

MARCH/APRIL/MAY 1999

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

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

The Sticky Question
of Denominational
Loyalty

Go On to Maturity

How to Hire Staff
Members Without
Getting an Infection

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

MARCH / APRIL / MAY 1999

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Passport for Home

The shocking news of Randal Denny's death saddened all those who knew him. Earlier in the week he'd worked all night on his sermon for Sunday. At breakfast the next morning he told Ruth, "I've finished the last chapter in my next book." It was the last sermon he was to write.

Friday evening he was speaking long-distance with his longtime friend's recent widow. As he was giving pastoral care, he slumped in his chair with a heart attack. He never regained consciousness.

While Randy lay in the hospital Sunday morning, Debbie Weisen, the children's pastor, delivered his final sermon to the concerned congregation. The title: "Is Your Passport Ready?" Randal died the following Wednesday morning.

Randal Earl Denny was a multitalented person, leaving a rich legacy to pastors who have known him personally or who have been enriched by his writings. He authored 14 books, and number 15 is ready for submission for publication.

Randy served as editor for *The Preacher's Magazine* for nine years—longer than any other editor except for the founder, J. B. Chapman. He delighted in this assignment. While editor he read and processed more than 3,200 manuscripts. Though merciless with his red pen when going over manuscripts, meticulously striving for perfection in all he did, he remained compassionate

with the authors and passionate about the magazine's goals. First, he wanted to equip pastors to be the very best pastors they can be. Second, he desired to bring encouragement to pastors. We will miss his loving touch on these pages.

Each issue of the magazine unveiled his pastoral perspective. An active pastor himself, Randy could identify with the pressures and struggles of his readers. He knew their hearts and their pain. He felt the daily grind, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the fulfillment that comes from ministering to the broken and needy. Randal's unvarnished love for his people caused them to return that love with astonishing creativity.

Spokane Valley Church of the Nazarene was running 280 when he arrived 16 years earlier. Today it averages 460 in worship.

Randal carefully balanced his time so the commitment to his church never diminished while passionately caring for his readers. In addition, Randy was called upon to preach at camp meetings and present workshops at seminars. His firsthand contact with pastors gave him credibility with his target audience. His correspondence confirmed their ap-

preciation for his understanding of the role and responsibilities of today's pastors.

The next issue will be dedicated to Randy. We will draw from his extensive writings. Special articles are being sought from those who knew him and have unique contributions to make. Extremely organized, Randal left his assistant, Cindy Osso, with enough material edited and ready to fill the two following issues.

I will miss his broad smile, hearty laughter, and generous spirit. He was ever a friend to the common person, a man of strong tastes (including a penchant for peanut butter and antipathy for turnips) and uncompromising convictions. I'll miss talking to him on the phone as we collaborated on the magazine.

Henri Nouwen wrote, "[Jesus] never stops telling us where to make our true home." He says, "Make your home in me as I make mine in you."

Randal focused on the journey and never lost sight of his true home. He made the final leg of his journey on an up-to-date passport while actively engaged in ministry.

We thank God for giving Randal Earl Denny to us. We are better for having known him. Thanks to him, we are all checking our passports for our own final journey home.

PM

BY WILBUR W. BRANNON
Director of Pastoral Ministries, Headquarters, Church of the Nazarene
KANSAS CITY



Definite Holiness Preaching

MAR 23 1994
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Peter's Pentecostal sermon in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 2, was one of the most effective sermons ever preached: "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (v. 41, KJV). The Apostolic Church was a cutting edge in its cultural and social environment.

The difficulty with our situation today is that all too frequently we are not the cutting edge—we are just edgy. If you look these two words up in the dictionary, you will find the following:

Edge: sharpness, hence penetrating power.

Edgy: eager, impatient, anxious, irritable.

Peter's message had penetrating power.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion" (Joel 2:15). Nobody uses a trumpet to put a baby to sleep. Trumpets are for waking people up. Trumpets in Zion arouse the Church to her mission. There is always some measure of suddenness about divine judgments. God's warnings precede them.

If John the Baptist were to step forth and begin to preach in the average church of the day, after six months' time there wouldn't be a half dozen people left in most churches because they couldn't stand the gospel of repentance! He demanded repentance, and he demanded that his hearers bring forth fruit demonstrating repentance. He made straight the paths of the Lord as he prepared the way for

the coming of our Lord. John the Baptist demanded that people bring forth fruit of repentance before he would ever baptize them. Yes, it's time that judgment began at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17, KJV).

There is a growing need for specific, pointed, practical preaching on holiness themes. When preachers fail to preach and insist upon that "holiness," apart from "which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, KJV), the work of God among Holiness people disintegrates. A denomination that retains the doctrine of holiness in its creed but does not insist upon the reality of holiness in the people's lives will soon witness the sad consequences of worldliness, deadness, and apostasy.

Spiritual dullness is the first to appear. The services become listless, dry, and dead. Backing up on holiness, they unconsciously back up on the whole system of revealed truth. They may take up an isolated note of truth and strike it long and hard to hide their own disharmony of soul. They sit juiceless and critical. Their hardened spiritual sensibilities render them insensible to the visitation of God's Spirit. When others are blessed by the truth, they are as dry as Gideon's fleece the second time around.

God's Word says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8, KJV). Also, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In these great, out-

standing, definite scriptures, we have the imperative to be definite in the great cardinal doctrine of entire sanctification.

Why should we be definite about holiness? Vagueness, haziness, looseness, carelessness in presenting anything makes it impossible for the hearer to understand what we are saying or trying to do. The doctrine of holiness is so simple as to its doctrinal background and reasonableness that anyone filled and thrilled by the Holy Spirit can help people to understand the fact of inbred sin in the human heart after one is truly regenerated. The fact of sin in believers needs the preaching of holiness, "the second blessing properly so-called," as taught by John Wesley and the modern Holiness Movement.

My father, Dr. E. O. Chalfant, said in the December 1937 *Nazarene Preacher's Magazine*:

It is my humble opinion that a real gospel preacher, if he means to preach the gospel, should in some way let it be known during the course of his message that sin is double in its aspects, an act and a condition—the act needs to be forgiven, and the condition needs to be cleansed away. In fact, you will find that things in the Bible are all tied up to this one great outstanding principle of holiness. For example, with reference to the judgment: "Herein is our love

BY MORRIS
 CHALFANT
 Minister to
 senior adults

BOURBONNAIS, ILLINOIS



Continued on page 11

*Holiness theology didn't begin
with John Wesley.*

Holiness theology began with

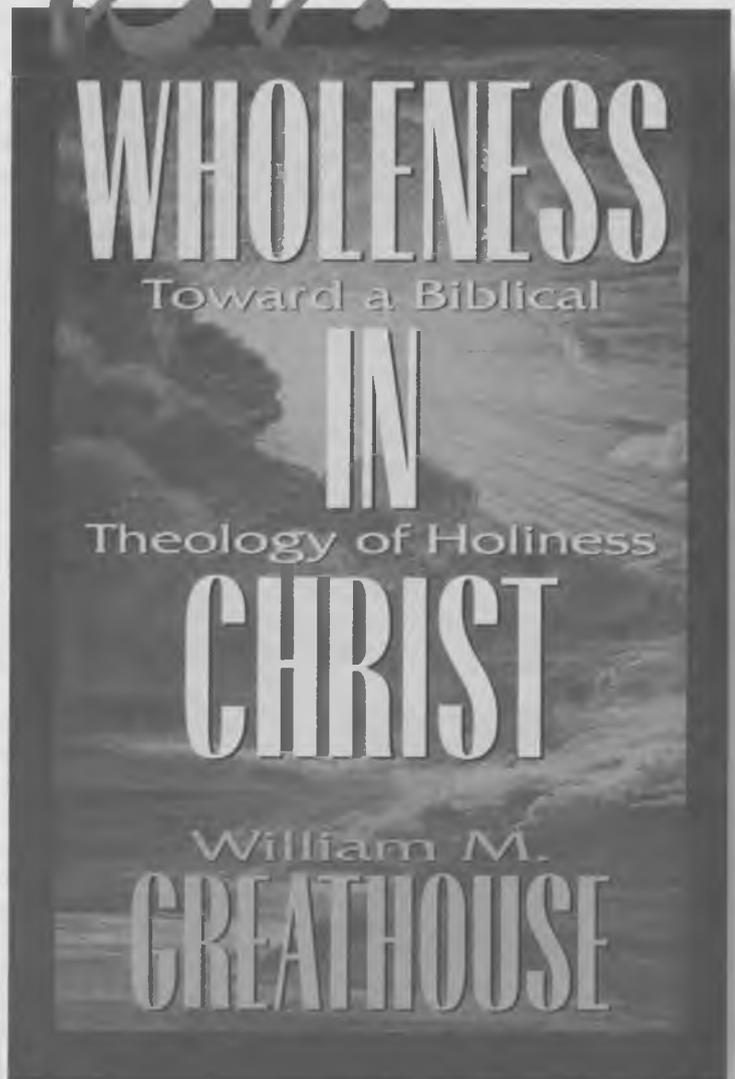
Christ.

Wholeness in Christ

William M. Greathouse

Dig into the biblical foundations of heart cleansing and holy living. William M. Greathouse, Holiness theologian and former general superintendent, takes an in-depth look at the doctrine of entire sanctification as he examines both the Old and New Testament roots of Holiness. You will find this masterfully researched work is a valuable resource for discovering the life and spirit of holiness.

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Holiness Teaching—New Testament Times to Wesley

Holiness Teaching: New Testament Times to Wesley

PAUL M. BASSETT, ED.,
vol. 1 of *Great Holiness Classics*
(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press
of Kansas City, 1997), 344 pages
PA083-411-5751

Finally, in 1997, we have volume 1 of the six-volume *Great Holiness Classics*—after four of the other volumes had been our helpers for some years—in an auspicious, significant, high-quality publishing venture and adventure, similar in extravagance to the same publisher's three-volume *Exploring Christian Holiness*.

I say "finally" because we had anticipated it for a number of years. When Carl Bangs's *Arminius* appeared, I said in a review of it in the *Seminary Tower* that I could see why we had awaited it for such a long time: Bangs's University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation on Arminius had only indicated a beginning of his research into the life and the Latin and Dutch works of the "quiet Dutchman." As this volume edited by Paul Merritt Bassett is in hand, I can see why it was "molasses slow" in its birthing: none of the writings he introduces us to, from the 2nd to the 17th centuries, had been written in English. Bassett translated all of them freshly, except for the writings of the 4th-century Macarius the Egyptian and the Arndt excerpt, in which case he used John Wesley's translation (see p. 27). At the same time, he is knowledgeable of the other translations the church has

been gifted with. The fresh translations were given us because our time is the end of century No. 20 of our era, and not a distant earlier century when many of the other translations appeared. Besides, Bassett knows that a Wesleyan-Holiness translator of the works would do them and us more justice than a translator would who comes to them from a variant tradition. I do not know of anyone in our Wesleyan-Holiness history who would have been up to this.

When I reviewed for the *Preacher's Magazine* Bassett's contribution in volume 2 of *Exploring Christian Holiness*, I gave him what was perhaps a left-handed compliment, saying that as Uncle Bud Robinson could find entire sanctification just about everywhere from Genesis to Revelation in Scripture, Bassett had seemed to find it in variant sorts of writers from the apostles to John Wesley—Augustine, Luther, and so on. At the same time, when Bud Camfield asked many of us to send him our nominations for the most significant event in all of Nazarene history, I wrote him that I think it might have been Bassett's work, in volume 2 of *ECH*.

In that earlier volume, Bassett gave us the teachings of the Greek-writing Eastern fathers and the Latin-writing Western fathers, as they taught precisely what we Wesleyan-Holiness people teach. Bassett gave us the views of Augustine and Luther and others, whose writings constitute a spirituality on which Wesley fed and on which we can feed for our more-or-less precise understand-

ing of entire sanctification.

In that volume, Bassett pretty much proved that, without any exception he could find, the fathers taught each one of the five or six aspects of the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification that we Wesleyan-Holiness people teach and experience. These aspects were that entire sanctification is subsequent to regeneration; that it is instantaneously received by faith through the baptism with or being filled with the Holy Spirit; that it constitutes a cleansing away of sin; and that it is for this life.

In this present publication, Bassett works with both entire sanctification and Christian perfection, and not as exclusively with the former as in the earlier volume. Adding Christian perfection to what he sets out to treat, it seems to me, gives him more allowance for including spirituality excerpts from Augustine, Anabaptists, Lutheran Pietists, and early modern Roman Catholic piety. Bassett admits that many of these writings "speak a variety of theological and spiritual dialects" (p. 26). He also says, "the Holiness message is clearly a development of what is already there, not a hybrid nor a novelty nor an aberration" (p. 27).

The reader will note that he says the excerpts from the fathers teach entire sanctification and Christian perfection. They are titled in that way. Augustine (354—430) is perhaps the last great father, but excerpts from him are not headed as being on entire sanctification. Augustine might be included by Bassett partly because of his enormous

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GRIDER

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emeritus at Nazarene
Theological Seminary
and distinguished
visiting professor of
religion at Olivet
Nazarene University



influence on Christianity ever since, Roman Catholic and Protestant. Bassett writes, "But here Augustine stops short of the view of Wesleyans and others. He insists that this work of grace is fulfilled only 'after the battle with death is exhausted'" (p. 164).

It is to be noted that he uses the more general term, "holiness," to discuss the Anabaptists, "Pietism" to discuss the spirituality of Arndt and Francke, and "piety" to discuss early modern Roman Catholic excerpts.

The reader is not to expect all these pre-Wesley treatises to mirror precisely what Wesley and his brother Charles came to teach in the 18th century. At points, it does mirror specific aspects of their teaching. Especially is this so in the fathers where, as Arminius said, the water is likely to be purer, since it is nearer to the fountain. In general, the later excerpts constitute a depth of spirituality upon which the Wesleys fed for their theological understandings. Reading these freshly translated excerpts, refined from a vast amount of spirituality literature, and then refined further to reduce it to about the size of the other volumes in the series, should help us as they helped Wesley—as material to put a burning into our bones, as we in our time and various cultures seek to explicate and to promote the actual teachings of the Wesley brothers and of the American Holiness Movement.

I chided the author about his not having included in *ECH* the teachings of Fénelon (1651—1715). And, lo, Bassett has here three selections from Fénelon's . . . *Christian Perfection*. He tells us why Fénelon barely gets included: because, among other things, as a good Roman Catholic archbishop, he taught that "one must be entirely sanctified before he or she may be justified" (p. 331), turning the Protestant order of salvation upside down. Also it is because, although Wesley had included Fénelon in his *Christian Library* and had promoted his writings, he also made harsh appraisals of Fénelon. Wes-

ley's Fénelon is a significantly edited Fénelon; but it is Fénelon.

Excerpts from the writings of Walter Hilton (ca. 1340-96) are among the choicest of all this spirituality literature—a man we never hear about in a usual survey course in church history. This English priest writes on the uncreated love (of the Holy Spirit) and the created love (in us), often using John's New Testament writings. This dear English monk, writing in Old English and Latin, often reminds us of the emphasis on love in Wesley and in the late Mildred Wynkoop. Hilton says, "He loves us so much, He gives us His love, which is the Holy Spirit" (p. 254). "We love God because he first loved us," he quotes from John (p. 255). And he adds, "He loves us most when He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit" (ibid.). Sin is disposed of, even as we Wesleyan-Holiness people say, for Hilton writes, "In the justification of a soul, our Lord Jesus manifests His greatest love to a soul, for He disposes of all sin and unites the soul to himself. Such is the greatest thing that He is able to do for the soul, and for this reason it is allotted to the Holy Spirit to do it" (ibid.). Hilton further says that "our souls are justified and sanctified, and that is the work of love alone" (p. 256). Hear him further: "Such love makes our will strong so that it may resist all sins. . . . It also moves us to forsake the love and enjoyment of the world. It puts to death in us all of the evil stirrings of sin as well as carnal affections and worldly fears" (ibid.). He speaks of "perfect lovers of God" (p. 259) and of "the gift of perfect love" (p. 265).

Having spoken of the author's translating almost all of these writings, I need to say that we evidently waited a long time for this volume also because, while working on the third unpublished volume of a six-volume history of Iberian Christianity, on an assigned history of all the Wesleyan-Holiness denominations, and other writing assignments; and while being the most sought-after Wesleyan-Holiness scholar as our representative

to the other Christian groupings, including the National and the World Councils of Churches and *Christianity Today*, etc., Bassett has for this volume carefully prepared biographical sketches of each writer that boil down great sweeps of church history. He gives us carefully thought-out introductions to each of the writings.

This six-volume series is officially Wesleyan-Holiness in promoting entire sanctification. John Wesley is the person who is most pivotal in all this somewhat edited material. Wesley is also pivotal in this volume edited by Bassett. The general introduction to the series states, "What is here . . . is generally called the Wesleyan interpretation of entire sanctification" (p. 15). This word "Wesleyan" evidently includes the basic American Holiness Movement interpretations. We read, "The experience of entire sanctification includes cleansing from this [just referred to] original sin" (p. 19). The introductory material to the series further explains: "At conversion, Christians receive God's Holy Spirit in regeneration. . . . To be sanctified wholly means to be baptized, or filled, with the Holy Spirit, as happened to the disciples in the Upper Room" (p. 20).

The plan for the series does not mean that every enduring spirituality writing introduced and printed represents all these specific teachings. Wesleyan-Holiness people do not require that an enduringly significant spirituality writing be measured by these specific aspects of Holiness doctrine. It does mean perhaps that those who have begun to speak about our "doctrines of holiness" need to keep in mind that, with all our differences of doctrine, it still is so that, officially, it constitutes a believer's being instantaneously cleansed from original sin, by "faith" (p. 20), through Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit (ibid.); that it "brings added power to conquer sin, to love others, and to witness for Christ" (ibid.); and that "God gives the witness of His Spirit when we are sanctified wholly" (p. 21)—although Beverly Carradine of Methodism and

A Dangerous Hope

A Dangerous Hope

by Al Truesdale and Bonnie Perry
(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press
of Kansas City, 1997)
PA083-411-6804, \$16.99

Al Truesdale, the theologian, and Bonnie Perry, the talented writer, have combined their writing skills and produced an outstanding volume on *grace*. No "cheap grace" here! A cogent expression of God's redeeming grace through the journey of life makes this book a must for anyone interested in living a holy life.

Throughout its pages come a gospel of living hope for both the individual and the Church of Jesus Christ. Both laity and clergy are given an optimum view of the Wesleyan concept of sanctification, God's complete grace. Chapter 7 will bring about a good grasping of the dimension of sanctification for any serious student

DERL G. KEEFER

Pastor

THREE RIVERS,
MICHIGAN



of the Word. Truesdale and Perry write: "There is a time when by grace and through faith disciples of Jesus open themselves to the Spirit's sanctifying presence, just as one does in justification. This is an essential dimension of the Good News. At this juncture He crowns every dimension of the human spirit with love for God and neighbor, and Christ claims us comprehensively for His own. In a love that is equally decisive and extensive, we open the whole of our lives to the Spirit's sanctifying activity" (p. 79).

If you are ready for an in-depth view of God's full grace, this book is for you. Written with laity in mind, this volume may be used for individual and group Bible study; however, the minister will find this work a great sermonic resource as well.

Well worth the \$16.99 price tag!

PM

Preacher's Exchange

WANTED:

Cassette tape by Rev. L. B. Hicks,
"There Must Be a Heaven Somewhere"

CONTACT:

Rev. Robert Welch
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810-744-3893

Samuel Logan Brengle of the Salvation Army, and some others, have said that their witness of the Spirit occurred not "when," but afterward by days or weeks.

Bassett views these and most other earlier theological writings to be in the main "reflections on worship," both "corporate and private" (p. 37). He attempts not altogether to identify entire sanctification and Christian perfection, but to "hold them together" (p. 38). He understands that "entire sanctification is the perfecting threshold. Now the life of Christian perfection begins" (p. 39). He says that, in all these excerpted readings, "what we will see every moment is the yearning for, and expectation of, perfection in love in this life, a perfection granted to a purified heart" (p. 40).

Readers of this volume will find Bassett's editorial contribution, as well as the many excerpts, will all promote their own worship of God—which is the most fundamental way in which we can serve God (as this book's editor has taught me). What particularly holds together all these writings on entire sanctification and Christian perfection is their relationship with the teachings of John Wesley, whose life and writings Bassett knows intimately.

This volume further confirms my hope that Nazarene Theological Seminary's distinguished and most senior professor, a church historian who is also a theologian, a theologian who is also a church historian—indeed, a Renaissance man—will at some time write a major systematic theology.

While I do not rate this work by Bassett as of quite the significance of his work in volume 2 of *ECH*, I consider its publication to be among the few most significant ones of Nazarene Publishing House's history.

If scholar-saints are allowed fans, I ask to be one. And if Bassett is not the one who says a few words when my body, readied by grace for the resurrection, lies in a plain casket made of pine, it will not be because I did not ask him to do so.

PM

Hymn Story of the Month

—Part Four

This is the fourth and final article in a series 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.

MARCH

"STAND UP, STAND UP FOR JESUS"

HYMN STORY

Tragedy struck swiftly. Dudley Tyng reached to pat the back of a mule as it provided power for a corn threshing machine. The sleeve of his jacket caught in one of the cogs of the gear, and

Tyng's arm was torn off. The loss of blood was great, and everyone knew that his situation was grave.

Tyng followed in his father's footsteps as an Episcopal pastor. He was courageous, preaching the gospel fervently without concern for modifying his message to be politically correct. On one occasion, he was dismissed from a congregation for preaching against slavery. When revival swept through Philadelphia in 1858, Tyng stood on the front lines. On March 30, 1858, he preached to 5,000 men at a noonday meeting sponsored by the YMCA, and 1,000 responded to the invitation.

Only days after that meeting, doctors were forced to amputate what remained of Tyng's arm in an attempt to save his life. But gangrene set in. As his friends gathered around his bed, someone asked him if he had a message for the men of the YMCA. Tyng replied, "Tell them, 'Let us all stand up for Jesus.'" Tyng died a short time later.

George Duffield, a Presbyterian pastor, one of the persons at Tyng's bedside, heard the words of encouragement from his dying friend. On the following Sunday, Duffield preached a sermon as a tribute to his friend, Dudley Tyng. Duffield used the text, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14, *KJV*). The sermon closed with a poem Duffield had written, a poem later set to music.

HYMN SINGING

After telling the hymn story, have the men in the congregation sing "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" (643 or 646). An alternative would be to have a men's chorus or men's quartet sing an arrangement of the hymn. Follow the hymn with testimonies from several men.

HYMN STUDY

Amazing Grace, p. 310; 52
Hymn Stories Dramatized, pp. 140-41; *Songs in the Night*, pp. 161-63; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 261-62.

APRIL

"JESUS PAID IT ALL"

HYMN STORY

On a spring Sunday morning in 1865, Elvina Hall took her usual place with the choir of the Monument Street Methodist Church in Baltimore. As the worship service progressed, a poetic response to the truth proclaimed began to form in her mind. Not

BY KEITH SCHWANZ
Pastor
PORTLAND, OREGON



wanting to be a distraction, Elvina waited until the congregation had bowed their heads before she wrote down the poem. The only thing on which she had to write was the flyleaf of the hymnal she held in her hand. She later showed the poem to her pastor and told him how it had been composed.

The pastor of the Monument Street Methodist Church gave the poem to John Grape, the church organist. Grape, an amateur musician and coal merchant, had written a tune for another hymn titled "All to Christ," but friends and family did not like that combination of text and tune. Grape was thrilled when he discovered that his tune fit the meter of Hall's text.

A poetic response to the truth proclaimed began to form in her mind.

HYMN SINGING

Ask a woman from the choir to tell this story, then have the choir sing an arrangement of "Jesus Paid It All" (218). An alternative would be to record a monologue of Elvina Hall's thoughts as she ponders what is being said in the worship service, her concern that she not distract others, her search for something on which to jot down her poem, etc. Ask choir members to hold their position—a freeze—as the recorded monologue is played while one woman pantomimes the hymn story. End the monologue with the woman coming back from her reverie just in time for the choir to sing an arrangement of "Jesus Paid It All."

HYMN STUDY

Amazing Grace, p. 121; 52 *Hymn Stories Dramatized*, pp. 85-87; *Songs of Glory*, p. 114.

MAY

"A NAME I HIGHLY TREASURE"

HYMN STORY

Norma Eliason had been asked to sing a solo at the 1946 Memorial Day service held at a cemetery in northern Minnesota. A lo-

cal judge spoke, but his address made no mention of spiritual truth. His words were without hope. Shallow. Empty. Then Norma sang a song about Jesus. The character of the service changed. As he surveyed the gathering, Norma's husband, Oscar, noticed the dramatic shift. He said that the people "just seemed to melt under the power of Jesus' name."

As was their custom, Norma and their boys took a walk after the Memorial Day service, looking for signs of spring. When they returned home 45 minutes later, they found Oscar sitting at the family piano, playing and singing a song he had just completed, "A Name I Highly Treasure." Tears of love filled Oscar's eyes as he sang his song of testimony.

HYMN SINGING

After telling the hymn story, have a soprano and a tenor sing "A Name I Highly Treasure" (155) as a duet. Go immediately into "There's Something About That Name" (148) as a congregational song. Without pause, have a soloist sing the first phrase of "Blessed Be the Name" (116)—"O for a thousand tongues to sing"—with the congregation responding with the phrase "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Continue the call and response between the soloist and the congregation, with everyone singing the refrain.

HYMN STUDY

This hymn story is based on personal correspondence with Norma Eliason.

HYMN STUDY RESOURCES

- Amazing Grace* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1990)
- 52 *Hymn Stories Dramatized* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1992)
- Songs in the Night* by Henry Garipey (Eerdmans, 1996)
- Songs of Glory* by William J. Reynolds (Zondervan, 1990)

A Tight Squeeze

BY DONNA G. KELLEY
Freelance writer
BALTIMORE

Eight church members attended special services at a sister church. After dinner, they entered the sanctuary for the afternoon service. Just for the fun of it, the eight sat together in the last pew on the left side.

Being shoulder to shoulder, the group had to rise all at once for the singing of hymns. Would a shoehorn be needed to pry them from the pew?

A member of the hosting church looked back at them. "I can just tell that your church is very closely knit."

PM

PM

The Sticky Question of Denominational Loyalty

Is denominational loyalty a good thing? Few would question the value of loyalty to the pastor and the local church. But what about loyalty to the denomination? Is that desirable?

Marks of Denominational Loyalty

Perhaps we can answer the question by looking at the way denominational loyalty behaves. We see it in the warm emotional response to the very name of the denomination, much like the patriot's response to the flag of his or her country or to the singing of its national anthem. We see it in the disposition when in a strange city to try to find the location of *our* church, and go even extra miles to get to it. We see it in the attitude of moving members who cannot bring themselves to slip comfortably into a working fellowship with some other denomination, just because it is friendly and convenient. On the contrary, denominational loyalty prompts going across town if necessary to be in *our* church, where we really feel at home. In fact, this kind of loyalty, in case there is no local branch of *our* church available, will endeavor to start one.

Denominational loyalty is intensely committed to the whole program, worldwide. Such loyal

members acquaint themselves with their leaders and also their district and general activities. They are keen on church news. They want to know of the church's plans and expansions. They come to know and carry a deep and fervent interest in its missionaries and missionary work. Moreover, they avidly read the denominational publications. Their tithes are consistently fed into *this* worldwide program.

Furthermore—and most importantly—they intelligently subscribe to the doctrines, ethos, and usages of *our* denomination. This is the core bond. Everything else revolves around these doctrines and standards.

These are the bonds that make their loyalty more than merely sociological—such as family connections, lifelong friendships, favorite preacher ties, or institutional circles. When denominational loyalty is fueled only by these sociological drives, it is too fragile and can easily, down the road, be washed out by unpleasant experiences. But when denominational loyalty is deeper than liking this particular pastor or being attached to this particular coterie of friends, and instead is grounded in a profound conviction of the biblical rightness of the doctrinal distinctives that

define this denomination, then no amount of disappointment in any one local situation will be able to shake a person out of loyalty to the denomination as a whole.

Perhaps no event could more dramatically demonstrate the power of denominational loyalty than the recent public presentation of rewards, in a denominational setting, to a group of churches that had paid all church budgets every year for 50 years. This means that these churches, for half a century, had so believed in the missionary, district, ministerial, and school programs of their church that they were determined to find some way to pay all such obligations in full. Undoubtedly that level of devotion required some real sacrificial giving, probably a

BY RICHARD S.
TAYLOR

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retired professor,
Nazarene Theological
Seminary*

EDMONDS, WASHINGTON



lot of prayer. But this is denominational loyalty at work.

