasia means the patient knows what he or she wants to say, tries, but can't speak, or the words are garbled. It would be unrealistic for the pastoral visitor to expect a person with expres-

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sive aphasia to recite the Lord's Prayer or sing the words of an old, familiar hymn. It would also be inappropriate for the visitor to expect a person with receptive aphasia to understand a lengthy passage of Scripture that is read.

The pastor and lay visitor need to know that brain injuries can cause memory problems. For instance, when a person is paralyzed on the right side of the body, there is a tendency to have memory problems associated with the use of language. Paralysis on the left side of the body tends to be associated with problems related to spatial-perceptual abilities such as eye-hand coordination, grasping and judging distance. Also, a person may have memory deficit and experience neither language nor spatial-perceptual deficits. If you visit someone with memory loss, keep in mind that he or she may not remember the visit. **Even though you might have known each other for years, there is no guarantee you will share a common fund of memory and experience.** In such cases, it is helpful to leave a calling card so the family will know you have visited. Make sure to write the date and time of visit on the card.

Some stroke patients may have what is called a visual field cut, which means not being able to see out of either the right side or left side of each eye. Knowing about a visual field cut will help determine where you want to stand or sit; otherwise the entire visit may take place without the patient ever seeing you or knowing you are there. One of the more visible signs of a stroke is paralysis, which may occur on either side or both sides of the body. If there is paralysis, the patient may not be able to raise a hand for a handshake or be able to grasp a Communion cup.

Stroke patients experience loss of emotional control and cry easily for no apparent reason. This is called organic emotional lability

and happens because the stroke causes a breakdown of the body's natural defense mechanisms. Stroke patients may also cry because they are depressed. In either case, the pastoral visitor can be assured that he or she is not the cause. If the tears are caused by organic emotional lability, they are easily interrupted by diverting attention, changing the subject, or asking a new question. Tears brought on by depression are not easily interrupted and ought to be met with calm assurance and statements such as "That's all right" or "It's all right to cry" or "I cry too" or "I'm here with you" or "God loves you" or "We are praying for you." If the patient is depressed, do not try to make the patient stop crying.

The pastoral visitor needs to know about some other possible aftereffects of a stroke. For instance, a person's hearing may be impaired, or there may be loss of sensation or touch. A person may become unaware of pressure on or within the body. There may be pains in various parts of the body. Or a person may become incontinent. In addition, stroke patients may offer sudden outbursts of profanity. Remember that profanity following a stroke is not related to whether the patient used profanity before the stroke. The pastoral visitor should not condemn the patient for swearing. The issue is best dealt with by allowing the words to pass without comment, then directing the conversation elsewhere.

#### Opportunity for Fulfillment and Redemption

The Bible contains a concept known as *kairos*, which means God's time; a time of opportunity, fulfillment, and redemption. Pastoral visitors will find it helpful to regard their visits as *kairos* time. Chronological time is measured on the face of a clock, and the hands never move fast enough for the stroke patient going through a rehabilitation pro-

gram. *Kairos* time is different from chronological time. In what way? Old Testament prophets demonstrated that time is full of God-given possibilities. Those who wish to find meaning in time will, according to some of the prophets, search out its potential by affirming that God can help people accomplish great things through faith, even in the face of difficult circumstances. This is what rehabilitation is all about, the process of reaching deep down inside to find personal, physical, and spiritual resources needed to become as independent as possible. In the New Testament, Jesus appeared in order that time might be fulfilled. While it is impossible to turn the clock back and make the stroke disappear, it is possible to help individuals and families discover fulfillment in time of crisis.

Prayer life and devotions can take on new meaning. The pace of life changes. Little things previously taken for granted become very significant. Values change as relationships with those you love take on new meaning. Pastoral visitors can help stroke patients and family members say to each other what they have kept in their hearts and wanted to say but never did. Pastoral visitors can help stroke patients, their families, and the church understand rehabilitation as a time for *kairos*, new creativity, and God breaking into one's personal history. It is an opportunity to use the individual's personal faith, values, beliefs, and experience to find meaning and purpose. Applaud and affirm the smallest achievements. It is important to do that because there is a tendency in today's world to associate loss of function with passivity and inaction. Pastoral care providers can help stroke patients and their families see beyond that narrow point of view in order to view themselves as worthy, lovable, and created in the image of God. To do so, clergy and laity alike need to ac-

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quire and use some practical skills that emphasize the intrinsic worth and sacredness of life as opposed to the notion that "You are what you do." The skills and approaches listed below will be beneficial additions to the ministry of pastoral care.

#### Visitation Skills

*Encourage the patient to speak, and affirm him or her when the attempt is made.*

Offer generous praise, even though the attempts may be far from perfect. Avoid criticizing the patient for not being able to speak clearly, because criticism may cause a retreat into silence. Give the patient opportunity to talk first, even if self-expression is painfully slow. Make sure to avoid supplying words, completing sentences, and talking for the patient. Not allowing the patient to finish what he or she has started to say destroys self-confidence. The aphasic patient often has to stop after a few words to think about what he or she wants to say next. If you knew the patient before the onset of the stroke, do not use the patient's prior abilities as the point of comparison for how well the patient is now communicating. If comparisons are to be made, they should be made on the basis of the patient's improvement since the stroke.

*Keep sentences short and words simple, and avoid using stilted, unnatural speech.*

Too many complex words easily confuse some stroke patients. Pleasantly repeat your statements if the patient does not seem to understand. Remember to treat the patient like an adult; do not talk down or use baby talk. The stroke patient may display symptoms that make him or her appear childlike, but he or she has the same thoughts and feelings as before the stroke.

Uneasiness  
and anxiety  
surface as  
patients  
struggle to  
redefine  
who they  
are.

*Present a constructive outlook.*

You and the church are part of a positive support system for the patient and family; therefore, you need to clarify your feelings and attitudes toward persons with disabilities. If you feel stroke patients are in a hopeless, desperate situation, then your attitude will be felt by the patient, even if you say the opposite. Your body language and the tone of your speaking will tell all. Emphasize the things the patient can do, and take note of the little, regular gifts the patient shares with others. Congratulate the patient when he or she gives and receives. Provide positive affirmation by using words of encouragement, faith, love, and reassurance. To keep a positive attitude does not mean to avoid going into the hard places with a patient and family. Instead, it means being willing to face difficult challenges together and to discover glimpses of hope in order to strengthen the self-confidence of the patient and family. In all this you will, of course, use your personal faith resources and those of your church, including prayer, Scripture, sacraments, and the theological language of your faith tradition.

*The pastoral visitor needs to adopt realizable goals for the relationship.*

Expecting a patient to perform as well after a stroke as before is unrealistic and unfair, so reduce your expectations of yourself and the patient. Revise your approach to prayer. A short prayer containing very clear, direct language is more appropriate than a lengthy prayer. Reading a couple of verses of scripture will serve a better purpose than a whole chapter. Viewing a piece of church art can replace countless words. Bringing a gift such as a picture of Jesus or a small cross or a picture of your church has great impact. Expecting too

much of the visit and not being able to accomplish it breeds a sense of failure in the visitor and frustration in the patient. Remember, rehabilitation takes a long time, so goals do not have to be limited to what can be accomplished in a short time.

The pastoral visitor can help the patient identify some freedoms and expressions that enable him or her to feel like something is being accomplished. These can be as minor as being able to move one's fingers, to wiggle a toe, or to remember one's own telephone number. The pastoral visitor can capitalize on the importance of nonverbal communication. Do not assume that the aphasic patient cannot communicate or that you cannot minister to a person who has trouble speaking. Stroke patients need smiles, hugs, and an arm around the shoulder. Act out your communication by using pantomime if necessary. In the act of touching a person, you are affirming the patient as being worthy, accepted, and lovable even in the midst of this devastating illness.

By utilizing the knowledge, approaches, and skills described above, pastoral visitors affirm that stroke patients are created in the image of God. Furthermore, caregivers demonstrate the church's willingness to walk with people through the reality and trials of a stroke. By doing so, the church witnesses to God's love for hurting people and demonstrates its desire to understand the patient as a whole person. The spiritual dimension of life cannot be dissected from the rest of one's identity. The church is at its best when it operates within a theological framework that emphasizes the unity of the person. If a stroke patient is to be healed, then all areas of his or her life must be touched. This view of life provides the warrant and the challenge for pastoral visitation with stroke patients.

PM

# Smart Investing: Don't Try to Time the Market—the Odds Are Against You

When it comes to the stock and bond markets, the only thing that you can predict with any certainty is that those markets will fluctuate. Whether their immediate future course will be up or down is, at best, an educated guess—even for the most competent of forecasters.

Extensive studies have concluded that neither individual investors nor professional managers have been consistently successful in their attempts at market timing over long periods of time. In fact, these same studies have shown that market timing exposes investors to potential losses that exceed maximum potential gains. In other words, the risks of trying to time the market outweigh the reward possibilities.

Market timing involves moving your money from one type of investment vehicle to another in an attempt always to be on the upside of the markets. Go to stocks when they're hot. Move to bonds or the money market when they're doing well. It sounds like an ideal scenario, but the reality is that it is rarely achievable.

This is because things like interest rates, inflation, the value of the dollar, the general outlook for business, the actions of the Federal Reserve, various political and social events, to name just a few, all or individually can cause the markets to move up and down.

So, accurately predicting the future course of the markets requires the ability to predict interest rate moves, the future rate of inflation, where the dollar is headed, and many other events. Some investment professionals have proven to be more skilled at market timing than others. Some have been luckier than others. But no evidence exists that *anyone* has succeeded with any regularity in the forecasting game.

For those investors who insist on bucking the odds and gambling on market

timing, there is no shortage of market timing services and newsletters available to assist them. For a fee, these services will advise investors when to switch among stocks, bonds, and the money market.

If, however, you're among the group of investors looking to avoid the investment risk (and the fees, transaction costs, and tax consequences) associated with market timing, there are some sensible alternative strategies. Strategies such as dollar cost averaging, asset allocation, and long-term investing may not be as exciting as market timing, but

they're a lot more likely to help you succeed in meeting your financial goals. **PM**



*The information in this article is of a general nature and is not offered as specific investment advice. Personal investment decisions should be made in consultation with professional investment advisers.*

BY PENSIONS AND  
BENEFITS USA,  
CHURCH OF THE  
NAZARENE

# Enjoy Your Successes!

**W**hat do you do with success? Enjoy it! Thank God for it! Celebrate! Rejoice! Count your blessings! Savor the moment! Remember it—for a long time!

Yes, ministry can be successful. It can have grand moments of accomplishment. Ministry can be fulfilling. Ministry can even be the greatest profession in the world. Maybe not all the time, for success is not an "all-the-time thing" in any area of life. But in the ministry, we need to know that success, victory, and fulfillment can be the order of the day.

**We need to know that the success of which we speak is not a statistical success.**

It is not a numbers game. It is not predicated on what others describe as success, or what they think, or how they think. Success in ministry is a combination of things. It is faithfulness, mixed with care, effectiveness, and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an attitude—an attitude that sees service as priority and servanthood as its conduit.

**How does one celebrate success?** What do you do when the blessings come and all seems right? How do you respond when the arrows are up and ministry seems to be on a roll? Celebrate them you must.

**First, celebrate.** Honor the success, however large or small, in your heart. Acknowledge the moment. Give it a place in the memory, in the heart, in your history. Plant it there as a reminder of God's affirmation and

blessing. Celebrate with family, with friends, with the church. We need some way to acknowledge to God that we are grateful and that we do not take His blessings for granted. Come to think of it, there are no seminars on celebrating success. And there should not be! Celebration of success should be a part of our response to God.

**Second, think positively.** There will be laypersons, and not a few fellow pastors, perhaps, who want you to see the minefields and the dark sides of ministry. Keep your eyes and heart on the positive. Celebrate the smallest of victories. Keep them in focus. Positive thinking is a deterrent to the negative and the pessimistic. Naturally, positive thinking must be tempered with realism, but the same could be said for negative thinking.

**Third, guard against pessimism.** Successful pastors are not pessimistic. They guard against pessimism. The pessimistic person is open prey for negative and reactionary influences. For, first of all, he or she is identified as being against something, and the reactionary influences seek such supporters. The life plagued with pessimistic thoughts seldom walks the higher highways of hope, the fuller fairways of faith, or the thrilling throughways of trust. A pessimist limps in the lowlands.

**Fourth, plan for success.** The great moments in ministry do not come with-

out planning, work, and prayer. Success in any field is the by-product of planning. Planning is our way of bringing God into our thoughts and ministry. Paul talks about "your partnership in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5). We are encouraged to know that God has called us to be in "partnership" with Him in the greatest work in the world! Planning opens the heart and mind to the thoughts of God, to His way, and to His will.

**Fifth, share your victories with your congregation.** Celebrate the smallest success with your people. Remember, your celebration encourages the faithful supporters. Those who pray for you and with you need to know that God is blessing and where He is blessing. When they hear the note of victory in the shepherd's voice, it is contagious. They feel it, and it encourages them to expect future victories.

**Sixth, keep a journal of God's work in your life and in the life of the church.**

One's history with God makes for great reading in the rough times. A journal reminds of God's blessings—how He helped in past situations and His promises for the future. The pastor is a person of promise—God has called him or her and promises His care and counsel. The One who calls is the One who says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

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# Picture Windows for Preaching

## Joy

It was difficult for the teacher, but the circumstances were a bit unusual. A child in the class kept disrupting the whole classroom of other children with his "Hallelujahs." He did it once too often, and off he went to the principal's office. The busy principal gave the boy a geography book to look at, thinking that there was nothing worth a "Hallelujah" on the pages. Suddenly, the principal heard a loud "Hallelujah." He dashed over to see what made the boy get all excited.

He asked the boy what made him say, "Hallelujah." The boy replied, "I was just thinking in this geography book about oceans, and I came to a sentence that says that the depth of some seas has not been discovered, and my Bible says that my sins have been cast into the depth of the sea—hallelujah!"<sup>1</sup>

1. Leslie B. Flynn, *Come Alive with Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 157.

## Salvation

Author Randal Denny tells the wonderful story of a simpleminded, illiterate man in England who was converted at a Salvation Army meeting. He began attending the meetings. His wife wasn't exactly clear as to what had happened; but she knew he was happy, and he did his best to make her happy as well. One day he returned home from the Salvation Army meeting rather ruffled.

COMPILED BY  
DERL G. KEEFER  
Pastor  
THREE RIVERS,  
MICHIGAN



She quizzed, "What's wrong?" "They all have red sweaters," he answered, "and I don't have a red sweater." So she went to work and knitted him one.

The first time he wore his new red sweater, he returned home sad again.

"Now what's wrong?" his wife asked.

"They all have yellow writing on their red sweaters," he answered. Unable to read, she still promised him that she would embroider some yellow writing onto his red sweater. She ventured across the street to a shop window, copied some letters, and embroidered them on his red sweater.

Coming home after the next meeting, he was all smiles. The wife asked, "Did they like the sweater?"

"Yes."

"What did they say about the writing?"

He replied that they liked the writing on his sweater better than the writing on theirs. Unknowingly she had embroidered on his red sweater, "This business is under new management."

Randal Denny commented, "We celebrate that we are under new management. We can resign as the nervous rulers of our puny universe and rest in the Lord who has given us new life."

Truly we are under new management!<sup>2</sup>

PM

2. Randal Earl Denny, *The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 140-41.

**Seventh, look for the tracks of God in your ministry.** Pastor Earl Lee was often reminding his people to "look for the tracks of God" in their lives. God leaves His heart print in the ministry of those whom He calls. He has a way of renewing His covenant with His followers. God has a way of involving himself in the ministry of His chosen. Successful pastors see the tracks of God, and they celebrate His presence, His blessings, and His affirmation of ministry.

**Eighth, remember who you are in the journey of ministry.** We are all redeemed persons, trying to obey a call from God. We have earned no special favors from God. Every success we have is a gift from His hand. We must remember our mission, our calling, and our goal.

A conductor on a passenger train was making his last run before retirement. A man asked him how he felt about his life as a conductor on a train. He replied, "It seems like I have spent my life trying to help people get home" (Charles L. Allen, *What I Have Lived By* [Revell, 1976], 117). Our calling and mission is to help people get home.

Gerald Kennedy declared that he could never be out of debt to the past. He wrote, "There is no way to return to the older generations and return even a small part of what they have contributed to my welfare" (*The Parables* [New York: Harper and Row, 1960], 139). It is a way of saying that a part of our success is a contribution from someone. Our successes are not solo flights. Our lives are contributions of parents, family, friends, teachers, to name only a few. To remember who we are is to celebrate God's work in our ministry.

Enjoy your successes! God's call on your life is a call to grow, to succeed, to celebrate victories, to enjoy the journey of ministry.

PM



# Of Church Mobs and Cabbages and Kings

The Christian leader is constantly confronted with the need to lead small groups made up of individuals with differing personalities and levels of experience. In fact, the church as a whole does most of its important work through these small groups. Its work is mainly made up of the efforts of individuals formed into various committees, boards, and fellowships. Their efforts are vital to the accomplishment of the church's goals. This has been proven a practical approach for many centuries. Even Jesus selected a *small* group of disciples to carry out an important mission. The committee is the backbone of the local church and the denominational governance process.

An English scientist said once that a committee was an alley down which a good idea is lured and quietly mugged. Apt, but sometimes the "mugging" isn't so muffled.

"Our Mrs. Smith has an efficient, well-ordered team," said a pastor friend when I asked him about the efficiency of some of his church committees. "But Mr. Gragly," he continued, "only heads a loud mob we call the Christian Education Committee! His group meets regularly for their monthly argument."

As he gave more details, it was obvious where some of the Christian Education Committee's problems originated. Part of the problem with Mr. Gragly's committee was that it had about 30 people among its members. At

any given monthly meeting, at least 25 show up. Mrs. Smith's group was considerably smaller.

One of the key differences between an efficient church group and a mere "mob" is primarily its *size*. That's what a lot of behavioral scientists and researchers tell us. I also know this to be true from my own experience and from that of other church leaders to whom I've talked. The size of a group, among other important items, is directly related to its efficiency and the value of its productivity. Generally, the smaller the group, the more efficient it is.

A frustrated chairlady of an altar guild once complained to me, "We can't have an effective group because we *always* have at least 20 members, and there are only 18 this year!"

I knew, after several years' experience with this particular altar guild, that it was *never* very effective. The chairlady was the type of leader who didn't feel secure unless *lots* of people voted on an issue. Yet very few adequate decisions were ever made by her group, and it was generally in turmoil. Why? The answer to this question can solve a lot of group problems in *your* church and make all your groups much more effective. Part of the answer can be found in the New Testament Book of Acts: "Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together" (Acts 19:32, NRSV).

Often several people assembled together with lots of talk going on (much of which has little to do with the group's mission) is considered a "meeting." It is not, however, usually *productive* unless the leader is absolutely sure that everyone participating really knows what's going on, what's expected of them, and the discussion is focused. Unless the leader is paying close attention, several in the group may be trying to pull the meeting and discussion onto extraneous topics and into making decisions based on their own individual agendas. This happens most often when individual members are not clear about the group's mission, and the discussion is not properly focused.

## Mobs vs. Teams

Efficient groups must have *structure* and their efforts must also be *focused* to be effective. The group must know exactly what its mission is and the *purpose* and *objective* of any given discussion. The leader must reinforce these things constantly. However, usually leaders spend most of their time refereeing between two or more aggressive people and, therefore, have little time for other important leadership actions that will affect the group's productivity positively.

Nowhere can it be more apparent than in a small church group the truth of the concept that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." However, the reverse is more often true for most local church groups: The whole is often diminished to an entity much less than the sum of its parts.



BY WILLIAM W. HULL  
Freelance writer  
SHAKER HEIGHTS, OHIO

The most inexperienced of leaders knows that little gets done when the decisions on the details concerning the various programs of the church like Christian education, finance, and youth are left to the entire congregation to decide in a single assembly. One hundred or more people assembled together are not nearly as effective as several small groups. Few church leaders learn from experience and overlook the value in smaller memberships for subgroups.

The difference between a "mob leader" and a "team captain" depends on the amount of knowledge and skill the leader possesses relating to group dynamics and how to use them effectively. Yet all too few Christian leaders spend enough time examining and learning these critical "mechanics" of how groups get things done—how to "oil the machinery."

It's trite, but nonetheless apt, to describe such leaders as being so busy fighting alligators that they've forgotten that their mission was to drain the swamp!

Critical to the efficient functioning of any group is its *size* and that individuals in the group understand thoroughly *why* they are there. Efficient groups are small; the members want to be part of them and *feel* they are indeed part of them, understand what their mission is, *why* they are together in the first place, and freely interact and communicate with each other.

#### What Is a Group?

The social psychologists have been trying to pin down a precise definition of a group for many years. Although definitions vary, they all have certain common elements. A group involves two or more people, people with a common goal, people who feel they belong to it, people who interact and communicate with each other.

#### Face-to-Face

According to this definition,

A group is  
two or more  
people who  
feel they  
belong  
together  
because  
they share  
a common  
goal and  
who  
regularly  
interact  
and  
communi-  
cate.

committees, boards, and fellowships within the church should be "groups." We call them "groups," at any rate. Yet it may come as a surprise to many church leaders that, for most such groups, their members rarely have common goals and feel that they really belong or communicate with each other.

#### When Is a Group Not a Group?

Some of the characteristics that affect a group's behavior and output can be fairly well controlled by the leader. The larger the group, the tougher it is to have any effective control, no matter how good the leader is.

Much behavioral research and experience with church groups has proven that even when it is of a manageable size, an effective group must have three essential elements:

1. Members who actively contribute to the group's mission
2. A specific structure and process that involves each member
3. A leader with an appropriate leadership style

The leader has a great deal to do with creating the circumstances that can bring all these elements together.

#### How Small Is Small?

If you will examine the definition of a group, you will note that one key element of the definition affects the physical circumstances in which the group meets.

If the group has only 2 people, they will most probably sit near each other when they meet. It is unlikely they will separate themselves with a large table that normally accommodates 12 or 15 people or sit on opposite sides of a large room. Regularly "interacting and communicating face-to-face" in such circumstances is difficult. But when the group membership rises to 10 or more, these are exactly the circumstances that usually prevail.