Someone might say that this was proof of loyalty to Jesus, not to a church. It was both. If their devotion was exclusively to Jesus, their giving might just as well have been scattered among a half dozen denominations that believe in Jesus. But they saw something in *their* church that convinced them that *their* church was the most appropriate outlet for their devotion to Jesus.

Perhaps this helps us answer the original question. Is there value in such loyalty? Is it something that every pastor should deliberately seek to cultivate in his people?

Hindrances to Denominational Loyalty

Many forces conspire to diffuse and dilute this kind of loyalty. Even [some ecumenical movements] tend to disparage denominational differences and encourage one grand melting pot. While it is a good thing to correct the tunnel vision that sees *only* our church and that has no ability to fellowship with others, it is not a good thing when people go home with the ties to their particular denomination weakened.

Admittedly, denominational loyalty may be a noxious weed if we are not convinced that our church is presenting Christ in a fullness that many others are missing; but if it is, then our very loyalty to Christ demands church loyalty too. Surely we can link arms with other Christians on some platforms without surrendering our distinctive convictions or losing sight of their importance. As to the comparison of size, churches with a distinctive, biblical message, to which they are loyal and which they enthusiastically propagate, exert an impact in this world far greater than their comparative size would indicate.

Another enemy of denominational loyalty is the contemporary culture. In these days of in-

dividualism gone to seed, all institutional loyalty has fallen on bad times. Even patriotism is often scorned. The so-called baby boomer generation has notoriously spurned labels and been reluctant to make lasting commitments. Their disposition has been to shop for a local church that they think best suits their needs and stay with it as long as it does. In the process, doctrinal distinctives and denominational names have been of little concern.

This is seen in the appeal of community churches. The appeal is to people who are "squishily" ecumenical, not as an informed philosophy but by default. The differences between churches have simply not interested them. They can shift easily from one denomination to another because they are not deep enough in Christian understanding to have a well-grounded basis for caring. As a consequence, all the strengths and advantages of fidelity to a worldwide denominational program have simply not been there. Budgets are paid to save face, if paid at all. A high percentage of church members couldn't care less, really, whether the budgets are paid or not. They will scrimp for local expenses, but what is "out there" does not excite them.

There is also the appeal of going independent. Really, it seems at times that the independent church has all the advantages. No church law, no hierarchical snooping, no accountability, no theological straitjacket, no restrictions on what is preached or where the money goes. To foul the picture still more, these independents often grow like mushrooms. Could it be that unbound religion has a powerful appeal to an unsanctified heart?

As great as the temptation may be to go independent, wise is the preacher and the church that opt for the broader identity and commitment, and accept the accountability that such connection imposes. Here is a chance to

demonstrate an unselfish cooperation that multiplies lasting effectiveness in compound measure, for the larger group can build schools, establish publishing houses, launch periodicals, send missionaries, and undertake great projects that are beyond the scope of the local church.

The Grounds of Denominational Loyalty

Before suggesting practical ways for cultivating denominational loyalty, perhaps we should look again at its grounds. What is there about a denomination that (1) merits loyalty, and (2) inspires it?

A denomination merits loyalty when it has a mission and a message that is biblical, vital to the whole of the gospel, and distinctive; that is, it has a mission and a message that tends to be neglected by other groups. If a denomination is built on trifles, such as baptizing facedown instead of backward, or on the length of a woman's hair, loyalty will be neither deserved nor long sustained. Who is going to mortgage his or her home, for instance, to build a church on such sand? But if the mission and message of this denomination is deep enough and broad enough to be foundational to the gospel itself and matches the heart needs of all people everywhere, its adherents will march forth under its banners with exultant and sacrificial commitment. They will believe in their church because it merits their faith.

But there is a catch here. A church will not only merit loyalty but also inspire it if members see their denomination, from top to bottom—in its leadership, publications, schools—keeping its focus in fidelity to its own self-proclaimed mission and message. The humble local church member must see the larger church busy doing what it advertises to be its ground for existence.

John Wesley declared that God

Denomina-
tional
loyalty
prompts
going
across town
if necessary
to be where
we really
feel at
home.

raised up the "people called Methodists" for the primary purpose of spreading scriptural holiness. Modern Wesleyan denominations exist largely because the people called Methodists forgot this purpose. If the second generation of Wesleyan denominations also forget, they, too, will have forfeited their moral right to the loyalty of their members.

Ways to Foster the Broader Unity

Let us assume that the denomination merits loyalty. How is it to be fostered?

First, the pastor must model loyalty.

Let the people feel the pastor's love for, confidence in, and respect for the denomination. Let them see him or her as a participant in the district and general activities. The pastor will gain in the long run. For the members who follow his or her devotion to the broader program will prove to be the most valuable players in the local program.

A preacher friend of mine accepted a large city church that for years had been notoriously independent. They had done their own thing and allowed the district to do theirs. But this pastor at once began announcing, pushing, and promoting district activities. When camp meeting time came, he sat on the front seat and boosted with sincere "Amens." Gradually his people began to wake up to the fact that while, in one sense, they were a large church, in another sense they were a cog in a worldwide movement and were in danger of missing out on the excitement of the larger vision.

Second, let the pastor see to it that a stream of missionaries, strong evangelists, and general leaders flow through the church every year.

The people need to become personally acquainted with the broader church. Their loyalty will have faces to it. Such acquaintance will generate prayer support and loosen purse strings for budgets much better than

When denominational loyalty is fueled only by sociological drives, it is too fragile and can easily be washed out by unpleasant experiences.

panic drives at the end of the church year.

Third, let the pastor personally read the missionary reading books and publicly promote them.

Absolutely nothing will send the emotional roots of denominational loyalty down faster or deeper than heavy pastoral involvement in missionary literature.

Fourth, let the pastor see to it, by whatever means, that the denominational publications are getting into every home, and that the church schools are using denominational literature.

As to church school literature, in a recent panel discussion, moderated by Tony Campolo (published in *Christianity Today*, August 11, 1997), the moderator confessed that his church, the American Baptists, had stopped producing their own literature and were exclusively using David C. Cook material. To this Roberta Hestenes commented: "What I worry about when everybody uses David C. Cook is the danger of getting a bland faith that has no church history in it. Denominations are gifts to the larger Christian community." Her point was that if a denomination is to preserve its mission and message, it had better use church school literature designed in sync with that mission and message.

Fifth, let the pastor see to it that holiness books are widely distributed in the church.

Nothing can be more useful than a book table well supplied with the kind of reading material that will educate the people doctrinally and denominationally, as well as building them up spiritually.

Sixth, as far as possible the pastor would be wise to promote the attendance and participation of the people, of all ages, in all district events—

assembly or conference, camp meetings, youth camps, Bible quizzing, teen talent events, zone rallies, missionary rallies, even local revivals in nearby churches. By this means, a cross-

church acquaintance will supplement the local church fellowship to weave a web of virtually indestructible denominational bonds. It is often an eye-opener for new members and for teens especially to discover that there are hundreds of others out there with the same beliefs, the same songs, and the same goals.

Seventh, the local church should explore every possible means of making graphic and exciting what budget moneys go for.

By visual aids or by Work and Witness trips, let the members see with their own eyes their giving become happy converts and sturdy buildings. This will soon put an end to grumbling about budgets.

Eighth, let the pastor expound the doctrines of the church carefully and continuously in such a competent manner that the people will become both adherents and exponents.

Hearing basic doctrines will increase love for the denomination that is committed to spreading those biblical beliefs worldwide.

Ninth, a membership class should be seen as the golden opportunity to "sell" the worldwide fellowship with enthusiasm and proper pride.

Every new member should be enthused in knowing that in joining the local church, he or she is becoming a vital part of a world family doing a world job. It is not honest to allow people to join in ignorance of what the church is and what it stands for. Let them study the manuals of church disciplines. That is only fair. Anything else is shortsighted. When people join blindly, they will be weak adherents, not nearly as strong and dependable as those who enter fully informed and fully committed.

This approach may result in fewer new members but in stronger churches. A capable pastor told me his class of new members could have been twice as large if he had demanded less.

In conjunction with recruiting

members, we need to think soberly about the community church trend (to return to this theme). To approach a community with Community Church up front may produce short-term results but may also lead to long-term headaches. The term "community" is innocuous, generic, inoffensive, nonthreatening, open-ended. Anything "community" belongs to the *community*—that is, everybody. When slightly religious people are drawn together on a *community* platform, they will feel they have a vested interest in maintaining this ethos. Then, down the line, when some new preacher says, "Wait a minute! This is a *holiness* church! We have a doctrine! We even have a *Manual*," there may be either an angry exodus or a war. It is more than likely that some of the attenders—even some who may be on the church board and teach Sunday School—will feel betrayed. After all, when a denominational church is the real goal from the start, but that fact is not kept up front from the start, are the church planters not guilty of bait and switch—a commercial practice that is illegal?

A blatant example of such deception was the pastor who was smoothly cultivating a prominent socialite couple and thought he almost had them hooked. When they dropped out and a fellow pastor asked what happened to them, he replied, "Oh, some fool showed them the *Manual*!"

Many forces
conspire to
diffuse and
dilute this
kind of
loyalty.

At any rate, such planting of new churches and such tactics will never produce denominational loyalty. Some who read these lines may protest that the hope of such pastors is that true revival will come and such persons be so soundly converted that church loyalty will grow in spite of such a slippery start. But what is the likelihood of revival if methods are used that God cannot bless?

Flying the Holiness Flag

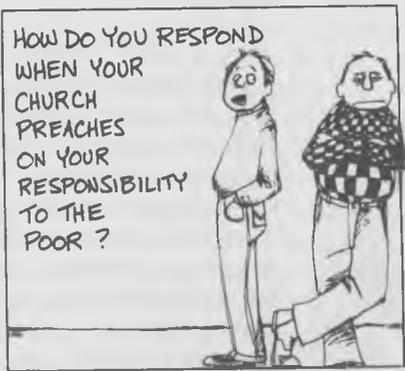
This leads us straight to holiness doctrine! The typical Wesleyan-type denomination has somewhere in its creedal statement a declaration of belief in a doctrine of entire sanctification as a second definite work of grace—sometimes called the baptism with the Spirit. Every new church member should know that this doctrinal claim is there. While it may take time, every attempt should be made to help prospects understand this doctrine and be persuaded of its biblical truthfulness. They should see clearly the difference between this form of holiness and the generic brand that is acceptable to all Evangelical denominations, that is to say, that Christians should "behave."

But of course, believing this with the mind will not alone produce rock-ribbed denominational loyalty unless and until members experience heart holiness personally. Let a Christian seek and find a clear experience of holi-

ness. Let that Christian know the joy of being filled with the Spirit and begin to discover that the Bible is full of this truth. He or she will be bonded forever. Never again will that Christian find it possible to be content in any other kind of denomination.

But a wholly sanctified, Spirit-filled church member can now make a claim on the denomination that matches the denomination's claim on him or her. The member's loyalty will be maintained and thrive only if he or she sees the denomination as a whole demonstrating the same loyalty to a doctrinal position as is expected of any member of the church. The Christian must be able with conviction to keep faith in the doctrinal and spiritual fidelity of the church's leadership, periodicals, books, and schools. Only the superficially loyal will stick to an apostate church—being loyal whether right or wrong. But the doctrinally informed member and the experientially sanctified member will be loyal first to truth, then to an institution only as long as they see in it an embodiment of that truth. This makes them more sound as Christians than the blindly loyal. Sometimes such Christians are compelled to say, when going elsewhere, "I didn't leave my denomination; it left me!" Was it not some such scenario that brought contemporary Holiness denominations into existence in the first place? **PM**

BEYOND BELIEF



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Go On to Maturity

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God" (Heb. 6:1).

"So let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start all over again with the importance of turning away from evil deeds and placing our faith in God" (NLT).

Introduction

When our son was born, Eleanor and I were the proudest parents in the world. We'd stroll down to the nursery window in the hospital and goo-goo, making faces at our pride and joy. Nathan usually looked the other way and bawled, but we couldn't wait to get him home. It wasn't long before he grew, laughed, cooed, and crawled.

He loved being bounced and enjoyed standing and flexing his knees while holding on to my finger. After a while he learned to stand by himself while holding on to something. We were soon able to coax him into taking a few steps while we held his hand.

Finally the time came for him to walk by himself. I would get him in an upright position while Mommy would wait with open arms, trying to persuade him to take his first step. After much reluctance, he made his first attempt—and CRASH! he hit the floor and came up bawling.

I said, "Son, we're going to

have to have a talk. That is not the way it is supposed to be done! You loused everything up! You're a complete failure! You are a shame and disgrace to your family! What you need to do is to be born again."

So we scooped him up, drove to the hospital, and carried him up to the OB floor. My wife went into labor and repeated the process. Before long Nathan was born again.

We rushed home and carried him into the living room. I took ahold of him and helped him get in a standing position. My wife, with outstretched arms, began coaxing him again to take his first step. It took a lot more persuading this time, but he finally weakened and attempted to put one foot in front of the other. Again CRASH! he hit the floor with a bang and a howl.

We scooped him up again and returned to the maternity ward. After a few hours, the process was completed, and he became reborn again.

This went on for a week and a half—attempts, failure, reluctance, and rebirth. My wife was getting pretty worn out and fed up about this time. She said, "This being reborn again and again isn't helping one bit. Maybe what Nathan needs is a chance to grow and develop—let him mature a bit, experience a few failures, but eventually he will learn to walk."

But I said, "Honey, you mustn't forget, we are Holiness people. We believe in Christian perfection. If you stumble, fall, or just plain blow it, then you've got to be born again, again. That's the only way to do it. We've always done it this way."

BY WILLIAM TUCKER
SIOUX CITY, IOWA



Past Failures

I have wondered at times if we have created more genuine backsliders than genuine saints. Back in my day, the sermons were designed to send you on a guilt trip if you hadn't attained a certain standard of maturity or perfection. The revivals that came twice a year were based on the assumption that 80 percent of

the congregation were in a backslidden state and on their way to hell. The revival sermons were so sharp, pointed, and radical that they would even make Peter and Paul tremble and question their faith and doubt their salvation.

Oftentimes they majored on minors and minored on majors. There was no allowance made for maturing—for growth, development, and progress from our former way of life. They would judge you on externals rather than the heart.

One preacher was even so brazen as to say that he only knew two women and three men in his congregation that had any chance of making it to heaven. Can you imagine what that did for the faith of the rest of the congregation, especially since the preacher's wife wasn't even listed among the women he thought might make it to heaven?

Hopefully churches have changed some over the years so that their goal is to help young converts go on to maturity rather than cause them to abandon their faith and compel them to start all over again at Square One.

Alternation

God wants people who are *re-generated* rather than people who are *alternated*. For too long we overemphasized coming forward and bowing at the altar, but forgot to assist them to arise and "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4, κλυ). To walk in newness of life takes understanding, encouragement, nourishment, and basic instruction. Only in this way can we develop a sense of assurance, enjoyment, and a shining hope. Without it is uncertainty, confusion, fretting, and drudging participation.

If we want the lasting peace of God, we need more than alternation. *To be alternated means:*

1. To change back and forth between positions.
2. To repeatedly change or fluctuate; to act intermittently and to vacillate.
3. To take turns—sometimes

you're it, and sometimes you aren't; sometimes you're on, and sometimes you're off; sometimes you're spiritually hot, while other times you're cold.

I am not denying that the scriptures teach the possibility of being reborn again, because they certainly do. But you only need to be reborn again if you've become spiritually dead. We will talk more about that later.

Most of us bowed at an altar of prayer. It hasn't hurt us or done us any injury. Most of us received spiritual help down at the altar. The only thing about the altar is that it can become addictive—we can be made to feel it is the only place or, at least, the paramount place where we can receive help from the Lord. We make it a sacred object of sorts—a holy shrine with supernatural powers. We feel if we loused up or succumb to temptation during the week, then we must wait until the Sunday altar call to get any relief. In the meantime, we wallow in the anguish of guilt, become depressed, throw off our faith, and backslide. There are others who feel the altar is the public whipping post where they must go to atone for their sins and to receive forgiveness from the Lord. In other words, it is a merit bench—by coming to the altar, they somehow earn God's attention, mercy, and forgiveness.

Lest I be accused of blaspheming some sacred ordinance or object, or that I'm lowering the position of the altar rail, may I ask, "Which New Testament church invented the altar rail? The church at Jerusalem, the church at Samaria, the church at Ephesus, or the church at Philippi?" Or may I ask, "How many of the 3,000 people converted on the Day of Pentecost bowed at an altar of prayer?" The truth is, the altar rail and the mourner's bench were not invented until the late 1700s or the early 1800s. For centuries converts lived, thrived, and survived without an altar in the church.

Have we
created
more
genuine
backsliders
than
genuine
saints?

Now I'm not suggesting, nor even hinting, that we should discard or neglect the altar rail as a convenient place to pray if it is used correctly. But on the other hand, if it is used as a place to start over again, start over again, and start over again—to be born again, reborn again, and reborn again in a continuous, vicious cycle—then it is defeating its purpose, and it becomes a crutch, an addiction, a drug of dependency.

All of you remember old Brother Louie! (Now your Brother Louie might be different than my Brother Louie. He might even go by a different name.) But he'd get up in every service and testify about how he finally got the real thing. He attended revivals for years on end. Finally on his 16th trip to the altar, he got the real thing. During every revival he went to the altar and claimed to be born again, but it didn't last. But now on the 16th trip, he got the real thing!

How do you think that made the rest of us young Christians feel? If you and your brother or sister only went to the altar once or twice, you'd feel mighty inferior to this masterpiece of a saint. You'd soon cast away your confidence in your initial experience and start tallying up your trips to the altar toward sainthood.

To compound the problem more, do you remember that evangelist who preached on Naaman the leper, who was instructed to dip seven times in the river Jordan for healing? He would dramatically illustrate how Naaman reluctantly held his nose and dipped one, two, and three times, and nothing happened—he was just as leprous as before. He held his nose again and dipped in the river four, five, and six times, and still nothing transpired. He was almost ready to give up, but then he took the seventh dip and was healed. Then the evangelist hammered home the idea that half of the congregation ought to be lining the altar rail for the seventh dip, implying that the first six didn't amount to anything.

How many times has faith

been destroyed from the pulpit, and seekers were asked to start all over again? How many times was alternation substituted for regeneration? For too long we overemphasized sensational crisis experiences rather than constant daily growth, and, as a result, we've failed to produce mature Christians. Yet was it not the holy apostles who exhorted the Early Church, regardless of their stage of development, to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" (2 Pet. 3:18)?

Regeneration

Our text said to "go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance . . . and of faith in God." When you build a house, you do not repeatedly lay a foundation. No! You lay one foundation, and then you start building on it. You concentrate on building rather than laying an endless repetition of foundations.

The foundation God wants us to lay is repentance and faith in Christ, which is the prelude to regeneration. Regeneration is different from alternation. *Spiritual regeneration is:*

1. The activation of a new life within us.
2. It is a spiritual rebirth; being born of the Spirit; having the life of Christ imparted to you.
3. It is the initial step and the continual process of allowing Christ's life and power to work in and through you.
4. Regeneration is not something worked up by our emotions or acquired by so many trips to the altar. Rather it is His life and His forgiveness received solely through faith by the consent of our wills—by that I mean, we allow God to perform the miracle in us, and we trust Him to regenerate and transform us.

At the point of regeneration—or when you became saved or born again—you became spiritually alive. By that *I do not mean* that 50,000 volts of electricity

went through your body, and you were tingling from your head to your toes. No! But rather Christ came to reside within you and gave you a new attitude and a new outlook on life. He made you clean and new on the inside.

1. The God you had feared is now your Friend.
2. The guilt you carried is now lifted.
3. The sins you loved are now repulsive.
4. While before you rebelled, now you desire to obey Him.
5. What seemed spiritual drudgery before now turns out to be a pleasure and delight.
6. You used to turn a deaf ear to God, but now you enjoy listening to and communicating with Him.

These characteristics of regeneration are not always constant and uniform. Like a child, our growth is irregular, and we often grow in spurts. But the fact is, there is always room for development, improvement, and growth. Those who are regenerated are expected to go on to maturity—not to begin and regress, begin and regress, and begin and regress again—but rather to take the steps necessary to be spiritually healthy and to grow in the Lord. William Barclay translates, "Let us never fall below the standard of conduct we have already reached" (Phil. 3:16). In other words, don't rise and fall, rise and fall in an up-and-down pattern. Another translation reads, "But we must keep going in the direction that we are now headed" (CEV). That is, continually go forward—don't regress and backslide. God never designed the Christian life with a reverse gear in it. However, some Christians have tried to modify the mechanism or shove in the clutch or put it in neutral and coast backward down the hill. Others have slammed on their brakes, turned around, and gone in the opposite direction. *But* God's plan for us is to go ahead,

The thing about the altar is that it can become addictive.

advance, and make progress until we reach maturity.

God's Great Design

In *God's great design* He planned and prescribed for certain things to help us grow, develop, be healthy, and become mature. If we don't make use of these specific means of grace, we will become anemic, malnourished, weak, sickly, and ready to die—if they are not corrected. What is this great design God has prepared for us?

1. God planned that you and He would have a time of prayer and fellowship every day.
2. God planned that you would personally learn His heart, mind, and values by reading His Word daily.
3. God planned that you would have pastors and teachers in the church to guide you.
4. God planned that you would have spiritual brothers and sisters in the church to give you encouragement and share experiences and knowledge with you.
5. God planned that you would practice caring for others, daily demonstrate acts of kindness, and be involved in Kingdom service as a means of developing growth.
6. God also planned for trials and adversity to enter your life so that you might become strong.
7. God planned for temptations to come your way for two reasons:
 - a. So you would better understand your soul's enemy, the devil. So you would become acquainted with his trickery, how he likes to make a fool out of you, and how he is bent on destroying you.
 - b. And so you would understand your own weakness, so that you would constantly cling more closely to God for strength.
8. In all the negative things of life, God planned for you to

exercise perseverance and endurance, for they will refine your character and bring about maturity. Paul says, "Stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (Col. 4:12).

If we fail to stand, we begin lacking assurance of salvation, and a dark shadow falls over our fellowship with God. The solution is not to throw up our hands, give up, and forget the whole thing. The remedy is not to be reborn again and start all over. **No!** The biblical thing to do is "to approach his throne in humble confidence, knowing that he extends to us mercy and grace to meet our every need" (Heb. 4:16, author's paraphrases rest of article). Also the Bible says, "God is faithful and just. If only we will own up to our sins, God will forgive them and purify us" (1 John 1:9). God knows you are human; He knows you are faulty and defective; He knows you are weak. That is why He stoops over to lift you up. In *mercy* He extends forgiveness for your failure. Through *grace* He offers you a helping hand and gives you strength, comfort, and encouragement.

Too many times we think salvation is something we are supposed to do on our own. We think we should grit our teeth and strain in the harness and exert all our human energy to accomplish it. Then when we stumble, we give up and think it is all over. We are tempted to say, "It's no use! I quit. I can't go on. I'm a total failure! It's no use trying anymore."

Truthfully, God never expected you to do it on your own. Salvation is of the Lord. It is His doing. That is why, when we were saved, or regenerated, Christ came to live inside of us through His Spirit. Paul says, "Continue to live out your Christian life with humble reverence, for God is at work within you, assisting you to desire and act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13). Paul also says, "In all of my daily struggles, I find his energy powerfully working within me" (Col. 1:29). Paul says again, "I

work hard . . . yet it is not my energy and grit, but it is God's grace effectively working in me" (1 Cor. 15:10). The Bible says in effect, "Our Lord Jesus . . . has given us every preparation (or provision) necessary to accomplish his purpose, and he stands ready to work in us to achieve what is pleasing to himself" (Heb. 13:20-21).

God never planned for us to be failures. He knew that if we tried to live our Christian life in our own strength, we would become total failures. He also knew that if we would allow Him to live inside us, He could give us strength to be a total success. Yes, mistakes along the way are only learning experiences. If we've learned anything from them, we'll reach up our hand to God and say, "Lord, take control of my life. Live in me and strengthen me, because only by Your power can I become successful."

As long as regeneration is kept alive and working, you do not need to be reborn again and again. The Bible says, "Don't throw away your confidence, because it has a rich reward. You need to keep on going so that when you have completed the will of God, you will receive his promised reward" (Heb. 10:35-36).

Spiritually Dead or Alive

But you say, "I don't feel very spiritual. Could it be that I died spiritually? If I am spiritually dead, do I need to be reborn again? Do I need to be saved all over again?"

The Bible unblushingly states that there are those who had once been believers and abandoned their faith either through rebellion or deception or neglect, who have not only the opportunity but also the responsibility to be reinstated into God's family by rebirth.

Rom. 11:20-24 illustrates this through the figure of the olive tree. The chapter is talking about salvation. Those who place their faith in Christ are born again by being grafted into the olive tree. If later they abandon their faith and rebel against Christ, they are broken off the tree and die in a

spiritual sense. But verse 23 says that if they return to faith and obedience, they can be grafted in again, that is, to be reborn again.

In Gal. 4:11—5:4 Paul tells some of the Galatians that because they listened to false teachers and are now trying to be saved by a different method than through Christ, they have by that act severed themselves from Christ and departed from His grace. Not wanting to give up on them, Paul says that he entered into spiritual labor pains again so that Christ might be reformed in them anew (4:19). That verse definitely speaks of the possibility of being reborn again.

Before we start dwelling on the possibility of repeating the new birth, let us examine whether a rebirth is necessary. As I said earlier, you only need to be reborn again if you've become dead spiritually. In both of these scriptural illustrations, the individuals were severed or cut off from the life of Christ. If you are cut off as a branch, you have no way to survive, but are hopelessly given up to wither and die. But if you remain in the tree and continue to draw sap and life from the tree, you are not dead. You may be sickly and fruitless, but you are not dead. In that case, you need spiritual healing, cleansing, nourishment, exercise, and encouragement.

How do you know whether you are dead or alive? First of all, death is rarely ever instantaneous. It usually transpires over a period of time. You are **not** *spiritually dead*:

1. As long as you are eager to repent and maintain fellowship with the Lord.
2. As long as sin is repulsive to you, and you long for purity of heart and life.
3. As long as you long for fellowship with God's people and thirst for instruction from God's Word to obey it.

We may be weak, feeble, anemic, unsteady, and unstable; yet that does not mean we are dead.

We may feel powerless and depressed over our failures; but if we long to be faithful, victorious,

and fruitful without making excuses, we are not dead.

On the other hand, we **are** *spiritually dead*:

1. If we are constantly in opposition to the will of God and maintain a rebellious attitude.
2. If we usually and habitually resent God talking to us and correcting us.
3. If we sin without giving a care as to how it hurts God or the church.
4. If we constantly make our feelings and desires the most important thing in life. If our *ego* becomes top priority, if *self* is No. 1 in our life, then God is demoted and excluded; we are spiritually dead.

The Bible has much more to say about the need to get up and get going, continue and persevere, grow and mature, advance and don't turn back, than it even hints at starting all over again. If you lack spiritual life, by all means start over anew by being reborn again. But if you have retained a spark of spiritual life, then you should fan the flame by every means of grace available that you might glow and burn for God. You seasoned saints should nurture the weak and the newborn. Constantly encourage one another so that both of you may grow, mature, and become fruitful for the Lord.

You must view the Christian life as a lifelong continuum—a never-ending process of growing and maturing. It is not a life of starts and stops, but of gradual growth. Not of arriving at total perfection, but a growing toward maturity and spiritual adulthood. Christian growth is not always symmetrical, regular, or consonant. You will have times of slow growth and times when it appears growth is at a standstill. Fluctuation is normal as well as healthy. Hang in there by being faithful and prayerful. God will eventually bring you to maturity and fruitfulness as long as you make that your goal.

PM

How many times has faith been destroyed from the pulpit, and seekers were asked to start all over again?

Church of the Solid Rock

Last week I talked to a friend of mine who lives in southern California, where so many homes have been ravaged by fires. Thankfully, the flames had stopped two miles from his home.

My friend, however, went on to mention another danger. The fall rains were starting, and the hills, now denuded of vegetation, were threatened by mud slides—mud slides that can take entire hillsides with them, destroying everything in the way.

Today's church faces a similar danger. We are in danger of slipping from our spiritual foundation, of being washed away by our pagan environment.

It's not that we are lazy. We're busy with many things, important things. But while we are working so hard, I hear little about truth. In fact, *doctrine* is almost a bad word today.

Yet doctrine is what forms the foundation of our faith. It is the reason for all that we do, whether in the arena of politics, parenting, finances, or other activities. Some people think of doctrine as irrelevant and divisive. But those perceptions simply show that we have not presented doctrine in its full context.

Our commitment to marriage and family, for instance, grows out of the doctrine of Christ and His Church. Once we understand that truth, then we can understand what the apostle Paul is calling us to do in Eph. 5. And we obey, not merely because it

Doctrine is not an entity in itself, but the revelation of the God who is true.

BY JOSEPH M.

STOWELL

President, Moody Bible Institute

CHICAGO

works best, but because we are committed to the truth. We go beyond pragmatics to principle, grounding our behavior in biblical absolutes.

Just thinking about absolutes makes some of us cringe. The relativism and pluralism of our day have made such claims intellectually unfashionable. But if there is a God who is true, then there is truth. And whatever is not truth is error. We need to frame doctrine, not as an entity in itself, but as the revelation of this God who is true.

We also need to affirm the relevance of doctrinal truth. For every major doctrine there are attending values. For instance, the doctrine of the Incarnation, properly understood, leads to servanthood (Phil. 2:5-8).

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us the value and process of unity. Jesus used His unity with the Father as an example for believers (John 17:20-23).

The doctrine of redemption compels us to moral righteousness (1 Cor. 6:18-20). The doctrine of the return of Christ purifies our motives and behavior (1 John 3:2-3).

If we devalue doctrine, we lose our stability for the cause of Christ. We become vulnerable to spiritual mud slides.

Foundations are everything. Whether in buildings or in building relationships or building families, the foundation is what secures us when the storm clouds gather. And God's truth is the foundation of the Church.

I can hear some people saying "The problem with doctrine is that it's so divisive." That's not the problem with doctrine. That's the problem with how we have handled doctrine, the way we have elevated lesser beliefs to the level of fundamentals.

Within the Body of Christ, there will always be differences of opinion. This is part of our diversity. While we should never throw away our distinctiveness, we need to have enough mutual respect to realize that on these issues, good and godly people can differ.

The only legitimate dividing work of doctrine is to separate fundamental truth from error. That is a divisive element we desperately need in our culture. Heb. 5:14 describes spiritually mature believers as those who "have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Good doctrine, well understood and well applied, helps us to differentiate truth from error.

A pastor friend and I were discussing this issue recently. The worst danger, we concluded, is not for those of us who have witnessed the demise of doctrine. It is for the next generation, for those who have seen the practices but never really understood the principles.

As my California friend described the danger of mud slides, my mind raced to the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24-29), where Christ spoke of two kinds of people, one wise and one foolish. The wise man, in obedience to the truth of God's Word, built his life on the solid rock of Christ's teachings. The foolish man also built a house, but without a solid foundation. Only one house stood when the rains came.

We need a Church that is rock solid, whose feet are firmly, non-negotiably, uncompromisingly planted on the truth, on the doctrines that undergird the practice and enjoyment of our faith. **PM**

How to Hire Staff Members Without Getting an Infection

Keeping Inherited Staff Members

When I arrived as the new senior pastor of Colorado Springs First Church of the Nazarene, my first major decision was whether or not to retain the pastoral staff that had graciously and successfully led the church through the transition of senior pastors. They had served effectively alongside my predecessor during which the church had experienced unprecedented growth.

According to our denominational polity, it was up to me to decide to keep or release some or all of the pastoral staff. As I reviewed the success of the pastoral team who had worked so effectively with the previous senior pastor, I became convinced they were successful before and without me. I believed that my major responsibility would be to plug in to what was already successful, retain all pastoral staff members, and agree to work together for the first year, after which we would evaluate our effectiveness as a team. Any potential changes would be made at that time.

It was the best decision I could have made! The success of our teaming together in ministry was

immediate. They were happy to be able to continue with their ministry at our church, the congregation was pleased with the decision, and I was blessed by the momentum the staff had already built and by the experience they had already gained. We enjoyed an immediate acceptance of each other that resulted in a unity bonding us together in a growing ministry.

Now, two years later, we have enthusiastically witnessed our congregation grow by nearly 20 percent. These are some of the greatest days in the history of our 85-year-old church!

As we celebrate the wonderful victories of these early days, I am now faced with the unenviable task of recruiting and hiring several new staff members. One pastor has decided upon retirement, another resigned to give attention to family needs, and our significant growth has demanded we expand by adding a new staff position. I now need to fill three staff positions in a short period of time. This has caused me to ask how I can recruit staff members and maintain the integrity of the process, allow God to direct the decision-making process, and keep my friends from whose churches future staff members may come.

BY GENE GRATE
Pastor
COLORADO SPRINGS

I was unable to find any sources that provided answers to my concerns. I certainly wanted God to be in the center of the process. I didn't want to feel like a "raider" secretly recruiting a staff member from a colleague's staff team. I didn't want to alienate friendships or bring harm to another church while trying to help mine. I didn't want to create any animosity toward me, or the pastoral team, or the church I serve.

Trying to find solutions to these concerns forced me to consider the method I would use in contacting and recruiting any future staff members. After much reflection and prayer, I developed a plan that, I believe, maintains the personal sensitivity and spiritual integrity of this process. It provides many benefits. I have yet to discover its flaws. I hope it helps others who find themselves trying to find answers to the same concerns I felt.

Hiring New Staff Members

Step One: Compiling a "Top 10" List

I begin the process of compiling a "Top 10" list of candidates for the position that is coming open. I arrive at my list in several ways. If the position is coming open voluntarily by a staff mem-

ber whom God is directing in another way, *I ask the departing staff member* whom he or she would like to see take his or her place and continue to build the work. This is helpful when a staff member wants to see the church continue to grow and succeed in ministry.

I also consult with other remaining staff members who may know friends or colleagues with whom they would like to work. By inviting their suggestions and comments, they feel included in the process of searching for and hiring a new team member.

Inevitably *I receive suggestions from members of the congregation* who are personally acquainted with someone's ministry they have admired. I gladly receive these names and add them to my growing list of candidates.

I am always amazed how quickly word moves across the country about open staff positions at growing churches. That means *I am generally contacted by others* who are interested in being considered for the position. I welcome these calls as well, believing one of them may be the person God has planned for our church and pastoral team.

Networking with other pastors and leaders across the country has proven to be very helpful in compiling a "Top 10" candidate list. I never fail to learn of persons who are effective in their ministry whom I did not know before. Such references are invaluable in this first phase of looking for new staff members.

It is my policy not to consider a staff member who has been in his or her present assignment less than two or three years, unless the prospective staff member and the senior pastor both concur that the staff relationship is not working, and both agree that a conclusion to his or her ministry in that local church would be healthy and timely. If those conditions are satisfied, then I would feel free to consider someone in that position.

How can I recruit staff members and maintain the integrity of the process?

Step Two: Praying and Prioritizing

After building a strong list of potential candidates, *I begin to pray over the list and ask God for wisdom and discernment* as I determine whom I should contact first. This invites God into the process of the search. Sometimes I find that the person I feel led to contact initially is not the person who will ultimately accept the position, but that first contact will offer another name I did not have before. This widens my network of contacts and references as the process continues.

I also find that being invited to be considered for a position at our church comes as an encouragement to others, some of whom needed such a call. Praying about a position at our church can solidify their call at their present assignment and strengthen their commitment to remain where they are.

Step Three: The Initial Call

My initial telephone call is to the candidate I would like to consider for the position that is open. I do this for a reason. I personally feel that every senior pastor and every staff pastor is responsible to the Lord for their calling and place of service. Although they work with and are accountable to their senior pastor, I don't believe a senior pastor should "play God" in a staff member's life. For example, a number of years ago I was contacted by a senior pastor of a church much larger than the one I was serving at the time, who asked permission to contact and recruit my youth pastor. Although I did not want my youth pastor to leave and felt he was still very effective in our church, I granted permission for my colleague to contact him and potentially offer him a position at his church. I did so because I do not feel I can "be God" in their lives. What if it were God's will for him to take another assignment and to send us another youth pastor, and I interfered with the

process? I ultimately believe each staff member must answer to God for his or her place of service.

Therefore, my first call goes to the candidate. I identify myself and our church and share with him or her the position that is open. *I clearly state in my opening comments that I am not calling to create any dissatisfaction* with that person's present assignment, but just to ask if he or she would like to pray about being considered for the open position at our church, and if that one would like to know about our church and the ministry for which the contact is being made.

If the answer is no, the process stops there. I never arm-twist anyone into allowing the process to continue. Again, I believe God should be the One to create an interest and desire in the heart.

If the answer is yes, then I ask the person to pray about our need for a few days, after which I will call again. If he or she still feels interested in our position and is not checked in spirit, then I continue with the next step.

Step Four: Including the Senior Pastor

When a candidate wants to pursue our interest in him or her, *I first give the person the opportunity to talk with his or her senior pastor*. If the candidate prefers me to contact the senior pastor, I am willing to do so. In fact, even if the candidate wants to be the one to first share our conversation with the senior pastor, I add that I may also talk with that pastor. Several good things come from this approach.

First, it keeps everything aboveboard and eliminates the "raider" concept, where I am "raiding" the other pastor's staff without that one's knowledge or consent. I know I am not sneaking up on another senior pastor's staff member without his or her knowledge. This openness keeps integrity in the process.

Second, it opens communication between the staff member

and his or her senior pastor. This allows that senior pastor to share his or her heart and vision with the staff member and ask that one to stay. I can see only good coming from such open communication. It allows the staff member to share what God may be saying to his or her heart. It can bring them together in prayer for God's will in the decision that must be made.

Third, when I contact the senior pastor, it allows that one to express concerns, such as: "Gene, this staff member has been here less than two years, and I feel that losing this person right now would injure our church and be a major setback to our ministry. Is there someone else you would consider at this time?"

This gives me information I may not have had and allows me to graciously respect his request. I don't believe God would harm one church to help another.

However, if the senior pastor says, "Yes, PLEASE talk to that person. I think God is calling him or her to your church," then I may immediately sense a real concern, a red flag. If the senior pastor is too anxious to see a staff member go, then I may not be so anxious to have him or her come!

Step Five: The Interview

Once communication has been clearly established between the candidate, his or her senior pastor, and me, I feel clear to set up an interview. Everyone knows what is happening. Everyone is

praying. Everyone can feel that God is in the process. I can look my colleague in the eye, knowing that we have communicated and are both seeking God's will in the decision.

Unfortunately, the interview process is like dating—both parties are on their best behavior. The candidate wants to be seen in the best light. The interviewing church and senior pastor present their need in the best light. Therefore, I try to achieve several things in an interview.

First, I require that the candidate bring his or her spouse for the interview. I try to accomplish the interview over a couple of days, allowing me more time to evaluate skills, attitudes, family priorities, and how this person might fit into our pastoral team.

Second, I arrange a time for the candidate and spouse to meet with our pastoral and support team. Sometimes others will see something I may miss and bring a concern to my attention. Although the recommendation for the church board to hire will be mine, I have confidence in others around me and value their concerns or endorsement or both of the candidate.

Third, I make certain that my wife is included in social occasions with the candidate couple. I trust her responses, some of which may be intuitive. I have come to appreciate and respect the feelings and impressions she senses when being with others. God has given her to me as a helpmate for life and ministry. I value her

insights in this process. She is as interested in the success of our church's ministry as am I. Her input is important to me.

Fourth, I want our church board to meet and support the decision to hire someone I recommend to them to join our ministry team. Their opinion of a candidate will help shape mine. They will be working with this individual and must have confidence in any incoming pastor's skills and ability to lead a ministry area. Their enthusiastic support will help the congregation accept our new staff pastor with open arms and provide the encouragement necessary for a successful beginning of ministry in the newly filled position.

In Conclusion . . .

Searching for and hiring the staff member God has planned for a church can be a long and time-consuming thing. However, I believe it can be a win/win situation when—

- God is allowed to work.
- There is open communication between a departing staff member and the senior pastor.
- There is complete communication between senior pastors.

This process works for me. I hope it helps others who find themselves in the position I am—looking for the right person to fill a staff position. There is a great feeling of accomplishment when the process is completed and you still have your friends! **PM**

Allow God to direct the decision-making process.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



A Penny for Your Thoughts . . . No, Make That \$1.95 per Minute

Now that the Supreme Court has lowered the gavel on "Dial-a-Porn" 900-number telephone services, all those vacant phone lines will be available for other, more productive uses. Like preaching.

The pope got things off to a rousing start with his new service, 1-900-740-POPE. Call that number, and you'll hear, in English, a tape of Pope John Paul II's daily message, as provided by Vatican Radio.

Each daily message will last about two minutes, and callers will be charged \$1.95 per minute. I suppose if the Vatican gets in a financial pinch, they can get the pope to tell a really good joke that runs about 10 minutes, which would provide about \$15.00 extra per caller; after all, who's going to hang up on the pope?

The company promoting the service projects that about 1 percent of the nation's Roman Catholics might call the service weekly, which would produce more than \$2 million a week, with the Vatican's cut amounting to \$600,000-700,000 of that, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Surely the entrepreneurial spirits of preachers everywhere are already envisioning Evangelical and mainline Protestant spin-offs.

The potential for TV evangelists is obvious. Instead of asking viewers to call a toll-free number

or write in (then wait weeks for a donation), just flash that 900 number on the screen ("Yes, folks, just call 1-900-EVANGEL for a personal message from Brother Billy Bob. You'll be charged just \$19.95 a minute for this inspiring five-minute message for today.") The direct mail folks could be out of business in a flash.

This isn't limited to TV preachers, though. Why, every local congregation could install its own 900-number service. Think of the money . . . uh, I mean, the ministry possibilities!

Use your church bulletin and flyers in the Sunday School rooms to promote "Pastor Bill's Dial-a-Sermon." Dig into those old sermon files and start recording; better yet, pull out those old sermon tapes that have been collecting dust in the bottom left drawer of your desk—you'll soon be in business, ministering to shut-ins, church dropouts, or those who were tied up at the beach or lake last Sunday and couldn't make it to your live sermon.

Not only is it a great new source of funds for mission projects, building campaigns, or the pastoral retirement fund, your personal 900-number also gives you new credibility in the community as a "media personality." (It's just the thing to help you rank right up there in the public eye with Oprah and Geraldo.)

The only problem I foresee is the limited number of clever number titles available; 1-900-I-

PREACH is such an obvious one that it's probably already gone. There are other possibilities—such as 1-900-PRECHER (for communities where literacy is not a priority); 1-900-HEL-FIRE or 1-900-LIBERAL (if you want to alert potential callers to your theological leanings before they call); 1-900-BAPTIST (if you have a particularly strong denominational appeal; alternates could include 1-900-4-WESLEY; 4-LUTHER; or 4-CALVIN, depending on your tradition).

Then there's the "lure the sinners in" strategy, in which you purchase the number already used by one of the dial-a-porn services that is going out of business. That way you take over an established clientele that definitely needs to hear your message.

Maybe the greatest benefit of all is that when your most annoying members call to speak to you, your secretary can say—in all honesty—"I'm afraid the preacher can't speak to you right now; he's on the telephone."

Need more ideas about setting up your own dial-a-sermon service? Feel free to call me at 1-900-4-MONEY—just \$49.95 per minute; average call length is as long as I can keep you on the phone for \$49.95 a minute. It's a great way to contribute to the Editor's Retirement Fund. **PM**

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BY MICHAEL DUDUIT
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The Atheistic Worldview of Sigmund Freud

and its influence on his clinical observations

The scientific contributions of Sigmund Freud, ranked by some historians with those of Planck and Einstein, include the most developed theory of the mind available and continue to form the basis of most dynamic psychotherapies.

Along with these scientific contributions Freud proffered a worldview he called "the scientific weltanschauung." In 1933, in Lecture 35 of his *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud asked the question as to whether psychoanalysis leads to a particular worldview. He defines a worldview or a weltanschauung as an intellectual construction that solves all of the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis. He then says that psychoanalysis is not a worldview—but we know that it has been a worldview for Freud and for many in psychiatry who accept his philosophy of life along with his scientific contributions. The scientific worldview, he says, holds that no source of knowledge of the universe exists other than "carefully scrutinized observations"—that is, "what we call research." Therefore, no knowledge can be derived from revelation or from intuition.

Freud then states that religion

is the only real enemy of the scientific worldview and begins, piece by piece, to dismantle the religious worldview. He uses arguments from many of his previous works to show that religion is a product of both the childhood of the individual and the childhood of the human race, that is or primitive peoples. He states the notion that the universe was created by a being "resembling a man, but magnified in every respect . . . an idealized superman . . . reflects the gross ignorance of primitive peoples."

This notion also reflects the individual's psychological tendency to seek God as a projection of the childish need for an all-powerful father to protect from the harsh realities of life.

Freud goes on to attack miracles as contradicting all that we've been taught by "sober ob-

servation." And then in that same paper he concludes that "religion is an attempt to master the sensory world in which we are situated by means of the wishful world which we have developed within us as a result of biological and psychological necessities. Religious doctrines bear the imprint of the ignorant times of the childhood of humanity."

Freud's Worldview

Freud's formal religious and philosophical works begin with

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Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices (1907) and end over 30 years later with his *Moses and Monotheism*, published posthumously. In these we find that Freud proffers, along with his scientific contributions, a materialistic and atheistic worldview.

Freud speaks freely of his atheism. He refers to himself often as a "godless Jew." For example, in a letter to Oscar Pfister in 1918, he asks, "Quite by the way, why did none of the devout create psychoanalysis? Why did one have to wait for a completely godless Jew?" And 10 years later in a letter to an American physician he referred to himself as "an infidel Jew."

I have often wondered why Freud called himself an atheist and not an agnostic. Because it's impossible to prove a negative, the position of atheism is logically unsound. Certainly no thinking person today would dogmatically deny the existence of God.

During one of several visits I made to Hampstead, England, to visit Anna Freud, I asked her why her father professed atheism rather than agnosticism. She answered by asking what the real difference was—and then explained that he really believed religion was childishness and hoped that people would outgrow it. I asked about Einstein, whom Freud knew and respected and who believed in a Creator. She answered by saying, "Yes, he did believe in God. But Einstein was also really very childlike."

During the 19th century an open conflict existed between religion and science, and a number of scientists and philosophers declared themselves to be atheists. That may explain Freud's comfort with it.

Why speak about Freud's atheism? Who really cares? What difference does it make? A number of reasons exist to understand Freud's lifelong attack on the religious worldview—especially those of us in the field who em-

brace that view. In the 17th century, men turned to the discoveries of astronomy to demonstrate what they considered irreconcilable conflict between science and faith. In the 18th century, they used Newtonian physics. In the 19th century, they relied on biology and Darwin. And in the 20th century, skeptics have looked to Freud. Many scholars refer to the 20th century as the century of Freud.

Modern scientific man tends to view faith as a psychological crutch, useful and perhaps even necessary for the uneducated masses but out of the question as a viable *modus operandi*. One often hears among students and professors in our colleges and universities the notion that Freud proved that God is nothing but a figment of man's mind. In addition, scholars have held the writings of Freud responsible in part for the change in our culture from one whose values were primarily moral and spiritual to one whose values are primarily material and secular.

Psychiatry continues to be associated with an antireligious worldview. All of us, therefore, pay a price for this. When well-known psychiatrists appear on the front pages of newspapers for losing their medical licenses because of charges of having sex with their patients—as happened in Boston at least a half a dozen times this year—people feel convinced that psychiatrists lack moral and spiritual constraints. Our field continues to be considered by many as hostile to religious faith.

Influences on Freud

What influenced Freud to assume his militant atheistic stance? We might consider both external and internal influences.

One external influence involves the cultural climate of the 19th century—a time when open warfare existed between science and religion. Freud spent the first half of his life in the last half of the 19th century. European

culture at that time seethed with feelings of anticlericalism and contempt for all religious faiths. Many popular texts focused on these antireligious feelings.¹ T. H. Huxley saw the battle being waged as between "free thought and traditional authority."

A great deal of the antireligious feelings stemmed from the reaction against the political powers assumed by the Roman Catholic Church. Most of the scientists clustered in one camp, and many of those admired by Freud embraced a kind of scientific positivism—the conviction that no truth existed outside of that derived from the laboratory. Many embraced atheism enthusiastically. This was the age of Huxley, Darwin, Marx, and Engels. Freud, who desperately wanted his new psychology to be accepted as science, had a vested interest in siding clearly with the scientists.

Another external influence on Freud was the writings of Ludwig Feuerbach. No individual influenced Freud more in the establishment of his atheism than this German philosopher. Feuerbach was a theologian who studied under Hegel, then went into the natural sciences and became an atheistic philosopher. In his best-known work, *The Essence of Christianity*, he describes God as a projection of man's needs. He wrote that the natural sciences had long ago "dissolved the Christian worldview in nitric acid."

Although Feuerbach claimed *not* to be an atheist, he wrote with great persuasion. According to Yale historian Peter Gay, he seduced more young readers away from religion than anyone else in his time. His writings formed the basis of the atheism not only of Marx and Engels but also of the young Freud. As a university student, Freud wrote a friend that "among all philosophers, I *worship* and *admire* [Feuerbach] the most."

Freud appears to have lifted his ideas about God from Feuer-

What determined Freud's atheistic philosophy of life, and how did that philosophy influence his clinical observations?

bach in toto. Feuerbach wrote that God is a projection of man's inner needs and wishes and is therefore an illusion. As so often happens, when Freud plagiarizes ideas from others, he forgets to give Feuerbach credit for these ideas.

The Problem of Theodicy

Among the inner determinants of Freud's atheism, I think the most significant involves his difficulty reconciling human suffering with a beneficent, omnipotent Creator. This problem, not uncommon among Jewish intellectuals, is most clearly formulated in C. S. Lewis's *Problem of Pain*. In that book Lewis writes, "If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, he would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness or power or both." This, Lewis says, is the problem of pain in its simplest form. When he was an atheist and people asked him why he didn't believe in God, Lewis would give the problem of suffering as the reason. How do we know this problem bothered Freud? Because he writes about it over and over again.

In a letter to Pfister in 1928, for the first time in any letter that I have ever read by him, Freud becomes quite angry and quite discourteous. He writes, "And finally—let me be impolite for once—how the devil do you reconcile all that we experience and have come to expect in this world with your assumption of a moral world order?"

And then in the 1933 lecture called *A Weltanschauung*, he says:

It seems not to be the case that there is a Power in the universe which watches over the well being of individuals with parental care and brings all their affairs to a happy ending. On the contrary the destinies of mankind can be brought into harmony neither

with the hypothesis of a Universal Benevolence nor with the partly contradictory one of a Universal Justice. Earthquakes, tidal waves, conflagrations make no distinction between the virtuous and pious and the scoundrel or unbeliever. Even where what is in question is not inanimate Nature but where an individual's fate depends on his relationships to other people, it is by no means the rule that virtue is rewarded and that evil finds its punishment. Often enough the violent, cunning or ruthless man seizes the envied good things of the world and the pious man goes away empty. Obscure, unfeeling, and unloving powers determine man's fate. The system of rewards and punishments which religion ascribes to the government of the universe seems not to exist.

Of course Freud seemed to be unaware that, in the Christian worldview, "the government of the universe" is temporarily in enemy hands.

A few summers ago before Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, died, I asked her about her father's difficulty with the problem of suffering. She expressed great curiosity about it. She asked if there is a God who sits there in heaven and decides who will get cancer and what specific adversity will affect each individual. I expressed to her the notion that the theologians such as Pfister would describe the presence of an evil power in the universe that might account for some of the suffering. She seemed unusually interested in this notion and came back to it several times during our discussion.

We must also remember that Freud suffered considerably: emotionally, as a Jew growing up in an intensely Catholic society; and physically, with an intractable cancer of the palate that required an endless number of operations. So the problem of suffering is another of the inter-

esting determinants of Freud's atheism.

Freud's Own Conflicts with His Father

The primary *unconscious* determinant of Freud's atheism is, I think, his intense unresolved ambivalence toward his father, Jacob Freud. His relationship with his father is a most unusual and complicated one. This unresolved ambivalence forms the basis for Freud's hostile, persistent, emotionally charged attack on religion—Judaism as well as Christianity. It also provides the basis of his scientific contributions as well. His oedipal theory, as we know, forms the core of all his scientific contributions.

Freud's father, Jacob, was already a grandfather from a previous marriage when he married Freud's mother, then a teenager. Thus Freud was closer to his mother's age than was his father, and was an uncle as soon as he was born. Freud's father died when Freud was about 40 years old. At about that time Freud, through his own analysis, discovered within himself the passion for his young mother and the love and hatred for his father. On these feelings he based his Oedipus complex—what Jones calls "the greatest of all his original discoveries."

The evidence that this ambivalence was unresolved is, I think, overwhelming. Freud never had intercourse with his wife after his father's death. He also wrote that the death of his father was the most significant event in his life.

He certainly associated his father with religion. Jacob Freud was educated as an Orthodox Jew and gave Freud a Bible for his 35th birthday with this inscription in Hebrew:

My dear son, It was in the seventh year of your age that the spirit of God began to move you to learning. I would say the spirit of God speaketh to you: "Read in my book; there will be opened to you

Freud speaks freely of his atheism. He refers to himself often as a "godless Jew."

the sources of knowledge of the intellect." It is the book of books; it is the well that wise men have digged and from which lawgivers have drawn the waters of their knowledge.

Thou hast seen in this book the vision of the Almighty, thou has heard willingly, that hast done and hast tried to fly high up on the wings of the Holy Spirit. Since then I have preserved the same Bible. Now, on your 35th birthday, I have brought it out from its retirement, and I sent it to you as a token of love from your old father.

Freud speaks often of the intense negative feelings he harbored toward his father. His father suffered financial reverses and, with seven children, had difficulty supporting Freud through his medical education. Freud saw his father as a failure. As a little boy, he had been bitterly disappointed when his father refused to defend himself after being called a "Jew" by some anti-Semitic bullies and being pushed off the sidewalk.

The evidence is quite clear that this unresolved ambivalence influenced Freud's attitude toward all authority, certainly toward the ultimate Authority. We know that Freud had difficulty with authority—once stating that he got along well with men who worked under him but never with those who worked over him. This intense, unresolved ambivalence toward authority certainly influenced his attitude toward God.

The Question of Freud's Objectivity

Now the question arises whether Freud's atheism—his antireligious worldview—influenced his clinical observations. Is it possible that one's worldview, one's philosophy of life, can actually color what one sees in the clinic or in the laboratory?

Many scholars in the history of science would answer that question with a resounding yes.

His father suffered financial reverses and, with seven children, had difficulty supporting Freud through his medical education.

Some like Thomas Kuhn² have argued that the scientific process is less than an objective, critical, empirical investigation of the facts. They claim the work of the scientist is greatly influenced by his culture, by his social and psychological environment, or by what Kuhn calls the "paradigm"—the preferred or prevailing theories, methods, and studies of that particular discipline.

But above all a scientist's worldview—his specific beliefs about "the order of nature"—affects objectivity. Kuhn writes that two scientists with different views of the "order of nature see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. They see different things and they see them in different relations to each other." And we might add that they tend to see and to accept those data that conform to or make sense in light of their worldview. So evidence exists that the worldview of the scientist and the presuppositions that view implies may influence not only the problems the scientist chooses to investigate but also what he actually observes and fails to observe.

Freud noticed from work with neurotic patients that unconscious attitudes toward authority figures (one's parents and especially one's father) may have a marked influence on one's conscious attitudes toward God. Freud writes:

Let's imagine to ourselves the mental life of a small child—the mother who satisfies hunger becomes the first love object and certainly the first protection against the undefined and threatening dangers of the outer world; in this function the mother is soon replaced by the stronger father and this situation persists from now on over the whole of childhood. But the relation of the father is affected by a peculiar ambivalence. He was a danger perhaps just because of that earlier relation to the mother; so he is feared no less

than he is longed for and admired.

Freud noticed that this yearning for an all-powerful father formed the basis of his patients' attitude toward God. God was a projection of inner conflicts—a way of dealing with oedipal guilt and with feelings of helplessness. He noticed that when the authority of the father declined, the faith of these patients vanished.

Faith and Neurotic Needs

Freud's observations can be verified clinically. Many who profess a faith have a neurotic conflict as the sole basis of that faith. Their religious life has all the manifestations of what we consider psychopathology. Modern analytic psychiatry considers behavior pathological by the degree to which unconscious factors control it. Of course, the unconscious influences all behavior, but if it dominates it, that behavior manifests certain characteristics. Some of these characteristics are rigidity, or stereotyped, repetitive, unalterable, and insatiable patterns, or the inability to learn through experience or to be influenced by reason.

Neurotic behavior tends to bring about what the person consciously wants most to avoid. Thus, we find people with problems of low esteem who use their faith only as a means of coping with their feelings of worthlessness. They consider others who fail to share their view as not only wrong but also bad and inferior.

Some people tend to use their faith solely to control hostile impulses—toward parents or toward specific minority groups, or to avoid close relationships. Others seek to resolve pathological guilt. As a rule, neurotically determined faith is used defensively, while healthy faith is adaptive.