It is not unusual for a group of

15 or more to be spread around an exceedingly large table or sit in a large room. This makes communication among participants more difficult. A group this size or larger often makes members feel as though they were making speeches rather than talking to companions. And it's really not face-to-face.

It is also true that large groups tend to put a damper on the interaction of some of its members.

Not a few psychotherapists will testify that one of the great fears of many people is speaking in public. Even comparatively small "audiences" like committees with 15 or 20 members are intimidating. This is not true of those with aggressive personalities.

It is not at all unusual for there to be an increase of people who are intimidated by speaking in public as a group gets larger. Nor is it unusual for there to also be an increase in the number of aggressive people who *want* to speak, and speak, and speak!

We have often noted many members in group meetings knitting, sorting recipe cards, working on papers, and engaged in all sorts of other activities unrelated to the business of the group. The meetings go forward with only a few actually taking an active part, although it seems otherwise. There is a lot of busy-work around the table, but much of it is personal, and much involves the mechanics of drinking coffee and eating cookies. The actual business of the group is carried forward by those few aggressive types who love to hold the floor.

Such groups do not really represent involvement. Yet, alas, they all too often pass as substantive "meetings."

The "activity" and discussion seem to indicate a fair amount of "progress." While the activity and discussion did not really represent total interaction by all members about the issue in question, this busyness masked

what really occurred, or what *should* have occurred and didn't.

One of the leader's prime functions is to spot when a meeting is going astray. The leader should be able to diagnose *what* the problems are and know how to correct them in a timely manner.

For more efficient groups, the minister must be, and train all his or her group leaders to be, aware of these things:

- the group's size
- the physical surroundings in which it meets
- the leader's style of leading
- how individual members conceive their roles
- how the entire group conceives its mission
- a specific structure and process that involves each member
- whose agenda you are working on—the group's or one or two individuals'
- spotting problems before they get out of hand
- focused discussions

#### Ten Tips for the Successful Creation of a Productive Small Group

1. Don't force membership.
2. Have no more than 8 to 10 members.
3. Train group leader in discussion/problem-solving techniques.
4. Give the group a clear reason for being and define its authority.
5. Give it *specific* tasks.
6. Keep the agendas *short*—very short!
7. Schedule group meetings to last no more than two hours at any one time.
8. Expect specific decisions from it.
9. Train the group in discussion/problem-solving techniques.
10. Show all members how and where their group fits into the larger organization. **PM**

This article is an excerpt from *The Taming of the Crew*, a larger work by this author.

# Prayer Power: How to Get It

**1. Pray earnestly as you meditate in the Scriptures.** Do not toss in a daily devotion carelessly. Mean it with all your heart.

**2. Search Bible verses concerning prayer.** Discover God's conditions for coming into His holiness, experiencing release in prayer.

**3. Pray with those of like commitment.** Search out believers who are intent on coming upon deeper channels of prayer.

**4. Fast and pray.** Set aside mealtimes in order to prove to God your concern about prayer burdens. Pray during those mealtime segments.

**5. Watch less television.** Pray more. See to it that the TV is off so you can unlock your prayer closet without noise around you.

**6. Keep a prayer list.** Write down your prayer concerns, particularly for those who are not yet Christians. Bring these matters in detail to God.

**7. Testify to answered prayer.** Give God the glory when prayers are indeed seen through. Do not take credit by appearing spiritually braggish; focus all on Christ.

**8. Read devotional material on prayer.**

**9. Discipline yourself more and more in prayer.** Increase your obedience to the Spirit so His slightest nudge takes you to prayer.

**10. Talk less on the phone.** When you start praying, if the phone rings, let it ring. Stay in prayer.

**11. Analyze your time proportions.** How much time is spent in shopping; how much in prayer?

**12. Dedicate your life to praying.** Understand that coming to know more of God is lifelong. Never consider yourself to have arrived. Enrich your life by growing more and more in the Spirit. **PM**

BY J. GRANT

SWANK JR.

Pastor

WINDHAM, MAINE



# Today's Books for Today's Preachers

## **Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry**

by Warren W. Wiersbe  
(Grand Rapids: Baker Books,  
division of Baker Book  
House Co., 1996)  
(PA080-105-7574)

Who can  
turn  
people's  
ears into  
eyes so that  
they see  
and feel the  
message?

—RANDAL E. DENNY  
Editor, *The Preacher's*  
*Magazine*



Each vacation time, I pack away a book on preaching. It helps to refresh me and revitalize my mind and heart for the greatest privilege God gives to me, preaching His Word. By the time I finish a book on preaching and rest up, I am ready for another round. I am in my 40th round now!

One of the most provocative books on preaching that I have read in recent years was written by the prolific preacher and author, Warren W. Wiersbe. His book, titled *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, stimulated me to grow and to better understand the necessity of pictorial preaching in today's television- and video-trained minds. We now serve a visual audience.

Out of Wiersbe's wide background as pastor, educator, and radio Bible teacher, he said, "I'm sharing with you the burden of a preacher, writer, and occasional seminary instructor who got weary of bringing skeletons into the pulpit and producing cadavers in the pews" (p. 9).

In his first segment of chapters, he wrote of "**Imagination and Life.**" Wiersbe points out, "The movers and shakers in history

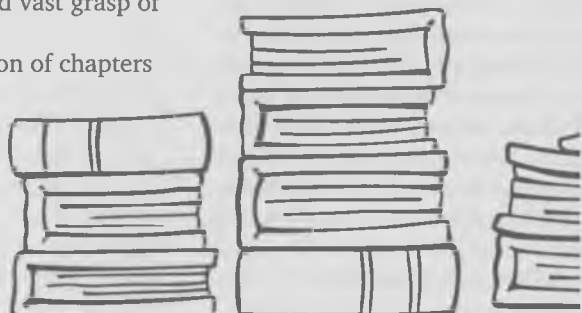
have usually been people . . . who can turn people's ears into eyes so that they see and feel the message and respond positively to it" (p. 17). He emphasized, "It takes time to paint pictures. It takes time for our listeners to see those pictures and in their imagination place themselves in the scene" (p. 19). This book aims to help distraught preachers to "discover that an outline is no more a message than a menu is a meal or a road map is a journey" (p. 20). The experienced author seeks to help the reader learn about people, the world, and words. He makes a strong case for the human mind as "our inner picture gallery." He says, "Ponder this fact: we think in pictures even though we speak and write with words" (p. 24). The book explores the various forms of imaginative writing.

The second section of chapters deals with "**Imagination and Scripture,**" in which Warren Wiersbe walks the reader through the Bible and its formidable use of pictures and stories. Keep in mind that Wiersbe's preaching career built weekly on consecutive exposition through the books of the Bible. It shows his familiarity and vast grasp of the Word of God.

The third section of chapters emphasizes "**Imagination and Biblical Preaching.**" For example, two samples of chapter headings in this seg-

ment provoke your imagination: "If You Don't Talk to Your Bible, Your Bible Might Not Talk to You." "Taking Things Apart and Putting Things Together." I thought these two chapters alone were worth the price of the book.

This lengthy paperback book on preaching by Wiersbe is one of those gems where you don't even want to miss the goodies in the footnotes. He put a lot of jewels in the footnotes for your worthwhile perusal. For example, note No. 19 on page 353: "As a regular part of the study process, the minister would do well to read the text aloud and listen to it. The careless reading of the Scriptures in public is often an evidence that the passage wasn't carefully read in private. It was said that people learned more from Campbell Morgan's public reading of the Bible than from anybody else's preaching of the Bible!" Warren W. Wiersbe is the ultimate practitioner of the preaching ministry. From this book you will learn much from which your people will benefit, appreciate, and enjoy. **PM**



# THE NTS HISTORY

## More Preachers and Better Preachers

by Harold E. Raser  
(Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1995), 150 pages  
(PA083-411-5638)

Harold E. Raser's book is a history of the first 50 years of Nazarene Theological Seminary. The title is from a 1928 *Herald of Holiness* editorial by J. B. Chapman, "More Preachers and Better Preachers Are Needed" (p. 10), in which Chapman urged the founding of a theological seminary.

The book is well written and contains an immense amount of significant data. Raser lets the reader in on what relates to the seminary's founding, according to Nazarene General Assembly journals, Nazarene General Board proceedings, and letters back and forth, including many between persons strategic to NTS's opening in 1945.

The author sets NTS's history in the wider context of the denomination's history and of America's history generally: the world wars, the Great Depression (pp. 14-15, 29, etc.).

He protects one denominational official, who was openly critical of the seminary, by not naming him. R. V. DeLong—who is depicted in the worst light of anyone in the whole story—is not protected. Raser reports that DeLong "confronted the general superintendents the day after the [1944] General Assembly adjourned and scolded them" for not nominating him to the board of trustees, as NTS's founding president (p. 36); and in a letter of apology for this

tirade, one excuse given for his actions was that "it was quite a shock not to be nominated" (ibid.). Raser reports that DeLong, later, will not accept a professorship unless he is given an administrative position; that he resigns in early 1953 and then tries to reverse that decision but is not permitted by President L. T. Corlett to do so.

Raser's research did not turn up what the late T. W. Willingham told me in a videotaped interview now in the denominational archives in Kansas City: that he, Willingham, was invited to travel a distance to meet with General Superintendent R. T. Williams and was asked, on behalf of the board, to be the founding president—and turned it down.

Raser recounts the concern of President Benner, the trustees, the supporting denomination, even the early students: that the denomination, with a seminary, not depart from its official teachings (see discussion on pp. 30, 61, 119-21, 124 and endnotes on pp. 144-45).

While the wonder is that historian Raser reports correctly on so much detail in his history, I noticed inconsequential factual errors and facts not quite correct—because I was not only a student the first 2 beginning years and a teacher there for 38 years or so, but especially because I was managing editor of the school's principal publication, the *Seminary Tower*, for some 35 years. I wrote, during that time, almost all of the publication's news items and edited the others—except for three sabbatical-leave

times. One such error is that I was brought in as "professor of theology" (p. 85), whereas I was an associate professor for 11 years. On page 145, in endnote 129, Raser says simply that "an effort was made by historian Timothy Smith . . . to bring a group of people together in Kansas City" to discuss Spirit baptism. He does not seem to know that the group met.

Although I realize the author was no doubt spatially restricted, I might have said more than Raser does about the publications of the faculty. Ralph Earle authored 52 books and edited and coauthored many more—as far as I know, more than anyone in our tradition since John Wesley. Raser mentions that he authored, coauthored, or edited 23 books (p. 47). DeLong wrote 39 books, which is not mentioned. I reported on faculty-authored books in the *Tower* at about half of NTS's history. At that time, the number was 184.

I might have also said more in the main story itself about the significance of the extracurricular service of NTS's faculty members. Much of this is mentioned. In the 14 pages of endnotes—a must-read area—much more of this is included. Yet, if space would have allowed it, I might have included more. Some, perhaps most especially the contributions of Paul M. Bassett, has historic significance. Bassett, however, is only mentioned, according to the index, on one page (107) as having joined the faculty and in endnotes on pages 142 and 143.

Although, if given the space and a free hand, I might have included other matters in a first-50-year history, I was often amazed by and enlightened by this history of a general denominational institution—which is now garmenting designated persons for ministry in the new millennium.

PM

To order contact: Nazarene Theological Seminary, attn.: Alumni Office, 1700 E. Meyer Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64131-1265 (1-816-333-6254, ext. 259).

# Top Ten Hazards of Local Church Ministry

(Nine of Which You Never Heard About in Seminary; All of Which Happened to Us or Someone We Know; Which Is Why I'm Not Using My Real Name)

**10** ● **HARVEST HOME** is a quaint ritual whose origins speak of poor rural churches that paid their parsons in chickens and eggs. It is, however, still practiced by Christians who have never seen a chicken with her feathers on. It works something like this: the diaconate sets a date that would be close to harvest-time if anybody were actually a farmer. Gardening church members bring produce. Generous nongardeners sometimes bring paper products and gift certificates. That's the upside. The downside is the U.H.C.G.'s (Unidentified Home-Canned Goods). A lot of people forget about Harvest Home Sunday until that morning, so they just grab anything off their shelves. We've gotten loose packets of Lipton Cup-a-Soup and Quaker's Instant Oatmeal. The worst was a huge jar of Welch's Grape Jelly, received for Harvest Home 1992. It looked a little brown, but it wasn't until AFTER we gave our children peanut butter and jelly

sandwiches that we noticed the expiration date: June 1980.

**9.** What can I say about the **PARSONAGE** that can be printed by a Christian publisher? The carpet is old enough to vote, but too worn out to go to the polls.

**8.** More than one pastor has run smack into **HILLARY AND BILL SYNDROME**. On Women's Sunday he has discovered, along with the rest of the congregation, that his wife is a better preacher than he is.

**7.** The **CHURCH TREASURER** believes that she owns the church money.

**6.** The **CHURCH CUSTODIAN** believes that he owns the church property.

**5.** The **TREASURER AND CUSTODIAN ARE MARRIED**—to each other—and neither of them likes the pastor.

**4.** Your profamily **DENOMINATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** covers 100 percent of a sterilization procedure, but only 80 percent of the costs involved in birthing the preacher's kids.

**3.** You are **PAID ON SUNDAY**, when the bank is closed. And don't

count on cashing your paycheck Monday either—it's a national holiday. But not to worry—your paycheck is small enough to be cashed at the grocery store!

**2.** Sooner or later in your ministry, the **DAZZLING NEW COUPLE** will suddenly appear, seeking to join a better church. They want to sing in the choir. They want to teach Sunday School. They want to be trustees. They want to be deacons. They want to be your friends. You eat together. You go to concerts together. You laugh and cry and pray together. You baby-sit each other's kids. Then Mr. and Mrs. Dazzle suddenly disappear to find a church better than yours.

**1.** The most perilous hazard is this: In spite of the 12-year-old jelly and the 22-year-old carpet, in spite of the quirky officers and pitiful salary, in spite of the zigzag stitches used to mend your broken heart, in spite of your suspicion that you are actually living in the Lake Wobegon of the East (or maybe because of it), **YOU GROW TO LIKE THE COMMUNITY AND LOVE THE PEOPLE.**

BY ALICE JONES



# WORSHIP AND PREACHING HELPS

## INTRODUCTION

My typical sermon delivery might best be described as a composite method of delivery. Ilion T. Jones in his book, *Principles and Practice of Preaching*, writes concerning the varying methods of delivery. He discusses the methods of reading from a manuscript and reciting from memory. He defines the essence of the extemporaneous method being "the thought has been prepared but the language and incidental treatment are left to the suggestion of the moment." In describing free preaching, he says it "means sermons that have been more carefully prepared as to structure, content, and language than in extemporaneous preaching, but are delivered, as in extemporaneous preaching, without use of manuscript or notes." According to Jones, "The average minister is likely to work out a method of delivery composed of some aspects of each method of delivery. Even those who think of themselves as doing extemporaneous and free preaching may make use of notes, read an occasional passage they want to give accurately or lines of poetry they cannot memorize, or recite portions of the sermon they have committed to memory. Many who think of themselves as manuscript readers do varying amounts of free speaking."

Being more of a composite style preacher, I found this as-

signment fairly challenging. However, I feel that I have benefited greatly from the discipline it has required.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to utilize some of the topics, material, illustrations, and ideas to assist you in your own style of preaching.

With the exception of the sermon "An Excellent Adventure," I have tried to include messages that correspond to Lectionary Year A. However, I did not adhere to the exact Sundays. I discovered that the lectionary is found helpful, particularly when I am having a difficult time in deciding on a topic of a series. Typically, I have preached from a different Gospel each New Year leading up to Easter Sunday.

As you know, preaching should be a living and dynamic experience for us and our listeners. It is truly a remarkable privilege as we seek, week after week, to deliver a word from the Lord to our congregations. One of my favorite books is *Preaching in the Spirit* by Dennis E. Kinlaw. He tells of an experience after graduation from seminary. He had just delivered what he thought was a pretty good sermon. It was an evangelistic sermon; and when he gave the invitation, seven persons responded. He felt fairly satisfied.

Dr. Kinlaw tells about a tall, stately, elderly gentleman coming down the aisle to greet him. He reached out to shake hands with the man, expecting him to say,

"Thank you, that was a good sermon." But instead of shaking my hand, he firmly took me by the shoulders and gently rocked me back and forth. Staring me straight in the face, he said, "Son, Dennis Kinlaw doesn't know enough to help a soul. He's not that bright. . . . Son, this world doesn't need to hear what you think. What it needs to hear is what God thinks. Go home and get down on your knees with your Bible and stay there until you know what God thinks. And the next time you stand up to preach, tell people what God thinks."

May God bless and help you as you endeavor to tell people what God thinks.

PM

December  
January  
February  
1998-99

PREPARED BY  
VIRGIL MILLS



# Comforted Comforters

Compassion Sunday

by Virgil Mills

2 Cor. 1:3-5

## INTRO

For a number of years in my denomination, the first Sunday of December has been designated as Compassion Sunday. I understand this is intended to help raise our awareness of the needs of others and of the compassionate ministries of our church around the world. However, our world has a great need for the ministry of compassion throughout the year.

I remember a scene in Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, in which Ebenezer Scrooge concludes that the true spirit of Christmas exists only one day of the year. He is quickly informed by the Spirit of Christmas Present that Jesus intended to live in people's hearts all the year. The same may be said of compassion. It is not seasonal. Certainly, compassion remains a desperately needed trait in this technical, busy, and sometimes confused age.

How should we define compassion? The *Winston Dictionary* defines it as "sorrow for the suffering of others." Other synonyms for compassion are pity, mercy, tenderness, kindness, and sympathy.

The Greek verb *splanchnizomai* means to be moved with compassion; to be moved as to one's inwards. This word frequently describes Jesus Christ in His ministry to the multitude and toward individual sufferers.

However we define compassion, we surely recognize it when we see it.

**ILLUS.** According to a Focus on the Family survey several years ago, compassion rated second as the most important value parents wanted to teach their children. I wholeheartedly agree with this high rating of importance. It is one of the greatest values we can seek to instill in our children and grandchildren.

**ILLUS.** There was a third grader in a first aid class a few years ago. In the class, he was asked by the instructor, "What would you do if your younger brother or sister swallowed the house key?"

With a little hesitation, the youngster responded, "I would climb in through the window."

We smile at that story. Yet we are confronted continually by news stories that demonstrate a lack of human compassion, even among the very young.

This is not a modern problem alone.

In the Old Testament, we read the words of a man who desperately cried out for compassion: "Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (Ps. 142:4). These words come from none other than the charismatic David. Someday he would succeed Saul as king of Israel. However, at this time, David was on the run and hiding in a cave, trying to avoid being killed by Saul. We not only read David's

words but also easily identify with his heart.

The apostle Paul gives to us beautiful words concerning both compassion and comfort in 2 Cor. 1. He fully recognizes not only the human need but also the example and resources God provides.

We all find ourselves in need of receiving compassion and comfort. We will also have opportunities to be compassionate and bring comfort to others. As believers, we are called to be comforted comforters. Where do we start?

## I. WE LOOK TO THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF ALL

The apostle Paul gives exuberant praise to God as our Resource for compassion and comfort. He is "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (v. 3). John Henry Jowett wrote decades ago: "Comfort is mercy at work. It is Samaritanism busy with its oil and wine. . . . Whenever we find this, busy goodness among the children of men, exercising itself among the broken limbs and broken hearts of the race, the Lord is the foundation of it." What a beautiful thought! As we share comfort and compassion with others, we are serving as channels from a divine fountain.

This is not just a New Testament phenomenon!

The name Menahem was given by the Hebrews to the coming Messiah. It meant "Comforter."

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah gives us beautiful words in this regard: "Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.' '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! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me'" (49:13-16).

What beautiful words to describe the faithful compassion of our loving and merciful God toward His people. The old prophet spoke beautifully, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2).

These words brought Handel from despair to write the oratorio *Messiah*.

**ILLUS.** On August 21, 1741, he was at the end of his rope. He had money and career problems. According to Robert Pelton, Handel came home "with a single thought; rest, sleep, oblivion." On the table sat a package containing a letter and a manuscript from the poet Charles Jennings. The broken man read the manuscript, dropped it back on the table, and tore the letter in shreds. Handel then threw himself upon his bed to sleep. But sleep wouldn't come. Finally, he got up, relit the candles, and took the manuscript once again. On the first page he read the title, "Messiah." He turned the title page and began to read. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. . . ." What wonderful words to his weary and discouraged heart! He had hardly begun to read them when they began to translate

themselves into music. For three weeks, day and night, George Frideric Handel kept at the task until *Messiah* was finished.

In the New Testament, we read about the compassionate, merciful, and comforting ministry of the Son of God:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (*Heb. 2:14-17*).

In the Upper Room, just hours before His death, Jesus promised a continuing presence of the Menahem, the Comforter. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18, KJV).

According to Vine, the word “comfortless” comes from the word *orphanos*. What wonderful news to share! As Jesus prepared to go to the Cross, He promised His comforting presence to His followers. He would not leave them alone.

Our God is the great Example! He is our Fountain of compassion and comfort! Do you need a renewing drink from that Fountain of compassion and comfort today?

## II. WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE COMFORTED COMFORTERS

Remember the Old Testament prophet Micah's words: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

When Jesus was confronted by Pharisees who were disturbed by His association with sinners, He quoted from another Old Testament passage: “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Matt. 9:13; cf. Hos. 6:6).

In our study passage, Paul says there is further purpose in God's comfort in all our times of trouble, "so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Cor. 1:4).

God has been compassionate toward us. His Spirit within us brings continuing comfort. We should be people of compassion and comfort to others.

John Henry Jowett wrote, "The Lord comforts us, not to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters."

**ILLUS.** A certain man recalled the loss of a brother to death and his mother's relationship with others who had

experienced a similar loss: “That is where my mother got her soft eyes and why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child.”

## CONCLUSION

That short story conveys quite a truth for us to ponder. So often it is God's way to work most effectively through us as wounded healers. In life as we encounter both the joys and heartaches, we are equipped by God's grace to be comforted comforters. So we really have a choice. We can allow life's setbacks to embitter us, or we can recognize that there will likely be people down the road who need our witness because we have been where they are. We will have the opportunity in word and action to testify to a God of compassion and comfort in the midst of the trials of life. In doing so, we become comforted comforters. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion" (Col. 3:12). Let's follow in our Father's footsteps and with His help be people of compassion and comfort. Be a comforted comforter!