Two points need to be made about those who base their religious convictions solely on neurotic need:

1. The behavior of these people is grossly inconsistent with

what they profess. Perhaps we have here a psychological explanation for the many brutal acts throughout history performed in the name of God, or those TV evangelists whose lives reflect the opposite of what they profess.

2. When the neurotic conflict has been resolved—in therapy or by other means—their faith disappears.

Freud accurately observed the unconscious determinants of the faith of some of his neurotic patients. But his own conflicts over these issues led him to draw several erroneous conclusions.

First, because of the element of the wish fulfillment to be observed, he concluded God is an illusion, nothing but a projection of psychological conflicts. One does not have to think deeply to realize that whether or not one wishes for an object has no bearing on whether or not the object exists. The fact that most discoveries in medicine were wished for long before they were discovered has no bearing on their validity.

Second, Freud refused to explore what he himself called “the deeper qualities” of faith, faith *not* neurotically determined or faith that brought positive transformation into men’s lives. He insisted on exploring only what he called “the common man’s religion,” which, as even the most theologically unsophisticated realizes, grossly distorts New Testament faith. And he explored this only in neurotics.

Third, he generalized from these few neurotic believers to all religious faith—even though he knew men such as Pfister, whom he admired immensely, whose faith was anything but neurotic. Pfister tried in vain to explain to Freud the difference between healthy and neurotic forms of faith.

Fourth, Freud failed to realize that his conclusion that all men wished for an omnipotent father contradicted the most important of his scientific discoveries. He failed to realize that the negative part of ambivalent oedipal feel-

ings may lead to neurotic antireligious convictions. Our knowledge of the oedipal complex leads us to expect that the unconscious wish that the all-powerful father not exist would be as strong, if not stronger, than the wish that he did exist. And clinical evidence bears this out.

Faith Can Be Healthy

For every professing believer whose belief rests solely on neurotic need, clinical observation reveals many whose *unbelief* rests on neurotic determinants. Their attitude toward God and everything religious manifests all of the characteristics of neurotic behavior—they are closed minded, inflexible, not influenced by appeal to reason or emotion.

One observes, especially among both students and faculty in a university setting, bitter hostility toward anything religious. On exploration one finds this hostility parallels feelings toward authority, especially one’s father. Case histories, such as the personal experience of a colleague, bear this out. This man, whose work has gained international

reputation and whose mind is highly regarded at Harvard, said that the most devastating experience of his life occurred during his analysis. It was then he discovered that this atheism, always considered by him to be carefully thought through, was entirely neurotically determined. His strong antireligious position was but a reaction to his dependence on a strong, devout widowed mother, living in the Midwest and constantly praying for him.

Psychoanalytic insights give us understanding of man but tell us nothing of God. Neurotic conflict, as Freud’s *work* has demonstrated, may form the basis of religious conviction—or, as Freud’s *life* has demonstrated, may form the basis of antireligious conviction. **PM**

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1. John Draper’s *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, Andrew White’s *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, et al.

2. In his widely quoted *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

We find people with problems of low esteem who use their faith only as a means of coping with their feelings of worthlessness.



“We’re operating on a tight budget, but the usher informs me that today’s collection will see us through to the end of this service.”

The Message They Receive May Surprise You

Pastor, do you spend hours working on the exact wording of your sermon? Do you pride yourself in finding just the right word to express your thought with flair? You may be surprised to learn that the message your congregation receives is dramatically different from the one you are spending so much time writing.

A study by the University of California found that the message people receive from speakers is not predominately based on content or word choice.¹ First, some 55 percent of the message people receive comes from what they see. Things like appearance, gestures, movement, and visual aids account for the majority of a speaker's communication.

Second, 38 percent of what is communicated comes from the sounds people hear. Things like tone, emphasis, inflection, variety in delivery, and energy account for a significant percentage of what people receive from a speaker.

Surprisingly, only 7 percent of what is communicated, even by the most gifted speakers, is content oriented. The words themselves, while important, pale in comparison to what people see and the sounds people hear.

The import of this study for

pastors is immediately apparent. To improve communication from the pulpit, pastors will need to shift the emphasis of their preparation from words to sights and sounds.

Improving What People See

The sermon event must become more than spoon-feeding painstakingly crafted words into passive ears of the audience. One poll found that 87 percent of churchgoers admit that their minds wander during the sermon.² A pastor glued behind a pulpit, passing down his oration, is a less than effective way of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How can sermons be made more visual? Fortunately, several things can be done to improve the visual communication that accounts for 55 percent of the message our listeners receive. Here are some suggestions:

- **Be animated.** Give your audience something to look at. Did you ever notice how newscasters constantly move their heads as they read the news? An expressionless, motionless speaker makes it more difficult to listen. Expressive eyes, eyebrows, and facial expressions help communicate

your important message. Be animated as you give your sermon.

- **Gesture.** Appropriate gestures always make a presentation more effective. Some speakers are so wilted and wooden that they could be mistaken for department store manikins. The type and extent of gestures will be dictated by the content, size, and intimacy of the congregation, and special concerns as related to television broadcasting.
- **Move.** In recent years, pastors have been increasingly unchained from the pulpit. With the advent of wireless microphones, pastors are free to move about. Movement can aid communication or can be an unnecessary distraction. Moving out from behind the pulpit may signal an illustration. Movement can be used to differentiate specific points of the sermon. Motion can help differentiate characters as a biblical narrative unfolds. Appropriate use of motion creates interest, provides visual variety, and augments the message.
- **Use visual aids.** Children's sermons are fre-

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quently some of the most listened-to messages of the worship service. One reason for their popularity relates to the use of visual aids. A message will be more memorable if illustrated visually. Dramas, sermons delivered in biblical costume, video clips, banners, or signs are only a few ways a pastor can employ visual aids to more effectively communicate the message.

Remember, what people see provides 55 percent of the message they receive. Pastors wishing to communicate more effectively must begin to think visually.

Improving What People Hear

The University of California study found that what people hear is responsible for nearly two-fifths of the message that they receive. Imagine the effectiveness of a pastor with a monotone, inflectionless, energy-draining sermon. Some congregations deserve medals for their endurance! There are ways to improve what people hear on Sundays.

- **Work on variety.** Many pastors develop a cadence and rhythm in their sermons that is unaltered regardless of what they are trying to communicate. Vocal variety is a worthy goal. Let the inflection, volume, tone, and energy fit the material to be conveyed.
- **Get rid of that preacher voice.** Some pastors use a "preacher" tone that is distinct from their usual voices. Some pattern their delivery after popular preachers. Others use their preacher tone of voice even when giving an illustration or personal story. Naturalness and appropriateness in sermon delivery provide better results.
- **Don't forget the energy level.** Some of us pastors would be helped with an

occasional jolt from a cattle prod. Perhaps some pulpits should be hooked up to a source of electricity so that the pastor's spouse or some other responsible party could administer a charge to get a fading speaker fired up! Energy is contagious. A pastor who is enthusiastic about the message will inspire enthusiasm and interest on the part of the listener. If you can't be energized about your message, don't expect your congregation to do so either.

Word Orientation

For most pastors, sermon preparation is a word-oriented activity. Many hours are spent in word selection. For some pastors, the goal is a tightly written, cleverly crafted oration that will tickle the ears of an attentive audience. This preoccupation with literary content to the exclusion of visual and aural aspects of the sermon yields messages that are not as effective as they could be. It comes as no surprise that a re-

cent poll found that only 12 percent, one in eight congregants, usually remembers a message.³

Good preparation is a must. Careful attention to memory-aiding devices such as alliteration is helpful. Nevertheless, a sermon must not be considered finished and ready to go until the dimensions of sight and sound described above are taken into account. The sermon event should be an experience of the senses. The more senses are stimulated by the message, the greater is the likelihood it will be remembered.

Pastor, are you sure the message you think you are communicating is the one that your congregation is receiving? Watch a videotape of your sermon and see. As you give greater attention to the factors of sight and sound described above, you'll see your preaching improve. **PM**

1. B. Boylan, *What's Your Point?* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 80.

2. Thom and Joani Schulz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing, 1993), 189.

3. *Ibid.*

The words
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hear.



"We must be willing to go forward."

Learning to Teach from the Master Teacher

Had the message made a difference? Would that 30 or 40 minutes of teaching be of long-term importance in the way the audience related to God? Would it affect anyone's mood, attitudes, or lifestyles? Had they learned anything, or would the material merely be stored in a suitable mental compartment from which it could be brought out for display at the appropriate moment? These questions beg for answers from every teacher and preacher after a presentation of God's Word.

Can one say that the teaching is "good" if there is little learning? And how significant is learning if it does not go beyond the retention of words spoken to influence one's character or lifestyle?

Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms lives—not our cleverness. Yet, as we think about how the Master taught, without reducing His divine communication to mere techniques, we can appreciate how He helped people to learn and to move beyond merely knowing mentally to assimilating and living out the knowledge.

There were times when *Jesus presented and discussed principles*, such as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7), in which He spoke about the proper attitude to the Law; the lifestyle appropriate to those who understand and follow God's law; the importance of responding to His words. During the Last Supper

(John 13—16) He spoke about the coming Comforter; about what to expect from those who hated Him; and about how they should relate to Him and to each other. Jesus discussed extensively the end times (Matt. 24) and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (chap. 23). Some of these didactic sessions were much more brief—perhaps only a few sentences in length. In addition to that, He encouraged the people to supplement His "lectures" with personal study of the Scriptures (John 5:39).

On other occasions Jesus *told stories*. In fact, especially when speaking to crowds, He spoke almost entirely pictorially, explaining the idea through the story rather than using the story to illustrate a point. Jesus captured their attention, bringing them face-to-face with an aspect of His message that would be far less effectively communicated through nonpictorial language. Often these stories (parables) presented one major point but, even though simple, carried profound theology. So, through the parables, He not only taught moral truths and rules for living but also taught about God's character, about His plan for humanity, and about the direction of history.

Who would ever forget the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) or fail to relate the forgiving father to our Heavenly Father? How could one bring home more effectively the meaning of being a true neighbor than through the

parable of the Good Samaritan (chap. 10)? So impressive were these stories that "good Samaritan" and "prodigal son" are a part of our everyday language.

Consider the awful finality of the gulf between heaven and hell as illustrated in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) or the importance of being ready for the Lord's return through the story of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25).

As well as parables, Jesus freely used comparisons and pictorial sayings (e.g., The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed" [Matt. 13:31]).

While Jesus was not averse to addressing a crowd or engaging in public debate when challenged by lawyers and religious leaders, *His main focus was a small group*—and not an overly auspicious one at that! Certainly not the sort of men one would readily identify as future leaders. Even out of those 12, He took aside 3 for special time alone with them, as at the Mount of Transfiguration or Garden of Gethsemane. If one might feel that so much wisdom was relatively wasted on so few, it should be noted that Jesus took time to teach one-on-one, talking to Nicodemus, possibly after the others had retired (John 3), or to the Samaritan woman at the well (chap. 4).

It is impressive to note how often *Jesus interacted with the listeners* so that they could never be simply noting information but were actively involved in coming to conclusions and in applications of principles.

Consider the to-and-fro conversations with Nicodemus, in which he is allowed to ask questions. With the woman at the well, Jesus, by a series of statements, encourages her to ask questions and draw conclusions. This takes much more time than blurring out all one has to say and feeling they've heard it all!

Jesus himself often asked questions: "What are the people saying about Me?" (see Matt.

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16:13); "Who was the real neighbor to the man on the Jericho road?" (see Luke 10:36, 30). When Jesus was questioned about His authority, He answered a question with a question, such as "Where did John the Baptist come from—from God?" (see Matt. 21:25). When He knew that in their hearts they were questioning His right to forgive sin, Jesus asked, "Which is harder, to heal or to forgive sins?" (see 9:5).

Even some of His didactic teaching was delivered in response to a question or a statement, such as questioning His healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 12) or asking why His disciples ate with unwashed hands (Mark 7). In the first situation, He responded with a discussion of the proper, nonlegalistic way to regard the Sabbath. In the second, He replied with an explanation of the nature of true spirituality. Jesus' extensive discussion about the last days followed the disciples' questions: "When will this [destruction of the Temple] happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). When Peter asked, "How many times shall I forgive my brother . . . ?" Jesus responded with the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21-35).

Jesus often used here-and-now situations and events as opportunities to make a point. Much of His teaching arose from personal encounters and daily life situations. The listeners did not have to dig into their memory to relate the point to some past experience or to think of how it could apply to some future situation.

What about the woman who broke her jar of valuable perfume to anoint Jesus (Matt. 26)? She ignored the protocol that would have kept her out of a roomful of men, daring to lavish her love on the Master. What a wonderful opportunity to speak about worship! Or the brief word to Peter about the unsuitability

of violence when he cut off Malchus's ear (John 18). Or Jesus' words on faith and prayer when the disciples failed to heal a sick boy (Matt. 17). Jesus proclaimed He is "the resurrection and the life" in the context of Lazarus's death and resurrection, and said that eternal life was available to all who believe (John 11:25). He taught about servanthood when Zebedee's wife asked for a privileged status for her sons (Matt. 20).

Sometimes Jesus performed an act to illustrate experientially what He was saying. It could be something simple, such as bringing a child into the middle of the group, and talking about the value God placed on children, and the importance of childlike faith; or asking for a coin when presented with the dilemma of to whom to give—God or Caesar.

It could be in the form of high drama, such as breaking the bread—"this is my body"—at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19). Again, at that supper, He put a towel around His waist, bent down, and washed His disciples' feet. Would they ever forget the meaning of being cleansed by Jesus or the importance of serving each other (John 13)?

When John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus, "Are you the one . . . ?" He did not delve into His genealogy or into the prophecies that pointed to Him. No. He "did" the answer, then said, "Go and tell John what you hear and see [what you have experienced]—the blind see, the lame walk . . ." (see Matt. 11:3-5).

In the case of the healing of the lame man let down through the roof, Jesus presented them with the question, "Which is more difficult, to heal the lame or to forgive sin?" (see Matt. 9:5). Then, "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . . [to the paralytic] Get up, take your mat and go home" (v. 6). In this "teaching session,"

as in others, Jesus used more than one method to drive home His message: a question, an action, a statement.

Jesus, simply being himself, taught more than could be learned from a philosophical discussion on His divinity. On the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17), Peter, James, and John saw and experienced Jesus' glory. Jesus expressed himself as the divine King of the universe as He demonstrated His supremacy over nature, over disease, and over the spirit world.

Not only did He teach by words and actions, but also **He gave His disciples assignments**—not merely bookwork, but practical work—whether in helping to feed the 5,000, participating in His miracles of compassion, or preparing for the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and for the Last Supper (Matt. 21; 26).

In Luke 9, Jesus sends His disciples out to preach, to heal, and to drive out demons—and gave His authority to them to do so. This was a highly responsible assignment, when we remember that their understanding of salvation and Christology was hardly complete! In other words, they did not just discuss or observe and discuss, but they also **did**.

Before His ascension, Jesus gave His last assignment—together with His authority: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples. . . . And surely I am with you" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Then **Jesus taught by living out His message.** Those principles He presented in discussions, whether through His simple lifestyle or through His humility and servanthood as He demonstrated it kneeling to wash His disciples' feet.

He taught concern for those spiritually hungry as He rejected protocol to eat with sinners—the outcasts of society. He showed compassion for the sick, the hungry, the lost, those people with-

out a shepherd. The disciples were with Him when He wept over Jerusalem; and whether Jesus ever said, "Be compassionate" or not, the Gospel writers noted over and over how Jesus was moved by compassion.

As He withdrew to pray, they saw how important prayer was in His agenda. Surely knowing that the Master had spent the night in prayer would impress them more deeply than a three-point sermon on prayer!

And finally, He expressed His love for them by dying for them and for us. Did they learn more about love from His discussion on love at the Last Supper or by His giving them the greatest love a man can show his friends, laying down His life for them?

Summing Up

While Jesus taught profound doctrinal truths, He did not do it in the way that would be found in a lecture on systematic theology. As well as teaching through didactic sessions, He told stories. He gave examples. He presented questions—often without answers—to stimulate thought. He was acutely aware of daily life situations of the listeners and related the teaching to on-the-spot observations. He gave His "students" responsible projects, coupled with the authority to carry them out. He spoke to the crowds who flocked to Him, yet He sought out a small group for the most intensive teaching and was not above taking time with one single individual. What is more, He lived out His message in a way His followers could observe and experience. This experiential aspect of Jesus' teaching pervaded His entire ministry and necessitated extended times together with those He was teaching.

It is easy for us to get used to one technique of teaching or to be attracted to a more prestigious method. As we consider how the Master Teacher helped people learn, we will be able to enrich our own teaching experience.

PM

When Death Comes Calling

Sally was a favorite of mine. She always sat on the left side of the dining room when I came to deliver a sermon on Sunday to the nursing facility where she made her home. She was a quiet little lady, about five feet tall. Although she always had a smile on her face, pain was etched in her dark eyes.

One Sunday she was too ill to come to the church service. She complained of back pain. The doctor told her it was arthritis. But I've often wondered if he knew it was much more serious. There was really nothing he could do. Her age worked against her. A few weeks later she was confined to her bed. Eventually she became unconscious.

I walked into her room. "Can you hear me, Sally?" I asked. I took her hand. "If you can hear me, squeeze my hand." Sally only rattled as she labored to breathe. I looked around her room. There was a teddy bear, a brightly colored afghan, and some pictures of her grandchildren in frames on the wall. It was a simple room.

I ventured to her nightstand and picked up a photo album. A wedding picture caught my attention. The bride was Sally. I could tell by the dark eyes and shy smile. She was beautiful and young, standing beside a handsome lad of about 19. She had her whole life ahead of her then. I'm sure Sally had dreams and goals when she stood beside that young man that day.

Sally told me she had lost her husband some years back, the man she hoped and dreamed

with, the man who walked with her through the death of a child and the Great Depression. What was she thinking about now? I wondered. What were her goals and dreams? Were they shattered now that she lay dying?

I quickly closed the album, feeling as though I was invading her privacy. Her family had been at her side moments before. But the stress of seeing their loved one in such a vulnerable state caused them to step outside for some fresh air.

All of those things that seem so important in life are left for others to take care of after we die. We take nothing with us but our spirit. Was Sally worried about the family she would leave behind?

Death must be a frightening thing to some, I thought to myself. What will our final destination be like? Will our loved ones who went before us be there to meet us?

My thoughts were interrupted by a labored sigh. It almost sounded like a sigh of relief. Sally's struggle was over. Death had carried her away from me. I walked to her bed to say my final farewell. The corners of her mouth formed a peaceful smile. My questions were answered. Death is not the cruel ogre we make it out to be. It is simply a door into a beautiful eternity for those who love God.

Sally looked almost childlike as I kissed her on the head. She was again that smiling, laughing girl who had a whole eternity ahead of her.

PM

BY LAURIE
LECHLITNER
Freelance writer
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The Case for Premarital Counseling

Writing to an advice columnist, a distraught new bride laments: "My husband is a football fanatic. He watches football on Monday nights, Thursday nights, and all day Sundays. He also belongs to two football leagues, one of which he runs. Leagues mean a draft party, weekly mailings, daily phone calls, faxes, and computer entry time. Those activities along with a trimonthly night out with the boys and miscellaneous sports events leave very little time left for us. We are newlyweds, and this is not what I expected from a husband. He doesn't see this as a problem and believes that it is I who makes this a problem."

One of the key objectives for premarital counseling is to help couples identify potential problems *before* they escalate, producing anger and disillusionment. "In our society we tend to spend more time getting ready for the wedding than preparation for the marriage," notes Gary R. Collins, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, author of *Christian Counseling*, and professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. "As a result many beautiful wedding days are followed by years of misery or, at best, minimal hap-

piness." Because of that reality, an increasing number of clergy from all faith groups are requiring premarital counseling sessions before the wedding takes place. These sessions can be informal discussions of two or three meetings or more tightly structured classes weekly for a month or longer.

However, many couples are reluctant to participate in premarital

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tal counseling. Often they view the proposal as irrelevant to them. Pastors, religious educators, and other spiritual leaders who want to do premarital counseling can establish a healthy atmosphere for the sessions by first helping couples understand the goals and purposes of such classes. Here are some of the advantages of premarital counseling that can be cited for couples about to be wed. It should be noted that even when premarital counseling is ecclesiastically mandatory, helping couples understand the reasons paves the way for couples to enter the process more positively.

Couples review how to use time after marriage.

Everett L. Worthington Jr., Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and author of *Counseling Before Marriage*. His book was written to guide pastors and other religious leaders in premarital counseling. In it he advises clergy to help couples understand the three types of activities that they will knowingly or unknowingly en-



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engage in: *distancing, coactive, and intimacy producing*. Dr. Worthington explains the three:

Distancing activities place us out of contact with others—reading, studying, mowing the lawn, grocery shopping.

Coactive activities are done with others but do not produce feelings of emotional closeness—watching television together, playing sports or board games, working together on a common project.

Intimacy-producing activities are those done together and create a feeling of emotional closeness—sexual intimacy, sharing dreams, planning for the future, talking about values, reminiscing about good times.

In a premarital counseling session like this, partners will list their activities of the past week. Then each partner analyzes his or her schedule to determine how much time is spent between *distancing, coactive, and intimacy-producing* activities. The key is for couples to thoroughly understand how each uses time and to strive for a balance that nurtures the individuals as well as the relationship.

Couples will receive biblical-theological foundations for marriage.

Premarital counseling provides clergy and spiritual leaders with a unique opportunity to educate couples about the theological meaning of marriage and to establish a spiritual foundation for their bond. Such a session will stress the permanence of marriage, fidelity to vows, and profound commitment to each other in good times as well as in bad times. Scripture to be cited and explained could include: 1 Cor. 13, stressing the priority of love; Mic. 6:8, Prov. 22:4, Luke 22:26, and John 13:5, all texts stressing the importance of humility in our relationships; Gen. 2:24, and John 17:21-22, emphasizing the goal of oneness in marriage; Gen. 29:18 ff., Eph. 5:25, and 1 Pet.

3:7, highlighting sacrificial, self-giving love.

Couples closely examine expectations.

Aaron Rutledge, author of *Premarital Counseling*, notes that couples have extremely high expectations for marriage. He says couples expect marriage to provide self-development and fulfillment, mutual expressions of affection, satisfaction of sexual needs, sharing of child rearing as well as shared interest in friends, recreation, worship, and creative work. In the history of the human race, Rutledge writes, never have "so many expected so much from marriage and family life." Thus, premarital sessions can help couples better examine and understand expectations. Rabbi Julie Gordon of St. Paul requires couples to participate in at least three premarital sessions. During those times, Gordon tries to get couples to articulate to each other which issues they feel are extremely important in marriage. "Often, they have talked about these issues," she explains. "But it's good for them to do it in front of a third person. Sometimes they have to listen more carefully. Sometimes they may say it a little bit more honestly."

Couples are encouraged to understand healthy communication styles.

Premarital counseling classes inevitably emphasize the importance of communication between couples. In such a session there is often a review of basic listening skills, appropriate ways of responding to what has been heard, and information provided about healthy ways of communicating. Lisa, who was married four years ago to Brian, says the premarital session on communication was extremely helpful for them as a couple. "One of the most useful tips we received from the minister was to set aside at least 20 minutes for an 'end-of-day review' with your spouse. The minister advised us

to do that no matter how busy we became. Those 20-minute sessions have proven to be clarifying and bonding in our relationship. We ask each other such very simple questions as: *What was the best part of your day? Did anything funny, bad, joyful, etc. happen today?* The 20 minutes allows us to better understand and feel what the other has experienced. It brings us much closer together."

Couples gain insights about conflict resolution.

Premarital facilitators help partners better handle current conflicts as well as educating about ways to manage future conflicts productively. Clergy would agree and be guided by this observation on conflict management by Jerry M. Lewis, M.D., senior research psychiatrist at the Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation, Dallas: "Conflict is inevitable in any close relationship. But in marriage, many couples use the bond as an excuse to drop civility, courtesy, and respect when disagreeing. Inevitably, such raw behavior damages the relationship and all-important intimacy." Dr. Lewis says that disagreements do not signal lack of love between a couple. In fact, conflict is often the sign of a deep connection and a desire to help a spouse function for his or her own good or for the health of their relationship. "The key is to treat conflict not as an excuse to establish who's right and who's wrong, but as an opportunity to understand each other's subjective reality—only then can intimacy survive and flourish," he adds.

Couples clarify roles and responsibilities.

In his book *Premarital Counseling Handbook for Ministers*, Theodore K. Pitt, D.Min., notes:

Today both men and women are engaging in extensive role learning as they approach marriage. As women develop

Many beautiful wedding days are followed by years of misery.

vocational expectations, they bring to marriage an accompanying expectation that their husbands will be full partners in the home, sharing house-keeping and child-rearing responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are reevaluating their concepts of the roles that both men and women fill in the home.

Consequently he advises clergy to aggressively discuss roles and responsibilities after marriage. That discussion should re-evaluate these roles and responsibilities:

- How household chores will be divided
- Income sources—will both spouses work?
- Decisions regarding having children
- Parenting responsibilities for the father and the mother
- Discipline styles
- Values desired for children
- Relationships with others including parents, relatives, friends
- Social obligations

Couples study financial management.

“Although both my fiancé and I were college graduates well established in our careers, we found the information about finances to be very useful for us,” recalls Katherine, married to Gus two years earlier. “The pastor used one of our six premar-

ital sessions to go over financial management, which included sources of income, budgeting, checkbook control, disposition or retention of assets acquired prior to our marriage, division and use of discretionary income.” Clergy focus on issues of financial management because they know that money is a major cause of conflict for many couples. In fact, a survey of 2,000 men and women by Roper Starch Worldwide confirms that money—more than sex, children, or in-laws—is the most common source of conflict for married couples.

Couples analyze their compatibility quotient.

In premarital counseling couples will be given an opportunity to determine if they are truly compatible. Clergy will be on the lookout for red-flag situations that may need special scrutiny and discussion. Those red-flag situations include:

- Drug or alcohol involvement
- Emotional problems or mental instability
- Lack of financial resources
- Contrasting cultural backgrounds or religious beliefs
- Wide gaps in education
- Age difference
- Knowing each other for a short time

“Couples may not see these as obstacles to a good marriage, and for some these differences

can and will be overcome,” notes Collins. “The counselor, however, needs to urge caution and thorough discussion of issues such as these before the couple moves ahead with marriage. In this way a lot of potential misery can be avoided.”

Couples form a stronger bond with the clergy person.

Rather than simply presiding over a rehearsal and wedding, many clergy feel it is important to establish a bond with the engaged couple that will endure beyond the wedding day. Rev. William H. Edwards, a Presbyterian minister in Smithtown, New York, says that premarital counseling sessions allow him to establish a relationship with a couple “so they can feel comfortable enough to come back and talk with me if problems develop later.”

Although some couples harbor ambivalent feelings about the prospect of premarital counseling, those who have been through premarital programs and sessions usually speak positively about the process. “It made a lot of things about our relationship clear to us. We learned some very effective ways to communicate,” says one woman who participated in premarital counseling with her fiancé. “We definitely avoid a lot of fights now, because we really try to understand where we’re each coming from.” **PM**

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BEYOND BELIEF



Saying Yes or Saying No?

I convinced myself that a good Christian dropped everything to try to solve problems or to listen to worries and fears, even if it took hours.

No, I can't help you," I said firmly. "What's wrong with you?" Mary demanded, irritated. "You're never willing to help me anymore."

For many years much of my life centered on "helping" Mary. She seemed always needy, and I convinced myself that a good Christian dropped everything to try to solve problems or to listen to worries and fears, even if it took hours.

The more I tried to help Mary, the more she demanded of me. It didn't seem to matter to her that I had a family to care for. I reached the point of desperation when Mary wanted me to be her chauffeur after her husband died.

Is it
"Christian"
to be worn
out by the
demands of
others?

BY HELEN MUELLER
(A PSEUDONYM)
Freelance writer
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"What do I do now?" I pleaded to the Lord for help. Suddenly I realized that I had rarely consulted God about my relationship with Mary. I had put myself in charge of it. Though I had tried in my own strength to put distance between Mary and me, guilt always drove me back to doing whatever she wanted me to do.

God reminded me that this was not the first time I had been in a relationship like this. At other times the person had moved away or had turned to someone else for help before I faced a crisis. Now God's instructions seemed clear: "Do not call her, and when she calls and asks you to do something for her, say no."

The first time that I followed what seemed to be God's instructions, Mary screamed at me over the telephone. She cried and she wailed. In the past I would have let this behavior turn my no into yes. But this time, even though she threatened to tell others how "mean" I was, I stood firm.

Afterward, however, a thought whirred inside my head and challenged my peace: "You ought to be laying down your life for her. The Bible says so!" But I knew that my "laying down my life" for Mary had led to burn-out, resentment, and moving farther from God by serving a person instead of serving Him. Surely that wasn't what the apostle John had in mind when he wrote, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we

ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

As I meditated on this verse and searched the Scriptures and prayed, God showed me some differences between how Jesus laid down His life and how I "laid down my life."

- Jesus chose freely to lay down His life. Jesus said, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18).
- Jesus laid down His life solely for the benefit of others. I discovered that I laid down my life to gain approval from others. It may have appeared as though I were acting to benefit Mary, but God revealed to me the truth of my self-centeredness: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).
- Jesus' laying down His life was fueled by God's love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). To rewrite that verse expressing the truth in my life, it would have read, "For Helen so feared the rejection of the world that she gave of her time and energy to avoid that rejection." Because I had not dealt with hurts in the past, it seemed as if I could not tolerate any more rejection. God showed me that people repeatedly rejected Jesus, but that it was love, not fear of rejection, that dictated how Jesus related to people.
- Jesus laying down His life led to life (Gal. 2:20; 1 John 5:12). My laying down my life was leading to death. Mary's dependence on God was dying. While I strove hard to meet her momentary needs, God desired to meet her real need—an intimate relationship with himself.

Not only was the death

Faithful in a Few Things

process taking place in her life, but I could see its effects in my life as well. My desire to reach out to others was dying because I was trying to relate to people in my way or in their way rather than in God's way.

My need for others' approval kept me from letting God be in control of my life. He had plans for me, but repeatedly I made the approval of others an idol in my life. I discovered that what the prophet Jonah said is true: "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs" (2:8).

As I confessed this sin, God's grace began to flow into my life. With the help of a Christian counselor I learned how to be motivated by love for others rather than seek their approval of me. Now I want God to direct my actions, for the sake of His glory.

Mary may still think that I am cruel. I see her only occasionally, mostly in social situations. I know that what God is doing in her life without my interference is far greater than any assistance that I could give her.

At times I suffer with guilt feelings, and I'm sorry that I am not so close to Mary as I once thought I was. I sometimes worry about what she has told others about me. The enemy whispers to me, "You can end this suffering by starting to help her again, by laying down your life for her." But I know now that this would mean refusing to obey God.

Deep joy and freedom come from laying down our lives in God's way. The biggest bonus has been receiving the very approval I craved. But now it is not approval from people, but approval from God. What joy there is in that!

PM

This article was taken from *Decision* magazine, December 1994. © 1994 Billy Graham Evangelistic Assn. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I was having lunch with two pastors from another denomination. The practice in their church, they told me, was to have a bishop be involved in moving them from one church to another. The usual practice was to start out in a small church. If a person proved capable, competent, and faithful there, the reward would be a move to a larger, more prestigious congregation.

That is not the practice in my denomination—or so I thought. We have no bishops who are responsible for suggesting a move. Yet, as I thought of men from my seminary class, I found that a similar phenomenon does exist.

My own ministry serves as an example. After graduation from seminary I was called to a small, somewhat struggling church. We had 30 families, with an average of 90 people in attendance on Sunday morning. Three years later the membership and attendance had grown, and I started getting inquiries from larger churches. The underlying message was that I had proven myself, had been faithful in a few things. Therefore, it was time to change leagues, move up to the larger church.

When I had been in that first congregation four and a half years, I accepted a call to a church that had 500 people in worship, a much larger congregation. I learned that being capable in a smaller church does not necessarily qualify a person for pastoring a larger church. The

ministries are considerably different. The following differences are most noticeable.

Relationships Versus Rancher

As I write, I can look up at the wall in my office. There are three articles hanging there, each with significance: one is a mirror with my denomination's symbol etched into the glass; another is a plaque celebrating the effect of a good friend; and there is a plaque that poetically describes the importance of the pastor's study. Each of these was a gift from someone in the smaller church. In each case I had a significant impact on an individual, either helping them through a difficult time or helping them grow in their faith. I have no corresponding gifts from people in the larger church on my wall.

This, I believe, illustrates the biggest difference between ministry in the two kinds of churches. In the smaller there is intimate contact with people, and an immediate difference is made in individual lives. In the larger, more of the work is with groups of people, and the greatest impact comes in the public meeting.

Peter Wagner has noted that if one would pastor a growing church, he must move from a "shepherd" role to a "rancher" role. The shepherd takes care of individual sheep through regular contact. On a ranch, however, there are too many sheep to get individual attention from the rancher. So he has other people

BY BRUCE T. BALLAST

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take care of them. The animals are still cared for, but the rancher doesn't directly care for each one.

Frankly, this is one of the prices to pay for serving in a larger congregation: there are just too many people to know them well. When I came to my present pastorate, I didn't realize that. I began ministry by trying to visit all the people in their homes. That worked well as a way to know people in the 30-family church from which I had come. It didn't work here; there were just too many.

There are a variety of ways to compensate for this lack of personal touch in ministry. One is to have a series of open houses to which groups from the church are invited. Another way to keep in touch is to write letters regularly to the congregation. Using the telephone to keep in contact is yet another tactic that pastors have used to overcome this challenge. Most pastors of larger churches decide to work primarily with a small group of leaders in the church and to touch the rest of the congregation through them.

Know this: if you are going to serve a larger church, you will have to get used to the idea that you can't know everyone in your congregation. You certainly can't minister to everyone. You will have to entrust this task to staff and laypeople.

Ministry Versus Meetings

A second way that ministries in larger and smaller congregations differ is closely related to the first. Involvement with people in ministry situations is replaced by meetings.

When in a small congregation, I was busy. I was available for personal contacts, of course. I also spent time teaching and leading Bible studies. I taught the high school class in Sunday School, met in several homes for Bible studies, was involved in a couples' group, and helped in leading Sunday School teachers' retreats. The only times that I

met with people strictly to do business was the monthly meeting of the church board.

A glance at my calendar for next month, now that I am in a larger congregation, includes these task-oriented meetings: the Church Council; the elders; the Executive Board; two worship committees; the Personnel Committee; two staff meetings; the Missions Committee; the Stewardship Committee; a Prayer Task Force meeting; a planning meeting for our Easter outreach; etc. Today I teach only two classes, both of them here at church.

The end result of all the meetings is that there will be less time to visit members of your congregation. If you are thinking of going to a larger congregation, know that this is one of the prices to pay. You will trade direct ministry for having many meetings with people through whom ministry gets done.

Local Versus Denominational Responsibility

When I became the pastor of a larger church, suddenly I was trusted with greater responsibility in the denomination that I serve. Key local committees were something that I knew about, but did not participate in, during my first pastorate. Once people knew I was the pastor of a larger church, I became "able" in their estimation.

This fact has implications for your ministry if you become the pastor of a larger church. You will be asked to expend a growing portion of your energy using your gifts outside your local church. For a gifted speaker, this may mean more invitations to speak at conferences. For an able administrator, the involvement may be a committee chairmanship. For a visionary, it may mean consulting.

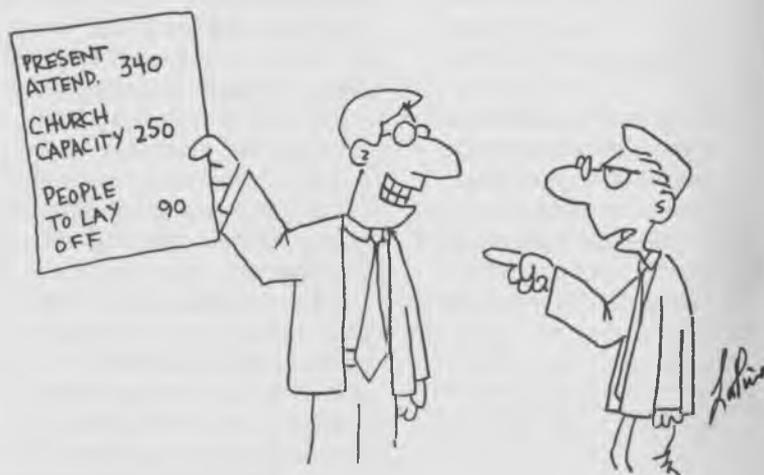
Opportunities to expand your ministry will grow if you are in a larger congregation. However, you will then have to develop guidelines to help you determine when to limit those experiences.

Conclusion

If you serve well as the pastor of a small church, you may be called to a larger one. Consider well the costs. If your primary spiritual gifts reside in the areas of shepherding, encouragement, and mercy, you might want to think twice about making the move, for you will be repeatedly frustrated by the limitations on your time to be with people.

If your gifts tend more toward leadership, preaching, or administration, then seriously consider God's call to expanded influence. Yet as you think about making the change, know that you're going to miss some things about your smaller church. PM

*It was time
to change
leagues,
move up to
the larger
church.*



"No! No! No! We at this church don't believe in downsizing."

Four Questions That Determine Forever for a Lost World

I have given 11 years of my life, not counting educational preparation, for the cause of Christian world mission. I've done so because God called me to do it—but also because I wanted to do so. It hasn't always been easy, but it has been rewarding.

In 1992 I returned from the mission field and took a pastorate. Not long after I arrived in my new assignment, someone said to me, "Pastor, I know you were a missionary, but missions is not really my thing." I'll tell you how that made me feel. He might as well have said, "Pastor, I know these are your children, but they sure are ugly." Though not intended to be malicious, that comment hurt me. What I think about missions doesn't really matter. What matters is what God thinks about missions.

Thousands of people today are giving their lives for the sake of world mission of the church. Hundreds of thousands are praying for missionaries and the people to whom they minister. Millions of dollars are given each year to help support the effort to evangelize the world. Is it worth it? Is it even necessary? You may have wondered at times, "What difference does it make anyway? Are missions really that important? What's the big deal?"

**Missions Are Important
Because Some Have Never
Heard of Jesus**

Another question is often asked, "What will happen to peo-

ple in remote parts of the world who have never had an opportunity to hear the name of Christ? Surely God is not going to condemn people to everlasting separation from His presence when they didn't have a chance to know the truth." If the peoples of the earth are not really in danger, if they're not in spiritual jeopardy, then why all the fuss?

Let's look at that question for a moment. What about the person in another culture, a pagan society, who has not had the same opportunity that you and I have had to hear and know about Jesus Christ? The first missionary, the apostle Paul, made a wonderful declaration: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [Jesus] will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). The implication is that everyone who does not call on this name will not be saved. Paul himself, as well as other New Testament writers, raise that tent of an implication into a skyscraper of absolute assertion.

The Tasaday

In 1971 Philippine government officials announced to the world that a people lost since the Stone Age had been discovered in a remote area of the southern Philippines. They were called the Tasaday.¹ It was considered the anthropological find of the century, a people previously untouched by modern civilization. When helicopters first located them, they numbered 25 men, women, and children living in

three large limestone caves.

Let's think about the Tasaday in their prediscovered state as we consider the eternal destiny of those without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Before the outside world stumbled upon them, the Tasaday had had no opportunity to read Christian Scriptures or to learn anything about Christianity.

The first thing we need to understand is that "no one is ever punished for rejecting Christ if they've never heard of him."² Well, that seems to settle it, doesn't it? The Tasaday are safe. They won't be condemned to hell. Not quite. That assumes that a person can only be condemned by God for rejecting Christ. What if other offenses bring God's judgment? The Tasaday had never heard of God and rejected Him? Would this be as serious as rejecting Christ? It would seem so.

The New Testament condemns all people everywhere, in every place and in every time, for rejecting God. In fact, Jesus Christ came to a world that already had turned its back on God. Jesus himself said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:12-13).

In Rom. 1:18-21 Paul addresses this question of those who have never heard of Christ:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who sup-

BY MERRILL
WILLIAMS
Missionary
SEOUL, KOREA

press the truth by their wickedness, since *what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened (*italics mine*).

Therefore, everyone who has ever lived and is now living has had opportunity to know about God, even to know Him.

God Has Made Himself Known

Theologians have called this knowledge of God general revelation. It is general in the sense that it does not tell about God in detail. It is also general because all people everywhere have received this information about God. This Romans passage teaches us several important facts about general revelation.

First, this knowledge is absolutely clear. "What may be known about God is plain . . . because God has made it plain" (v. 19). "God's invisible qualities . . . have been clearly seen" (v. 20).

Second, this revelation connects with the understanding of man. God does not send a message that may or may not be received. No, these people saw and "understood."

Third, general revelation has been in progress since the beginning of the world. It didn't happen only once, never to be repeated. It is constantly continuing.

Fourth, general revelation comes to people through the things that God has made. This revelation is "understood from what has been made" (v. 20). The creation, in all its parts, is a giant mirror reflecting its Creator.

"How can
preachers
preach,
how can
announcers
announce,
how can
heralds
herald, how
can
witnesses
witness
"unless
they are
sent?"

Fifth, this knowledge is so clear that no one has any excuse whatsoever for not perceiving God. Paul says that "men are without excuse" (ibid.). What excuse is it that men are without? It is the excuse of ignorance. No one has ever been able to say that he or she didn't know any better. Since the beginning of creation God has constantly been making himself known, so that people have recognized Him through His creation, and, therefore, no one has any excuse for rejecting Him.

The Judgment of Pagans

How would God judge the Tasaday? The New Testament teaches that God will judge people on the basis of what they know. Although the Tasaday didn't have any knowledge of the laws of the Old Testament, they did have a law, as all people do. This law is within them, "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). It calls them to judgment where they are condemned. The reason for their condemnation is that no one lives up to his or her own moral code.

The Tasaday then will not be punished for never having heard of Christ. But they will be punished for having heard of the Father but rejecting Him, and for disobeying the law that is written in their hearts.

If every person ever to inhabit the earth has heard of the Father but naturally rejects Him, then all people in all times need to know about Jesus Christ and His salvation. "To have no knowledge of Christ is to be in jeopardy because of the prior rejection of the revelation of the Father. But to hear of Christ and reject Him is to be in a state of double jeopardy. Now not only has the Father been rejected but the Son as well."

How Can the Person Who Has Never Heard of Jesus Christ Hear About Him?

If the Tasaday need to hear about Christ in order to be saved

to eternal life, how can that happen? Missionary Paul answers that question: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

Paul has already said that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But the question remains: How can those who have never heard of Christ hear about Him? Here we need to understand that some may have heard of Christ but have never been brought to understand how they can be saved by Christ. That's true of many people, even in so-called Christian nations.

In very close logic, Paul asks four questions—*four questions that determine forever for a lost world.* He argues back from effect to cause, through the series of praying, believing, hearing, preaching, and sending. So the last link in his argument must become the first in order for a lost world to be saved. In order for the Tasaday to be saved, they must call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer.

1. Believing

The first question is, "*How . . . can [people] call on the one they have not believed in?*" The obvious answer is, they can't, unless they *do* believe. To believe in Christ is more than an intellectual decision, although it is that. Belief is a deliberate decision to trust Christ with our lives. Before faith can take effect, sin has to be dealt with. Personal sins have to be confessed to God and a promise made to separate from those sins, to be done with them. Trusting Christ involves both a negative step (turning from sin) and a positive step (turning to Christ). For the Tasaday, or anyone else, to be saved, they first have to believe in Christ. Will you do your part to help people

at home and around the world trust Christ and be saved?

2. Hearing

The second question is, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" The obvious answer is, they can't, unless they *do* hear of Him. Many people around the world have at least heard the name of Christ. Tragically, some of them have only heard it in the movies that so-called Christian America exports to the world, as some character uses Christ's name in blasphemy.

It's not enough just to hear Christ's name. There must also be an explanation of that name. Someone needs to explain, as Peter did before the Sanhedrin, that "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If they're going to believe, they have to understand. Will you do what you can to help them understand?

3. Preaching

The third question is, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" The obvious answer is, they can't, unless someone *does* preach to them. The word here translated "preaching" is a word that means "to herald," or "to announce." So it doesn't have to be preaching by a professional minister, but simply the announcement of the gospel by someone who has come to experience it for himself or herself. Each of us has a responsibility to witness for Christ, to tell others what He has done for us, and what He can do for them. If the peoples of the earth are to call on the name of the Lord and be saved, someone is going to have to tell them about Christ. Will you be one of His witnesses?

4. Sending

The fourth question is "How

can" preachers preach, how can announcers announce, how can heralds herald, how can witnesses witness "unless they are sent?" The obvious answer is, they can't, unless they *are* sent. Here is the rationale for missions.

The term "missions" actually comes from Latin meaning "to send." The love of God inspires missions: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Many of us know this verse by memory. Yet millions, even billions of people around the world have not heard it. Not one time. They don't know that God—the only true God—loves them.

The rejected Father sent the Son, and the Son sent His disciples. That is the basis for the world mission of His Church.

Bernie May tells about the time his friend, Bengt Junvik, a southern California businessman, flew a single-engine airplane from California to a mission station in Alaska. This was not the first time Junvik had made a trip like this, but this time he lost his bearings in a snowstorm and crashed somewhere in central Alaska.

The Alaskan Civil Air Patrol began to search for the downed plane and its pilot. For five days many planes and pilots flew back and forth across the barren expanse of that winter wilderness. Finally, however, with the expense of the rescue operation and all hope of Junvik's survival gone, the search was halted.

But Junvik's wife and family determined to continue searching. To them cost was no factor. They flew to Alaska, hired pilots and planes, and continued the search. They would do whatever it took, keep on looking as long as necessary, spend any amount, to find their loved one. Their efforts paid off. Thirteen days after the search was begun, Junvik was found. He

was living in his plane, which was buried in the snow in a dead-end canyon.

"Was the mission cost effective?" May asks. "Money," he says, "is never a consideration when it's your husband, your daddy, or your child who is lost. Not only did the Junviks spend a small fortune to find their loved one, they spent additional money hosting a huge 'thank-you' banquet in Anchorage for everyone who helped with the search. It was not only important to find the lost, but also important to celebrate."

After he returned home, Bengt Junvik said he usually complained when his wife and children spent too much money. But not this time.

Surely this is what Jesus meant when He told about the shepherd with 100 sheep. With only one missing, "Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4). The shepherd risks his own life to find that one lost sheep. What will we risk to find the lost ones in our neighborhood, in our town, in our city, anywhere in the world, and bring them into the fold of God?

A second question begs to be asked after the question concerning those who have never heard. The Christian must ask, "What happens to me if I never do anything to promote the world mission of the church?"¹ "Well, missions just isn't my thing," I was told. The truth is that missions is God's thing. If it's God's thing, then it must be ours too. **PM**

1. I am aware that there has been controversy over whether or not the Tasaday were really completely out of touch with the modern world. For the sake of illustration I am assuming that, when they were "discovered," they were a truly Stone Age people.

2. The following argument is the one put forth by R. C. Sproul in his book *Objections Answered* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1978), chap. 3, pp. 47-59.

3. *Ibid.*, 56.

4. *Ibid.*, 57.

God does
not send a
message
that may or
may not be
received.

Creation is
a giant
mirror
reflecting
its Creator.

The Lingering Effect of Leaving the Garden

I ran away from God when I was a teenager. I wanted to be part of the “in crowd,” but I had a warped idea of what the “in crowd” should be. So I ended up with the street crowd who taught me things that could only help me survive in a ghetto. I had Mother’s counsel—but I didn’t know it or want it. Often when I had opportunity to do some real evil things, I backed off. Was it God’s Holy Spirit, or was it a relationship that had been planted into my conscience by Mom? At that time I didn’t know, but I did know something checked my extremes.

In the Philippines years ago, I came to a confrontation with this checking agent. I had to ask myself, “Is this stuff about God real, or is it just a story we’ve been told?” When I searched for an answer, I proved to myself that God is exactly who He says He is. It was then that I began to know Him, not as a conscience put there by a loving mother, but as a friend and companion who had been with me through all my adolescent years.

At the age of 23, I committed myself to God. Yet something was missing. I found God in a place. The missionaries who brought me to God were of a different denomination than the one in which I had grown up. The place where I found God was different than the place where I had been all my life. As a result, I left my church, thinking God was in a place. I reasoned that, by moving to another

place, I would be able to keep a better hold on God there. What I had experienced with God was real. I didn’t want that experience to ever get away from me.

As a result, I kept finding people instead of God. Everywhere I went, people disappointed me. They were not perfect, as I presumed God’s people should be. I surmised that if they were God’s people, they should act like Him. Then, because I couldn’t accept their inconsistencies, I distanced myself from the church. Oh, I’d keep in touch. Whenever I could teach or lead something in church, I came back. I didn’t get much out of being second fiddle or sitting in the audience. My relationship was with a place. Since I couldn’t find a perfect church, I figured that what was missing had been hidden behind all the defects in the churches I attended or, more probably, defects in the people who attended those churches. If I could somehow find a place where those defects were shoved out of the way, I reasoned, I could find peace. Yet, no matter how desperately I looked, I couldn’t find the perfect place.

One evening, after my wife and I had watched a relaxing video, we went to bed. All of a sudden, she sat up in bed and said, “John, I love you more than anything in the world!” I hugged her as we lay back down. In that instant, without any warning, she died as I held her in my arms.

I first responded, “I want to

die.” After 30 years of marriage with her, she was as much a part of me as the blood flowing through my veins. I wanted to be where she was. We had a relationship together that was far more real than anything I had ever experienced with anyone or anything in all my life. But, now, it was sliced in two—part of me was gone!

At the funeral, I reached over the casket and kissed my dead wife on the forehead. For hours following that touch, I had the taste of formaldehyde on my lips. If I had not realized it before, I did then—our relationship in the flesh was severed forever.

That’s the kind of thing that happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose the tree of knowledge over life with God. They were sliced off from the relationship they had enjoyed before sin came into their lives. The rest of their days held the taste of formaldehyde. They died spiritually, and the perfect relationship that had, up to that moment, characterized their connection to God was ruptured.

When my wife died, I began to realize how the absence of that close, intimate relationship separated me not only from my departed wife but from God as well. Here’s what I have learned from this. I could know Him. I could be saved and in the church. Yet, I still could sense that something vital was missing. It was a relationship that escaped me as I searched for the perfect place and criticized im-

BY JOHN CONLON
Pastor
OREM, UTAH

perfect people. What I had to deal with was this: How do I go about finding a satisfying relationship like that with God?

In my own life, as I meditated upon this question of how to go about finding total peace with God, I was reminded of the relationship I had enjoyed with my wife. It didn't all start off with perfect harmony. It took a time of getting to know each other. There is only one way to nurture that kind of a relationship. That is to live together, do things together, learn about each other, and share with one another. This is the kind of alliance that God is seeking in all of us. It doesn't start until we begin to do things together.

I was seeking a perfect relationship in the church, and I was seeking perfect people. I had focused upon the imperfections of other people and a place but not upon a relationship. Instead of growing as I dug into His Word, and instead of observing God at work in changing imperfect lives, I sought a finished product. As I came to better understand the nature of a relationship, I began to realize that God is alive in His people. With all their imperfections, they are being molded and sculptured by the Master Craftsman, who is creating in each person a new nature as He restores His saints through companionship with himself.

In the Garden of Eden, the first relationship was lost when Adam sinned. In that garden, they had a choice to select either the fruit of life or the fruit of knowledge. They ignored the fruit of life, which is found only in a permanent relationship with God. Instead, they chose a place where they believed that they no longer needed that close, intimate connection with the Author of Life.

I discovered that the place where I worship may be the most spiritual, wholesome sanctuary on earth, or it may be only a dull reflection of perfection. The people in it may vary from

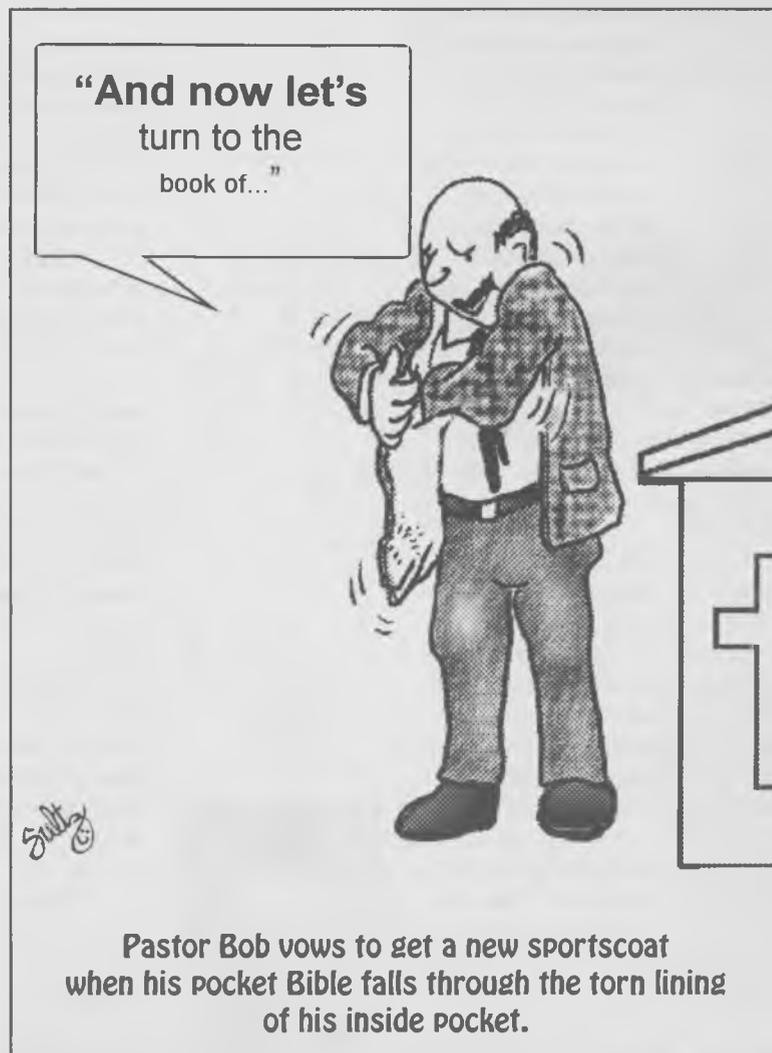
It was a relationship that escaped me as I searched for the perfect place and criticized imperfect people.

saints to sinners, but my relationship with a sanctuary or a place or my judgment of people who do not measure up to the image I hold of perfect people will never satisfy the craving that gnaws at my inner being to be connected with God. I can prepare programs, orchestrate great events, and even build buildings, but until the relationship, broken by the spiritual death of Adam and Eve at Eden, is restored, I am naked and unable to find peace.

Within that divine/human relationship that I have experienced in Christ, once I quit focusing upon the place and the people, "the fulness of the Godhead" resides within me (Col. 2:9, κλν). I am restored to the very presence of God. I have learned that Christian peace and joy are not found in a place or

through criticism of imperfect people. Rather, the peace and joy that Jesus promised to His followers are the fruit of a living relationship of mutual love and giving that is nurtured by His holy presence. The only way I can experience that relationship is to live with the Holy Spirit daily, meditate upon my study of God's Word, walk in obedience with the Spirit, talk with God, and most of all listen to Him as He directs my steps to love and lift up my brothers and sisters in Christ.

John write, "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another" (1 John 3:11). There is no other message. The health of the church and the health of my own personal relationship with God are measured by my love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. **PM**



Pastor Bob vows to get a new sportscoat when his pocket Bible falls through the torn lining of his inside pocket.

Preventing Clergy Burnout

To prevent clergy burnout, try the following:

1. Breakfast out with your spouse once each week. Put it on the family calendar and make it a permanent, needed getaway from the parsonage phone.
2. Exchange house keys with another couple. When you and your spouse need a breather, skip town. Stay an overnight at your friend's home. They can have the same privilege with your home. A phone call to the friend prior to landing on their front porch would be helpful. This kind of reciprocity works wonders for all concerned.
3. Get a more organized schedule for your weekly responsibilities. Some burnout is brought on simply by a haphazard work plan.
4. Start next Sunday's sermons early in the week. This prevents pileup at the close of the week.
5. Schedule each day efficiently so as not to overlap travellings and other duties.
6. Prioritize your weekly responsibilities so that majors are major and minors are minor. Some persons do not have a precision awareness of what is major and what is minor regarding duties.
7. Fellowship with clergy of other denominations. These persons cannot harm you ecclesiastically, for they are not of your official circle.
8. Take off at least one full day a week from churchly duties.

9. Filter phone calls to the parsonage via an answering machine. The parsonage phone automatically brings the workplace from the church into the home; such is the nature of the job. However, this does not have to imprison the pastor. He can filter calls so as to schedule responses more efficiently.

10. Get sitters for the young parsonage children so that both parsonage spouses can have their free times. This is absolutely imperative for obvious reasons; yet many parsonage adults do not seem to get around to planning such opportunities.

11. Eat out at inexpensive restaurants and coffee shops. Some parsonage adults do not plan on eating out that much, for they conclude it costs too much. It does if one chooses the more expensive dining spots; but the less expensive respites are just as refreshing.

12. Develop your hobby. Keep at it. Use that pastime as your rightful opportunity for creativity outside the world of religion.