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome and Prayer	
Lighting of the Second Advent Candle	
Scripture Reading .....	Isa. 40:1-2
Music of Adoration and Praise .....	“No Other Name”
	“I Love You, Lord”
	“That Beautiful Name”
Choral Music .....	“No One Ever Cared for Me like Jesus”
Invitation to Prayer .....	“All Your Anxiety”
Sharing and Fellowship	
Worship Through Our Giving	
Responsive Reading .....	“God of All Comfort”
Special Song .....	“There Is a Savior”
Morning Message .....	“COMFORTED COMFORTERS”
Our Response	
Benediction	
Postlude	

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

# WELCOME

Let the people know that today is recognized as Compassion Sunday and that this will be a part of the focus of worship for the morning. Remind them that it is also the second Sunday of Advent.

## LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Consider letting a family or single person who has experienced God's compassion in a special way this past year light the candle. Perhaps they have experienced a death in the family or suffered a financial loss.

# Preparation for Christmas

by **Virgil Mills**

Matt. 3:1-12

## INTRO

Preparation is a substantial part of life. We may prepare for a career for years through educational opportunities before actually beginning a paying job. This preparation is costly in dollars, energy, and time. In my church are medical interns still preparing while most of their peers have completed their formal education years ago.

Athletes will prepare for years for a particular competitive event at the Olympics. Sometimes preparation takes an incredible amount of effort. I am astounded to see the sacrifices these individuals make in their personal lives in order to achieve excellence.

Successful marriages typically require preparation on the part of two individuals. Even the wedding ceremony itself may consume months of time and hundreds or thousands of dollars.

As the Advent season has come upon us once again, our minds turn to preparing for Christmas. People busily plan for the traditional festivities of Christmas: decorations, gift giving, entertaining, on and on. Sometimes the preparations can seem almost endless. In fact, the pressures of the season can strain the nerves of many people to the breaking point.

**ILLUS.** During one Christmas season, I saw an example of the seasonal tension in a department store parking lot. One driver became so upset when she lost a parking space to another lady, she left her vehicle and began pounding on the window of the other car to express her displeasure and frustration.

Certainly this is not the kind of experiences we associate with the season that speaks of "peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14, *KJV*).

In order to really prepare to celebrate the true meaning of the birth of our Savior, it is critical for us to get ready for Christmas on the inside. I am not talking about Christmas as a day of celebration, but getting ready to encounter the Christ of Christmas, both in the present and future. The purpose of the Advent season is not only to remind us of the birth of the Savior but to encourage each of us to be prepared for the Savior's second advent as well.

John the Baptist, along with the prophet Isaiah, serve as helpful guides for us. John seems out of place during the Christmas season. After all, the song says, "'Tis the season to be jolly." Who wants some wilderness preacher dressed in camel's hair and eating locusts to come along and tell

us that we have to change our ways—and just two weeks before Christmas Day. John didn't look very sophisticated. His message was not very popular with some people. He particularly aroused the ire of the religious elite.

William Sloan Coffin writes, "The church is full of people who are seeking that which they have already found and only want to become that which they already are . . . and that's one of the greatest problems we have in the church."

Hopefully, in our church we desire to search our hearts to determine if we are properly prepared to encounter the coming Savior.

With John, we find a sense of urgency for the people to get prepared for Someone very important.

In ancient times, a road crew would go ahead to get the way ready for the king to travel. John serves as part of the spiritual road crew, telling the people to get ready for the coming King. How were they to do that in the first century? How are we to do the same today?

## I. PEOPLE NEED TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS

John called for repentance. The word "repent" means to "change the mind or purpose." In the New Testament, repentance involves a change for the better. Almost always, the repentant change of mind is toward sin.

The apostle Paul tells us, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

Reinhold Niebuhr said: "No person, however deeply involved in sin, is able to regard the misery of sin as normal. Some memory of a previous condition of blessedness seems to linger in the conscience."

This statement of Niebuhr reminds me of the wonderful grace of God, particularly prevenient grace. This grace that goes before is described by Kenneth Grider as "the many ways in which God favors us prior to our conversion. It means that God takes the initiative in the matter of our conversion, inclining us to turn to Him, wooing us, breaking down the barriers to our repenting and believing." He goes on to say, "God does not meet us halfway, but instead comes all the way to where we are and initiates in us the first desires to be saved." Truly, God has gone all the way to where we are in sending His Son, Jesus Christ.

**ILLUS.** An artist painted a picture of a game of chess with Faust from Goethe's classic story on one side and the devil on the other. The game is almost over. Faust seems to only have a few pieces left. On his face is a look of despair. On the other side, the devil leers with delight in his apparent victory. Many a chess player has looked at the painting and agreed that all is lost; it is checkmate.

One day in the picture gallery, a master chess player looked intently at the painting. He was fascinated by the look of despair on the face of Faust. Then he looked at the pieces on the board. He stared and studied the picture with concentration. Other visitors came and went; he continued staring at the painting. Suddenly the gallery was disturbed by a shout: "It's a lie! The king and the knight have another move!"

James Stewart says of this scene, "Sin's seeming checkmate is a lie. The king and the knight have another move. And Christmas is that saving move." Jesus' birth was a critical move in a series of moves to rescue us from Satan's grasp.

## II. PEOPLE NEED A HEART CHANGE

The Baptist speaks with urgency to the people: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (v. 11).

William Barclay writes: "The drabness of life, and the inadequacy of life, and the futility of life, and the earth-boundness of life, which characterize so many of us, all come from the failure to submit to that baptism of the Spirit which Christ alone can give."

Another voice echoes to us from the past: "We need to be told that forgiveness of sin is not the only thing necessary to salvation. There is another thing yet; and that is the baptizing of our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (Bishop Ryle of the Church of England).

Blackman has said, "Man's chief requisite is not warning against sinful actions so much as purification of the heart where overt sins are motivated."

Charles Wesley gives to us these words:

*Refining fire, go thro' my heart;  
Illuminate my soul;  
Scatter Thy life thro' every part  
And sanctify the whole.*

**ILLUS.** Hal Perkins writes in the book *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching*:

John is saying an amazing thing to these people: "I participated with you in securing your commitment to an outside, objective influence and government, the government of God. But the One who is coming will make possible your being brought internally, subjectively under the coloring, influencing, controlling power of the Holy Spirit. He will make it possible for the Holy Spirit of God to actually penetrate into and through your entire being to transform you from the inside out. It will be more than just your personal resolve; He will engulf you and be with you and be in you to make possible your transformation."<sup>2</sup>

**ILLUS.** In his book *Preaching in the Spirit*, Dennis Kinlaw writes concerning some of the possible consequences in the church when the transformation of the Holy Spirit is occurring: "There may be times when the Holy Spirit's anointing of the pastor tends to bring out the polarities of a congregation. A Spirit-filled pastor may stir up the Devil in a church like nothing else will. . . . A Spirit-filled pastor spells the end of the lukewarm church. The mood of his congregation will turn one way or the other, more like heaven or more like hell, and the individuals in that congregation will shift one way or the other."

He goes on to quote the prayer of one young woman he knows: "Lord, make me a crisis person so that the people I meet will have to move one way or the other."

This young lady's prayer is quite a challenge to us. Certainly this statement seems to have been true for John the Baptist. It is unlikely that a person could have remained neutral concerning his message for very long. Jesus Christ continues to command that kind of influence. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus says to the church at Laodicea: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (3:15-16). The Lord Jesus Christ will not be satisfied with anything but a fiery and dynamic relationship with His people.

## CONCLUSION

On the Day of Pentecost, Luke records in Acts 2 the fulfillment of the Baptist's forecast. The followers of Jesus were never the same again. During this season of gift giving, may we recall, as part of our preparation, the words of Simon Peter to the Pentecost Festival crowd in Jerusalem: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38).

What a gift! Have you received God's greatest gift? If not, are you really prepared for Christmas? The greater question asks, "Are you really prepared for an encounter with the Christ who is coming again?"

1. J. Kenneth Grider, "Prevenient Grace," in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 415, 416.

2. Hal Perkins, "Jesus' Baptism with the Holy Spirit," in *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching: From Text to Sermon*, ed. H. Ray Dunning and Neil B. Wiseman (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990), 441.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Lighting of the Third Advent Candle  
Responsive Reading ..... "Messiah Brings Salvation"  
Music of Adoration and Praise ..... "Emmanuel"  
"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"  
Choral Music ..... "In All His Glory"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "Oh, the Glory of Your Presence"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Our Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... Matt. 3:1-12  
Special Song ..... "Refining Fire"  
Morning Message ..... "PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### OUR RESPONSE

Plan enough time for response at the altar. You might want to utilize "Holy Spirit, Be My Guide" as a closing hymn.

# Why Bethlehem?

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 2:1-6

## INTRO

Bethlehem was located about five miles south of Jerusalem. The name itself means "house of bread." The town sat high up on a limestone ridge.

Bethlehem is significant for a number of reasons. For one thing, Bethlehem was the place where the patriarch Jacob of Israel had buried his beloved Rachel. The scripture reads:

While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. Israel moved on again (*Gen. 35:16-21*).

George Herbert Livingston writes: "Tradition has long held that Jacob's retinue was camped on a hilltop about two miles south of present-day Jerusalem. The place still carries the name . . . 'Hilltop of Rachel.' Presently there is a small building along the road to Bethlehem . . . a few miles south . . . which is known as the 'Tomb of Rachel.'"<sup>1</sup>

The person from whom the nation of Israel had derived its name had buried his beloved wife near the city. This gave the town of Bethlehem significance.

**ILLUS.** Imagine living in the town where George Washington or some other famous national leader had buried his wife. This would be of some importance to a locality.

Bethlehem also gained significance as King David's hometown. To a great degree, the memory of King David brought a measure of great pride to the typical Jew. In fact, many Jews dreamed of a coming Messiah, a new David, who would restore the kingdom of Israel to its former greatness.

So what is significant about Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus?

## I. BETHLEHEM REMINDS ME OF GOD'S SURPRISES

**ILLUS.** December 7, 1941, was a day of surprise. The imperial navy and air force of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. That event propelled the United States into World War II. In a few days, President Franklin Roosevelt asked for a Declaration of War in a joint session of Congress. As the president described the surprise attack, he used the famous phrase "a day that will live in infamy." As people visit the memorial in Pearl Harbor, they are reminded of

the destruction and loss of life that came as a result of a foreign power's surprise attack.

Bethlehem reminds me of a far different kind of surprise—the appearance of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Helmut Thielicke writes:

Jesus Christ did not remain at base headquarters in heaven, receiving reports of the world's suffering from below and shouting a few encouraging words to us from a safe distance. No, He left the headquarters and came down to us in the front-line trenches, right down to where we live and worry . . . where we contend with our anxieties and the feeling of emptiness and futility, where we sin and suffer guilt, and where we must finally die. There is nothing that He did not endure with us. He understands everything.<sup>2</sup>

Although many people in Judea professed to be looking for the appearance of the Messiah, they were not prepared for Him to actually come.

Like most everyone else in the Christmas story, Herod was surprised by the announcement. The magi came to the most obvious place in their search for a king. They came to King Herod's city and palace. The magi asked: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (*Matt. 2:2*).

Some religious leaders of the day did recognize that the prophet Micah had foretold that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. However, they were not prepared for it actually happening.

Bethlehem was known as the "city of David." Even in David's story, a certain amount of surprise is involved. Remember, upon God's word Samuel the prophet came to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king in place of the disobedient Saul. At first, as Samuel eyed Jesse's son Eliab, he thought to himself, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD" (*1 Sam. 16:6*).

The Lord had another idea. He said to Samuel: "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (*v. 7*).

Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel. Each time, Samuel related the message, "The LORD has not chosen this one either" (*v. 8*).

Finally, David, the youngest, came on the scene. Surprisingly, the Lord said to Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one" (*v. 12*). God surprised Saul, Jesse, and David. And the world was surprised by Bethlehem's heavenly birth.

**ILLUS.** Bishop Fulton Sheen puts it so beautifully:

In the filthiest place in the world, a stable, Purity was born. . . . the stable is a place for the outcasts, the ignored, the forgotten. The world might have expected the Son of God to be born—if he was to be born at all—in an inn. A stable would be the last place in the world where one would have looked for Him. Divinity is always where one least expects to find it. . . . Only two classes of people found the Babe: the shepherds and the wise men: the simple and the learned; those who knew that they knew nothing, and those who



knew that they did not know everything. He is never seen by the man of one book; never by the man who thinks he knows. Not even God can tell the proud anything! Only the humble can find God! Divinity is always where one least expects to find it.<sup>3</sup>

"We live by God's surprises," Helmut Thielicke says.

Someone has said, "We should be living on tiptoe, ready for God at any time, at any place, in any way."

## II. BETHLEHEM REMINDS ME OF A GOD OF ABSOLUTE RELIABILITY

Matthew quotes the chief priests and teachers of the law saying, "For this is what the prophet has written" (v. 5).

Incredibly God used a pagan Roman emperor's worldwide census to enable Joseph and Mary to be in the right place at the right time. God made a way through incredible, surprising means to have His Son born in the city of David, as foretold. This identification with David is beautifully portrayed elsewhere in Scripture as well.

In the Book of Revelation, John records the words of one of the heavenly elders: "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed" (5:5). Later, John quotes Jesus himself: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (22:16). These two passages present Jesus as Creator and yet, at the same time, He identifies with His human creation. He is "the Root and the Offspring of David." He was born in David's hometown.

The prophet foretold it. Almost everyone seemed surprised. Once again, God was absolutely reliable.

## CONCLUSION

Why Bethlehem? It teaches us to prepare to be surprised by God. Also, Bethlehem reminds us that God is absolutely reliable. He will work His plan.

**ILLUS.** In the December 1989 issue of *Guideposts*, there is a story written by Fred Nicholas:

On Christmas Day a young man, tall and slim with dark hair, was making his way south on Interstate 85 just below High Point, North Carolina, trying to hitch a ride.

For two years he hadn't been home; he and his mother had a disagreement, and he set off across the country, going from town to town, from odd job to odd job. . . . But now he was ready to go home.

Thirty miles to go, but a ride was hard to find. "Mom," he said to himself, "I'm tired and hungry, but I'm coming home."

The cold wind blew and a few trucks rumbled by. Then across the road, he heard a voice call his name. "Mike! Hey, Mike, come here!" To his surprise there was his stepfather, waving, calling to him from his

truck. Mike ran across the highway. "Get in, Son. We're going home."

Mike . . . embraced his stepfather. "Fred," he said, "how did you happen to be here?"

"I came to pick you up. . . . Drove straight here."

"But how did you know I'd be here? I didn't write. I didn't call."

"Your mother sent me. Just this morning in her prayers for you, she knew you were coming and that you were on Interstate 85 just below High Point."

We are surprised by this kind of story. Yet the Christmas story is one of surprise and powerful reliability.

Horace Walpole, back in 1743, defined "serendipity" as the facility of making happy chance discoveries. As we celebrate another Christmas, let's do so with awe as we ponder our wonderful God! His surprises are far better than any wrapped gift under the tree. What chance discoveries does our reliable God have waiting for you?

1. George Herbert Livingstone, "Genesis," in *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969), 1:130.

2. Helmut Thielicke, *Christ and the Meaning of Life*.

3. Fulton Skeen, *The Life of Christ*, 55.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle ..... "Messiah Brings the Kingdom"  
Music of Adoration and Praise ..... "O Little Town of Bethlehem"  
"Once in Royal David's City"  
Choral Music ..... "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Baby Dedication  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... Matt. 2:1-6  
Special Song ..... "Bethlehem Morning"  
Morning Message ..... "WHY BETHLEHEM?"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Have someone who has come to know the Lord in the past year light the candle.

### BABY DEDICATION

Good time for baby dedication. If no dedication, perhaps you could introduce the babies in the nursery.

### WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING

Have someone share a testimony about a gift he or she has received from God recently.

# Why Joseph?

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 2:18-25

## INTRO

The spirit of the Christmas season can be so temporary and shallow.

**ILLUS.** In one Peanuts cartoon, Lucy comes to Charlie Brown and says: "Merry Christmas. Since it's this time of the year, I think we ought to bury past differences and try to be kind."

Charlie Brown asks: "Why does it have to be this time of the year? Why can't it be all year long?"

Lucy looks at Charlie Brown and answers, "What are you, some kind of fanatic?"

As we prepare to leave the Christmas season and look forward to a new year, let's take some time to study an important character of the Christmas story: Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

Over the course of His earthly ministry, Jesus seemed to borrow a lot of things. He borrowed a manger for a cradle. He borrowed a boat for preaching and a donkey for His ride into Jerusalem. He borrowed a room for the Passover meal and, ultimately, a tomb for burial. Jesus said himself: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). So it is not surprising that Jesus would borrow an earthly father.

Why does Matthew's Gospel make such a point of the genealogy of Jesus if He is not really Joseph's biological son? Michael Green writes in *Matthew for Today*: "The answer is that Matthew is . . . not interested in strict biological descent but in legal standing. Legally Jesus was the son of Joseph and inherited his pedigree. Biologically . . . he was not. He was born of the virgin Mary through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit."

Before we look at the character qualities found in Joseph, let's take note of the special circumstances that confronted Joseph and Mary.

In Joseph's day, engagement or betrothal was a solemn contract between two individuals and, to a great degree, two families. This arrangement lasted for a year before the couple were married in a complete sense. The engagement was binding. In fact, it could only be terminated by divorce. Even back in Deut. 22:24, a betrothed girl is called a wife, although the preceding verse speaks of her being engaged to be married.

Joseph knew he had been faithful to his part of the engagement agreement. He had experienced no sexual union with Mary. However, to his dismay, Mary is found expecting a child. What a dilemma! Joseph was within his rights to demand that Mary be treated as an adulteress. What should he do? Obviously, it's not surprising that this borrowed father would have some special qualities.

The question brings us to examine the qualities of this special "borrowed father."

## I. LOOK AT JOSEPH'S SENSITIVITY TO THE DIRECTION OF GOD

Although we know very little about Joseph, it seems apparent from what we know that he had a heart for God. We are told simply that Joseph was a righteous man. We have no reason to believe anything other than that Joseph was exemplary in his day as an Old Testament Jew.

On four different, separate occasions in the Gospel of Matthew, we find Joseph receiving special direction from God. Take note of Matt. 1:20; 2:13; 2:19; 2:22. On each occasion, Joseph responded with quick and complete obedience. He is never shown waffling or wavering in his action.

When instructed by an angel of the Lord to take Mary home as his wife, he woke up and "did what the angel of the Lord had commanded" (1:24).

When an angel of the Lord told Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape the murderous efforts of Herod, he responded quickly to the divine direction. "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod" (2:14-15).

Again, when it was time to return to Israel, the angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph in a dream. "So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel" (2:21).

Finally, when Joseph heard that Herod's son was reigning in his late father's place, upon further instructions, "he went and lived in a town called Nazareth" (2:23).

Each step of the way, we find a sensitive, obedient, and righteous man hearing and obeying. In doing so, the testimony of the Scripture echoes back, time and again: "to fulfill what the Lord had said" (1:22, etc.).

**ILLUS.** When I was a child, my mother used to take us to Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary in central Indiana. It was an interesting place with birds and a number of nature displays. There were also several marked paths for hiking. It was really important to stay on the path if you wanted to get back to your point of origin. You couldn't plan to successfully complete the path by only partially following the correct path. Guaranteed success required absolute obedience to the marked trail. Being especially sensitive to poison ivy, I knew the importance of keeping to the path in order to avoid exposure to the dreaded plant.

Joseph displays that kind of marked obedience. In Joseph we find a man who models for us a sensitivity to God that included obedience at each opportunity. What a lesson for us as we leave the Christmas season and look toward a New Year!

## II. LOOK AT JOSEPH'S SENSITIVITY TO MARY

Joseph's righteous character did not manifest itself in harshness or legalism. Confronted by an unexpected pregnancy, he continued to be merciful. "Joseph . . . did

not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Matt. 1:19). This does not picture a man who wants to extract his full measure of justice. Instead, we see a portrait of compassion in the midst of great personal loss.

**ILLUS.** I heard about two men who both preached trial sermons at a local church in applying for a pastoral opening. Both of the men preached a sermon concerning hell. But after the choice was made between the two men, the question was asked, "Why did you choose the one minister over the other? After all, both preached a sermon about hell."

One man answered: "The minister we chose preached on the subject with a broken heart, whereas the other minister preached on the subject, seemingly pleased that some would go there." Perhaps the one preacher's attitude was misjudged. However, the listening congregation heard a brokenhearted sensitivity in the one preacher that apparently was not communicated by the other.

In his compassion, perhaps Joseph was influenced by his ancestor David: "Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD" (Ps. 25:6-7, KJV). Or perhaps the words of the prophet Micah lingered in his thoughts: "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:6-8).

**ILLUS.** I remember an example of compassion displayed by the adopted Son of Joseph in John 8. A woman was caught in adultery. In a very public and humiliating display, the woman was brought before the group with the intent of trapping Jesus. Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). One by one, the accusers slipped away. After they were all gone, Jesus asked the woman: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (v. 10).

The woman responded, "No one, sir" (v. 11).

Jesus added: "Then neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin."

We see in Jesus a perfect blend of righteousness and mercy. Isn't it likely that His first earthly example of this male sensitivity was seen in Joseph?

### III. LOOK AT JOSEPH'S STEADY MODELING DURING JESUS' CHILDHOOD

We don't know how many years Joseph lived beyond Jesus' 12th birthday. In fact, we know very little at all about Jesus' early years. However, in the Gospel of Luke, we are given one episode from Jesus' home years. After the Feast of the Passover, Joseph and Mary's group had

traveled for a day when they realized young Jesus was not among their group. After three days of searching in Jerusalem, they found Him in the Temple courts, sitting among the teachers. He was listening to them and asking questions. "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (2:47).

Yet, when Jesus went home to Nazareth, we are told that He "was obedient to them. . . . And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (vv. 51-52).

### CONCLUSION

We cannot fully know the influence Joseph had upon Jesus the boy during those years. I am convinced that Joseph, the borrowed father, was not an accidental choice.

**ILLUS.** In his book *God Came Near*, Max Lucado writes:

I have a feeling some of you can relate to Joseph. You know how he feels, don't you? You've been there. You're smiling because you, too, have been called to go out on a limb or two. . . . Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch. You've grown accustomed to it and it to you. . . . And then you hear the call, "I need you to go out on the limb." . . . Have you been called to go out on a limb for God? . . . It won't be easy. Limb-climbing has never been easy. Ask Joseph. Or, better yet, ask Jesus. He knows better than anyone the cost of hanging on a tree.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Responsive Reading ..... "The Word Became Flesh"  
Music of Adoration and Praise ..... "Go, Tell It on the Mountain"  
"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen"  
Men's Ensemble ..... "Good Christian Men, Rejoice"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "Angels, from the Realms of Glory"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... Matt. 2:18-25  
Special Song ..... "Joseph's Song"  
Morning Message ..... "WHY JOSEPH?"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

### CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

#### SPECIAL SONG

Perhaps the soloist could be dressed in costume as he sings. Or someone else could be dressed accordingly while the soloist sings. Perhaps even a baby could be held by the soloist.

# New Year's Resolutions That Make a Difference

by Virgil Mills

Phil. 3:7-16

## INTRO

I read somewhere that 60 percent of Americans don't make New Year's resolutions. I'm not sure of the reason for this. Perhaps some people believe it is a futile exercise with no real purpose. Others may have made resolutions in the past and have failed to follow through with the commitments they made to themselves. Therefore, they wish to avoid the sting of failure again. Others may feel there is nothing particularly special about a new calendar year. So there is no greater reason to make resolutions then than at any other time of the year.

Whether or not you choose to make resolutions, the beginning of a new calendar year seems to be a natural time for reflection, evaluation, renewal, and, for some, resolutions.

I have no idea what date was on the calendar when Paul dictated his letter to the Philippian believers. However, in chapter 3, Paul resolves to do certain things. Remember that he is in chains. At the time, he may have been chained to a Roman guard.

## I. PAUL RESOLVED TO FORGET WHAT IS BEHIND

"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind" (v. 13).

Certainly the apostle Paul did not mean that everything in the past should be forgotten, literally. In fact, he writes in Ephesians:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (2:11-13).

It is evident from this passage that Paul encourages his listeners to remember what they were without faith in Christ.

A lifelong awareness of our past, outside the security of

faith in Jesus Christ, leads to continuing thankfulness to God and a passion for the Christian journey.

**ILLUS.** In the Gospel of Luke, there is the story of the woman who had lived a sinful life. She came into the house of a Pharisee with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she took up her position behind Jesus, she began to wet His feet with her tears. She then wiped His feet with her hair and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee became indignant within himself over Jesus allowing himself to be touched by such a woman, Jesus responded with the story of the moneylender. He then made the beautiful point: "I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47).

It is critical, however, to not allow our past to preempt the living, active, and dynamic grace of God in the present. It is important to remember what the grace of God has done for us, but not to allow life's experiences in our memories to keep us from being all that God wants us to be in the present day.

A. Forget memories of past self-reliance.

Paul was determined to put behind him that part of his past that could lead him to faulty self-reliance:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things (*Phil. 3:4-8*). Not only did Paul refuse to put his confidence in his elite past, but also he refused to mourn its loss.

B. Forget memories of past failures.

Paul also refused to allow his memories of past failures to keep him from experiencing the grace of God in the present moment. When writing to Timothy, Paul was well aware of his sinful past and God's mercy. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

So often we allow our painful memories of failure to cripple our effectiveness in the present hour. Many times, even after we have repented and experienced God's forgiveness, we are tempted to go on punishing ourselves.

**ILLUS.** Olympic skater Dan Jansen failed to win the gold medal in 1984, 1988, and 1992, before finally winning in 1996. He relates how, when he was nine years old, he fell during a race and failed to win. He cried as his mother helped remove his skates and for the entire six-hour trip home. His father drove silently while Dan continued to softly cry in the backseat of the car during the whole trip.

Finally, as they pulled into their drive and began to leave the car, Dan's father spoke quietly to Dan: "You

know, Dan, there's more to life than skating around in a circle."

We, as well, can allow life to get out of focus as we allow failures of the past to dominate our attitudes and actions of today.

## II. PAUL RESOLVED TO PRESS ON

Paul says determinedly, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (v. 14).

The word "press" is a strong word. According to Vine, "It is used as a metaphor from the footrace." It speaks of effort and intensity.

**ILLUS.** In the film *Chariots of Fire* you witness race after race. Eric Liddell, the missionary/runner, is depicted running with fiery intensity. He believes strongly that God has made him fast, and he runs for God's glory.

There is a proper place for out-and-out determination to win the spiritual race of life that God has set before us. We must recognize our inadequacies to make it on our own. We know that we must have the same grace of God that Paul was promised by the Lord. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:9). But, coupled with that grace, we must, as Paul, resolve to press on.

A. Paul presses on because of unfulfilled wishes.

Earlier in Phil. 3, Paul had outlined his desires in regard to a greater, closer, and deeper relationship to Christ. He readily admits in verses 12 and 13 that his wishes are not yet totally fulfilled. His journey to his desired destination of experience is not altogether complete: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (v. 12).

B. Paul presses on because there is a prize to win.

Paul puts it this way: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (v. 14).

**ILLUS.** There is a contemporary Christmas song with the phrase "Christmas is Jesus." For Paul, the "prize is Jesus."

In another letter, Paul relates: "As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. . . . I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6, 8).

Paul's greatest dreams, wishes, and goals would be achieved when he joined Jesus Christ in another world.

C. Paul pressed on with the confidence that he had a real partner.

Earlier in this letter Paul had encouraged his Philippian friends with his confidence that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6).

Paul says, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (3:12). Paul must have had in mind his Damascus road experience in writing these words. Although it had been many years since that blinding light and wonderful voice of the Savior brought him to his knees, the experience was as fresh as if it were yesterday.

On that road, Jesus Christ took hold of Paul's heart, mind, and body.

**ILLUS.** C. S. Lewis, speaking of his own conversion experience, tells about being surprised by God. In fact, he says that he was the most reluctant Christian in England.

No doubt Paul was shocked and surprised by the dramatic intervention in his life by the very One whom he persecuted. But Jesus changed Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle. Paul experienced an abrupt detour from the road of persecution to the path of salvation for himself and for many in the Gentile world. Jesus Christ had intersected Paul's life in a way that he could never forget. If the Lord Jesus Christ would go to that extent to get Paul's attention and change his direction, he would certainly be faithful until the end. Paul recognized he was saved from his darkness, for life and eternity.

## CONCLUSION

Paul resolved that he would not allow anything in his past to hinder him from reaching his goal. Whatever it took, he was pressing on. He knew that at the finish line of his life, he would find life forever with the One who had taken hold of him, Jesus Christ.

What about you and me? How's your resolve for the New Year?

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome and Prayer	
Scripture Reading	Ps. 57:9-11
Music of Adoration and Praise	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
	"I Know Whom I Have Believed"
Choral Music	"Through It All"
Invitation to Prayer	"God Will Make a Way"
Sharing and Fellowship	
Worship Through Giving	
Scripture Reading	Phil. 3:7-16
Special Song	"I Want to Know Christ"
Morning Message	"NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE"
Our Response	
Benediction	
Postlude	

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP

Take time for people to share spiritual resolutions that they have made for the coming year. These might be in the area of Bible study and prayer. You may need to be directive.

### OUR RESPONSE

Be particularly sensitive to those who may need to pray about failures in the past. Perhaps you could use "Cares Chorus" or "He Touched Me" in closing. This could be not only a time for repentance for sins but also a time for healing of memories.

# Getting the Team Together

by Virgil Mills

1 Cor. 1:1-10

## INTRO

The apostle Paul uses the analogies of sports or athletics in his writings. He particularly uses the image of Olympic-type competition to illustrate his message. Typically, in these cases, individual competition is the focus. For instance, Paul uses the pictures of a runner and a boxer to make a strong point:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Paul is intent on being true to his calling and mission: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (v. 22). He is determined to run to win life's race that the Lord Jesus Christ has set out for him. He is determined to fight to win. Paul is determined by God's grace to win his life-and-death competition by being faithful to his personal call.

In regard to the church, the analogy of team competition has a worthwhile application as well.

In years gone by, the word "team" was used to describe two or more animals harnessed together. It was extremely helpful in a largely agricultural world to have a team of animals trained to work together efficiently.

Now the word "team" is very often used to describe people working together in a group toward a common purpose or goal.

The word is often used in the world of sports. However, it is being heard more and more in the business world.

Robert Kreitner writes in his book, *Management*: "Teams and teamwork are vital group dynamics in the modern workplace."

If a team would be successful, proper attention must be given to its formation.

For us to minister effectively, it is critically important to understand how and why the church is formed. It is not an organization formed by human beings alone. The church is formed by God with great purpose and value.

It is easy on occasion to focus on the many human shortcomings we see in the church and lose sight of its high calling and treasured position.

Most scholars say that the church at Corinth was Paul's most difficult church. Even a cursory inspection of his two letters addressed to Corinth is cause enough to suspect deep problems. William Barclay writes of the church at Corinth: "Here we see what 'the care of all the churches' must have meant to Paul. Here we see the heartbreaks and the joys. Here we see Paul the shepherd of his flock, bearing the sorrows and the problems of his people on his heart."

However, Paul has great confidence in God's grace at work in the believers' lives at Corinth.

This should be the case for our church today as well. Why should we be hopeful in regard to the church?

## I. THE CHURCH IS CALLED BY GOD

Ultimately, God calls the church together. He puts the team together!

The term "church" in the New Testament is from the Greek word *ekklēsia*. It means to be "called out." With a few exceptions, *ekklēsia* is reserved exclusively in the New Testament for the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, either as a local body of believers or the larger body of believers everywhere.

Paul describes the special calling of the church of God in Corinth in the beginning verses of this letter: "To those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (v. 2). There are three elements to this special calling.

### A. The church is set apart.

Paul writes to those "sanctified" in Christ Jesus. One aspect of this meaning is to be set apart to God. This sanctification is only made possible for the Corinthian Christians through their faith relationship with Jesus.

The Lord God presented Moses with the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. There God also made something else very clear. "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exod. 34:14). The redeemed are precious to God.

### B. The church has a holy calling.

"Call" is a common word that acquires greater significance when used in reference to God's calling. In the Old Testament, we have examples that include Moses, Jeremiah, and Abraham. Abram (eventually called Abraham) was called by God out of his present status and location to begin a new people: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. . . . So Abram left, as the LORD had told him" (Gen. 12:1, 4).

In the New Testament, the 12 disciples are called by Jesus. He issues the invitation.

The apostle Paul stressed his calling: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1).

In the case of the Corinthian Christians, like Abraham, they were called to be part of a new people. They were called to be part of a holy people.

William Barclay wrote concerning two great days in a person's life: "The day we are born and the day we discover why."



C. The Church is greater than what we see.  
We certainly should take a worldview toward the Christian message.

**ILLUS.** Several years ago, I had the opportunity to be a part of a Work and Witness team in Kenya, Africa. What a joy to worship and work with people on the opposite side of the world! What a blessing as we stood close to the equator and prayed together.

**ILLUS.** There was an 18th-century prince who acted in unbecoming ways to his status of royalty. His governess pinned a piece of royal purple on his lapel. Then she said to the prince, "Whenever I find you not acting properly, as a prince should, I will point to the purple and appeal to your royal attire."

The church at Corinth was special in its calling. Ours is as well. Sometimes it may not seem that way, but it is true. We are part of a royal bloodline.

## II. GOD EQUIPS HIS CHURCH

A. The grace benefits of Christ are more than sufficient. Paul launches into a testimony of thanksgiving as he reflects on the resources of God made available to the Christians at Corinth. "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus" (v. 4).

Paul loves to talk about grace, both in his experience and in others'. How wonderful to recognize the full provisions of grace. Paul knew very well the debauchery out of which many Corinthians had been saved. But he was also very confident of the sufficiency of the grace of God. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20, *KJV*).

B. The gifts of God will give the means to win the day. "For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. . . . You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed" (vv. 5, 7).

Later on in this letter, Paul addresses some problems occurring due to misunderstandings of spiritual gifts. However, that does not negate the fact Paul was confident that God is faithful to equip His people for the spiritual battles of life.

C. They could depend upon God's support. "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8).

The word "blameless" was used often as a legal term.

T. Crichton Mitchell says of the word: "It is entirely scriptural to describe Christians living obediently and with pure intention of pleasing the Lord as 'blameless but not faultless.'"

In translating this passage, Barclay has it: "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . will keep you secure right to the end so that no one will be able to impeach you in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Although we do not adhere to a belief of unconditional security, there is security for the believer in Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

Our divine Leader, Jesus Christ, has called us to himself. He has equipped us through His grace for the contest of life. He will give us the support we need to be victorious. I'm glad to be part of that kind of spiritual team.

**ILLUS.** I remember watching a replay of a football game several months ago. At a critical point in the game, the camera focused in on the coach of the team. He had determined that a particular kind of offensive play had a good chance to be successful. So he passed the play along to the quarterback. The coach was animated on the sidelines as the play was put into the game and implemented. The play was hugely successful. I could hear the coach saying, as he excitedly walked the sidelines: "I told you that play would work. . . . I told you that play would work!"

Our Savior knows what is needed in our lives. He knows what is needed in His Church. He knows what's ahead. He knows what we need now and in the future. Jesus, lead us on!

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome and Prayer	
Music of Adoration and Praise	"Holy Ground"
	"We Have Come into His House"
	"Come, Christians, Join to Sing"
Choral Music	"Family of God"
Invitation to Prayer	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
Responsive Reading	"Christian Unity"
Reception of Church Members	
Sharing and Fellowship	
Worship Through Giving	
Scripture Reading	1 Cor. 1:1-10
Special Song	"We Are the Reason"
Morning Message	"GETTING THE TEAM TOGETHER"
Our Response	
Benediction	Num. 6:24-26
Postlude	

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP

This would be a good time for some longer-term members to share some wonderful memories of God's blessing on the church. You could also ask a newer member to share about how he or she came to be part of the church.

# Finding the Right Plan

by Virgil Mills

1 Cor. 1:18-2:16

## INTRO

If a team of any kind would have success, it will typically need to have a strategy or game plan. If you listen to sports programming before athletic events, analysts many times list certain things that must happen for a particular team to win. The team that best executes an effective game plan usually wins.

In the spiritual contest of life, the stakes are much higher than in any game we may attend or watch on television. It is vitally important to have a strategy that will give us cause to celebrate at the end of this very important contest.

Having a strategy is true for the church as well. Do we know the purpose of our church? Do we recognize what God has called the church to be and to do? Do we have a plan to carry out the mission to which God has called His Church?

Part of the development of a game plan involves anticipating the conditions in which the game will be played.

In our study of the Church, we look to the apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Corinth was a reputable, or disreputable, city in the Roman Empire. Not everyone could afford a trip to first-century Corinth. Its seaport ranked second only to Rome in wealth and importance. The Corinthians were known for lavish and excessive living. The temples of Aphrodite were like a vast brothel system. This was the world to which the apostle Paul took the message of Jesus Christ. Our world is in trouble as well.

George Hunter III writes in *How to Reach Secular People* that in the United States alone at least 120 million undisciplined people are ages 14 and older.

In my county, almost 50 percent of the population is unclaimed by any denomination.

**ILLUS.** Hunter believes that the Church in the Western world needs to understand the new missionary challenge in the secular West today. He claims the situation we face today is much like what the early apostolic Church faced.

For the Christian movement's first three centuries, the communication of Christianity had to achieve four objectives: (1) Facing a population of Christianity with no knowledge of the gospel, the Christian movement had to inform people of the story of Jesus. . . . (2) Facing hostile populations and the persecution of the state, the Church had to "win friends and influence people" to a positive attitude toward the movement.

(3) Facing an Empire with several entrenched religions, the Christians had to convince people of Christianity's truth, or at least its plausibility. (4) Since entry into faith is by an act of the will, Christians had to invite people to adopt this faith and join the messianic community and follow Jesus as Lord.

These were the elements of persuasion in Paul's ancient setting. As we examine the four components, it seems they have a great deal of relevancy for our world today.

Somehow the apostle Paul managed to come into his pagan world and point the Corinthians to the very center of Christianity. What was the strategy for the Church then? What about for the Church today?

## I. GOD'S PLAN IS A POWERFUL PLAN

Paul reiterates where the power rests: "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).

"Jesus Christ had the power to change life, to forgive sin, to heal brokenness, to conquer despair, to set people free, to give life in the place of death! This is the good news that startled the Corinthians. . . . This was worthy of being at the center of their lives" (Earl Palmer, *Alive from the Center*).

Paul's proof was not based on the rhetorical skill and philosophic arguments of his day but, rather, in what God can and will do in a life.

**ILLUS.** There is a very influential ministry in the city where I minister by the name of Mel Trotter Mission. For much of the founder's life, he was an alcoholic. He came home after one 10-day drinking spree to find his baby dead in his wife's arms. "I've killed my son. I'll never touch another drop." Yet two hours after the baby's funeral, Trotter staggered home drunk. He had taken the little white shoes off his baby in the coffin and sold them for drinking money.

In total despair, he headed along Chicago Street for Lake Michigan. On the way, Harry Monroe, superintendent of Pacific Garden Mission, pulled him inside a hall where the gospel was being preached. Mel Trotter became a Christian. For the next 40 years, he served as superintendent of a rescue mission here in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From here, he started 60 other gospel missions in U.S. cities. The gospel is powerful!

## II. THE PLAN IS GROUNDED IN GOD'S WISDOM

Paul quotes from the Book of Isaiah: "For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate'" (1 Cor. 1:19). He goes on to say: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (vv. 20-21).

Paul recognizes, however, that humans cannot come to

In Eph. 1:18 we read: “I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share” (TLB).

We have the ultimate life coach in Jesus Christ. He is

The Bible captures some of His majesty. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9).

This couple is a living testimony to the power found in following God's plan.

68

# How Do We Know If We've Won?

by **Virgil Mills**

1 Cor. 3:1-23

## INTRO

In our world there is often a great deal of discussion concerning winning and losing. Some say, "It's not whether you win or lose; it's how you play the game." Others say, "Winning is everything."

In 1 Cor. 3, the apostle Paul addresses winning and losing in the work of the Lord.

In order to better understand Paul's words, we need to look at circumstances in the church at Corinth. There is trouble among the members. Divisions have developed. "One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:12-13).

Of course, we know Christ, Paul, and Cephas (Peter) very well. Who is Apollos? According to Acts 18, he was a Jew, born at Alexandria in Egypt. This city was known for its large Jewish population. Alexandria was second only to Athens as a center of culture and learning. The Septuagint was translated here as well. Out of this city came Apollos. "He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:24-25). Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of God more adequately to him. This probably means they explained to him more completely the work of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and beyond. While Apollos is a knowledgeable and powerful speaker, the apostle Paul characterizes himself as something different. At least Paul recognizes some are very unimpressed with his personal abilities.

"For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing'" (2 Cor. 10:10).

Paul refuses to play competitive games. Instead, he appeals to the church at Corinth for unity: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Paul preached and taught for a year and a half in Corinth, but many converts were still Christian babies.

"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready" (3:1-2).

Vine describes this condition as: "having the nature of flesh . . . sensual, controlled by appetites, governed by human nature, instead of by the Spirit of God."

In the carnal expression of their lives, they misunderstood the source of spiritual life and growth. How different from Paul's attitude as he writes another letter while in chains:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice (Phil. 1:15-18).

In 1 Cor. 3, Paul teaches both the church at Corinth and us today some wonderful inspired truths concerning winning and losing.

## I. GOD GIVES THE GROWTH

The apostle uses examples from the agricultural world to make this point.

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (vv. 6-7). He recognizes God as the great Cause of any success or growth. Paul, Peter, and Apollos are role players. They are only gardeners.

## II. WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF A SPECIAL PARTNERSHIP

"The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers" (vv. 8-9).

**ILLUS.** In his book *Preaching in the Spirit*, Dennis F. Kinlaw titles one chapter "Called to Work with God." In this chapter Dr. Kinlaw writes: "God wants to save the world, and He looks for helpers. The realization of this fact has changed my attitude toward prayer and toward preaching. I now realize that the preaching event is not my service, but His. He wants to accomplish certain things in that service; I am simply privileged to be His accomplice. I am privileged to work with Him rather than for Him."

**ILLUS.** Recently in a worship service sharing time, one of the most effective Sunday School teachers in our church shared a beautiful confession. She told how she had been praying that she would teach well, but was convicted that she should change her prayer to something quite different. She had begun to pray instead that the people in her class would really experience God.

## III. JESUS CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH WE MUST BUILD

"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But

each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (vv. 10-11).

Earlier Paul used an analogy from the agricultural world. Now he illustrates with pictures from the world of construction.

Obviously the structure of a building will only be as strong as its foundation. A weakened foundation may lead to collapse of the entire structure.

**ILLUS.** During the rains of El Niño in California, we have seen time and time again soggy ground giving way and houses falling down the side of the mountain.

Jesus, preaching the Sermon on the Mount, said:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (*Matt. 7:24-27*).

Jesus Christ is our Foundation.

## IV. FINAL EVALUATION OF OUR WORK WILL COME SOMEDAY

We must be careful not only to lay the proper foundation but also to build on it wisely.

"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (vv. 12-15).

"The Day" refers to the time when Christ will return to earth in power and judgment.

William Barclay writes: "The wrong and the inadequate will be swept away. But, in the mercy of God, even the inadequate builder will be saved, because at least he tried to do something for Christ."

Donald Metz puts it this way: "Good men who work with tainted motives or twisted methods may be saved, but their work crumbles. Those who try to build only upon natural talents, human skills, or personal charm will see their work go up in smoke."\*

**ILLUS.** Most of us have seen the pictures from time to time on the evening news as shocked and devastated homeowners stand by helplessly as their homes lie in rubble from a devastating fire or storm.