13. Plan recreational breaks in your weekly schedule. If you are not athletic, at least plan walks through

rural sections or other neighborhoods than where you reside.

14. Read other than religious materials. The brain needs that kind of detour. Leisure reading magazines are especially renewing for the mind.

15. Have a policy by which parishioners do not own your living quarters, even if the parsonage is alongside the church building. The parsonage is the private living area of the parsonage family, except when by invitation parishioners are invited in for special occasions.

16. Plan ahead. Keep a working calendar in the church and parsonage so you can refer to it quickly. Check off items as they are seen through.

17. Take a walk through the mall. Plan to buy nothing. Such a simple change of scenery is a positive move therapeutically for the mind.

18. Drive around the countryside when uptight. Take your time returning to the workplace.

19. Take your annual vacations; do not think it is heroic to skip these needful breaks.

20. Be realistic about your vocation. Do not try to put a happy face on everything or everyone.

BY J. GRANT
SWANK JR.
Pastor
WINDHAM, MAINE



Express your feelings to a trusted friend; but be careful. Know for certain that individual can indeed be trusted. It is best to find such a confidant outside the "system."

21. Watch for danger signals in your body and mind. If something irregular begins to appear, see your family doctor. Perhaps there is a chemical change in your body that needs tending.

22. Cut through the habit of watching too much television if that is your bent.

23. Try to get to sleep at a reasonable hour each night. Nighthawks pay for it.

24. Answer your mail as soon as possible. This one simple move can efficiently keep your work responsibilities up-to-date.

25. Delegate more churchly doings to parishioners. Do not try to do it all yourself. Such does not make sense. Then if there are no parishioners to pick up on some duties, ask yourself if that particular item has to be. If it does not, discard it.

26. Regarding visitation in parishioners' homes, put a tear-off in the church bulletin by which you ask for worshipers to state the day and time that they would like the pastor to stop by for a pastoral visit (prayer and Bible reading). This cuts through criticism that the pastor does not call on parishioners in their homes. With today's frenetic schedule in most homes, the old-fashioned pastoral calling methodology has to be adapted to the present-day rat race.

27. Slow down if you tend to be a hurried person. Pare down all that is nonessential. Cut out needless movement. It is easy to create movement ruts that are unnecessary; eliminate these.

28. Listen to your spouse's appraisal of your reaction to the ministerial work responsibilities. That spouse is looking on objectively to what you have impregnated subjectively. Perhaps your spouse is the only individual in the world who knows your work

world and your reactions to it; therefore, the spousal advice is very significant in being realistic regarding the ministry.

29. Realize that God has to change lives. The minister can lead people to God; but then it is up to God and the free will of the individual to move on from there.

30. Realize that Christ said HE would build HIS Church. Clergy are simply facilitators. The overall divine move has to come upon each local congregation; much of that is a mystery to us. Therefore, we must relinquish continually the final ministerial outcome to God alone.

31. Refuse to read material that is depressing, especially information regarding other congregations, particularly those that seem to be overflowing the charts statistically. Each situation is an individual work in the eyes of God. Therefore, keep your mind positive by refusing to intake competing information that

would cause you to be discouraged.

32. Stay away from competitive comparisons regarding other churches. Simply don't gather with clergy who are into this dialogue game of comparing ad infinitum. Is not this of the flesh and not truly of the divine?

33. Abandon your work and soul continually to the Lord God. Refrain from analyzing too meticulously where you are on the success charts.

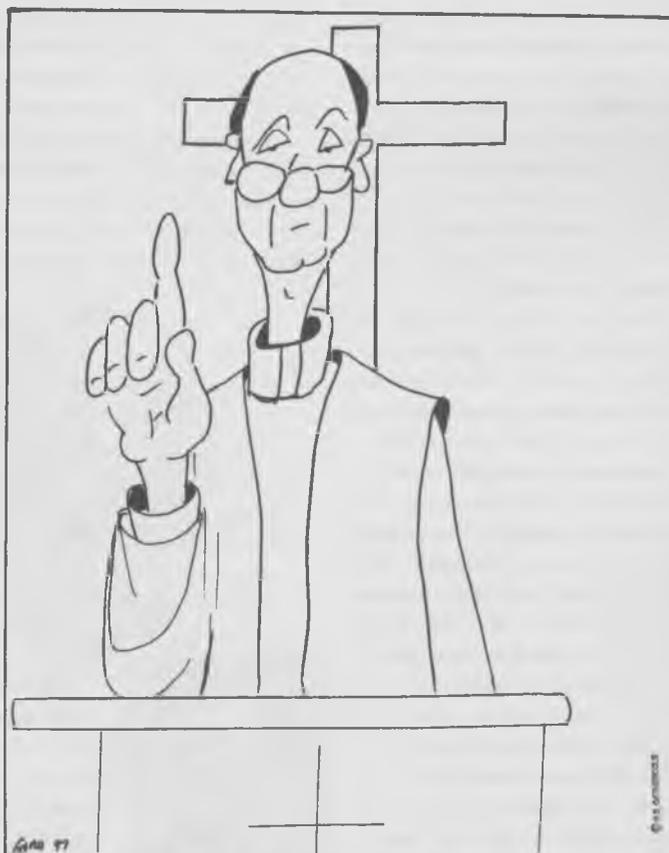
34. Enjoy local concerts and community gatherings.

35. Plan family excursions that have nothing to do with church work.

36. When pressure builds, take a morning off to do nothing in particular. See to it that your mind winds down so that you can get back on track again. Winding up the mind when it is already exhausted leads to trouble.

37. Listen to relaxing music.

PM



We will now have a written test on last week's sermon.

Refuel the Heart

Suppose it is Monday morning, and you have had the worst weekend of your ministry. Attendance was down, and the offering hit a new low. The "critic in residence" outdid himself or herself in venting anger and criticism. It rings with clarity on a Monday morning. The organist walked out in a huff. To top it off, your wife was sick, and your children were having a bad day. This is to name only a few of the "things that can go wrong" on a bad weekend.

Been there? All of us have—many times. Such experiences come frequently to everyone who serves people. Sometimes there seems to be a string of them. They squeeze energy from our spirits and waylay our enthusiasm.

There are two ways to go forward from such hectic days. One is to escape, run, hide, quit. While it is an option, it doesn't make anything better. Sooner or later, one regrets throwing in the towel. It only postpones the day of reckoning. If one is to stretch one's own soul, he or she must deal with the rough times.

Another way through those dark moments is to refuel the heart. It is a "face the music" and "let's go forward" kind of stance. It is not easy. But it does face the facts and put them in perspective, and it puts one on the journey again.

Let's see what the resources are for a rotten Monday morning. However bad the weekend might have been, or however dark the picture may be, there are some "points of light" we need to see.

One, the eternal God is

with us. The God who called us to ministry is with us in our darkest hour. He is there with His presence, His power, and His provisions. He wants His children to cast our cares upon Him in trust (1 Pet. 5:7, KJV). In the dark moments of the soul the one thing we need to establish is that God has not abandoned us and never will. He is with us in our anxiety, caring for us in ways we cannot imagine. Let this be the first thought to invade your darkness. Reach out and grasp its truth.

Two, let the eternal Word transform your dark moments.

God's Word gives strength and substance for your soul. It has a transforming power that no other word has. It has ability to lift your heart and bring peace in the midst of chaos. When nothing else makes sense, God's Word invades our confusion with words that ignite hope and refuel the heart. Stay close to the Word—always—but especially in your troubled moments. The psalmist experienced the transforming power of the Word when he wrote, "Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life" (119:49-50).

Three, prayer is the great option in the midst of pain.

We find it hard, sometimes, to pray in the midst of confusion and defeat. But it is simply one resource to which we must turn. We must talk to God about our worst moments and our greatest

fears. Rufus Jones admonished us to "keep a window open on the Godward side." When you are overwhelmed with the crisis and all signs are pointing downward, that is the time to seek God. Remember, one does not pray because he or she feels like it; one prays because it is right, it exposes life to better options, it exposes the despair to hope and the darkness to light.

Dwight Moody said, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling Christian" (Randal Earl Denny, *The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997], 13). Our crises often grow and enlarge because we have not given God a chance to do something great in the midst of something awful. Jeremiah reminds us that God has great plans for us—"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' (29:11). But Jeremiah also reminds us that it is our responsibility to seek the Lord—"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (vv. 12-13).

Four, as Jack Hayford admonishes—"Don't give a hearing to those shadows that come against you" (*Glorious Morning* [Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1996], 126). It is too easy to let the bad news ring in our hearts over and over again until despair mounts and our fears are at scary levels. Hayford cautions, "Don't open the door to those fears that cause you to feel despair, discouragement, and defeat" (ibid.). The "Monday morning blues" is a time to refocus, to consult God, to go to the Word. It is a time to refuel your heart and to refocus your soul.

Pastor, be encouraged. A lousy weekend is not the end of the journey. There is tomorrow, and it can be bright with the possibilities and plans of God. **PM**

BY C. NEIL STRAIT
District
Superintendent,
Church of the
Nazarene
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Released from Prison

There were no doors closing behind me, no metal bars, no guards standing nearby, but I was a prisoner. I was shut up in a prison from which it seemed there would never be an escape. Each day brought new struggles, new questions, but always the same answers.

I was the wife of a pastor, had four lovely children and a nice home. Mine appeared to be a perfect life.

Over the years, I had spent many hours counseling and encouraging others. Now I desperately needed someone to whom I could reach out, but there was one big barrier. How could I, the pastor's wife, let anyone know I was having a struggle? In my position I couldn't admit I was an "uncomely" part of the Body (1 Cor. 12:23, KJV). I was hiding behind a facade of "everything is OK." That offered me a certain amount of protection but, at the same time, prevented me from receiving help. No help can come when we project this image of continuous victory.

When one of the parishioners of my husband's church had tried to destroy his ministry, the pain and loneliness were about to destroy me. I wondered how anyone could be so cruel as to destroy a man's ministry of nearly 30 years. We had worked hard and poured our energies into the ministry, and now it was being destroyed as a tree hewn to the ground.

I found myself wondering

where God was, why He was allowing this unfair thing to happen. It was as though my family and I had been tried and sentenced but for no criminal offense. The gallows were waiting for us, and we were hoping for God to commute our sentence.

Adding to the hurt and confusion was the guilt I carried. I would get in our car and drive, thinking, *How can I share my faith in the Lord with anyone? It's supposed to be a joy to serve the Lord, but my joy is gone.* There was only darkness in my soul, as if I were in a tunnel with no place to turn around and go back, no rest area. The farther in I went, the darker it became.

I had equated victorious Christian living with being able always to say I had every facet of my life under control. Victory is

not in having control. Spiritual growth comes when we relinquish control and say, "I need help." Obedience to God's Word is very important if we would be a healthy Body of Believers. That includes sharing our needs, our hurts, our tunnel times, and being honest with each other.

Yet how was I to go about getting help? That was the question ever before me, one I continued to put before the Lord.

The first step in my receiving help came about through an unexpected phone call. It was from a woman who, along with her husband, had experienced a similar time when their reputation was unjustly damaged. She knew some of what we were going through and said God would vindicate us.

I immediately asked: "But when? How long must we wait?" I thought vindication would bring deliverance from my discouragement, and my joy would be restored.

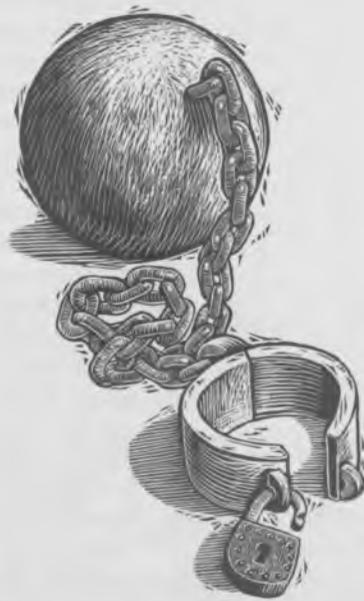
She shared with me her experience and gave encouragement and comfort. Knowing she understood and cared opened the door. I now felt free to admit my feelings of frustration.

The healing had begun, but it was not complete. I sought out another woman, older than I, who had experienced many hurts. Her life seemed to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15). I knew she was a person I could trust. She gave encouragement each time I talked to her.

The third person was a neighboring minister's wife. By that time, we were both involved in a church ministry that gave us reason to seek advice from one another. We became good friends and began to share with each other. It was like the final chapter. I knew the end would come soon, the prison door would swing open, and I would be free.

Through interfacing with these three women, I was being gently

BY BETTY THOMPSON
Freelance writer
MAHOMET, ILLINOIS



Continued on page 11

Tune Up

I played the clarinet in the high school band. When I started as a freshman, I had an old wooden clarinet that someone had given me. Whenever we tuned up, I would play my C, and the other students would wrinkle up their faces.

"You're still flat," the band director would say. "Bring it up!"

"I can't bring it any higher, Mr. Miller," I answered. "It's pressed up as high as it will go!"

For a short while he overlooked this discrepancy in my instrument, for the noise of the band pretty well covered my off-key clarinet. However, it was terribly noticeable when the clarinet section had the lead, especially in the orchestra.

"You're going to have to get another clarinet if you want to stay in the orchestra, Muriel," the director told me one day.

I had saved my nickels and dimes for some time and had enough to make a down payment on a new metal clarinet. What a different sound my instrument made after that! No longer was I out of tune with the entire band and orchestra. Eventually I played first clarinet in both.

It's easy for us to get out of tune with others. We may become supercritical or impatient or quarrelsome. Then the whole harmony is ruined. This can especially hinder the work of the church! All it takes is one person who insists on having his or her way and makes a fuss if it isn't granted!

Some Christian workers have always done things a certain way and resist any change for the improvement of the work. In these modern days, because of so many comparatively recent inventions, I think there's a great need for us to evaluate what we are doing in God's work.

Take, for instance, the competition we face from television. In the good old days, the church was the center of family activities. Nowadays many families have become "couch potatoes." Numerous TV channels throw every kind of entertainment imaginable at them. If the entertainment doesn't draw enough viewers, dials are flicked; shows are discontinued.

Unfortunately, large numbers of people get not only their entertainment from television but their church as well. It's so much easier for many to tune in a TV religious program rather than to get all dressed up for church and go out. Can we afford to drone along with church programs that worked 40 years ago?

In view of the apostle Paul's dogmatism when it came to matters that concerned God's will, some may think he wasn't very open-minded. But when it came to reaching and influencing people for Christ, he certainly was open-minded! He declared, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law . . . that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without

law. . . . To the weak I became weak. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:20-22, NASB).

William J. Reilly had a word of advice in his book *Successful Human Relations* for those of us who see ways that certain changes in our church or group would improve our outreach or interest level. "Your ability to open a person's mind," he wrote, "depends entirely on your mental attitude toward that person, your willingness to understand him and to help him to be right. And opening his mind is your first step toward getting him to believe what you say and do what you want." The Bible says, "Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8).

The Need for Consideration

I have seen some young dynamos come into the church and try to change everything within a few months. At several churches where I served, young men took over in areas that concerned me. When they got through making their changes, I felt as if steamrollers had run over me—absolutely crushed!

In one situation, I had been the leader of the children's church and in that position had been able to lead many children to Christ. The new minister of education took over and instituted an entirely new approach. Some of his ideas were good, but after they were instituted, as far as I know, no children were led to receive Christ as Savior. That wasn't part of the curricula.

Looking back on the situation now, I wonder how much more could have been done for the Lord if there had been some consultation between the young man and myself, some compromise so that some of what I had been doing might have continued and have been blended into his totally new program. Perhaps boys and girls might have continued coming to know the Lord.

The apostle Paul urged Christians to live in love and consider-

BY MURIEL LARSON
Freelance writer
GREENVILLE,
SOUTH CAROLINA

ation toward one another, and "in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you," he added, "should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:1-4). Peter told Christians to "live in harmony with one another; . . . love as brothers," he said, "be compassionate and humble" (1 Pet. 3:8).

In relation to our subject, I read these passages to mean that when we believe that changes should be made, God wants us to go about doing this in a way that it won't hurt or devastate some of our fellow Christians.

The apostle Paul thought Euodia and Syntyche, two women in the Philippian church, were doing a great work for the Lord. Even though both obviously loved and served the Lord, Paul had to urge them to work together in harmony. When we consider one another's feelings and ideas, so much more can be done for God's glory!

Knocked into Sour Notes

Unfortunately, when we get steamrollered or fail to get our ways in some matter, our natural reaction is to get resentful. I'll admit—that has been my first reaction too! If we continue to allow ourselves to feel that way, then we become bitter. Along with bitterness comes anger and hostility, which in turn lead to complaining and the spread of dissatisfaction in the church.

According to Eph. 4:30-31, harboring these off-key feelings

results in our grieving the Holy Spirit. With our off-key instrument—our tongue—we can ruin the harmony in our department, group, or church.

When feelings like these hit me, I soon realize that the peace and joy I enjoy from the Lord has disappeared. I look up to the Lord and say, "Lord, I forgive this person that has upset me so, and I pray for his or her wisdom and guidance." Then I cup my hands and hold all those tumultuous feelings up to the Lord and say, "Here, Lord, take this junk!" He does—and in their place He returns my peace and joy. These keep me in place so that I can hold my peace and be submissive and not cause others of God's instruments to get out of tune!

The Way of Love

I believe there's a happy medium we can reach in doing the Lord's work. The way to arrive at it is by prayer and looking to the Lord for answers—not by fussing or criticizing! Instead of arguing with my band/orchestra director, I got a new clarinet, which solved my out-of-tune problem.

I have found at least two ways help in dealing with someone who might spoil the harmony in church work—one is prayer, and the other is kindly diplomacy. In the case of the other young man who steamrollered over me and others, I found several occasions in which I could use the kindly diplomacy approach.

Since he was in charge, I sub-

mitted to his new ways and managed with much prayer to overcome my wounded ego and live with the situation. As I yielded my position to the Lord, I found He gave me peace in simply serving Him. The young man left for another church within a year, and I had the joy of restoration.

The Bible says that "love suffers long and is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4, NKJV). It "is not easily provoked" (v. 5, KJV) and "thinks no evil." It "endures all things" (vv. 5, 7, NKJV). Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal"—or like a flat clarinet (v. 1, KJV).

Love tunes us into wanting to do things God's way. Self is the off-key culprit that makes us supercritical, impatient, and quarrelsome. So God tells us to "put off" that "old man" with his old, self-centered ways, just as I had to get rid of that old, flat clarinet. God tells us to "put on the new man" in Christ, which we received when we gave ourselves to Him (Col. 3:9, 10, KJV).

When we seek to work in love and harmony with all our fellow Christians, regardless of how we ourselves are disregarded, we will enjoy the "peace of God" in our hearts that "passe[s] all understanding" (Phil. 4:7, KJV). Ultimately we shall see God's will come to pass in the work. God can certainly work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28).

Let's trust in Him for that! **PM**

Can we afford to drone along with church programs that worked 40 years ago?



Pontius' Puddle



Smart Investing: "Buy Low" with Dollar Cost Averaging

The formula for investment success seems simple enough: "Buy low and sell high." The problem, of course, is predicting when a security's price will be low and when it will be high. The best analysts and market watchers are fortunate if they can predict the general direction of the market correctly. Certainly, the individual investor cannot be expected to properly "time" specific securities purchases and sales with any consistent success.

However, you can pursue at least half of the investment success formula. You can consistently "buy low" by putting into practice the principle of dollar cost averaging. To be more specific, security at an average cost that is less than the average price. More important, it greatly reduces the risk that you'll invest all, or the majority, of your assets at or near a market high.

It may sound too good to be true, but dollar cost averaging really does work. All it requires is a commitment on your part to invest a fixed amount of money into the investment of your choice at regular intervals.

The result is that you'll buy more units when the price is low—and fewer units when the price is high. An example will illustrate:

DOLLAR COST AVERAGING

Investment Amount	Unit Price	Units Purchased
\$1,000	\$40	25
1,000	50	20

1,000	40	25
1,000	25	40
1,000	40	25
<u>1,000</u>	50	<u>20</u>
\$6,000		155
Average Unit Price		\$40.83
Your Average Cost per Unit		<u>\$38.71</u>
Difference/Savings per Unit		\$2.12

In this example, we assumed a monthly investment of \$1,000. The low unit price was \$25, at which price we bought 40 units. The high price was \$50, at which price we were able to buy just 20 units. Total units purchased were 155. Total investment was \$6,000. Dividing \$6,000 by 155, we arrive at our average cost per unit: \$38.71. The average price (the sum of the six unit prices divided by six) over this period was \$40.83, or \$2.12 per unit higher than we paid. This confirms the principle of dollar cost averaging.

Of greater significance, however, is the fact that dollar cost averaging kept us from investing the entire \$6,000 at \$50 per unit. Had we invested the entire lump sum at that price, we would have purchased just 120 units—35 fewer than purchased using dollar cost averaging! Of course, we could have been extremely fortunate and invested all our money at \$25 per unit, the low, in which case we would have purchased 240 units.

If you have an aggressive risk

temperament and are comfortable trying to time the markets in pursuit of maximum gains, then dollar cost averaging may not be for you. But remember that no one has shown the consistent ability to time the market accurately. Conversely, if you're looking for absolute guarantees, this time-tested strategy won't assure you of a profit. All dollar cost averaging does is increase your chances to reduce your average cost per unit over a given period of time. You'll enjoy a profit only if your selling price exceeds your average cost per unit (as it does in the example illustrated here).

Dollar cost averaging works best for the investor who is neither an aggressive market timer nor the risk-averse investor. In other words, dollar cost averaging is for the moderate investor who is willing to give up some potential of a security's upside in exchange for some protection from a security's downside.

One convenient and flexible means of beginning a dollar cost averaging program is to set up a regular investment plan in cooperation with your local church to contribute money into your retirement account. When you do, you'll be investing wisely.

PM

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

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Picture Windows for Preaching

Christ—the One Road

Robert Shannon wrote of a religious congress for young people sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church on September 17, 1997, in Bologna, Italy. Two strong and unique personalities occupied the same platform that day. One was folk singer Bob Dylan, who sang and played for the young people. The other was Pope John Paul II, who desired to spend time with young people. When the pontiff spoke to the crowd of 20,000, he referred to Dylan's classic song, "Blowin' in the Wind."

John Paul answered the song's title by expressing the thought that truly life's answer was blowing in the wind, the wind that is both the breath and life of the holy. The pope also answered one of the questions of the Dylan song that asked, "How many roads must a man walk before he becomes a man?" John Paul stated strongly: "I answer you, One! There is only one road for a man, and it is Jesus Christ, who said, 'I am the life.'"

People of all ages are looking at different roads to salvation—materialism, New Age philosophy, Eastern religions, and so on. There is but one road—Christ!

Mike Dudit, ed., *Preaching* magazine (Jackson, Tenn.: Preaching Resources, January-February 1998), 48.

Change

Charles Swindoll, in his book *The Bride*, relates that one of his mentors talked about his home church in the Midwest. One Sun-

day morning during an adult Sunday School class, someone introduced a new trendy visual aid commonly used at that time in the business world. The poor guy was hauled before the church board and severely lectured. "How dare you contaminate our church with this worldly method!"

Change is never easy. Today's newest technology is tomorrow's antiquated method.

Church

Fratricide, commonly known in lay terms as "friendly fire," is a military term used to describe one nation's accidental killing of its own troops. During the French and Indian War, George Washington reported that nearly 400 of his troops were killed by friendly fire. During the American Civil War, Confederate Gen. Stonewall

Jackson was shot by his own troops as he returned to his Southern lines. One military historian indicates that probably 10 percent of the nearly 1 million American casualties of World War II, or 100,000 American troops, were the result of friendly fire. The Vietnam War discovered that the percentage jumped to 15 to 20 percent of the casualty list. During Operation Desert Storm, 35 of the 146 Americans were killed in the same manner.

How tragic as the church fights evil, sin, Satan, and hell to witness good lay leaders and pastor-shepherds destroyed, not by the enemy's artillery, but from friendly fire. **PM**

King Duncan, *Dynamic Illustrations* (Knoxville: Seven World Publication, January-February 1996), n.p.

COMPILED BY
DERL G. KEEFER
Pastor
THREE RIVERS,
MICHIGAN



"He must be making up his illustrations. No one lives such a comical lifestyle."

Worship and Preaching Helps

INTRODUCTION

Evangelism is difficult work. Pastors persistently hand off that assignment to the laity. The laity feel comfortable passing the responsibility to the pastor. "Who will do evangelism?" The problem is compounded because we live in an era when Americans are convinced they should do only what makes them comfortable. Sadly, the work of evangelism does not get done.

Evangelism comes from the same root word as "martyr," proving that evangelism is not natural. Human nature seeks to safeguard itself, to protect from fear-inducing experiences. These facts speak again to the futility of trying to reach lost people for Christ.

The Church continues to live today, however, because there are some other dynamics taking place. People who fall in love with Jesus also love other people. Because Christians love other people, they are willing to risk witnessing in order to communicate that love.

Christians possessing a passion for reaching lost people have more of the Spirit of God than they have "the spirit of fear" (2 Tim. 1:7, KJV). The Spirit of God always provides love, power, and a disciplined life (ibid.)—the intriguing characteristics of those who lead people to Jesus Christ.

In this series of expository ser-

mons, we have sought to highlight God's deep longing for the lost. We have sought to do so in two ways: through sermons that evangelize the lost and through messages motivating God's people to witness.

I've teamed up with former staff members of mine, Tim Pusey and Mike Barton, men who know God. Their love of God and of people is evident in the sermons prepared to serve as thought starters for your ministry to your people. Leading people to Jesus Christ and inspiring others to do the same is unquestionably one of your top priorities. Evangelism is the highest way of honoring God and helping people.

—Lyle Pointer

March
April
May
1999

PREPARED BY LYLE
POINTER, TIM PUSEY,
AND MIKE BARTON



LYLE POINTER



TIM PUSEY

Making God Visible

by Lyle Pointer

1 John 1:1-4

Purpose: To persuade people to testify to God's work in their lives.

Proposition: As we tell how God is involved in our lives, we reenvision God for people.

INTRO:

ILLUS. I have heard it said, "You are the only Christ people will see." That is a frightening thought. Perhaps your fears are my fears: How can people adequately portray Christ? Knowing my weaknesses, I'm a poor representation of Jesus; what if I make a serious blunder? All positive influence will be lost!

Now you and I are not ones to shirk our responsibility to live with integrity, consistently and lovingly. Yet we simply cannot convince people they have seen God when they have only observed us.

This problem is further complicated by contemporary misunderstandings about God, such as:

"Science has made faith obsolete!" "God is only a crutch for the weak!" "God is uninvolved in our day!" "God is simply what I make Him to be."

Now, people's misconceptions about God make my job as a witnessing Christian more frightening if not impossible. How can I help people see God? Perhaps we should begin at an elementary level by asking:

I. WHY SHOULD I SAY ANYTHING?

A. The evidence compels us to speak (vv. 1-2).

1. The disciples expressed this inner compulsion: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

2. Some happenings are so significant they must be told.

ILLUS. Jesus told people not to tell when He had healed them. They whispered the miraculous truth anyway. Imagine the twofold problem for the blind person who is healed. On the one hand, he wants to comply with the command of Jesus, the One who replaced darkness with light. On the other hand, friends are asking, "How is it that you were blind last Saturday, but today you are walking without a guide?" How does he tell the truth, but not tell about Jesus?!

3. What we see makes us responsible; what we hear makes us accountable; what we experience makes us culpable.

4. Let us never underestimate the impact of revelation.

a. An eternal word has been spoken.

(1) A communiqué of everlasting significance has been uttered.

(2) God has spoken.

ILLUS. As God spoke the world into existence, He has now spoken through Christ to the world He made. As creation was an important event, so was the entrance of Jesus into the world.

b. Life has appeared, and the eternal is revealed.

(1) God is life; God is alive.

(2) God is the Giver of life.

B. So others may find fellowship with us and God (v. 3).

1. The gospel witness is proclaimed so others may join our fellowship.

2. The longing for relationship compels the Christian to tell others about Christ.

3. People came to Christ because of their relationships.

4. Friends influence friends.

ILLUS. Terry came to me saying, "God wants me to get saved, and you're the one to do it." At least two human influences brought Terry to accept Christ: first, a manager at work who talked with Terry about his bright future and about God; and second, Terry's continuing friendship with me over four years.

C. So we may experience joy (v. 4).

1. No greater satisfaction can be found than bringing someone to Christ.

ILLUS. The first person I ever led to Christ was my eighth grade friend, Lonnie. After leading Lonnie to accept the Lord as Savior, I could never be the same. I longed to experience the deep, delicious delight of being used by God to see a person changed.

2. There is also joy in telling the good news, whether or not a person comes to Christ.

3. Joy includes including others.

a. Enlarging the fellowship brings happiness.

b. Friendships build us into better people.

4. Joy will be found as people accept Christ.

a. A variant reading in the text (v. 4) suggests the witness does not find the joy as much as the one who is included in the fellowship.

b. A motive for witness is the multiplication of joy in others.

II. WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

A. Tell what you have seen and heard (v. 3).

ILLUS. I was summoned as a witness in a hearing to determine whether an additional bus company should be licensed in the state of North Dakota. They required witnesses to take an oath of truthfulness. I was uneasy, even fearful. I was unsure I could answer all their questions aimed my direction. I had concerns about how others would view me. Yet I was compelled to explain what I knew to be true.

1. The witness is responsible for what he knows.

a. We can say, "I don't know," when questions go beyond our realm of knowledge.

b. We do not have to be the authority in all matters.

ILLUS. Fearful Christians often decline to witness because they do not know the Bible well enough. They also

anticipate unbelievers will ask them questions they cannot answer. Our ignorance of some things should not deter us from telling what we do know.

c. We are held accountable for what we have experienced.

2. Being responsible only for what we have experienced diminishes fear of witnessing.

ILLUS. We have probably felt, "But what if they ask me questions for which I don't have answers?" Be honest. Tell them, "I don't know."

B. Tell what Jesus showed us about God (v. 2).

1. God wants to answer prayer (Luke 18:1-8).

ILLUS. In a parable called the unjust judge, Jesus informs us that persistence pays in trying to get justice from a corrupt court system. How much more a good God will help us!

2. God is generous toward us, for He gives to those who ask Him (Luke 11:11-13).

3. God seeks out people who are lost (Luke 15).

4. God is seen in Jesus' life (John 1:18).

C. Tell what you have experienced.

1. We can tell believers about answers to prayer.

ILLUS. Two people in one congregation were miraculously healed from cancer.

2. We can recount how God spared us from a near-tragic accident.

ILLUS. A front end collision in a car caused a teenager's family to acknowledge God protected them from harm.

3. We can explain the timing of circumstances as the benevolent work of God.

4. We can testify to the strength God has provided in times of crisis or sorrow.

ILLUS. Scores of people have exclaimed to this pastor, "I don't know how I could have made it if I didn't have God with me."

5. Perhaps we need first to look attentively to see God in our lives!

CONCLUSION:

1. Let me tell you three ways I've seen God work:

ILLUS. A woman abused as a child began to hope again. Suicidal, hating God, and angry at people, she experienced His love and acceptance. With renewed hope she became a vibrant servant of God.

ILLUS. A man, aged 65, called his brother to come pray for him to be saved. His brother, having prayed for decades, drove 1,800 miles in order to pray personally with his dying brother. God changed him.

ILLUS. A daughter of a parsonage family locked in a criminal psychiatric ward could not carry on a sensible conversation. Her crime was the neglect and abuse of her five children over 15 years. Her family prayed for her. Today she is free and coherent. She now boards the city bus to make her way to church. God freed her from a distraught mind.

2. We must make God visible to people by declaring the God we have seen, heard, and experienced.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship

Call to Witness "Saved to Tell Others"
"I Will Sing of the Mercies"
"That the World May Know"
"Lift Up Jesus"

Prayer

Welcome of Guests

Special Music

A Call to Proclaim "MAKING GOD VISIBLE"

Offering/Offertory

PASTORAL PRAYER

PRAYER OUTLINE:

- 1. Thanks for giving spiritual insight.
- 2. Thanks for those who have taught us spiritual truth.
- 3. Thank You, God, for revealing yourself to us.
- 4. Help us to make You visible to our world.
- 5. We pray specifically for . . . (an unsaved person).

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

But the world says, "Seeing is believing."

Today God wants to teach us how to bridge between these two ways of thinking by making God visible to an unbelieving world.

Can I Really Know I'm Saved?

by Lyle Pointer

Heb. 10:19-27

Purpose: To assure people of their salvation.

Proposition: God wants us to know we are saved.

INTRO:

- A. Almost everyone believes God wants to save them.
- B. The same people may not know God wants them to be certain they are saved.
- C. Many Christians are unassured about their salvation, even some who sing "Blessed Assurance."

I. WHY ARE PEOPLE NOT CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

A. Some people's consciences produce guilt feelings (v. 22).

1. We may have tried to deny God's love as applying to us; we have been forgiven but do not feel as though we have been.

2. We perhaps choose to believe we are exceptions to His rules, that is, God forgives others, but we "know what we are really like."

3. However, we see the finger of God continually pointing to our former sins.

ILLUS. One Christian psychologist observed with sadness, "Some of God's best people feel the worst about themselves."

B. Some people base their spiritual assessment on their past, rather than on God (v. 23).

1. Our memories remind us of things in our personal histories for which we have deep regret.

2. Regret may serve as sandpaper to scratch the shine off our spirits.

3. We are more in tune with our past disharmonies than we are in touch with God's great grace.

C. Some people stop progressing (v. 23).

1. Holding to hope is a continuous activity.

2. Continuous trusting in the Lord is based on His promise and His faithfulness.

D. Some people give very little love and do few good deeds (v. 24).

ILLUS. Some people complain about the church asking so much from them. The people of God "spur [ouch!] one another on toward love and good deeds."

E. Some people skip church and become discouraged (v. 25).

1. The church meets to help people come alive spiritually.

2. The church should be dispensers of encouragement, praise, and appreciation.

F. Some people continue sinning (v. 26).

1. At this point we should lose confidence in our relationship with Christ.

2. Note the progression: people listen to false guilt; they stop progressing; they fail to do good; they skip church and become discouraged; they start sinning.

II. HOW CAN YOU BECOME ASSURED OF YOUR SALVATION?

A. Test the source of your guilt feelings (v. 22).

1. Is my conscience jumping back into my preconversion days?

2. Is my conscience vaguely uneasy, or do I know what I've done wrong?

3. Am I experiencing guilt for wrongdoing, or for something beyond my ability to act?

a. Some people feel guilty for things they could not change.

b. They wish they could have done what they did plus many more things.

ILLUS. A lady had to choose between caring for her sick husband or her dying mother, who lived in another state. She was setting herself up for false guilt feelings when someone reasoned with her, "Don't feel guilt about not being omnipresent. God alone can be present everywhere."

B. Evaluate your spiritual life by God's faithfulness (v. 23).

ILLUS. Phoebe Palmer struggled with assurance of salvation because of the testimonies, experiences, and expectations of others. Then she realized she should take the Bible's revelation of God as the only measure of her relationship with God.

C. Keep professing your hope in Christ (v. 23).

1. People think: "Because I don't feel spiritual, I'd better not testify to what I'm not sure of. I would be a hypocrite."

2. Failure to testify to God-given hope may undermine assurance.

ILLUS. Leonard, a Christian for nearly 50 years, spoke at a testimony meeting: "I thank God He saved me as a teenager. I have not always felt I was a Christian. In fact, I'm not sure I do right now. But I am confident by faith that Jesus is Lord of my life."

D. Show love through good works (v. 24).

1. Evangelicals have de-emphasized good works because some people depend on kind deeds to secure God's favor and salvation.

2. Doing good is God's way of affirming us. We have the chance to see God work through us.

ILLUS. For five years I listened to my secretary respond to the question, "How are you doing?"

She would say, "Doing good."

Now that doesn't sound like proper English, but she was accurate. Her life was filled with doing good deeds.

ILLUS. Rita watched some Christians help her build a home under the direction of Habitat for Humanity. She first marveled at their volunteerism. Then she inquired about their religious beliefs. Shortly she, too, worshiped the Christ of Compassion.

E. Attend church (v. 25).

1. Worship of God builds confidence in the Lord.
2. The fellowship of God's people increases the awareness of God's presence and approval.

F. Be encouraged (v. 25).

1. Practice encouraging each other.

ILLUS. Harold and Wilma encourage people constantly. No wonder people are drawn to them and their church. Harold and Wilma reassure, inspire, compliment, listen, motivate, praise God, testify, express confidence in both God and His Church. And they live congruent with their speech. Nothing tastes so good as lunch with those two vibrant, Christian encouragers.

2. Flattery is not the same as applauding one another.
3. Reminding each other of God's love and faithfulness improves our outlook.
4. Call each other to patience and perseverance, for we need to hear that advice.
5. Watch out after you have experienced a spiritual peak, for testing frequently follows.
6. After a mountaintop experience, we tend to live self-sufficiently without due dependence upon the Spirit.

ILLUS. In my college days I heard my pastor, Jim Bond, say, "Never doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light."

G. Stop sinning (v. 26).

1. Sin interrupts assurance.
2. Obedience bring certainty.
3. Today, would you move from uncertainty to confidence?

CONCLUSION:

1. God provides everything we need to live a triumphant Christian life.
2. God even ministers to our fears of failure and to our uncertainties of success.
3. How we live our lives in Christ determines how we understand God and how we understand God determines how we live.

ILLUS. DeEtte Richmond and Richard Sippos were being married at the Santa Clara University Mission Church when all of a sudden, a huge clap of thunder shook the building. "That's not the Lord disapproving," announced Rev. Jack Ruffi, not missing a beat. "He's clapping His hands." Pastor Jack knew God well.

4. God will rejoice when you move into a close relationship with Him.
5. God invites you now.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Opening "Blessed Assurance"
- Testimony "And Can It Be?"
- Offering
- Testimony "Because He Lives"
"I Know Whom I Have Believed"
- Special Music
- Message "CAN I REALLY KNOW I'M SAVED?"
- Closing Chorus "I Have Christ in My Heart"

PASTORAL PRAYER

Place prayer at the end of the service in order to invite people to accept Christ or to enter into a relationship with confidence in God.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

OPENING

Recount a story of a person who lacked assurance. Transition out of the story by saying, "Today's worship experience is dedicated to helping people enter into a relationship of confidence."

TESTIMONY

Highlight a person who became confident of his or her salvation. Have that person describe the doubts and the process that ended in assurance.

A Slur That Compliments God

by Lyle Pointer

Luke 15:1-7

Purpose: To invite people to God who seeks them.

Proposition: God wants to find every lost person.

INTRO:

1. The social gap between the religious leaders and the ungodly people was very great.
 - a. The religious leaders did not associate with ungodly people.
 - b. The tax collectors were legal thieves and despised by the overtaxed populace.
 2. The sinners were generally immoral people, not merely those who were unforgiven by God.
 - a. Their lifestyles were reprehensible.
 - b. They were unembarrassed about how they lived.
 3. When Jesus ate with people whose occupations and immorality were incompatible with Old Testament law, He was criticized.
 - a. Eating with people implied welcome, recognition, and acceptance.
 - b. To eat with someone meant to choose them as friends.
- ILLUS.** Our word "companion" in the English language means literally "with bread." To dine with someone is to be a close companion.
4. Jesus, in the eyes of the religious leaders, defiled himself by befriending immoral people.
 5. So the religious leaders spoke what, to their minds, was a scalding condemnation: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).
 6. What religious leaders thought would discredit Jesus, we interpret today to be a high compliment.
 7. Jesus takes this conflictual encounter as an occasion to tell a story, the story of the lost sheep.
 8. A better name for the parable is the story of the seeking shepherd.
 9. The shepherd is a metaphor for God.
 10. Let's read the account to hear Jesus' response to the slur against Him. (Read Luke 15:1-7.)

I. GOD, LIKE THE SHEPHERD, HAS A GREATER CONCERN FOR THE LOST PEOPLE THAN FOR FOUND PEOPLE.

A. God prioritizes "finding of the lost." Contrary to both ancient and popular wisdom, God does not hate us when we sin.

ILLUS. When a child is found, he gets hugged, not his siblings.

B. God values us even while we are sinners.

1. God cherishes us while we are still sinning.
 2. God loves individuals.
 3. God is attentive to our personal plight.
- ILLUS.** In the Gospel of Thomas, a book of religious writings from A.D. 140, comes a retelling of the story of the good shepherd. The story has the shepherd finding the sheep and then whispering lovingly in its ear.
4. God prizes you particularly.
 5. There are no masses of people in God's eyes—only individuals.
 6. The shepherd had 99 sheep, but his concern was for the one.

C. God gets involved with us.

ILLUS. A doctor does not set a broken bone from across the street. He comes close. He is tender, but strong.

1. Love does not touch us apart from closeness.
2. God moves close to us and enjoys our friendship.

II. GOD SEEKS US UNTIL HE FINDS US.

A. Our God is a seeking God.

1. When Jesus heard the comment, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," He knew He could not leave this picture of God unchallenged.

- a. God does not simply welcome and eat with sinners.
- b. This is an inadequate description of God.

2. God goes out looking for people, not simply welcoming those who seek Him.

B. Our God seeks until He finds.

1. Jesus tells us God is not adequately described as merely a seeking God.

2. God searches until He finds us.
 - a. He goes to great lengths to secure us.
 - b. He undertakes no token search.

c. He pursues with persistence and perseverance.

d. God even finds people while they are hiding.

ILLUS. Adam and Eve sinned and immediately became ashamed of seeing God. Therefore, they hid from God when He came looking for them.

ILLUS. Elijah hid from Queen Jezebel, who had threatened him. In a cave, far from civilization, God found Elijah hiding.

3. God finds people while they are running.

ILLUS. Jacob was running from his brother Esau. Jacob was running for a good reason: he had cheated his brother out of a large sum of wealth. When Jacob awoke from a troubled night of sleep, he recognized God had caught up with him. He testified that God was close.

ILLUS. Jonah, called of God to preach to people against whom he was prejudiced, tried to run from Him. However, God caught up with him.

C. God seeks until He finds, and then He celebrates.

ILLUS. At Sid Ellis's funeral, three of his friends asked me, "Was Sid right with God?" Friends want to rejoice. They want to dance with angels over the lost being found.

APPLICATIONS:

1. We are to seek and save the lost.
 - a. God has formed a search party among His followers.

b. Christ began the process of seeking for the lost when He told His disciples, "Go into all the world . . . and make disciples" (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19).

c. Jesus says, "As [for the same reason] the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

d. Let us become godly by doing what God does—finding lost people.

2. God is looking for you.

ILLUS. While on a beach north of San Diego, I heard the loudspeaker announce: "Would the parents of Brittany Leach please come to the lifeguard stand. Brittany is six years old; she is lost and needs her parents."

I didn't see Brittany's parents, but I imagined they jumped to their feet and ran toward the lifeguard station. As they neared where their daughter was waiting, they probably stood on tiptoes to see over the crowd. I can imagine them trying to catch a glimpse of Brittany. Concerned about her fear and panicky feeling, they hurried even as the sand gave way beneath their feet. Getting to Brittany was more important than anything else in that moment.

3. That's the picture I have of God as He looks for you.

4. Knowing His heart, I know He is trying to find you.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Prelude "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"
- Interview a New Christian or Someone New to Your Church Fellowship "Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us" "Why Should He Love Me So?" "No One Ever Cared for Me like Jesus"
- Prayer "Gentle Shepherd"
- Offering
- Welcome of Guests and Announcements
- Special Music
- Message "A SLUR THAT COMPLIMENTS GOD"

PASTORAL PRAYER

Pray for courage to witness, for willingness to extend ourselves to others, to overcome the fear of social disapproval.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

INTERVIEW

Ask people what helped them to come to Christ or what influenced them to come to your church. Also inquire how they were made to feel accepted into the church fellowship. Explore with them who and what were used by God to bring them to where they are spiritually.



I Can't Live the Christian Life

by Lyle Pointner

2 Pet. 1:3-11

Purpose: To assure the unbeliever that God's power is available to help him or her live the Christian life.

Proposition: God gives us power to obey Him.

INTRO:

ILLUS. Over the years I've had many people say to me, "I can't live the life."

1. To allow that negative conclusion to remain untested permits a person to become defeated before he or she begins.

2. Let me make some observations about the person who says, "I can't live the life."

a. Your reservation may be due to your sincerity.

(1) You're not going to be presumptuous.

(2) You refuse hypocrisy.

(3) You desire to live the life but are mindful of your inadequacy.

b. Your reservation may be due to your sensitivity.

(1) You are wisely counting the cost of such a choice.

(2) You're also fearful of the possible failures ahead.

(3) This is no smoke screen but a genuine apprehension about becoming a Christian.

3. Living the Christian life is impossible for us alone.

4. God, however, makes possible what is impossible with us.

5. Here's how God enables us to live the Christian life. (Read 2 Pet. 1:3-11.)

I. WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BY GOD'S DIVINE POWER (V. 3)

A. God's power gives us everything we need for godliness.

1. God provides the strength to live holy lives.

2. The Holy Spirit energizes human power.

ILLUS. I was working on a crew, building a road through a timbered section of the country. We came to a place where two large stumps had grown together. The cedar trees had been cut 20 years before. The remaining stumps stood about 10 feet tall and were each 12 feet across. The bulldozer was a powerful piece of equipment but was not up to the task of digging out such huge trees. So we put 87 sticks of dynamite under those two stumps.

a. There are times when we do not have the resources ourselves.

b. We must call on resources outside of ourselves.

c. Such is the case when it comes to living the godly life.

B. God's power comes through our knowledge of Him.

1. When we say, "I can't live the life," our knowledge has centered on ourselves.

a. We know we are inadequate.

b. Our self-understanding tells us that we are not able to make the necessary changes and marshal the required discipline to live holy lives.

c. If the Christian life is an impossibility, then God is exceedingly unkind and malicious.

d. However, the Bible tells us God is both good and glorious.

2. When we know God, we are convinced He is able to work through us.

ILLUS. Part of my responsibility as a professor is to assess talent. My work as a church growth consultant also requires me to evaluate people's abilities. One variable I always try to keep in mind is the divine dimension. God is able to work through people's lives far beyond the raw human talent.

3. Our knowledge of God means:

a. We are intimately acquainted.

b. We accept God as He has revealed himself to us.

C. God's power is called forth by His glory and goodness.

1. God's glory might be defined as a mixture of reality and splendor.

2. God's reality and awesomeness assure us that we are not dealing with simply another human agent.

3. God's power comes to us out of His transcendent mightiness.

4. We also recognize this God as good, that is, He wants to help us.

5. Naturally, God delegates part of His almightiness to us.

II. WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THROUGH HIS PRECIOUS PROMISES (V. 4)

A. God's promises emerge from His glory and goodness.

1. God's promises are based upon His own character as glorious and good.

2. A glorious and good God makes a commitment to our best welfare.

ILLUS. Throughout my educational experiences, from grade school through graduate school, I always had teachers who wanted to see me prosper. I look back upon each of those individuals who contributed to my life and conclude that they simply liked me and some of my potential. I hope both of those things were true. Most were committed to investing their lives in people. That's why they would take jobs as educators when they could very well have made more money elsewhere. In my more mature reflection, I recognize that these teachers and professors taught me because of their basic goodness.

B. God's promises encourage us to participate in His divine nature.

1. How do we participate in the divine nature?

2. Three analogies might help us to understand:

a. Jesus used the word picture of "the vine and the branches," saying: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If

a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

b. The second analogy is the phrase employed by the apostle Paul, "in Christ."

c. The third expression is to be holy or to be godly.

C. God's promises enable us to escape the world's corruption.

1. We can count on God to provide us a way through (1 Cor. 10:13).

2. The Holy Spirit, one of God's promises, serves as a guide to paths of right living.

III. WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BY ADDING QUALITIES TO OUR FAITH (V. 5)

A. In order to live the life, we have the responsibility to add to our faith.

1. Making "every effort" places upon our shoulders the responsibilities to make improvement.

2. The task of acquiring positive Christian characteristics is never easy; it requires effort.

3. The qualities are so attractive, namely:

- a. Goodness
- b. Knowledge
- c. Self-control
- d. Perseverance
- e. Godliness
- f. Brotherly kindness

g. Love

B. These biblical qualities make you effective.

1. These qualities must be possessed in increasing measure—that is, growth must continue to take place.

2. These qualities prevent you from being unproductive in your knowledge of Christ.

ILLUS. Tom became angry with other members of the church board. His muscles tensed. His face was drawn. Afterward he said: "I knew I was losing it. My anger should not have been expressed. I'm so thankful God helped me to hold my tongue." He was kept from doing the wrong thing by his awareness of how a Christian was to live. He chose to be self-disciplined.

IV. WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BY CLEANSING FROM PAST SINS (V. 9)

A. Cleansing speaks of the removal of sins.

ILLUS. The word "cleansing" is a domestic term. We use products such as Comet or Ajax to cleanse the sinks in our homes.

1. God scrubs us clean.

2. God gives us the ability to live the life because He gives us a clean start.

3. God removes the sins that have hampered our relationship with Him.

B. Cleansing also provides a renewal of spirit.

1. The human spirit is refreshed by the cleansing work of God.

2. The human spirit becomes hope-filled because the past is no longer a blight upon one's future.

ILLUS. A man was bound by his addiction to alcohol. His body and mind crumbled under the toxic effect of his drinking. Sober and struggling, he decided God's way afforded his only hope. Years after his conversion, he marveled at the fact that he was still a Christian and sober. "As low as I was," he commented in amazement, "I never would have guessed that God could have kept me. In fact, if I can live for God, anybody can."

CONCLUSION:

1. "I can't live the life" is countered by human effort and divine power.

a. The promise of God's Word brings reassurance to the person who doubts he or she can go on.

b. "You will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (vv. 10-11).

2. Having the assurance that you can live the life of godliness, would you now enter into relationship with God?

3. Begin now the adventure of living life for Him.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude

- "Standing on the Promises"
- "In the Name of the Lord"
- "Greater Is He That Is in Me"
- "Nothing Is Impossible"

Offertory Prayer

Offering

Special Music

Message "I CAN'T LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Invitation

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

"No one needs to remind us of our weaknesses and inabilities. God does remind us that He makes possible what is otherwise impossible—living the life of godliness! Let us reaffirm God's power and promises."

OFFERTORY PRAYER

"We cannot repay You, God, for Your generosity to us. We express our gratitude to You through giving."

INVITATION

"Invite Christ into your life on the basis of His ability to help you live the life of holiness."

What Difference Does "Being Saved" Make? (God Gives New Life)

by Lyle Pointer

Eph. 2:1-10

Purpose: To remind us of the new life we have received from God and how that life affects us.

Proposition: Being dead in sin, God gives new life in Christ.

INTRO:

ILLUS. In teaching classes on how to share one's faith in Christ, I ask Christians to write out the differences Jesus made in their lives. In other words, "What have you found to be true about God's involvement in your life?" For many this was a very difficult task.

A. We believe God's influence is important and all-encompassing.

1. Yet to explain it, to pinpoint exactly what God does in our lives, is taxing.

2. The spirit world is usually explained in human terms; the invisible is best described by the visible.

ILLUS. We know God is spirit and not a body. To explain God, we tend to describe Him as having a face, a smile, eyes, and hands.

B. To know what difference God makes upon our lives produces a profound impact.

1. We become more confident in our relationship with God.

2. We are more at ease around other believers.

3. We have an attractive explanation to the questions unbelievers ask of us.

C. To explain adequately what Christ does, we may profit from understanding the damage done to us by sin:

I. SIN CAUSES DEATH IN LIFE

"You were dead in your trespasses and sins" (v. 1).

A. Sin is missing the target.

ILLUS. My dad owned a .22 pistol that always shot high. We discovered someone had tampered with the sight—filing it down.

1. To sin means that we miss life as God wanted us to experience it.

2. Sin is universal because it is a failure to become what we should be.

3. We may have an improper idea of a sinner.

a. We tend to think that a sinner is a horrible person,

such as a robber, a murderer, a prostitute, a drunkard.

b. We tend not to think of the respectful citizen as a sinner too.

c. In fact, we may feel that there are very few sinners because people aren't that bad.

d. We may become caught up in the cultural trap of categorizing kinds of sin.

e. Sin, in its basic definition, is a failure to be and to do as we ought.

B. Sin is taking the wrong direction.

1. Another word for sin is to slip or to fall.

a. This word for sin pictures a person sliding off the road; losing one's footing and going down.

b. It implies a loss of direction, a straying from the right road.

ILLUS. We were pheasant hunting on land for which we had received permission from the farmer. A man came running toward us, yelling loudly. He told us that we had trespassed. We informed him that we had permission to hunt. Unknowingly we had crossed a cattle guard that separated one man's land from another. We had trespassed.

c. The sin is to choose the wrong path.

d. The result is that a person fails to reach the destination.

C. Sin has deadly results.

1. Sin causes death in this life.

a. Perhaps we think "dead in . . . sins" means that a person who sins in this life will inherit eternal punishment hereafter.

b. Sin's power destroys life here and now too.

2. Sin kills innocence.

a. We are never quite the same after we sin.

b. We never completely forget what we did.

c. While sin's memory may not be on the surface, we can never completely subterfuge the history of wrongdoing.

d. Once lost, innocence cannot be recaptured.

ILLUS. Adam and Eve hid from God because they had sinned. Their presenting reason for not responding to God's call for them was that they were naked. Nakedness speaks of vulnerability, of shame, of the desire to cover up.

3. Sin kills ideals.

Sin initiates a damaging process. A person sees and abhors wrong. Then the person is tempted to do the wrong. When a person sins, he or she becomes unhappy and uncomfortable. When the next sin occurs, feelings of guilt may not accompany the wrongdoing; eventually the person becomes comfortable doing the wrong. He or she has now experienced death in life. Sin's power is so strong it makes the next sin easier.

ILLUS. Like Novocain, the first needle prick is felt, but later jabs of the needle are painless.

a. Ideals, once held, slowly die away.

b. Sin is a slow, subtle kind of suicide.

4. Sin kills the will.

a. A person chooses a forbidden pleasure because he or she wants to do so.

b. In the end the person sins because he or she cannot

resist sin.

ILLUS. A young lady informed me she wanted to divorce her husband, for she was enjoying an affair with another man. Seeing she was not going to repent, I told her I feared that this pattern of unfaithfulness would continue. She assured me it would not. She went on to divorce her husband and to marry the one with whom she was having an affair.

Two years later she told me she was now having an affair with the lawyer who had helped her secure her first divorce. She claimed that physical relations were now more exciting outside of marriage. She related how her moral looseness had begun as an unmarried teenager. Innocence was killed. Ideals were set aside. The will was assassinated. Hear her words: "I'm terrible, but I can't help it."

II. HOW DOES JESUS CHRIST GIVE LIFE?

"God . . . made us alive with Christ" (vv. 4-5).

A. Jesus restores integrity in place of lost innocence.

1. Jesus cannot give a person back his or her lost innocence.
2. Jesus can take away the guilt that lost innocence produces.
3. Jesus bridges the estrangement between God and us by our acceptance of God's love.
4. Jesus removes the fear of approaching God.

ILLUS. Debbie commented, "I don't know why I stopped going to church."

Sid acknowledged, "I don't feel comfortable around church people."

These observations were made by people who had chosen not to go God's way. They stand in stark contrast to Duane's observation: "I couldn't make it from week to week if I didn't have the Lord. I enjoy going to church. I feel my spirit uplifted."

5. Jesus told us that God's welcome mat is always out for us no matter what we have done.

B. Jesus reawakens the standard of integrity.

1. Dead ideals are given new birth.
2. The dreams once dreamed are dreamed again.
3. Goals that once energized us have a renewed attractiveness.

ILLUS. Young people can now reclaim lost virginity. After having become involved sexually, they have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. With that newfound relationship comes the motivation to take vows of purity. Admittedly, innocence is gone, but through Jesus, integrity has been instilled.

4. The Christian message rekindles ideals and hopes.

C. Jesus revives the lost power of choice.

1. Whereas sin destroys the ability to determine a noble path of life, God resuscitates that power.

2. We have the power to say yes or no in the appropriate situations.

CONCLUSION:

1. What difference does "being saved" make in our lives?
2. The answer: God gives new life!
3. In contrast to sin's deadly destructiveness, coming alive in Christ is all the more compelling.

ILLUS. A teenage boy in my church had determined to place God first in his life. One day he faced an opportunity to sin. In fact, a group of guys urged him to do the wrong thing. He decidedly, but weakly, said no to their pressure.

Was it easy for him to do that? Not at all. He walked away from the group with his head bowed and his shoulders drooping.

While he walked away in social shame, God enabled him to lift his head and square his shoulders, knowing he had acted with integrity. The power of God had stiffened his backbone. He was enabled to stand tall. God gave him the power to live.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship

Testimony

"Glorious Freedom"
 "He Brought Me Out"
 "Hallelujah, I Am Free!"

Offertory Prayer

Offering

Special Music

Message "WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES 'BEING SAVED' MAKE?"

Song of Invitation..... "He Is Able to Deliver Thee"

Song of Celebration "Wonderful Grace of Jesus"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

"Is there any difference between the Christian life and simply living a good life? The Bible maintains that a marked difference exists. We will highlight the attractiveness of the Christian life through songs and sermon. Let's begin with . . ."