Our work in the Kingdom will be tested in the fire of God's honest judgment. Yet verses 12-15 give us the picture of a God of both justice and mercy.

**ILLUS.** A young preacher gave the commencement address at Asbury College in the 1930s. He conveyed the following story to Dr. Kinlaw: "The place was packed. . . . God was with me and I soared. I thought, I have this audience in the palm of my hand. I can do anything I want with them. Suddenly, a cold chill moved over me. I closed the service immediately, went to my room, and got on my knees. I said, 'God, if You'll forgive me, I'll never be guilty of that again.'"

## CONCLUSION

The final evaluation of our lives must wait until Christ returns. In the meantime we must endeavor to remind ourselves constantly that God brings the growth. He brings the victory. He causes us to win. We build upon Jesus Christ. Someday truthful evaluation will occur.

As we endeavor to win for Christ, we should take to heart the words of Paul: "So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (vv. 21-23).

Praise His name!

\*Metz, BBC, 8:335.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Scripture Reading ..... 1 Chron. 29:10-11  
Music of Adoration and Praise ..... "Majesty"  
"All Hail King Jesus"  
"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"  
Choral Music ..... "He Who Began a Good Work in You"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "Lord, Be Glorified"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... 1 Cor. 3:1-23  
Special Song ..... "It Will Be Worth It All"  
Morning Message ..... "HOW DO WE KNOW IF WE'VE WON?"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP

Give opportunity for some persons to share about Christians who have gone on to be with the Lord. Find out what made them special in the person's memory. Was it their prayers, smiles, etc.?

### OUR RESPONSE

Give ample time for response at the altar. You may want to close with "What a Day That Will Be."

# An Excellent Adventure

by Virgil Mills

1 Cor. 12:31-13:13

## INTRO

In recent times, many psychologists insist that there really is only one basic human urge: that is the desire to love and be loved.

**ILLUS.** A story in an Illinois newspaper told about the abduction of a three-week-old baby in a town in southern Illinois. A woman in her late 30s called on the parents and identified herself as a representative of the hospital. She claimed the baby had been selected as baby of the month. She asked to take the baby to the hospital for a picture. After several hours when the woman did not return, the frantic mother called the hospital and then the police. The woman and baby were discovered in Chicago a few days later.

When the authorities asked her why she had stolen the baby, she tearfully replied: "I just wanted something to love." The woman had lost both her husband and father within the month. She had suffered a miscarriage as well.

The experience and practice of love in the community of the Christian faith remains critically important. Jesus told His disciples in the Upper Room the night before His death, "This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:17). John the apostle writes in his first letter:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (4:7-12).

The apostle Paul has been discussing spiritual gifts in great detail just prior to his words concerning love, found in chapter 13. He makes a transition from discussing spiritual gifts with the words: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way" (12:31). As Paul prepares to speak concerning love, he challenges his listeners to prepare for an excellent adventure. I enjoy stories that contain greatness: great travel, great characters, and great significance. Paul writes to Corinthian Christians concerning agape—God's kind of

love. Let's listen closely to his inspired words. It could lead us to a real adventure.

## I. WHAT LOVE IS NOT

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (13:1-2).

A. It is not just the practice of outward religious behavior.

Paul writes a great deal concerning spiritual gifts and proper worship in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. He does so with care and diligence. However, Paul is very clear. Outward worship and religiosity do not substitute for the experience and practice of God's kind of love.

Just as the Pharisees in Jesus' day, it is entirely possible for people to confuse religious activity with the true essence of spirituality. Love is that true essence.

B. It is not in self-sacrifice.

"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (13:3).

**ILLUS.** Several months ago Ted Turner committed \$1 billion to the United Nations for charitable causes around the world. Paul says, if this kind of thing is done without love, the giver gains nothing.

Even in the church, an individual may give his money, time, and talents, but without love gain nothing.

## II. WHAT IS LOVE?

A. God is love.

His very being is the best definition of all.

God's kind of love is so unique. It cannot be duplicated by Satan. It is original. Only God can impart it.

B. God's love is for us.

"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5).

Such love can only be given by God. And He wants us to have it.

**ILLUS.** Inventors patent their products with the U.S. Patent Office so they may have control over the production and profit of their creation.

C. God's love is active.

**ILLUS.** A popular song many years ago contained the words: "What the world needs now is love . . . love, sweet love. . . That's the only thing that there's just too little of. . . What the world needs now is love, sweet love." Admittedly, this sentiment sounds rather like a trite cliché in this day. The word "love" is definitely overused and misused many times in our world.

However, Paul writes with conviction as he benchmarks the genuine expression of agape.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It



always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (13:4-7).

**ILLUS.** Several years ago Robert Fulghum wrote a book titled *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*: "These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody." These are some of the things he learned in kindergarten.

Some of the simplest truths are the most profound.

Time and space do not permit me to lift out each element of love's manifestation as shown here. However, sometimes it is more helpful to look at things as a whole.

**ILLUS.** I have a bird feeder in my backyard. I enjoy watching the different species of birds as they feed together. They are cardinals, sparrows, blue jays, and chickadees. Sometimes they seem to cooperate and peacefully enjoy the food together. On other occasions, it seems a real competitive spirit makes life difficult for all of them.

In the church, we have so much diversity. Only through the experience and activity of agape in its members can the church hope to be unified and peaceful.

### III. LOVE WILL LAST

"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. . . . Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (13:8, 13).

There is a desire in the human heart for lasting value. Deep inside of us we have a longing for continuity.

**ILLUS.** I remember reading a story several years ago about a little boy who received a puppy for a pet. The child dearly loved the little animal and was devastated when it was struck and killed by a car. The boy's father then bought the little boy a pet rabbit. It too was killed. The boy cried out to his father: "Please, Daddy, give me something to love that will never die."

The apostle Paul offers wonderful hope for that sentiment: "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39).

In 1 Cor. 13:13, Paul praises the value of faith and hope in our present world. But someday faith and hope will no longer be needed in the manner they are now.

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1).

Horatio G. Spafford writes:

*And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend.  
"Even so"—it is well with my soul.*

Love will give us confidence as we stand before the Lord, according to John. "Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:17-18).

**ILLUS.** Several years ago I came back from Africa after a mission trip. To officially get back into the U.S., I had to pass through customs. Only certain items were allowed back into the country. Items not permitted into the country had to be left at the gate.

As we cross into eternity, only love will be allowed. It will be the only element of our lives that transfers forward into another world. We will be able to check hope and faith at the gate. Faith will be exchanged for sight. Hope will be transformed into realized dreams. Only loving attitudes and actions will transfer into our eternal home.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Welcome and Prayer	
Responsive Reading	....."God's Love"
Music of Adoration and Praise	....."Such Love"
	"I Love You, Lord"
Choral Music	....."The Wonder of It All"
Invitation to Prayer	....."Jesus Loves Me"
	"He Loves Me"
Sharing and Fellowship	
Worship Through Giving	
Scripture Reading	.....1 Cor. 12:31—13:13
Special Song	....."The Love of God"
Morning Message	....."AN EXCELLENT ADVENTURE"
Our Response	
Benediction	.....Eph. 3:20-21
Postlude	

### CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

#### INVITATION TO PRAYER

Have a child sing "Jesus Loves Me."

#### SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP

Have a married couple give a testimony concerning what God's love has meant to their marriage.

#### OUR RESPONSE

You could use "I'll Live for Him" as an invitation to prayer at the altar.

# Eight Steps to Happiness

## Part 1

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 5:1-12

### INTRO

What do you want out of life? Many people answer, "I just want to be happy!" What does it mean to be happy? Is it simply getting what you want? So often, even when people get what they want, they are not really happy.

Perhaps part of the difficulty is the word itself. We may trace the English word, "happy," to the word "hap," which means "chance." William Barclay writes: "A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take the fickle joy the world can give." Happiness or a sense of well-being based on circumstances is tentative and fleeting.

The Greek word *makarios*, used in the Sermon on the Mount, is also found in Greek literature concerning the gods to describe their sufficiency, satisfaction, and security. The same word is used of God in 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15.

Vine writes concerning this: "The Lord indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good."

The portion of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matt 5:1-12 is often referred to as the Beatitudes. The word, "beatitude," comes to us from the Latin word *beatitudo*, which means blessedness or happiness.

In the Aramaic, the verb, "are," was not actually used. We find that addition in our English translations. With that being the case, the more proper translation would be more like: "Oh, the blessedness of . . ." or "Congratulations!"

So as we turn to this wonderful section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, what does He teach us about the steps to true happiness? How should I respond?

### I. I NEED HELP

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 3).

We dethrone pride by experiencing poverty in spirit. By admitting our spiritually destitute state, we exhibit the opposite of spiritual self-sufficiency.

C. S. Lewis writes: "Pride leads to every other vice."

Howard F. Vos writes in *Matthew: A Study Guide*: "Such persons recognize that they have no power within themselves to please God but that they are utterly dependent on His grace."

**ILLUS.** A dad explained to his son that his conscience was a still small voice that would talk to him when he had done wrong. The little boy responded by praying, "O God, make the little voice loud."

In Luke 18, Jesus tells the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector "to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else" (v. 9). Remember, "the Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself" (v. 11). He touted his supposed virtues compared to the tax collector. In contrast, "the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'" (v. 13).

Jesus commented on this scene: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 14).

Charlotte Elliott communicates this truth beautifully in the words,

*Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

**ILLUS.** In my college experience I found myself with a critical financial need. In desperation I went to the president of the college and explained my situation. He overwhelmed me with his generous response. Out of his available resources for such occasions, he paid the outstanding bill and gave this young sophomore hope. This would have never happened if I had refused to humble myself and to ask for help in my time of need.

### II. PLEASE FORGIVE ME

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (v. 4).

This second beatitude complements the first. The former emphasizes a mental realization of spiritual poverty, and the latter an emotional response to that condition.

The apostle Paul writes, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). This being the case, there is a place for heartfelt mourning over sin. The Bible teaches: "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:8-10).

Heartfelt mourning for our sin and failure is powerfully healing when it leads us to Christ.

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Cor. 7:10).

This kind of attitude also plays a critical role in having true happiness in our relationships.

**ILLUS.** Robert Schuller, in his book *The Be (Happy) Attitudes*, tells a moving story: "I will never forget the morning I asked my oldest daughter, Sheila, to do the breakfast dishes before school, not realizing that she was already late and facing too many tardy notices. I was stunned by her reaction. She burst into profuse tears.

Again, misinterpreting the motive behind the outburst, assuming that she was merely trying to get out of an unpleasant chore, I demanded that she dry her eyes and get to work—immediately.”

Dr. Schuller relates her reluctant obedience and their silent ride to school. He began to realize his poor timing: “The more I thought about it, the more remorseful I became. Finally, I decided that I had to do something. I had to say I was sorry, and my apology could not wait until suppertime.”

After getting permission from the school, Dr. Schuller took his daughter to lunch. “Sheila, I’m sorry. I’m so very sorry! It’s not that I shouldn’t have asked you to help out at home, but I had no right to insist on it this morning without any previous warning. . . . I was wrong. Please forgive me.”

Sheila responded with quick and loving forgiveness.

How much better could our relationships be if we moved more quickly to say, “I’m sorry.”

As I reflect on this second step to true happiness, I am reminded of another application as well. In Rev. 21:3-4, I read the words of John: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

Someday our God will truly comfort His people who mourn.

### III. YES, LORD

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (v. 5).

Meekness does not equal weakness.

William Barclay expands on this verse: “O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realize his own ignorance and his own weakness.”

Lloyd John Ogilvie writes: “The circumstances, other people, and the demands of life are not the cause of our tensions. The cause is being out of control because we are under our control rather than the Lord’s.”

Adelaide A. Pollard writes so beautifully the prayer:

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me after Thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*

The roots of this particular beatitude are found in Ps. 37. David contrasts the fate of the wicked and the righteous: “Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great pow-

er, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found” (vv. 34-36, KJV).

In contrast to the wicked, according to the apostle Paul, God has quite a plan of promotion for the Christian: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we will judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

**ILLUS.** In his book *Destined for the Throne*, Paul Billheimer writes:

From the very beginning it was God’s plan and purpose that out of the riven side of His Son should come an Eternal Companion to sit by His side upon the throne of the universe as a bona fide partner . . . to share with Him His sovereign power and authority over His eternal kingdom. . . . We may not know why it pleases the Father to give the kingdom to the little flock. We may not know why Christ chooses to share His throne and His glory with the redeemed. We only know that He has chosen to do so and that it gives Him pleasure.

### CONCLUSION

We have taken our first three steps toward experiencing the true happiness that Jesus offers. Does it bring a smile to your face? Or, at least, to your heart?

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Responsive Reading ..... “Sing a New Song”  
Music ..... “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”  
..... “Come, We That Love the Lord”  
Choral Music ..... “Jesus Is All the World to Me”  
Invitation to Prayer ..... “The Longer I Serve Him”  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... Matt. 5:1-12  
Special Music ..... “Jesus Is the Joy of Living”  
Morning Message ... “EIGHT STEPS TO HAPPINESS—PART 1”  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

### CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

#### WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING

Have someone share an experience of great joy giving to the work of the Lord.

#### SCRIPTURE READING

If possible, show slides or a short video taken on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee to give the people a sense of the terrain where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount.

# Eight Steps to Happiness

## Part 2

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 5:1-12

### INTRO

We have examined the first three steps toward true happiness as found in the Beatitudes. Each step to happiness calls for our initial response of: (1) I need help. (2) Please forgive me. (3) Yes, Lord.

Now let's take a close look at the remaining steps to happiness found in the Beatitudes.

### IV. I WANT YOU, LORD, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (v. 6).

William Barclay identifies an interesting grammatical element in this beatitude. The meaning is that of hungering and thirsting for the whole thing. The idea is to hunger for the whole loaf of bread, instead of just a slice of bread. It is to thirst for the whole pitcher of water, not just a cup of water. Therefore the correct translation could be: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the whole of righteousness, for complete righteousness."

A step toward true happiness is taken as we experience a longing for God. The psalmist writes: "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (63:1, KJV).

**ILLUS.** In his book *Congratulations—God Believes in You!* Lloyd Ogilvie tells of a man who was dissatisfied with his life. "Congratulations!" Ogilvie said to him. "You are very fortunate. . . . Thank God for your dissatisfaction. He's got something better in store for you. The discontent you feel is a sign that you are a special chosen person. The Lord is invading your life!"

What does the word "righteousness" mean?

H. Ray Dunning defines it as "God's disposition to 'put things right' and thus is nearly equivalent to *justice*. In particular, God showed this righteousness by coming in saving power to those who were needy and helpless."\*

Righteousness also has the meaning of right living before God and others.

**ILLUS.** Within the last several months, a leader of a Christian denomination was indicted on racketeering charges. He was accused of misusing church funds. If the charges are true, they will compromise this man's Christian witness. However, with that being said, none of us

would be comfortable with comparing our own righteousness to the standard of God's righteousness.

Lloyd Ogilvie writes in this regard: "When we measure our lives by the righteous standard of God, we are engulfed with frustration and failure. . . . We want to be right on our own, justified by our own goodness, loved because we have measured up. . . . A grasping desire for righteousness on our own strength to please God leads to anything but happiness." However, this reality leads us to the wonderful truth found in Rom. 5:18-19: "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

For us, seeking righteousness culminates in the finding of the Savior named Jesus Christ. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. . . . We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2, KJV).

Lelia N. Morris expressed it well almost 100 years ago: "Not our own righteousness, but Christ within, / Living, and reigning, and saving from sin."

### V. I WANT TO UNDERSTAND

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

The Hebrew word for "mercy" describes the feeling of getting inside a person's skin and feeling what that one is feeling.

**ILLUS.** Several months ago, I saw a man walking down a busy street. He was shouting and shaking his fist at as many motorists as possible.

Showing mercy moves us beyond reacting in an equally offensive manner but, instead, trying to empathize with this man in his state of emotional or spiritual sickness or both.

A French proverb says, "To know all is to forgive all."

**ILLUS.** A few years ago my family had an activity planned that involved several of my daughter's school friends. One of the friends had quietly said to my daughter, Jenny, "Could you please pick me up first? I don't want anyone else to see where I live."

When we arrived at the young girl's home, we quickly recognized the reason for her request. We understood why she might feel embarrassed. My heart was moved to compassion for this young lady. Also, there was deep thankfulness in my heart that my own daughter's spirit of mercy had made her friend feel that her secret was safe with her.

**ILLUS.** Malcolm Muggeridge interviewed Mother Teresa several years ago on the BBC. In the interview, Muggeridge said: "The thing I noticed about you and the hundreds of sisters who now form your team is that you all look so happy. Is it a put-on?"

Mother Teresa responded, “Oh, no, not at all. Nothing makes you happier than when you really reach out in mercy to someone who is badly hurt.”

## VI. LORD, YOU ARE FIRST PLACE

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (v. 8).

Søren Kierkegaard writes, "Purity of heart is to will one thing."

The words of Ogilvie are insightful: "Single-mindedness is not simple-mindedness or narrow-mindedness. Rather it is the result of putting God first in our lives." It amounts to being free of the tyranny of a divided self.

Ultimately, purity is God's greatest work within us. This was what He did through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is what Simon Peter spoke of in Acts 15:8-9 concerning Cornelius, himself, and others: "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith."

**ILLUS.** Dale A. Hays tells of a story he heard from a Haitian pastor: A man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After a great deal of bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding over the door.

After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the single nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail. The Haitian pastor's conclusion: "If we leave the devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation."

## VII. I'M WILLING TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (v. 9).

God is a God of peace. In 1 Thess. 5:23 we read: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.”

According to David, one of the requirements of loving life and seeing many good days is to “seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14). The apostle Peter quotes from this psalm in 1 Pet. 3. He also writes, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (v. 9).

**ILLUS.** A little girl snuggled up to her mother one night before bedtime. "Mommy, I was a peacemaker today."

Her mother asked, "How was that?"

"I heard something, and I didn't tell it," she answered. Truly we can be peacemakers with our words.

## VIII. I'M WILLING TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH JESUS

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (vv. 10-12).

**ILLUS.** Adoniram Judson was a missionary to Burma. At one point, he was tortured in the prisons because of his faith. After his release, he asked the king for permission to preach. The king said, "I am willing for a dozen preachers to go to that city, but not you; not with those hands. My people are not fools enough to listen to and follow your words, but they will not be able to resist those hands."

## CONCLUSION

Our life here on earth is a journey of many steps. Jesus gives to us eight steps to real happiness and contentment. Ultimately we will be with Him forever. What a happy ending!

\*H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 205.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

## Prelude

## Welcome and Prayer

Responsive Reading .....“Rejoice in the Lord”

Music ..... "He Has Made Me Glad"

## "This Is the Day"

### "Heavenly Sunlight"

Choral Music ..... "Center of My Joy"

Invitation to Prayer ..... “The Crystal Fountain”

## Sharing and Fellowship

## Worship Through Giving

Scripture Reading .....Matt. 5:1-12

Special Music ..... "Satisfied"

Morning Message ...“EIGHT STEPS TO HAPPINESS—PART 2”

## Our Response

### Benediction

## Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

## SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP

Give time for testimonies concerning the happiness those in the congregation have found as Christians. Give extra time for greeting one another during this time. Encourage the congregation to communicate their joy in the Lord to one another.

## OUR RESPONSE

You might close with "It Is Well with My Soul," "View the Present Through the Promise," or "Soon and Very Soon."

You might feel directed to an earlier part of the sermon as you close. For instance, you might feel a greater need to emphasize the need for purity of the heart. If this is the case, you might choose to close with "Cleanse Me."

# Monday Christians

## Part 1

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 5:13-48

### INTRO

**ILLUS.** Several years ago, in my very first full-time ministry position, I had the responsibility of leading a weekend youth retreat. As part of the program that weekend, I showed a film titled *Super Christian*. With tongue-in-cheek humor, the young star of the film dressed in his super Christian outfit for Sunday morning worship. He performed with outstanding religious precision throughout the entire morning. He acted very piously until his arrival at home at noon. Then things began to change radically. As soon as his special Sunday-go-to-meeting outfit was replaced by normal clothing, he went from super Christian to something much less. This much less version carried through into Monday and beyond.

As I recall the story, this young man eventually saw his need for a genuine change of heart and life. He came to see that Christianity was meant to be lived on Monday morning, as well as on Sunday.

Jesus calls all who follow Him to be His disciples just as much on Monday as on Sunday. Monday Christians recognize the importance of exercising Jesus' kind of influence in their world throughout the week. As salt and light Christians, being Christian on Sunday is simply not enough.

The scribes and Pharisees were, in many ways, the most outstanding people of the Jewish nation. They spent time in study. They were disciplined. In many cases, they led exemplary moral and ethical lives. Yet, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "The trouble with the Pharisees was that they were interested in details rather than the principles . . . that they were interested in doing rather than being."

Jesus very pointedly tells people, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 20).

The word translated "surpass" describes a river overflowing its banks.

According to Webster, the word "righteousness" means "doing what is right." But Jesus means much more than just doing right things. The Pharisees would have argued their righteousness in doing right things with anyone. They did so, even with Jesus.

The apostle Paul speaks to this issue:

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on

their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:10-18).

The former Pharisee paints quite a sad portrait of the human condition as he quotes from a combination of six Old Testament passages in the above passage.

"Therefore," he continues, "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (vv. 20-22).

Let's look at some key principles that Jesus cites in His Sermon on the Mount concerning the surpassing righteousness that we must have to enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, what principles must we live by in order to be Monday Christians?

### I. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT OUR WORDS DO MATTER

A. Angry name-calling is not appropriate.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (vv. 21-22).

The word "Raca" has the meaning of "worthless fellow." It was spoken with a contemptible tone of voice. The word "fool" was used to condemn a person as being intellectually and morally bankrupt.

The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is simply not true. Words can be terribly destructive.

Later on in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (12:34-37).

Could Jesus be any clearer concerning the importance of our words?

B. Speaking the truth is needed.

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord." But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (vv. 33-37).



Barclay writes: "Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved and in others of which He is not involved. . . . He is everywhere. . . . He hears all words. . . . All promises are made in the presence of God."

**ILLUS.** Mark Twain wrote, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

## II. UNRESOLVED CONFLICT HAS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (vv. 23-24).

We have in this passage a Jewish picture. A person has come to the court of the Jews in the Temple with an offering to God. The person is seeking forgiveness. As he stands waiting for his offering to be accepted and sacrificed on the altar, he remembers that he has wronged someone. He then should go and remove the roadblock to fellowship with his fellow before he attempts to remove the roadblock to fellowship with God.

Vos comments: "This injunction has a current relevance. One cannot expect to have clear channels of fellowship with God if the channels of fellowship with others are clogged. One who is miserable in the fellowship of believers will hardly enjoy a pleasant fellowship with God."

The Greek word in verse 24 that is translated "be reconciled" is found only here in the New Testament. Ralph Earle defines it as "mutual concession after mutual hostility."

John MacArthur says, "True worship is not enhanced by better music . . . better prayers . . . or even better preaching . . . [rather] by better relationships between those who come to worship."

We must not ignore the consequences to the church when fractured relationships between the people of God prevail.

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way" (v. 25).

I am reminded of the admonitions of the apostle Peter:

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. . . . For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone. . . . But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong . . . ? (1 Pet. 2:12, 15-17, 20).

A part of our responsibility as Monday Christians is to

live lives that give nonbelievers no excuse to discredit the gospel.

**ILLUS.** Dennis Kinlaw told a story about Uncle Bud Robinson. Robinson was riding a train to one of his evangelistic meetings. Uncle Bud was experiencing the blessings of God. It was as if a little bird was singing in his heart. At a stop, Bud overheard an employee at the station berating a young mother. Uncle Bud was indignant. When he approached the counter, Bud proceeded to tell the employee in no uncertain terms what he thought about the man's rudeness to the young mother. Getting back on the train, Uncle Bud initially felt satisfaction for setting the man at the station straight.

But then as he opened his Bible and tried to read, he noticed the little bird was not singing anymore. In his sensitive heart, he knew what he needed to do. At the next stop, he bought a ticket back to the previous station and once again approached the ticket counter. He told the employee that he was a minister and apologized for his earlier behavior.

The man, in turn, broke down and began to open his heart to Uncle Bud. Ultimately, Bud was able to lead the man to Christ.

## CONCLUSION

Our human relationships do impact our relationship with God. Our words to one another do matter.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Scripture Reading .....Ps. 86:10  
Music of Adoration and Praise ..... "How Great Thou Art"  
"To God Be the Glory"  
Choral Music ..... "My Tribute"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "I Will Serve Thee"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading .....Matt. 5:13-48  
Special Music ..... "The Light of the World Is Jesus"  
Morning Message ..... "MONDAY CHRISTIANS—PART 1"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

SCRIPTURE READING  
Consider asking a senior adult to read the psalm.  
WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING  
Have the congregation sing "Sent Forth by God's Blessing" while the offering is being received.

# Monday Christians

## Part 2

by Virgil Mills

Matt. 5:13-48

### INTRO

We are continuing our study from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is calling His listeners from a bland religiosity to a radical relationship that makes a real difference.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (vv. 13-16).

Monday morning Christians understand this as their mission. Sunday-morning-only Christians will be content with much less demanding spirituality.

In Part 1, I expressed two principles for Monday Christians from verses 21-26: (1) Words Do Matter. (2) Unresolved Conflict Has Negative Consequences.

Let us continue with four additional principles for Monday Christians.

### III. THE HEART IS WHERE IT STARTS

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (vv. 27-28).

We read in the ancient Book of Proverbs: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (4:23).

Remember the words from the old song that went like this:

*How about your heart—is it right with God?  
That's the thing that counts today.  
Is it black by sin? Is it pure within?*

—Bennie S. Triplett

Jesus zeroes in on the sin of adultery in His teaching here.

John MacArthur writes: "It is not lustful looking that causes sin in the heart, but sin in the heart that causes lustful looking."

**ILLUS.** Ocean water contains seven times more salt than the human body can safely stand. If a person drinks it, he or she will dehydrate because the kidneys demand extra water to flush out the extra salt. The more salt water someone drinks, the thirstier he or she gets. The person actually dies more quickly of thirst.

When we allow lust to rule in our hearts, we become like the person dying of thirst. In a desperate search for something that will satisfy, the individual can speed along his demise by not realizing that the very opposite result is occurring. Instead of giving us what we really need, lust, if not dealt with, will kill spiritually.

### IV. NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (vv. 29-30).

The word that is translated "causes you to sin" or "causes you to stumble" (cf. ASV) is often used for the bait stick that springs the trap when an animal touches it.

The right hand and right eye represent a person's best. This saying speaks of an essential willingness to give up whatever is necessary, even the most cherished things of life, in order to avoid hell.

**ILLUS.** There was a young man in my church who loved God. He also loved basketball. He received an athletic scholarship to a large university in the state where I pastored. Early on in his basketball career, the coach asked this young man to state his priorities. The young man listed them in this order: God, family, education, and basketball. This was not pleasing to the coach. My friend ultimately gave up his scholarship and basketball at that particular university. Later, he did transfer to a Christian college and finish his basketball career there.

This young man had come face-to-face with the question: "What is most important to me?"

### V. TRUE DISCIPLES LIVE BEYOND THE MINIMUM

As we have already seen, Jesus asks for a spirituality that surpasses that of the Pharisees.

Jesus speaks, particularly, of those times when we are treated unfairly.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (vv. 38-42).

In Rom. 12:20, the apostle quotes from Prov. 25:21-22: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

**ILLUS.** Barbara Bowen explains in her book, *Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind*, that people carried everything on their heads—water jars, baskets of fruit, vegetables, fish, and even the little braziers that heated most homes. If your fire went out, you'd pick up

your brazier and go to your neighbor for some hot coals to get started again. Anyone kind enough to heap coals into your container was generous indeed. In the same way, we are to extend warmth and life to others, even our enemies.

This is a beautiful picture. But what about justice? What about fair retribution?

Paul's quotation from the Book of Proverbs is sandwiched in between two strong admonitions that deal with man's revenge, God's wrath, and the need for Christians to overcome evil.

Let's go back to another Old Testament passage. Let's listen to the words of a man who believed he was being terribly mistreated by violent and evil men. The psalmist, David, writes: "Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused. Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. Let slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down men of violence. I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely the righteous will praise your name and the upright will live before you" (140:9-13).

Oesterly comments concerning this passage: "It would be unreasonable to expect to find in the Psalms the Christian idea of a man's attitude toward his enemies . . . but in this psalm we have the next best thing to it; for there is no hint of the desire of any personal retaliation against the vindictive enemies of the psalmist; all is left in the hands of God."

Paul writes, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:17-19).

William Greathouse writes concerning this issue: "The apostle does not mean that we are to be consoled for our kindness by the knowledge that our enemy will be punished. This would be to have a malicious motive. Such an attitude would be utterly contrary to the meaning of *agape*. . . . What we do must be for our enemy's good; by the power of *agape* we must strive to make of him a friend and a child of God."\*

Paul continues: "Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21).

There will be a payday someday. In the meantime, Monday Christians seek to overcome evil with good and leave the rest to God's judgment.

## VI. TRUE DISCIPLES ARE CALLED UPON TO LOVE AS GOD LOVES

This attitude will make possible the implementation of the previous principle in a much more complete way. Monday Christians are called to go beyond mere toleration of poor treatment; they are to love in dynamic ways through their actions.

William Barclay writes: "The one thing which makes us

like God is the love which never ceases to care for men, no matter what men do to it."

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (vv. 43-48).

## CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ calls us out of a world darkened by sin. He calls His disciples to be light.

Jesus Christ calls us out of a world that is decaying. He calls His disciples to be salt.

This will not be done with disciples who operate with a Sunday-only commitment to Christ. We must be Monday Christians. We must be His disciples seven days a week.

**ILLUS.** Author Robert Louis Stevenson writes that while he was seated by a window at nightfall, he was watching a lamplighter light the streetlight below. His nurse came into the room and asked him what he was doing. "I am watching a man make holes in the darkness," he replied. Not a bad description of our calling.

\*William M. Greathouse, "Romans," in BBC, 8:247-48.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude  
Welcome and Prayer  
Responsive Reading ..... "Worship the Lord"  
Music ..... "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"  
"God Is So Good"  
Choral Music..... "Be Thou My Vision"  
Invitation to Prayer ..... "Yes, Lord, Yes"  
Sharing and Fellowship  
Worship Through Giving  
Scripture Reading ..... Matt. 5:13-48  
Special Music ..... "I'd Rather Have Jesus"  
Morning Message ..... "MONDAY CHRISTIANS—PART 2"  
Our Response  
Benediction  
Postlude

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

### OUR RESPONSE

You may want to close with "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

### BENEDICTION

After you close your prayer at the altar, you could close with the benediction "Christ Be with Me," by St. Patrick. It is No. 783 in *Sing to the Lord*.

# Highpoint

## Sunday Night Preaching Resources

### Make Advent and Christmas Live

The news that Toys R Us would close 90 of their stores came as a real disappointment to my six-year-old granddaughter. Her grandmother (my wife) and I try to take our granddaughters on a reconnaissance mission to their favorite toy outlets. There they gaze with awe at the seemingly endless array of dazzling toys, dolls, and games that have arrived just in time for Christmas. They point out those special items that they would treasure under the Christmas tree on Christmas morning.

Of course we're trying to teach them the true meaning of Christmas by doing all of the things grandparents are supposed to do. Church life, Christmas programs, and the general message of Christ's birth are emphasized in all the Felter households. The truth is, however, each one of those precious little girls holds Christmas to be a special time when their dreams are fulfilled on a special night. And with the dawning of the morning, hope turns to reality as they experience the ecstasy of opening each gift.

This quarter I have turned again to my friend Rev. Derl Keefer. I asked him to take my themes and dream with them. He probed the deeper meanings of Advent and Christmas, and those Sundays beyond, intimated in my outlines. His craftsmanship is here for you to use on Sunday nights during this most wonderful of all seasons.

The 13 sermons here move in a rhythmic cadence that follows the pace of everyday living. They examine the embedded meanings unique to the special moments that make up the Advent journey for busy people. I hope you find them useful in your preparations for these times.

David J. Felter

# Prepare Him Room

For many years I dreamed of going to Hawaii. The lure of the tropics has always been strong. There is something about palm trees, salt-laden breezes, and the screech of sea birds that touches my soul.

Several years ago, my brother and sister-in-law invited my wife and me to join them for Christmas in Hawaii. It was one of those years empty nesters understand. Both our married sons were spending the Christmas holidays with their in-laws, and, as it turned out, my brother and his wife were on the same schedule as us. Off we flew across the Pacific Ocean to the Big Island. The flower leis, scented breezes, and coral-colored waters took my mind far from Christmas traditions as we walked through the palm-thatched welcome area of the airport.

Christmas Day came, and we gathered at my sister-in-law's mother's winter home in Kailua Kona. Back home in Kansas, our Christmas trees stood tall, twinkling with ornaments, garlanded with solitary stars evoking memories of Bethlehem. In Hawaii, Christmas trees are miniature replicas of what to this Midwesterner are the "real" trees of Christmas.

A Christmas dinner of tropical food was tasty but left me wondering how the rest of the world was faring back home with their turkey drumsticks and cranberry sauce. During the dinner we reflected on the essence of Christmas. It was not in the fir trees,

the artistic markings of Jack Frost on cold windowpanes, or even in the lyrical melody of "Let it snow, Let it snow . . ." The real meaning of Christmas was as near to us in the tropics as it was in the cold, December gray vastness of Kansas prairies.

I took the liberty of putting 13 themes together for this quarter of *Highpoint* Sunday Night Preaching Resources. I asked my good friend Rev. Derl Keefer of Three Rivers, Michigan, to help me craft them into sermons. Derl needs little introduction as he was featured in this column last quarter. He is a student, a preacher, an author, a pastor, a district leader, but most of all, he is a disciple.

Wherever your Christmas holidays take you, may you discover the true essence of Christmas. May these sermons, and the subsequent themes that build upon the timeless truths of the Nativity, bless your ministry.

December  
January  
February  
1998-99

DAVID J. FELTER  
*Highpoint Editor*  
KANSAS CITY



# The Claims of Holiness

Acknowledging God's holiness is uniform throughout Christendom. Statements regarding the Holiness of God is safely cached in the Creeds, housed in the hymns, and tucked away in our traditions. In the Holiness Movement, we have committed to moving beyond stasis phrases of acknowledgment to dynamic investment in living expressions modeled on biblical revelation.

Robert Browning once wrote:  
*I say, the acknowledgment of  
God in Christ*

*Accepted by thy reason, solves  
for thee*

*All questions in the earth and  
out of it,*

*And has so far advanced thee to  
be wise.\**

Rev. Derl Keefer begins this series of sermons from James with this statement: "As we claim God we also are looking for more in our experience of Him." These Sunday night preaching resources will take your listeners into the heart of practical religion. The wisdom of James is practical as well as applicable to real-life situations in our time. When you combine this with the variety ideas presented by Pastor Keefer, you have at your fingertips, a resource for expressing the message of everyday holiness living in dynamic concepts that link the biblical revelation with Christian profession and practice.

Derl Keefer has been senior pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Three Rivers, Michigan,

## Sermons for Sunday Night

DERL G. KEEFER  
Senior Pastor,  
Three Rivers Church  
of the Nazarene  
THREE RIVERS,  
MICHIGAN



since 1983. He is married to Karen and has two adult children, Julie and Jeff. Derl is also chairman of the Michigan District Sunday School Ministry and has been since 1987. He writes sermons and illustrations for various clergy magazines and manuals, including: *Preacher's Magazine*, *Resource*, *Preaching Magazine*, *Clergy Journal*, *Minister's Annual Manual*, *Abingdon Preaching Annual*, and others. Keefer has recently developed an independent ministry called Lighthouse Ministry as a resource for ministers.

May God bless your efforts on Sunday nights. However you conduct these services in your location, let these outlines enrich your array of possibilities for evening celebration.

\*From, "A Death in the Desert," stanza 21,  
*The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of  
Robert Browning* (1895), 390.



# PREPARING HIM ROOM

**Matt. 1:18-25**

**INTRODUCTION.** I thoroughly enjoy Christmas, but too often I find myself scurrying and hurrying from one thing to another.

- Open house at the parsonage
- Church board dinner to set up and take down
- Putting out the house decorations and resetting them after the wind knocks them off
- Attending assorted parties
- Preparing for the Christmas cantata
- Preparing sermons
- Visiting church members and prospects
- Taking care of all the "ordinary" duties of ministry

Each person can write a list that is at least as long or longer as we prepare for the season. The important question is: Are we preparing for the event of Christ? I agree with the little quote, "Jesus is the Reason for the season." We must envision the simple message of Jesus.

## I. JESUS CHRIST—GOD WITH US!

The cosmic event of Christ entering the earthly scene is not a science fiction flick at the theater; instead, it reveals God with us in real life.

- Jesus is the Message of life.
- Jesus is the Anointed of life.
  - Jesus comes from the family of David.
  - Jesus comes from a spiritual kingdom of light.
  - Jesus comes in humiliation and suffering in life.
  - Jesus comes as Reformer and Restorer of life.
  - Jesus comes as Prophet, Priest, and King of life.
  - Jesus comes as Evangelist to the world of life.

*Illustration for Life:* One day an educated Hindu was eating lunch on a park bench in New York's Central Park. He saw an anthill and went over to examine it. As he leaned over, he scared the ants, and they scattered. When he stood back up, he watched the ants resume their normal activities. When he bent over again, the ants again scurried in all directions. The Hindu thought, "I wish I could communicate to the ants that I am not going to hurt them." As his mind wandered, he thought, "Even if I

could talk with the ants, even if they had intelligence, and if I could learn their language, I probably couldn't communicate with them because my thoughts are not their thoughts. My terms of expression would not be understandable to them." His imagination kept going. "But if I could become an ant and yet retain my personality and my self-consciousness, I could then really tell them something of my thought."

It dawned on him that a Christian friend who had been witnessing to him was trying to tell him that Christ was like that. "God had become man in order to reveal himself to humankind to rescue them from sin." After this the man accepted Christ as Savior!

## II. JESUS CHRIST—GOD IN US!

- God in Us—a Cosmic Event
- God in Us—a Personal Event
- God in Us—a Salvation Event

*Poignant Point:* A young Brahman came to a missionary's home for a night of questioning about Christianity. As they talked, the young man said, "Many philosophies that Christianity contains I find in Hinduism, but one thing that your Christianity has we don't have." "What is that?" the missionary asked. His reply was striking: "A Savior."

- God in Us—a Reconciliation Event
- God in Us—a Rescuing Event

*Illustration:* An English warship pursued an African slave ship in an attempt to rescue the slaves. As the English vessel pulled alongside the Portuguese ship, the slave runner captain handed the slaves guns, telling them the English had come to kill them. Terrified, ignorant, and confused, the slaves did as they were told, thinking they were fighting for their lives. They wounded and killed the very ones coming to free them from the bonds of slavery!

God has sent Jesus to rescue us from the bonds of Satan's slave chains. Satan has lied and confused us to the point that we resist the Savior!

## III. JESUS CHRIST—GOD WITHIN US!

- "Emmanuel—God with us" (Isa. 7:14)
- Emmanuel—God Our Companion
- Emmanuel—God with Us in Our Loneliness
- Emmanuel—God with Us in Life

*Salvation Thought:* "God was touched with the feeling

of our infirmities, and could not bear to see us suffer alone; and so he had come to give help to the helpers, comfort the sorrowing and preach to the penitent."\*

**CONCLUSION:** Today God has come to us through His Son Jesus to be our Messiah, Savior, and Companion. Are you prepared to receive Him?

\*G. F. B. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard Smith, Inc., 1931).

## Variety Idea for Sermon 1

### Advent Observance:

Does your church observe the Advent season? The observance of Advent involves much symbolism. The coming of our Savior is an exciting, life-changing event. Why not use a Sunday evening to communicate the meaning behind all the symbols of Advent? There are many books and resources available to make your presentation informative and meaningful.

# INCLUDING OTHERS IN CHRISTMAS PREPARATION

**Luke 2:8-20**

**INTRODUCTION.** Christmas stands at the heart of the redemption story. At the center of the Nativity event the focus paused on the incarnation of Jesus. The fourth-century church celebrated a festival called "The Sun of Righteousness." Before all the festivities, all the celebration, all the commercialism, all the hoopla—there was a silent night.

On that silent night shepherds kept watch over their flock of sacrificial lambs headed for the Temple altars. While passing the time of night with each other and keeping their eyes peeled for preying wolves, suddenly God included them in His Christmas preparation. He sent a chorus of angels to announce the entrance of the King of life to the world of the shepherds.

As we prepare for Christmas, we ought to include others in our Christmas preparations.

## I. PREPARATION INVOLVES COMMITMENT

It is ironic that those men whom God chose to include in His preparation were despised because of their "ceremonial" uncleanness. The crew of shepherds couldn't be involved in the religious community because of their occupation as sheep herders in the Temple pay.

These people were outsiders to the "church" but insiders to God. Their commitment to Him found reward in the heavenly visitation that moonlit night.

God will involve all in His plans who are committed to Him. The miracles stem from godly people, as does healing and salvation.

A. The Shepherds Saw the Miraculous.

B. The Shepherds Heard the Miraculous.

C. The Shepherds Responded to the Miraculous.

*Illustrating the Point:* In his book *One Crowded Hour*, Tim Bowden writes about cameraman Neil Davis and an incident that occurred in Borneo during the skirmish between Malaysia and neighboring Indonesia in 1964.

A number of Gurkha troops from Nepal were questioned as to their availability to jump from transport planes into the combat area against the Indonesian troops if needed. The Gurkhas had the right to turn thumbs down to the request because they had never been trained as paratroopers. Davis relates the story:

The Gurkhas usually agreed to anything requested of them, but as a group they rejected the plan. After thinking about it throughout the night, their NCO sought out the British officer who asked them the previous day. The NCO told him that the troops had reconsidered their position but had two provisions to make.

The British officer asked what they would be to consider. *Provision one*—they would jump if the land was marshy and reasonably soft with no jagged rocks because they were inexperienced in falling.

The British officer assured them that it would be a jungle area and not to worry. *Provision two*—that the plane fly as slowly as possible and no more than 100 feet high.

The British officer pointed out that the planes always flew as slowly as possible when dropping troops. However, the jump from 100 feet was an impossibility because it did not allow the parachutes to open in that short of time from that height.

"Oh," said the Gurkhas, "that's all right, then. We'll jump with parachutes anywhere. You didn't mention parachutes the first time."

God and the church could use that style of Gurkha-like commitment and courage anytime!\*

## II. PREPARATION INVOLVES THE ORDINARY

- No extraordinary persons necessary
- No regal titles necessary
- No clergy status necessary
- No riches necessary
- Ordinary people needed
- People who like to work
- People who like to exist
- People who like to have a vision

*Quick Quote:* "Things turn out the best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out" (John Wooden).

## III. PREPARATION INVOLVES SIMPLE FAITH

- The shepherds believed what they saw.
- The shepherds believed what they heard.

- The shepherds believed what they hoped.
- The shepherds believed who they discovered.

*Thought Provoking:* Phillips Brooks defined FAITH as "Forsaking All I Take Him." Not an intellectual acceptance of what the Bible says about Jesus but receiving Him in a daring abandonment for salvation, guidance, and ownership.

## IV. PREPARATION INVOLVES ACTION

- The shepherds responded immediately.
- The shepherds responded in movement.
- The shepherds responded in gossiping the gospel.

*Quick Quote:* Oliver Wendell Holmes: "The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving."

**CONCLUSION:** The same preparation awaits us this Christmas. Come on, everybody—listen to the angel voices!

\*Craig Brian Larson, ed., *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 36.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 2

### Hanging of the Greens:

How about involving the whole church family in decorating the sanctuary for Christmas? Use Christmas carols, poems, legends, and symbols throughout a worship service to explain the traditions of Christmas. Decorate a tree by having families and individuals bring an ornament they have created. Let them give testimony as to why they chose the ornament and what it means to them.

## MANAGING THE MOMENTS

Matt. 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION. Bill Strayhorn relates that a four-year-old boy was watching his mom change his new little brother. Mother forgot to sprinkle the brother's backside with baby powder in her hurry to put the diaper on and get to her next appointment. Suddenly the four-year-old hollered, "Hey, Mom, you forgot to salt him!"

Babies have a way of turning ordinary intelligent grown-ups into complete morons as they make those funny noises and equally funny faces. Have you ever wondered what the babies think of it all?

Christmas is the season of the Baby, the Christ child. Let's not forget whose birthday we celebrate by getting lost in the preparations. The entrance of the wise men of Persia in the Christmas story will help us discover how to prepare for the season.

#### I. THE WISE MEN MANAGED THE MOMENTS BY SEEKING THE PERSON

##### A. Our Search for the Perfect:

1. Congenial church
2. Clever clergy
3. Concise creed

##### B. Our Search Should Lead to the Perfect Christ.

*Picture Window:* An artist in 1471 attempted to paint the Crucifixion scene. After completing his first sketch, he asked his landlady's girl who she thought was the man in the picture. The youngster looked at it and said, "He is a nice man." The artist knew that he failed and destroyed his first sketch. He asked God for greater skill and set about completing his second sketch. Once again he called the girl into his studio to gaze at the picture and tell him who she thought the face represented. The girl pondered over the sketch and finally said, "He is a great sufferer." Again the artist knew that he had failed. He destroyed the second painting. He prayed and meditated more and began his third drawing. When he finished, he called the girl in a third time and asked her who she

thought it was on the canvas. Looking at the portrait, the girl knelt down and exclaimed, "It is Jesus!"

##### C. Our Search Leads to God with Us.

#### II. THE WISE MEN MANAGED THE MOMENTS BY WALKING IN THE LIGHT

*Commentary Comments:* "These trained astrologers with the insatiable curiosity characteristic of scientists had seen a remarkable astrological phenomenon, the exact nature of which is not disclosed; and being familiar with the current widespread belief that the time was ripe for the appearance of a king to be born in Judea who would claim universal homage and usher in a reign of peace, they set out for that country to test the truth of their conjecture," states R. V. G. Tasker in the *Tyndale Commentary*.

##### A. The Light Excited Their Imagination.

##### B. The Light Helps Us Discover the Child.

##### C. The Light Inside Is the Holy Spirit.

*Quick Quote:* "When He came—there was no light; when He left—there was no darkness" (author unknown).

#### III. THE WISE MEN MANAGED THE MOMENTS BY WORSHIPING THE KING

##### A. Worship Seeks the King.

##### B. Worship Lifts the King.

##### C. Worship Motivates the King.

##### D. Worship Serves the King.

*Quick Quote:* "The act of divine worship is the inestimable privilege of man, the only created being who bows in humility and adoration."\*

#### IV. THE WISE MEN MANAGED THE MOMENTS BY BRINGING THE RIGHT GIFTS

##### A. Their Gift of Gold Represented Kingship.

1. Christ's Kingship—a rule of help
2. Christ's Kingship—a rule of hope
3. Christ's Kingship—a rule of holiness
4. Christ's Kingship—a rule of heart

##### B. The Gift of Myrrh Represented Sacrifice.

1. Christ's death leads to love.
2. Christ's death leads to salvation.
3. Christ's death leads to eternity.

##### C. Their Gift of Frankincense Represented Priesthood.

1. Christ's Priesthood opens the way to God.
2. Christ's Priesthood is a bridge builder to God.
3. Christ's Priesthood is the only way to God.

CONCLUSION: How will you manage the moments of Christmas?

\*G. F. B. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard Smith, 1931), 757-58.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 3

Celebrate the Carols:

Structure a service around the singing and playing of Christmas carols. Use vocal and instrumental soloists, small ensembles, young musicians, and congregational singing to celebrate different carols. Research the history of the carol and authors. Have a dramatist present the history before the singing and playing of each carol.

# KEEPING THE GLOW AFTER THE WRAPPINGS ARE GONE

**Luke 2:1-20**

**INTRODUCTION.** The tour guide explained that the Church of the Nativity escaped the devastation of the Muslims as one of the few in the area. Afterward the tourist came to what purportedly was the place of Jesus' birth. A star engraved on the floor, incense hanging, brick and mortar all around—quite different from Jesus' first night on earth.

Several days elapsed as Joseph and pregnant Mary journeyed the 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The primitive accommodations left a lot to be desired. The Eastern khan resembled a series of stalls opening off a common courtyard. Travelers provided their own meals and refreshments. The innkeeper's responsibility only included providing fodder for the animals and fire for cooking. The crowded conditions in Bethlehem forced Joseph and Mary to the common courtyard where the King of the Universe would be born as a human. "Swaddling clothes" (KJV) simply meant a square cut of cloth with bandagelike strips coming diagonally off from one corner (no Pampers!). The mother placed the baby on the square, winding the strips around several times to wrap him or her. The word "manger" generally meant a place animals ate, like a trough.

The symbolism of "no room . . . in the inn" indicated Jesus' life. The only spot where there would be room was a cross 33 years later. Jesus would seek an entrance into the overcrowded hearts of the people of His day; but He could not find it. He still seeks a place in the overcrowded hearts of people today—and He is still rejected! It's time to unwrap our hearts and place them at His disposal.

## I. UNWRAP YOUR HEART TO THE MESSIAH

Legend has it that the world grew colorless in a single night. The clouds became lifeless, still, spongy vapors floating above a pale, motionless ocean. The flashing light of the diamond was stilled and brilliance in every gem vanished. The world became like stone sculpture, losing animation and life. Life on earth was full of confusion and bewilderment. Hu-

mankind longed for the colors and variation of creation, while all of nature mourned in sorrow, the passing of distinction.

The essence of the legend is a parable and a futuristic prophecy in a world without the Christmas Christ. It will be a dark, dead, dismal world without the Messiah. Personally it is that now if your heart has not been unwrapped in anticipation of the Messiah's birth.

### A. Without Christ's Birth the World Would Be:

1. A heathenistic world
2. A hopeless world
3. A paralyzed world—no action
4. A lost world

### B. With Christ's Birth:

1. A Christian world
2. A hopeful world
3. An active world
4. A found world

## II. UNWRAP YOUR HEART FOR PROCLAMATION

- A. The Proclamation—an Announcement by God
- B. The Proclamation—an Announcement of the Supernatural
- C. The Proclamation—an Announcement of All
- D. The Proclamation—an Announcement of Joy
- E. The Proclamation—an Announcement of Redemption

God's people proclaim Christmas to the world and don't just enjoy the wrappings of Christmas.

*Humorous Thought:* A man forgot his wife's birthday until he got to the office and saw it on his calendar. He quickly ran out at noon and looked across the street and saw a pet store. He entered and heard a parrot say, "Good morning. Nice day." The pet store owner got the parrot to say several phrases for the man. The husband thought it would be a great gift for his wife, so he had it sent immediately to his home with a note: Happy Birthday, Darling.

Later that afternoon he phoned his wife to find out whether his gift arrived and to discover how she liked it.

Just fine," she answered his question. "In fact, I've got it in the oven right now."

The husband was flabbergasted and astonished. He exploded, "That bird was a talking parrot and could say anything."

Very sweetly the wife replied, "If it were such a smart

bird, then why didn't it speak up and say something when I was preparing it for supper?"

People are waiting for us to say something about the Messiah. Don't just stand there!

## III. UNWRAP YOUR HEART WITH PRAISE

- A. Praise—Words of Power
- B. Praise—Words of Adoration
- C. Praise—Words of Possibilities
- D. Praise—Words of Positiveness
- E. Praise—Words of the Kingdom
- F. Praise—Words of Gratitude
- G. Praise—Words of Commendation
- H. Praise—Words of Promise
- I. Praise—Words of Inspiration
- J. Praise—Words of Applause

*Quick Quote:* "Oh, for a heart that is fixed on God no matter what happens. Oh, for devotion to Him that is steadfast, for lips that will praise His unchanging love and faithfulness, though all the world crumbles around our feet. This is the praise that pleases the Father and brings glory to His name."\*

\*Richard Lee, *Windows of Hope* (Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah, 1992), 84.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 4

### What's in a Name?

Matthew and Luke both record the instruction of the angel to name the Baby. Isaiah also offered a prophetic note on the Messiah's character. Names are significant and would have been especially so to the Jews. Designate members of the congregation to share a brief summary, testimony, or scripture about the different names of Jesus. Provide suggestions and resources for preparation.

# BUILDING BETTER EXPECTATIONS

Heb. 10:32-39

**INTRODUCTION.** Visual Aid: A jigsaw puzzle with 365 pieces containing various colors, some bright and some dark, and each changeable.

Today a jigsaw puzzle with 365 pieces purchased by God lies before you about to reveal its picture. The title on the front of the box is 1999. The unique characteristic of this puzzle depends on you. Will bleakness and despair or hope and faith fit the picture together? It's up to you as you place the pieces together.

## I. BUILDING BETTER EXPECTATIONS—BUILDING ON THE PAST

- The Past Includes Conviction
- The Past Includes Salvation
- The Past Includes Temptation
- The Past Includes Tribulation

*Poem:* "New Year" by Whittier

*The wave is breaking on the shore,  
The echo fading from the chime;  
Again the shadow moveth  
O'er the dial-plate of time.*

*Thought:* Nothing can help us to feel God's care and love more swiftly than the recollection of our blessings. "Count your blessings" may be an overused phrase, but it is sound advice at the end of our year.

## II. BUILDING BETTER EXPECTATIONS—BUILDING ON TODAY

### A. Building on Today with Confidence.

#### 1. Confidence in yourself.

*Quick Quote:* "If you lose confidence in yourself, that makes the vote unanimous" (Anonymous).

#### 2. Confidence in God.

*Quick Quote:* "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess" (Martin Luther).

#### 3. Confidence in others.

### B. Building on Today with Goals.

*Quick Quote:* "You see things, and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'" (George Bernard Shaw).

### C. Building on Today with Endurance.

*Thought:* "The battle against evil is difficult, not so much because of the action required, but because of the endurance necessary to achieve victory."<sup>1</sup>

### D. Building on Today with God.

## III. BUILDING BETTER EXPECTATIONS—BUILDING ON THE FUTURE

### A. Building on the Future with Promise.

### B. Building on the Future with Aspiration.

*Quick Quote:* "You will become as small as your controlling desire; as great as your aspiration" (James Allen).

### C. Building on the Future with Faith.

*Illustration Point:* The African impala has the ability to jump as high as 10 feet and as far as 30 feet! Yet these animals can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a short 3-foot wall. The secret? The magnificent creatures will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will touch the ground.

"Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us."<sup>2</sup>

1. Eleanor Doan, *The Speaker's Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 95.

2. Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, 78.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 5

### Reflection and Commitment:

Lead the congregation in a time of reflection on the past year. Ask the congregation to help you recall the good and the bad, the happy and the sad, the victories and the defeats, the challenges and strengths. Acknowledge the sovereignty of God. Express hope in God's power, love, and grace through song and scripture. Invite the congregation to make new commitments.

# LIFE AFTER THE PARTY

Ps. 146:1-9

**INTRODUCTION.** The college football coach was excited about the game. His emotional motor was revved to its highest gear. His boundless optimism was apparent as he delivered his motivational locker room talk to his players. He roared with excitement as he barked out his talk: "All right, boys, here we are, unbeaten, untied, and unscored upon—and ready for the first game of the season!"

Folks, we are at the beginning of 1999—unbeaten, untied, and unscored upon—are you ready to play? God has our game plan in His book.

## HIS GAME PLAN INCLUDES PRIORITIES

### I. HIS GAME PLAN INCLUDES JOY IN THE LORD

- A. Justification Brings Joy.
- B. Offering Brings Joy.
- C. Yielding Brings Joy.

*Great Thought:* "Joy is the ever abiding confidence that all is well, regardless of the outward circumstances, because our loving God is in control. You can be sick, yet joyful. Handicapped, yet joyful. Attacked, yet joyful."<sup>1</sup>

### II. HIS GAME PLAN INCLUDES TRUST IN THE LORD

- Trust in the Personhood
- Trust for Deliverance
- Trust in the Importance of Life
- Trust in the Care of God
- Trust in the Midst of Trouble

*Picture Window:* Some naturalists in the highlands of Scotland desired to secure a rare flower for their collection. The flower was growing down the side of a cliff. They offered a young boy a large amount of money if he would consent to be lowered down the side of the mountain to pick the flower off the side of the cliff. At first he hesitated but finally agreed: "Only if my father holds the rope."

### III. HIS GAME PLAN INCLUDES THE TRUTH OF THE LORD

- The Love of Truth
- The Greatness of Truth
- The Power of Truth

*Quick Quote:* "Truth is a queen who has her eternal throne in heaven, and her seat of empire in the heart of God" (Bossuet).

### IV. HIS GAME PLAN INCLUDES THE MISSION OF THE LORD

*Illustrating the Point:* Chuck Swindoll, in his book *Strengthening Your Grip*, discusses how he received his vision for missions.

Swindoll was married less than two years; and with his draft deferment expiring, he decided to choose which branch of the service he would enter. Not wanting to be transferred overseas, he sought out which branch would "guarantee" his remaining in the States. The marine recruiter promised, "No chance you'll go abroad, young man," and so Chuck enlisted.

The short of it is, the letter came from Washington with orders to go to Okinawa; and taking the wife was "Against Marine Corps Policy." Stunned and disappointed, hurt filled the pit of his stomach.

Before long he was sent to Camp Pendleton, California, for more training. He visited his brother and wife one weekend in Pasadena. As he got on the bus to return to camp, Orville gave him a book that would change his attitude, future, perspective, career, and life: *Through Gates of Splendor* by Elisabeth Elliot, a widow of a slain missionary.

He writes, "In my broken, desperate, lonely, inescapable situation, God showed me a world much bigger than my own. Through each one of those 256 pages, He got more and more of my attention. Chapter by chapter I released more and more of my selfish territory. He scaled the walls I had built and sealed off the words 'Private Property.'"

Even as a Christian there were things he would not let go—until encountering the penetrating pages of this book. He continues, "I realize now that God timed everything perfectly. Without His forceful plan to get me overseas, I would never have caught His vision of an entire world without Christ. Never!"<sup>2</sup>

- Missions Is Caring.
- Missions Is Healing.
- Missions Is Service.
- Missions Is for You.

1. Lee, *Windows of Hope*, 61.
2. Chuck Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 181-82.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 6

### Commissioning Service:

Has an individual or group begun a new ministry in your church or community? Strengthen those individuals by having a special service dedicated to setting them aside for ministry. Have the individual or group share with the congregation the call and the ministry. Invite the congregation to come kneel and pray for each one being commissioned.



# GRACE FOR A NEW YEAR

## 1 Cor. 1:1-3

**INTRODUCTION.** The New Testament usage of the word “grace” means “the unmerited and abundant gift of God’s love and favor to persons.” This uniquely arrives through Jesus Christ in the lives of Christians.

**Quick Quote:** “The word grace emphasizes at one and the same time the helpless poverty of man and the limitless kindness of God” (William Barclay, *John*, in *The Daily Study Bible*, 66).

Just as Paul greets the Corinthians with grace, we meet the New Year with God’s grace.

### I. GREET THE NEW YEAR WITH THE GRACE OF GOD’S GIFT OF FAITH

#### A. The Gift of Faith Redeems Us.

1. The gift of faith reconciles us to God.
2. The gift of faith liberates us from sin’s grip.
3. The gift of faith frees us from the fear of death.

#### B. The Gift of Faith Transforms Us.

1. The transformation affects the old ways.
2. The transformation jump-starts the new you.
3. The transformation re-creates the image of God.
4. The transformation delivers new life—eternal life.

**Picture Window:** A young teen was making a voyage on a great ship with his dad. Unexpectedly a storm churned up the ocean, causing immense waves that tossed the ship around like a balloon in the air. Passengers were stricken with absolute fear. The young teenager sat still and kept his eyes directed toward a certain spot on the ship. He sat there seemingly quite unperturbed as waves dashed the ship relentlessly. Someone questioned him about being so unafraid. He replied, “I have my eye on that little window, and through that window I can see the ship’s bridge, and on that bridge is my dad. My father is the captain of the ship, and he has brought it through many storms.”

How is your gift of faith holding up in the storms of life?

## II. GREET THE NEW YEAR WITH THE GRACE OF GOD’S GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### A. The Gift of the Spirit of Power

1. The gift of power establishes the kingdom of God.
2. The gift of power establishes a witness to God.
3. The gift of power establishes a witness to humankind.
4. The gift of power establishes a spiritual life.

### B. The Gift of the Spirit of Action

1. The action of transformation (Gal. 5:22-23).
  - a. Love
  - b. Joy
  - c. Peace
  - d. Patience
  - e. Kindness
  - f. Goodness
  - g. Faithfulness
  - h. Gentleness
  - i. Self-control
2. The action of the Spirit never ends.

### C. The Gift of the Spirit of Sanctification

1. Initial sanctification
  - a. Begins in the new birth
  - b. Makes us holy unto the Lord
  - c. Makes us ready for holy service
2. Entire sanctification
  - a. Yielding of entire spiritual house to God
  - b. Cleansing of entire life by the Spirit

**Periscoping the Point:** “Sanctification resides at the center of the kingdom of grace. Sanctification is the *process of making holy*. To be *wholly* or *entirely* sanctified means that we place our whole existence at the disposal of the Kingdom. It involves the Holy Spirit cleansing us from any lingering obstruction to Christ’s Lordship and empowering us for victorious living and service. The term *sanctification* communicates a point of departure as well as a destination. It means placing *all* of life in the stream of transforming grace.”<sup>1</sup>

## III. GREET THE NEW YEAR WITH THE GRACE OF HOLY LOVE

### A. A Holy Love Demonstrated as a Servant

1. To the socially elite lost in their materialism
2. To the socially destitute lost by humanity

### 3. To the undesirables lost in their degradation

### 4. To the world of in-betweens

### B. A Holy Love Demonstrated as a Family Member

1. Love demonstrated by spouses
2. Love demonstrated by parents
3. Love demonstrated by children

### C. A Holy Love Demonstrated as a Church Member

**Wesley Wisdom:** “But what is perfection? . . . It means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love ‘rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in every thing giving thanks.’”<sup>2</sup>

**CONCLUSION.** Read passages on grace: John 1:17; Rom. 5:15; 16:24 (KJV; not in NIV); 1 Cor. 1:3; 15:10; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Eph. 1:2; 2:5.

Friends, take the grace of God freely, and give it away freely to everyone!

1. Al Truesdale and Bonnie Perry, *A Dangerous Hope: Encountering the God of Grace* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 78.

2. John Wesley, Sermon: “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978), 6:46.

## Variety Idea for Sermon?

### Senior Adult Emphasis:

Give senior adults worship responsibilities—prayer, offering, choir, Scripture reading, ushering, and sharing of brief testimonies. Build a bridge between the senior adults and the young people by honoring the seniors with a reception hosted by young people.

## FREEDOM VIEW

## Acts 13:42-52

INTRODUCTION. Marjorie Kimbrough wrote the meditations for January in *365 More Meditations for Women*, using "Letting the Light Shine" as her theme. She wrote in the *Abingdon Preaching Annual*, 1996, that it occurred to her as she addressed the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. that King, like Paul, was a light. He was a light to the United States and to the world, and he had seen the light, the glory of the coming of the Lord. In the meditation she wrote:

If Dr. King were alive today, he would ask us to give an account for our dreams, not his. He would ask us, "What have you done in my absence? Did I die for nothing? Have you moved toward freedom and justice for all? Are you finally at peace or are you still fighting pointless wars?"

In every generation there is a light bearer, a prophet, a drum major for justice. Where is ours? Can we see the light?<sup>1</sup>

That light is freedom from slavery, from chains that bind us!

## I. FREEDOM TO PRAY

*Quotable Quotes:* "Prayer honors God; it dishonors self. It is a man's plea of weakness, ignorance, want; a plea which heaven cannot disregard. God delights to have us pray" (E. M. Bounds).<sup>2</sup>

"The purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth" (Phillips Brooks).<sup>3</sup>

A. A Christian Should Pray to Obey God.

B. A Christian Should Pray to Communicate with God.

C. A Christian Should Pray to Align Wills with God.

*Bible References:* Ps. 32:6; Isa. 55:6; Matt. 7:7; Luke 18:1; John 16:24; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17; James 5:13; Jude 20

## II. FREEDOM TO READ THE BIBLE

A. A Letter from God

B. A Guide from God

C. A Map from God

D. An Inspiration from God

E. A Word from God

*Bible References:* Deut. 6:1-15; Josh. 1:8; Pss. 1:1-2; 119:105; John 5:47; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21

*Quotable Quote:* "I believe that the Bible is almost unknown today. It isn't a book about God, though that's how it's generally considered, but a book about man. The Bible offers a sublime answer, but unless we know the question to which it responds, we can hardly understand it. The Bible is an answer to the question, 'What does God require of man?'" (Abraham J. Heschel).<sup>4</sup>

## III. FREEDOM TO PRAISE

*Amusing Illustration:* The pastor decided to sell his horse to a prospective buyer. He explained that the horse was a bit peculiar. The pastor explained that his remarkable horse would go only if the rider said "Praise the Lord" and stop only if he said "Amen."

The buyer was skeptical, so he mounted the horse, kicked it in the sides, and rode off. The horse galloped faster and faster, and the rider became frightened. He yelled, "Whoa," but the horse didn't stop but went faster instead. Suddenly the man saw they were headed to the edge of a cliff. Desperately the buyer yelled, "Amen."

The horse halted just in time before hurtling down the mountainous cliff into a roaring river! Peering down over the edge of the cliff, the man wiped his brow from the perspiration. "Whew," he said. "Praise the Lord!"<sup>5</sup>

A. Praise Is God Power.

B. Praise Is Reverence.

C. Praise Is Attitude.

D. Praise Is Spiritual.

E. Praise Is Enthusiasm.

## IV. FREEDOM TO BELIEVE

A. Believe in Godly People.

B. Believe in Godly Truth.

C. Believe in Godly Power.

D. Believe in Godly Results.

E. Believe in Godly Living.

F. Believe in God's Eternity.

CONCLUSION: Martin Luther King Jr. left a movement who believed "we shall overcome." He left dignity. He left hope. He left his history. He left his inspirational speeches. He left his light shining for freedom. What will you

leave?

1. Michael Duduit, ed., *The Abingdon Preaching Annual*, 1996 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 19.

2. Paul Cedar, *Life of Prayer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 13.

3. Ibid.

4. C. Neil Strait, *The Speaker's Book of Inspiration* (Atlanta: Drake House/Hallux, 1972), 20.

5. King Duncan and Angela Akers, *Amusing Grace* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds Corp., 1993), 249.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 8

## Minority Day:

Encourage the congregation to attend a Martin Luther King service in your community, or find a congregation to share a Sunday night service with you.

# ATTITUDES THAT EMPOWER

**Phil. 2:3-8**

INTRODUCTION. Travel back in time with me 2,000 years to the great metropolis of Rome, a city power, filled with glory, peaked with excitement, where events like gladiator fighting, chariot racing, and lion feedings met people's need for sport and recreation. But let's ignore, if possible, that side of town. Let's go to a drab little room where an older man is seated on the floor, shoulders stooped, and balding. Chains are on his hands and feet, with a member of the Imperial Guard of Rome chained to him.

We know him as Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, missionary, theologian, preacher, evangelist, home mission pastor extraordinaire! This man endured great hardships for the Kingdom, yet liberated thousands through his message of hope. Now he is stuck in a dingy room chained together with a hardhearted Roman soldier. He has quill in hand, writing a letter—possibly a letter of complaint to God and the church for all the awful things that he has endured—and ultimately this confinement? One author wrote that no doubt Paul is writing the New Testament equivalent to Lamentations. Paul has every reason to be upset and bitter. But no—rather, he writes a treatise on joy to the church at Philippi that becomes a part of holy writing for all Christians for all ages! The apostle writes that Jesus himself possessed a joyful attitude for God. Then Paul startles his readers by stating, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, NASB).

## I. THE ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY

- Humility Excludes
  - Selfishness
  - Selfish Ambition
  - Selfish Conceit
  - Selfish Reliance
  - Selfish Love
- Humility Includes
  - Self-esteem
  - Godly Ambition

- Godly Worth
- Godly Reliance
- Godly Love

*Digging Deep:* “Our repose is to rejoice in the infinite happiness of God and, on a lower scale, in our own crosses and to desire still more of them, for in them we have the privilege of imitating him and proving our love, and there is nothing dearer to the heart than loves. We shall never lack either this happiness, nor God nor the cross.”<sup>1</sup>

## II. THE ATTITUDE OF SUBMISSION

- Submission—Realizing God's Place

*Provoking Thought:* “In our culture, a chatty familiarity with ‘the man upstairs’ has displaced the speechless awe that dares not move in the presence of the Almighty. In the Church of Jesus Christ a horizontal rejoicing that we are ‘part of the family of God’ (as precious as this is) threatens to displace the vertical dimension of Spirit-anointed worship.”<sup>2</sup>

- Submission—Realizing Our Place
  - Confession
  - Surrender
  - Adoring Trust
- Submission—Realizing Others' Place
  - Caring
  - Loving
  - Giving

## III. THE ATTITUDE OF COMMITMENT

- Commitment to a Kingdom—Heaven
- Commitment to a Cause—the Church
- Commitment to a Person—Jesus
  - Every Knee Shall Bow
  - Every Tongue Confess

*Picture Window:* Chuck Swindoll quotes from Billy Graham's book *Faithful Witness, Urbana '84*, concerning the Student Missions Convention held at the University of Illinois. He addresses the need of Christian commitment carrying the vehicle of inner strength.

Graham writes that *Newsweek* magazine reported that a “new wave of mountain men” have been growing in the United States. Among these “serious mountain climbers” are the “elite group” known as “hard men,” who look at mountain climbing as a way of life. Their ultimate experience is called “free soloing: climbing with no equipment and no safety ropes.”

*Newsweek* said that John Baker is considered the “best” of the hard men elite. His skill has not arrived easily. It has been acquired through commitment, dedication, and training. His wife says that when he's not climbing, he is found to be hanging by his fingertips in his California home to strengthen his arms and hands.

Graham comments, “Where are the hard men and women for Jesus? Where are those who will bring all their energies to bear for the sake of Christ? That's the kind of people it's going to take to spread the gospel around the world in these closing years of the twentieth century.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Charles de Foucauld, *Meditations of a Hermit*, in *A Guide to Prayer* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1983), 29.

2. William Greathouse, *Love Made Perfect* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 29.

3. Charles Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity: A Commitment to Excellence* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 235-36.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 9

### Singing Testimonies:

Have testimonies from the congregation taken from the hymnal. Ask members to pick a song that is their testimony and read the words or, better yet, sing a stanza or two.

# OVERCOMING DOUBT BY BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

**Rom. 4:1-25**

**INTRODUCTION.** Abraham and Sarah had become age-challenged. They were no longer the young, beautiful couple of the Canaan days (Gen. 20) when Abraham had to lie about Sarah's relationship with him. At that time she was the belle of the ball. Everywhere she traveled, men eyed her beauty.

Abraham and Sarah remind me of a couple I read about, Joe and Betty. They had met at the nursing home, and Joe asked Betty out on a date. After they got back from their first date, all the women had questions for Betty, asking all kinds of details.

Betty told them how awful it had been. "Would you believe I had to slap him three times in one evening?"

The women gasped, "You mean Joe got fresh with you?"

"Worse," Betty replied, "he kept going to sleep in the middle of our conversation!"

Abraham and Sarah had nearly given up on the idea of having children. Paul wrote, "There was no hope that Abraham would have children. But Abraham believed God and continued hoping, and so he became the father of many nations" (Rom. 4:18, NCV).

That's overcoming doubt by believing the impossible!

## I. OVERCOMING DOUBT BY BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE ABOUT SALVATION

- A Holy God
  - Forgives Sin
  - Forgets Sin
- A Needy Person
  - Repents
  - Confesses
  - Believes

*Illustrating the Point:* A store clerk leaned over his counter and asked Rev. J. G. Morrison a question about faith. His query was, "Rev. Morrison, how little faith can a

person have and still get to heaven?" The preacher gave him a piercing look and replied, "Mister, just enough to make him comfortable in the presence of a holy God."

The impossible becomes possible by faith in the God of salvation.

## II. OVERCOMING DOUBT BY BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

- Our Stability Is in Our Depth of Faith.

*Preaching Point:* King Duncan wrote: "You are familiar with the famous 'Leaning Tower of Pisa.' It leans almost 20 feet out of perpendicular. Somehow, when the architect was planning that tower he designed a 179-foot-high structure with a 10-foot foundation. No wonder it leans. I suspect that there are many people both within and without who have a leaning 'Tower of Pisa' faith. Tall structure—tiny foundation."\*

- Our Stability Is About Growing in God.

*Quick Quote:* Henry Ward Beecher: "An acorn is not an oak tree when it is sprouted. It must go through long summers and fierce winters; it has to endure all that frost and snow and side-striking winds that come before it is a full grown oak. These are rough teachers; but rugged schoolmasters make rugged pupils." So when a person is spiritually created, he or she has only begun. Spiritual personhood must come with many years. Growth in the Lord is a necessity of our Christian life.

## III. OVERCOMING DOUBT BY BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE AS A DISCIPLE

Discipleship means that I am a follower. That statement describes Abraham—he was a follower of God. No less is the expectation of us by the same God of eternity.

- As a disciple I must be clear in my relationship with God.
- As a disciple I must be responsible in my relationship with God.
- As a disciple I must be living among sinners.

*Questions from the Past:* Dr. T. W. Willingham charged his listeners to examine their lives as disciples by asking them for introspection:

- Am I happy that I am surrounded by sinners?
- Do I look upon being surrounded by sinners as an opportunity to be the light of the gospel in a dark place?
- Do I realize that it is only in an atmosphere of sinful-

ness that much of the nature of Christ can be clearly demonstrated?

- Have I so lived that I have helped reconcile someone to God and obtained the thrill of soul winning?
- To what extent am I personally carrying on the work of Christ?

Let the impossible happen—shine in the darkness!

## IV. OVERCOMING DOUBT BY BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE CONQUERING DEATH BY LIFE

- Eternal Life Replaces Eternal Death.
- Eternal Life Means Eternal Living.
- Eternal Life Begins in Christ's Death.
- Eternal Life Brings Our Heavenly Home Closer.
- Eternal Life—the Family of God.

*Great Thought:* Victor Hugo said that when it was his time to go down to the grave, he would say like so many others that he had finished his day's work, but not his life. His day's work would begin in the morning. His tomb was not a blind alley but a thoroughfare. The tomb closes with the twilight only to open with the dawn.

*Wisdom:* Believe the impossible by overcoming your doubts.

\*King Duncan, *Dynamic Preaching Magazine*, May 1987, 3.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 10

**Skit:**

Have the teens or adults put on a skit about faith. There are many good skit/drama books available from NPH.

# OVERCOMING FEAR

Ps. 23:1-6

**INTRODUCTION.** What we call the 23rd psalm takes up little space in Israel's hymnbook called the Psalms. If erased, it would leave a little blank space on the page.

As one writer commented, "But suppose all translations which have been made of them into all languages, all references of them in literature, all remembrance of them in human hearts, could be effaced, *who* can measure the blank, the void, the loss? . . . They touch, inspire, comfort us, not as an echo from three thousand years ago, but as the voice of a living friend."<sup>1</sup>

This psalm helps me overcome my valleys of fear!

## I. THE VALLEYS OF FEAR

- Depression of emotions
- Health of the physical
- Family calamity
- Financial failure
- Collapse of the spiritual

**Definition:** Fear—"Agitation or dismay in the anticipation of or in the presence of danger" (*Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*, 331).

**Poem:**

*Some of your hurts you have cured  
And the sharpest you still have survived;  
But what torments of grief you endured  
From evils which never arrived.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE VALLEYS OF FEAR—CONQUERED BY THE POWER OF THE SHEPHERD

- Power to ward off external enemies with His rod
- Power to snatch us from internal wandering by His staff
- Power to redeem us from Satan's snare by His love
- Power to restore us to spirituality by His compassion

**Picture Point:**

The boy, terminally ill with cancer, was being taught the 23rd psalm by his mother. She would have him repeat the phrase "the Lord is *my* shepherd" by using his fingers and thumb. Starting with his thumb and counting out,

the word "my" would land on his ring finger. When he got to that word, his mom instructed him to hold that finger in his fist, symbolizing the personal relationship which Jesus had for him. When the boy died he was found holding his ring finger. He died in the arms of the loving shepherd. Each person must come to the point where he or she personally knows the shepherd.<sup>3</sup>

## III. THE VALLEYS OF FEAR—TAMED BY THE SHEPHERD

- The Shepherd provides us rest through prayer and meditation.
- The Shepherd provides us leadership through His guidance.
- The Shepherd provides us restoration through meeting our needs.

**Glorious Thought:** Giles Fletcher wrote of Jesus:

*He is a path, if any be misled;  
He is a robe, if any naked be;  
If any chance to hunger, He is bread;  
If any be a bondman, how strong is He!  
To dead men life is He, to sick men, health;  
A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth.<sup>4</sup>*

## IV. THE VALLEY OF FEAR—OVERCOMES FOREVER!

- Overcome throughout our earthly wanderings.
- Overcome throughout our heavenly days.

**Quick Comment:** "Forever" literally 'to length of days' means all the days. For the Hebrews eternity is not a timeless state, but endless days."<sup>5</sup>

**Thoughtfully Quoting:** "There is only one way to get ready for immortality, and that is love this life and live it as bravely and faithfully and cheerfully as we can."<sup>6</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Billy Graham writes about crossing the North Atlantic on an ocean liner. When he got up after a full night's sleep, he peered out the porthole to discover one of the blackest clouds he had ever seen in his life. He felt certain that they were in for a tremendously terrible storm. He ordered breakfast sent to his room. As the steward brought the meal, Graham said how it looked as if they were in for a bad storm. The steward replied, "Oh, we've already come through that storm. It's behind us."

Billy Graham reminds us that we have overcome fear as he writes, "If we are believers in Jesus Christ, we have come through the storm of judgement. It happened at the cross."<sup>7</sup>

What valleys do you face today? God will go with you.

1. Joseph Exell, ed., *The Psalms*, vol. 8 in *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 164.

2. Carroll Simcox, comp., *4,400 Quotations for the Christian Communicator* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 138.

3. Lloyd Ogilvie, ed., *Psalms 1—72*, in *The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1986), 183.

4. Albert Wells, comp., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 101.

5. Don Williams, *Communicator's Commentary*, 187.

6. Henry Van Dyke, in Doan, *Speaker's Sourcebook*, 96.

7. Billy Graham, *Unto the Hills* (Minneapolis: Grason, 1986), 233.

## Variety Ideas for Sermon 11

**Prayer Time:**

During family altar time ask Sunday School classes to gather together in the sanctuary (yes, there will be some commotion and confusion) to pray. Those who don't attend Sunday School can select a class to join.

**With This Ring:**

Make this a really special Valentine's Day. Decorate the sanctuary with flowers and candles. Have the organist play wedding music. Use this service as an opportunity for couples to renew their wedding vows. The service could also be an invitation to the unmarried to participate in the True Love Waits commitment. Challenge all to a life of purity, commitment, and Christian living.

## KEEP ROMANCE ALIVE

Gen. 2:20b-25; 29:26-30

## INTRODUCTION:

- Read Valentine greetings from cards.
- Read Valentine greetings from God.
  - Prov. 10:12
  - John 3:16
  - John 15:13
  - 1 John 4:8
  - Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37

Survival of a marriage entails strong foundational blocks if it is to survive. The vows spoken on the wedding day are only a beginning, not a marriage. The vows were taken before God and witnesses, but the marriage is something that partners work at daily, along with God.

"[Marriage] is a commitment toward another person's happiness and a move away from society's blast at the traditional family. It's a commitment to decide to learn about another person and marriage in general."<sup>1</sup>

The foundation blocks include

## I. BUILDING BLOCK ONE—LOVE

As obvious as that may be, love must be the cornerstone. First Cor. 13 models love between people not just in the church but also in marriage.

- Love demonstrates faith between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates kindness between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates understanding between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates servanthood between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates positive feelings between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates honesty between marriage partners.
- Love demonstrates vision between marriage partners.

*Quick Quote:* "You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so you learn to love God and man by loving. Begin as

a mere apprentice, and the very power of love will lead you on to become a master of the art" (St. Francis de Sales, 1567—1622).

*Another Quick Quote:* "Love is not the care of good relationships, it is the *consequences* of good relationships. . . . Love is seldom spontaneous, instant, dynamic. It usually takes considerable time to create. It results from work, from thinking, from promoting equality, from being able to cope and adapt" (William Lederer).

If a marriage is unable to achieve working at love, it is doomed to failure.

## II. BUILDING BLOCK TWO—COMMITMENT

*Pondering Points:* Carl Jung said, "Seldom, or perhaps never, does a marriage develop into an individual relationship smoothly without crisis: there is no coming to consciousness without pain."

How do couples make a marriage work?

- Commitment to Jesus

*Quick Quote:* "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction."

- Marriage commitment includes an acknowledgment of the Jesus of history.
- Marriage commitment includes a personal relationship by both partners to the Jesus of history.
- Marriage commitment includes a witnessing to each other of the Jesus of history.

Christ works at the head of the marriage union. The miracle of the Christian marriage occurs when two minds and two hearts seek the will of Christ.

- Commitment to each other
  - Forsaking parents—Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31
  - Forsaking others
  - Forsaking criticism
  - Forsaking foolishness
  - Forsaking abuse
  - Forsaking outside influences

## III. BUILDING BLOCK THREE—COMMUNICATION

- Choose to listen to communicator.
- Choose to understand from communicator.

*Interest Point:* Francis of Assisi—"Lord, let me quest to understand rather than be understood."

- Choose to develop communication.
- Choose to learn from communication.

*Quick Quote:* "Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee and just as hard to sleep after."<sup>2</sup>

**CONCLUSION.** Even the most devoted of couples occasionally experience rough waters. A lady celebrating her golden wedding anniversary told the secret of her long and happy marriage. She said that on her wedding day she decided to make a list of 10 of her husband's faults that, for the sake of their marriage, she would overlook.

A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had overlooked were. The grandmother replied, "To tell you the truth I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten!'"<sup>3</sup>

1. Robert and Rosemary Barnes, *Rock-solid Marriage* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 20.

2. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Gift from the Sea* (Pantheon).

3. Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, 150.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 12

## Submission to Authorities:

Rom. 13 is a reminder of the allegiance, respect, and honor we need to give to those in authority. Involve active and inactive members of the armed forces to participate in the service. Invite them to wear their uniforms, give testimonies, read Scripture, and lead pledges. Have the names and addresses of local, county, and state officials available to members so they may express their support and appreciation with written messages. Have a special time of prayer, lifting each official by name.



## LIVING WELL

## Rom. 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION. In his book *Strengthening Your Grip*, Chuck Swindoll tells that volumes are written yearly on subjects relating to the mind, the emotional makeup, the inner person, and the spiritual body, but Evangelicals are mum concerning the physical body.

He writes, "You see, these bodies of ours can easily lead us off course. It isn't that the body itself is evil; it's just that it possesses any number of appetites that are ready to respond to the surrounding stimuli, . . . all of which are terribly appealing and temporarily satisfying."\*

When we talk about "the physical body," we think of weight. A scientist once computed that the average human consumes 16 times his or her weight in a year, while a horse eats only 8 times its weight. This all seems to prove that if you want to lose weight, you should eat like a horse! (*Amusing Grace* by King Duncan).

Truthfully the body's well-being is important.

## I. THE BODY IS A LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD

- God sets the sacrificial standard.
- God sets the sacrificial direction.
- God sets the sacrificial offering.
- God sets the sacrificial determination.

*Thoughts for Today:* With God's help, my determination, and friends' encouragement, I will make it through the dark tunnel of chocolate, pies, shortcakes, sausages, and fats of all kinds!

*Quick Note:* We sacrifice to survive.

II. THE BODY—A YIELDED INSTRUMENT TO GOD  
(Rom. 6:12-13)

- The Body Yielded—Instrument for God
  - Instrument for righteousness
  - Instrument for goodness
  - Instrument for holiness
  - Instrument for grace
- The Body Yielded—Instrument Against Satan
  - Instrument against sin
  - Instrument against unrighteousness
  - Instrument against wrong

- Instrument against legalism

*Exercises to Do:* In yielding to God, do these exercises for a healthy life.

- Examine your life.
- Expose yourself to challenges.
- Exchange Satan's way for God's way.
- Explore alternatives.
- Exclude negative people, places, and things.
- Energize your efforts.
- Exhibit confidence.
- Expect obstacles.
- Exceed expectations.

## III. THE BODY—THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (1 Cor. 6:19)

- The Holy Spirit saves our temple.
- The Holy Spirit purifies our temple.
- The Holy Spirit glorifies our temple.
- The Holy Spirit strengthens our temple.
- The Holy Spirit builds our temple.

*Thought:* During my ministry in the suburbs of Chicago for half a dozen years, I enjoyed going to downtown Chicago on the shores of Lake Michigan. The city of Chicago had the lake as a great reservoir for the water supply. God's gracious Holy Spirit is the Christian's reservoir for drawing help in our need as we build His temple in us.

CONCLUSION: God has given us our bodies—don't destroy them, but rather live well!

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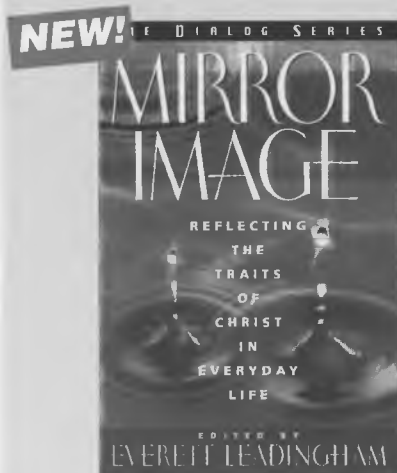
\*Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip*, 61.

## Variety Idea for Sermon 13

Ask a doctor or nurse to share health tips during the worship service.

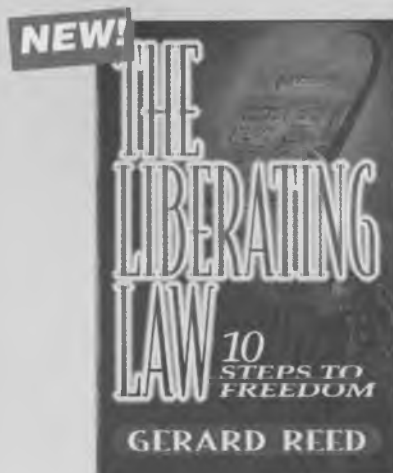
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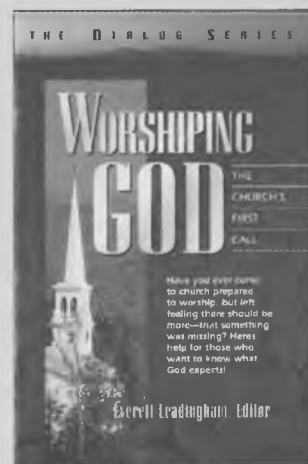
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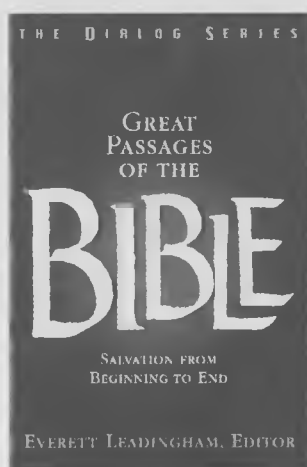
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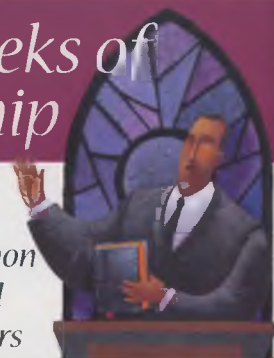
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