TESTIMONY

This testimony may be read for someone who is hesitant to speak up front.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

"We give You gifts expressing the joy of Your forgiveness, the freedom from our sins, and the pleasure of Your 'forever' friendship."

Praying for Unbelievers

by Lyle Pointer

Eph. 6:19-20 and Col. 4:2-6

Purpose: To assure people of their salvation.

Proposition: A definite relationship exists between prayer and the work of God's Spirit in bringing people into a relationship with God.

INTRO:

ILLUS. A series of events led him farther and deeper into sin. At a dance hall as a teenager, he got mad at a fellow, grabbed a beer bottle, and smashed it into the face of the guy who had danced with his girlfriend. Silver was a rough person. He was 6 feet 5 inches tall, big, and loved to fight. Lying, stealing, and cheating were everyday events for him. It appeared as though he possessed no conscience.

Year after year, his brother prayed for him. Silver cheated his brother again and again, put him down, and spoke unkindly of him. Yet his brother prayed for him decade after decade. On his deathbed, dying of cancer, Silver called my dad, his brother, and said: "Would you pray with me? I am ready to accept Christ."

1. Have you ever wondered if someone you loved, if someone you cared about would ever come to know Jesus Christ?

a. Have you ever questioned, "Does it do any good to pray?"

b. Is there any connection whatsoever between prayer and evangelism?

2. You say, "Oh sure, the Bible speaks of both."

3. Yet, isn't it difficult to just keep on praying when you see no results?

4. We would all answer: "Of course it is. It's hard to do anything when we don't see results."

5. Let's read Eph. 6:19-20 and Col. 4:2-6.

I. HOW DO WE PRAY ABOUT PEOPLE COMING TO JESUS CHRIST?

A. Paul instructed, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me" (Eph. 6:19).

1. Have you ever wondered what to say to someone?

a. How can I start this conversation?

b. How can I get into it?

c. How can I bridge this gulf between us?

d. How can I introduce spiritual things to other people?

2. Christians ask themselves these questions again and again.

3. Paul was saying, "Would you pray for me? I'm talking to people about Christ, and I need you to pray for me."

B. You might think Paul would be the last person on earth to need prayer.

1. Paul had the finest spiritual training.

2. Paul by personality was a very dominant, aggressive person.

3. Words just seemed to flow from Paul, for not only were his thoughts significant, as we read the books of the New Testament written by him, but also his thoughts were deep and penetrating, even mysterious to us.

4. We think, "Surely this man, with such a grasp of knowledge and insight and with fluency in his language, could have easily communicated about Jesus Christ."

5. Yet this dominant, brilliant, educated, aggressive Christian says, "Pray for me."

6. Paul's struggle is the one you and I experience.

7. Pray for me so that, when I open my mouth, I will have words to say.

C. Paul was fear filled.

1. Oh, we've experienced that!

2. Fearless—well, not until a couple of weeks had passed.

3. Paul had some reason to be fearful, though.

a. You notice that Paul was in chains.

b. Paul had been thrown into prison because he had talked about the Lord Jesus.

4. We fear something horrible.

We don't have a long history of terrible things happening to us as he did for having spoken up. Our imagination runs wild and, chasing it, are our emotions. So we get frightened, so frightened that fear takes over, and we hesitate to speak.

5. Oh, how we need people to pray that we will be fearless, full of courage and boldness.

D. Paul asked to be able to speak clearly.

1. Now it is not because Paul had a speech impediment.

2. The gospel is very mysterious, clouded, and not easily communicated.

3. Think as an unbeliever thinks.

4. Our task is indeed a difficult one to make the gospel clear when so much of it is mysterious and strange.

E. A sense of oughtness compels us.

"Pray that I may declare [the gospel, the mystery of Christ] fearlessly, as I should" (Eph. 6:20).

1. Paul experienced a sense of oughtness that you and I experience.

2. Although there are times when we would like to excuse, intellectualize, and talk our way out of the necessity of talking to others about Jesus Christ, there's always the inner urgency, "I should," when it seems "I cannot."

3. There's that prevailing inner voice, "I should."

4. The "I should" is not an ought to be discarded.

5. The "I should" is a duty to be embraced.

6. The "I should" is a step of faith that one must take.

II. PAUL PLED, "DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER" (COL. 4:2)

A. The one who would speak for God requires a devotion to prayer—a commitment to talk to God.

1. Devotion means to be deeply committed.

2. Devotion includes persevering.

B. Pray that there will be open doors (Col. 4:3).

ILLUS. My personal experience is that, as I pray for open doors, more doors open. I think doors swing both ways. The more I pray, the more there are open doors. The more I pray, the more I see the open door. The less I pray for the open door, the more I am apt to walk down the hallway of life unaware that doors are ajar.

III. PAUL ADVISES, "BE WISE IN THE WAY YOU ACT TOWARD OUTSIDERS" (COL. 4:5)

ILLUS. How embarrassed we are again and again to hear the report of hypocrisy leveled at Christians by unbelievers. While Christians are well intentioned and, I believe, are graded lower than they should be, yet we hear embarrassing evaluations by unbelievers. The casual work, the careless word, the temporary relinquishing of ethics, the unguarded lie by professing Christians result in the outsider saying, "There is no difference."

A. Paul insisted, "Act [rightly] toward outsiders" (Col. 4:5).

1. In those times when we think we have a right to be angry with people, let us relinquish that right for the more noble purpose of leading the unsaved into a right relationship with God.

2. There are times when Christians stand for principles, they think, but they are evaluated as being perfectionistic.

3. Ruthlessly evaluate your behavior toward unbelievers by the standard of Christian love.

B. Paul pressed, "Make the most of every opportunity" (Col. 4:5).

1. Making the most of every opportunity means we take persons, to the degree that they are open, closer to a right relationship with God.

2. Seize the opportunity.

a. Our inclination is to quit before the opportunity has been fully exploited.

b. Never, never are we to push.

c. Never, never is it appropriate to pressure.

d. Never, never is it right to put people down. Yet there is much that can be done when God presents an opportunity.

C. Paul urged, "Let your conversation be always full of grace" (Col. 4:6).

1. "Full of grace" means being loving and redemptive.

2. Take to heart the welfare of others.

D. Paul illustrated that we are to be "seasoned with salt."

1. Being "seasoned with salt" suggests creating a thirst in the person to whom we are talking.

2. Being "seasoned with salt" has another meaning, too—"sprinkled with humor."

ILLUS. Do you enjoy being with people who say funny things? Do you enjoy a laugh and delight in people who are lighthearted? Of course! We seek them out.

3. Conversations seasoned with humor draw the unbeliever to a place of openness.

4. Is your conversation "seasoned with salt," that is, does it make a person thirsty?

5. Is there humor that invites them into a relationship with you?

6. That's the kind of thing Paul suggests we pray about: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

ILLUS. Terry, an angry, unsaved man in his 20s, said, "In the last 30 seconds of my life, I'm going to repent." After I left the restaurant where Terry made that statement, I went home to tell my wife, Paula. In the living room beside the couch we began to pray for Terry. It astonished me when we got up from praying to realize we had prayed for an hour and 15 minutes. It seemed just a few moments had passed. Let me assure you that it was one of the very few times in my life when that length of a prayer seemed short to me. Yet, while praying, something happened inside me. A deep inner certainty that Terry would be saved flooded my spirit.

Within two weeks, Terry came over to our home and said, "Lyle, I need you to know, I've accepted Christ into my life."

Let's pray together for those who will one day believe in the Lord Jesus.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

We Praise His Name Together "I'll Tell the World"
"The Light of the World"

We Direct Our Hearts Toward God "Turn Your Eyes upon
Jesus"

Pastoral Prayer

We Direct Our Hearts in Love to Others

"Rescue the Perishing"

"Room at the Cross"

Special Music

Message "PRAYING FOR UNBELIEVERS"

"Lord, Lay Some Soul upon My Heart"

Just Call Him "Dad"

by Timothy B. Pusey

Rom. 8:12-17

INTRO:

I suppose there is no relationship that can compare with being a father. My life has never been the same since the day the first of our three children was born. Being a dad to three children has a way of changing your life! Much to my disappointment, I have not demonstrated in these 16 years that I am the perfect father. I am sure my children can't comprehend the love I have for them.

Today I want to share with you the wonderful kind of relationship each of us can have with our Heavenly Father. To so many, He seems aloof, distant, and indifferent, but that's not at all the way He has intended for it to be.

I. WHEN JESUS COMES INTO OUR LIVES, WE BECOME PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD

A. God adopts us into His family. He claims us as His own. He declares himself to be our Father, and we are His children. He accepts responsibility for us. He commits His love to us. In fact, He loves us with a love that is impossible for us to fully comprehend.

The apostle Paul used the idea of adoption, fully aware of how serious and complicated adoption was in the Roman world. In their culture, the father had absolute power over the life of his offspring regardless of how old they became. Consequently, when a child passed from one family into another, it was an extremely serious matter.

When we become Christians, we enter into the very family of God. We did nothing to deserve it. God, the great Father, in His amazing love and mercy, has taken the lost, helpless, debt-laden sinner and adopted him or her into His own family. There is nothing we could ever do to deserve His kindness and His affection. Yet He chooses us—and invites us to become part of His family.

ILLUS. I remember visiting an orphanage when I was only a boy. It was a big old building. In it lived children whose parents were either deceased, incapable of raising their children, or merely uninterested in doing so. While the people who ran the orphanage were good people, even from the perspective of a boy, I could tell that it wasn't much of a home. It was more of an institution. I remember as a child pondering what would become of me if my parents were to die.

B. We received all the benefits of being God's children. What a wonderful transition it must have been for an orphan to become part of a family! That's just how it is when God claims us for His own. Not only is there the newfound relationship with our Heavenly Father, but also there are all the rights and privileges that go with it! We are God's sons, His daughters. He is our Father, our "Dad." We receive a new Father as we become part of the family of God.

II. AS PART OF GOD'S FAMILY, WE ARE EXPECTED TO BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM

ILLUS. Several years ago, my wife and I joined three of my cousins and their families for a day at an amusement park. Being cut from the same mold, these nine blond, Pusey descendants all fairly resembled one another—enough so that several watching in the crowd assumed they were all brothers and sisters. My cousin Marla and I were leading the pack at the start of the day, with nine stair-stepped children directly behind us, trailed by the other half-dozen adults. One of the adults trailing behind overheard someone who had observed this man and woman with nine children saying, "Some people don't know when to stop!"

A. As God's children, we should expect more and more of a family resemblance with our Heavenly Father. As we learn to walk with Him, people should note our attitudes and our responses to people being more and more like that of our Father. As it can sometimes be observed that a son walks just like his father, so a born-again Christian walks more and more like Jesus Christ.

B. In this way, holy living becomes the natural outflow of our new relationship with God. Holy living is more than simply discipline or duty and certainly more than rules and regulations. Nor is holy living simply responding in fear and trembling to a holy God. It's the by-product of getting close to the Lord, of being influenced by His character and His nature. It's a matter of loving God so much that we want to be like Him. He becomes our ultimate Role Model.

We love our Heavenly Father so much that we do not want to disappoint Him in any way. If you think of someone who has had a tremendous influence on your life, one whom you have admired, one who has loved you and cared for you, you would acknowledge that you would not want to intentionally hurt that person or disappoint him or her. You don't want to intentionally hurt someone who means a great deal to you because you love that one! You feel somehow indebted to the person! You want to honor him or her by what you say and do.

The inward awareness that we are beloved by God as His children is the root of holy living. The wonderful assurance that I am a child of God prompts me to have a heart for all that He has and all that He asks of me. To know that God truly loves me spurs a desire to please Him and honor Him with my life. Living a life that pleases God begins with cultivating a heart for the Lord and His ways. Holy living becomes the only logical response to the One who has made us part of His own family.

III. AS GOD'S CHILDREN, WE ARE HIS HEIRS

A. As the adopted son becomes a rightful heir to his father's estate, so we become heirs of all God has when we become His sons and daughters. What an incredible thought! You always hoped that you'd discover a rich uncle somewhere who would leave you his fortune!

B. Scripture tells us that this "inheritance . . . can never perish, spoil or fade" away (1 Pet. 1:4). Ours is an eternal inheritance. The promise of our Father is that He will

someday take us to the place He has been preparing for us. The Bible describes heaven in such wonderful ways that I can only conclude that heaven is beyond our wildest imaginations. The heartaches and struggles of life will be over, and we will be forever with our Heavenly Father.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. Bob Benson, in his delightful way, relates these truths to a scene at an old-fashioned Sunday School picnic. While others show up with baskets full of homemade chicken, potato salad, pies, and all the other fixings, you scurry off to the event with nothing but a piece of bologna between two stale pieces of bread. One family spreads out their feast beside you and, seeing what you have, invite you to join in their feast. A bit embarrassed, you finally concede only when they encase it as a matter of you sharing what you have and of their sharing what they have. You find yourself "eating like a king when you came like a pauper."¹

While some people hang on to their stale bologna sandwich kind of living, clutching it feverishly so no one can snatch it from them, God invites us to join Him at His banquet table. You have been invited to become a member of His family. You have been invited to eat at His bountiful table of blessings for all eternity! How could we possibly pass up such a wonderful opportunity!

1. Bob Benson, *Come Share the Being* (Nashville: Impact Books, 1974), 106.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Welcome
- Baby Dedication
- Moments for Friendship in Worship
- Songs of Praise "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
"I Will Sing of the Mercies"
"He Has Made Me Glad"
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
- Personal Voice of Praise
- Choir "You Are My All in All"
- Songs of Worship "More Precious than Silver"
"My Lord, My God"
"We Declare Your Majesty"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Giving Tithes and Offerings
- Solo "I'd Rather Have Jesus"
- Dramatic Sketch
- Message "JUST CALL HIM 'DAD'"
- Song of Invitation "The Savior Is Waiting"

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lead the people in focusing on praise for the attributes of Jesus.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

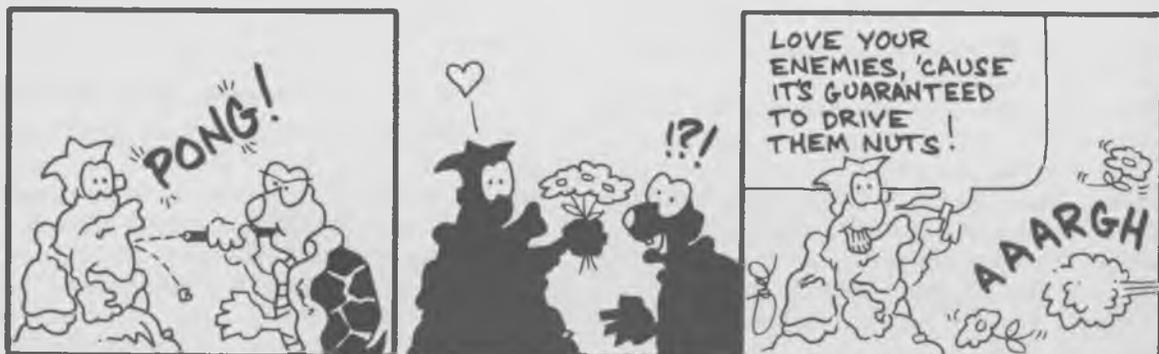
BABY DEDICATION

Recall for the congregation the tender ears Samuel had in hearing the voice of his Heavenly Father. "As we dedicate this child to the Lord today, we pray that God will early give him or her ears to hear His voice and that this child will become a mighty man or woman for God." Make it as personal as possible in relating to the parents.

DRAMA

Use a short drama to introduce the topic of the relationship between a father and child.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



PONTIUS@AOL.COM © JOE KAUFMAN

The Good Life

by Timothy B. Pusey

John 10:7-11

INTRO:

A. I suppose everyone wants to enjoy “the good life.” Some people think they discover it by living in huge houses and driving fancy cars. Some folk are convinced the good life is experienced when you’re out under the stars by a campfire. Some single persons see marriage as the good life; some married people see singleness as the good life! Others see warm, wonderful scenes in commercials of a group of friends having beer together, and they think that’s got to be the good life.

B. While I suppose a lot of things may bring some degree of pleasure into people’s lives, I want to lead you to something I have found to be much deeper, more lasting, and more satisfying than any other approach to “the good life.” I want to tell you about Someone whose whole purpose in living and dying was so that each of us can experience a truly good life. His name is Jesus. In the passage of Scripture that we’re going to look at this morning, He was standing around talking with a group of skeptics. They were religious people, but they were certainly skeptical of who Jesus was and skeptical of what He taught. In the midst of this conversation, Jesus made an interesting analogy to try one more time to explain himself to them.

I. THE GOOD LIFE IS DISCOVERED THROUGH JESUS

A. The only way to enjoy the good life is to find it through Jesus. That was the audacious claim Jesus made to His skeptics! They should forget about every other attempt to acquire the good life.

B. Jesus is the Gate to the good life. When Jesus called himself “the gate” (vv. 7, 9), He was illustrating with make-do sheepfolds found out on the hillsides in warmer weather. Palestinian shepherds would put together some make-do walls to keep the sheep in. Since they had no access to a regular gate, the shepherd would lie across the only entrance to the simple sheep pen, so the sheep could only leave by crawling over him.

It’s fairly obvious in Jesus’ analogy that you and I are the sheep. Jesus is the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. The only way to get into “the fold” (v. 16, κλυ) of God’s family is to come through Jesus. Neither Buddha nor Muhammad nor Joseph Smith nor the pope is the gate of access to God—only Jesus Christ. Through Him, and through Him alone, people gain access to God the Father. It was a pretty bold statement for Jesus to make. It still is. The apostle Paul said, “Through him [Jesus] we . . . have access to the Father” (Eph 2:18). The writer to the Hebrews affirms that “Jesus” is the “new and living way” (10:19-20). Jesus is our Gate. He is the only Way to God.

C. As the Gate, Jesus opens the way to God. Until Jesus came, people could think of God as merely a stranger at

best or, at worst, as an enemy. How many people do you know who think of God as an indifferent stranger “up there somewhere”? Surely you know of people who think God is an angry being who exists for the sole purpose of making our lives miserable, perhaps like the sinister Joker of Batman fame.

D. The wonderful truth is that Jesus came to this earth to show people what God is like and to open the way to God. Those who lived during Jesus’ lifetime discovered that, amazingly, Jesus was loving and merciful, kind and gracious—and so they began to see God that way. Jesus wasn’t afraid to be seen with ungodly people and certainly didn’t surround himself only with religious types. Sadly the seemingly religious people were the ones with whom He had the most problems. Jesus is genuinely interested in people and wonderfully empowered to lead them to the good life.

II. THE GOOD LIFE BRINGS SECURITY AND FREEDOM

A. Jesus described the good life as a secure place. In using a well-known Hebrew phrase, He described for His listeners a place of safety and a place of peace: we “will come in and go out” (v. 9). In Jewish thought, to “come in and go out” without being harmed or hindered in any way was the way of describing a life absolutely safe and secure. You only have to contemplate the dangers of crossing the borders of some countries today to realize how coming in and going out freely reflect peace and security.

ILLUS. During the World Series of 1997, we were all reminded of such dynamics. Livan Hernandez, one of the star pitchers for the Marlins, wanted so terribly to bring his mother from Cuba to watch him play in the World Series. His attempts were repeatedly thwarted by Cuba’s policies. None of us would think of Cuba as being a particularly safe and secure place to live. You can’t come in and out of Cuba as you desire. Yet, if you drive to the border between Canada and the U.S., you find it fairly easy to come and go because they’re both fairly safe and peaceful places to live.

B. When we come to know our Heavenly Father through Jesus His Son, we gain a new sense of security and peace. Once we learn to submit to His ways, we live with a new sense of security. If we feel confident that we are in the hands of God, then our worries and fears are unarmed. We have One who is wise and strong on whom we can depend. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Our lives are not secure because they are free from problems. I’d love to be able to tell you that—but it wouldn’t be true! Nevertheless, our lives are secure because we have assurance that, even through the hard times, God is working for our good. We’re not going through our tough times alone. God has plenty of strength to carry us when our strength is depleted.

C. Our new sense of security is altogether different than what is brought about by those to whom Jesus referred as “thieves and robbers” (v. 8). He referred to people who deceive us and confuse us spiritually and otherwise. Jesus targeted people who encourage others to

trust in themselves, as if sinful people could ever justify themselves in the eyes of a holy God. Spiritual thieves and robbers leave us devastated and empty, worse off than before they came.

ILLUS. The tragic story of Princess Diana reveals the saga of disappointments over all the things that promise to bring "the good life." Wealth, status, worldwide fame, jewels, beauty, the wedding of the century, and the adoration of millions didn't appear to bring her the good life. Many indications suggest she was everything but happy.

ILLUS. Every professional football team longs to find a place in the Super Bowl. Millions and millions of dollars are spent to earn the spot. More millions are spent broadcasting the event, which for many people is the highlight of January. Do you think those players on the winning team will still be on a high by the end of February? Are their day-by-day lives really any more meaningful because of their success? Are their relationships at home any better? They achieved their dream—and many of them on that playing field had bought into the lie that such an achievement would make life worth living. Success is a thief and a robber.

D. The good life of which Jesus speaks affects us at the inner core of who we are and what we're about. It provides inner security and rest. The only way to enjoy the good life is to find it through Jesus.

**III. THE GOOD LIFE IS BETTER THAN RELIGION—
IT'S A RELATIONSHIP!**

A. I don't even like the word "religion." For many folk, "religion" connotes going through the motions that people must go through in order to appease an impersonal, indifferent God. So often "religion" implies what we must do, as if we could possibly work hard enough to earn our salvation or the favor of God. For some people, religion is merely the label of the church organization with which their family has been connected. If you view Christianity as only a religion, you can easily miss the point of what Jesus came to do for us.

B. Knowing that religion wouldn't satisfy anyone, Jesus came to enable us to have a personal relationship with God. By the way Jesus cared for people, it became obvious God wants something more than religion. He wants to enjoy a relationship with each of us. He created us for fellowship with Him, but the stain of sin on us has kept us from that fellowship. That desired relationship was so important that Jesus, God's Son, willingly laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sins: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11).

By the way in which Jesus reached out to people of all walks of life and with all kinds of past failures, it became obvious God wants a relationship with each one of us.

Our status and our past failures are immaterial to Him. He wants a living, vital, meaningful relationship with each one.

CONCLUSION:

That's "the good life"—freedom from the sins of our past, released from the fears of tomorrow. We can begin to enjoy the good life as we come to the source of cleansing and forgiveness—Jesus. I invite you today to have a relationship with the Heavenly Father, made possible through Jesus Christ. Jesus laid down His life for you so you could know God. He offers forgiveness for your sins and gives you the power to turn from sin so you, too, might enjoy "life . . . to the full" (v. 10), the abundant life.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Welcome
- Songs of Adoration "All Creatures of Our God and King"
"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
- Invocation
- Choir "There Is a Savior"
- Giving Tithes and Offerings
- Welcoming New Members
- Moments for Friendship in Worship
- Songs of Assurance "Jesus Is All the World to Me"
"Care Chorus"
- Open Altar Prayer
- Direct a time of silent prayer, encouraging people to praise God, to thank Him for His blessings, to intercede for the needs of others, and to bring their own needs to the Lord.
- Special Music: "Wonderful Lord"
- Message "THE GOOD LIFE"
- Song of Invitation "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEA

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

The Christian life involves more than just "believing." It also includes "belonging." We grow in Christ by being in relationships with other Christians. The Bible admonishes us, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10). In the same way that it's hard to imagine a football player without a team, a soldier without a platoon, a tuba player without a band, and a child without a family, so a Christian without a church is missing one of the great blessings God has in store for His children. Paul refers to the church as the family of God (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5). We need each other. We belong together. We are connected by God; we are joined together as parts of one body. We are God's family!

Child of Hope

by Timothy B. Pusey

Isa. 9:1-7

INTRO:

ILLUS. Marcel Sternberger tells about an incredible thing that happened to him one day on the Brooklyn subway in 1948. He struck up a conversation with Bela, a man who had recently immigrated from Hungary. Marcel was fascinated with Bela's story, which included details of Nazi imprisonment and the tragic loss of his family at Auschwitz, including the death of his young bride. Realizing the story seemed strangely familiar, Marcel urged Bela to exit the subway with him, and Marcel placed a telephone call to a young woman named Marya, whom he had recently met. Marcel handed the phone to a stunned Bela so that Bela could talk with his wife, Marya, who was also living in New York.¹

Bela's situation was about as hopeless as any you and I might ever face. Yet, in the midst of the hopelessness, something significant happened. Hope was rekindled. Hope was restored.

About 700 years before the time of Christ, the world was caught in a rather hopeless situation. Into this hopelessness, God called a man named Isaiah to be His messenger of hope.

I. ISAIAH PROCLAIMED HOPE WHERE THERE WAS NO HOPE

A. The world in which Isaiah lived was rather dismal and unsettling. The kingdom of Israel had splintered into a divided nation. Sadness prevailed in the fact of its division. The nation of Judah lived its life in a perilous manner, in rebellion against God. The people proclaimed the Lord as their God even as they offered sacrifices to pagan gods. Their king was ungodly.

God allowed them to be destroyed by their enemies. Their sister nation of Israel had forgotten the Lord as well. From God's vantage point, these grievous days of His chosen people caused His heart to ache as a parent's heart aches when his or her child reacts in rebellion.

B. For such a world, God gave Isaiah a vision of hope to share with all the people. Like recalling a dream, the past, present, and future blurred together as Isaiah recounted his vision. Its message must be taken quite seriously, for God was revealing His sovereignty, His holiness, His judgment, and His grace. Because of those attributes, God didn't give up on Judah—and neither did Isaiah. With pain and sadness, Isaiah pronounces woeful judgment upon the people for their rebellion. Yet Isaiah countered every woe by a word of hope, however small. God promised the redemption of Judah and the restoration of Jerusalem in order for Him to deliver through them the Savior for the world. Isaiah had a wonderful vision of hope.

II. ISAIAH COULD SEE BEYOND THE CURRENT SITUATION TO A TIME WHEN THE SAVIOR WOULD COME TO THE PEOPLE

A. By this time, the nation of Judah had already reached the point of no return, even though Jerusalem was not destroyed until 587 B.C. The people had rejected God. God was sickened by the way they lived. Swift and terrible judgment would fall on all who persisted in refusing God's call. Still God offered forgiveness and restoration to all who would turn to Him.

B. In the opening word of this chapter, Isaiah erases all of the gloom of darkness—"nevertheless." He foresees the dawning of a "great light," bringing hope to those living in darkness (v. 2). This light would come in the form of a Child whose birth would be the birth of hope. This Child of Hope would govern a world in peace.

C. One word would be inadequate to describe this Child of Hope. He is the "Wonderful Counselor" because He is intimately acquainted with the counsel of God. He is "Mighty God," for He demonstrates such strength in saving our lives. He is "Everlasting Father" because He is the One with the Father, from everlasting to everlasting. He is "Prince of Peace" because He brings peace within the hearts of men and women (v. 6). Surely this Child of Hope is none other than the Messiah, the long-awaited Deliverer of the world—the Christ, the Son of the living God, the one we know simply as Jesus. God allowed Isaiah to see beyond his current day of gloom to the time when the Savior would be given to the world.

We could wrap it up, having discovered a dismal point in time when God miraculously and wonderfully broke through the despair and brought hope. We could merely point to the time when God sent One to be the Savior of the world, to deliver the people from their despair and hopelessness. However, Isaiah's vision reporting does not end there. This Christ is the "Everlasting Father": "Of the increase of his government . . . there will be no end" (v. 7). The impact of this Child of Hope continues today.

III. THIS HOPE PROPHESED BY ISAIAH CONTINUES TO CHANGE PEOPLE TODAY

A. Like ripples on a pond, Isaiah's prophecies reach out to surrounding nations and stretch to all people and all generations. What Isaiah saw happening in his own time reveals principles that are eternal and universal. What God said to the people of Judah through Isaiah He says to us today. The hope that Isaiah proclaimed is the hope to which you and I can still cling today. Jesus' kingdom is forever, and we have been invited to enter it!

B. These verses speak to us. Verse 4 tells us that this Savior has "shattered the yoke that burdens them." What is the yoke that burdens people today? That yoke is the enslavement to sin, the sad ramifications of sin, the messes people have made of their lives, the twisted relationships that have resulted.

Ultimately, the yoke that burdens people today is the same that burdened people in Isaiah's time. This "great light," this "Prince of Peace," has a wonderful way of shattering the yoke that burdens people! God designed to

break the yoke of sin and to deliver us from the burden of guilt and corruption. So it is that we can sing with jubilant voices, "For unto us a child is born" (v. 6, κλν)!

John's Gospel tells the wonderful story in a nutshell in 3:16. Christ being given to us is the great Foundation of our hope and the Source of our joy, even in times of fear and doubt.

C. Jesus comes to us in the same way God promised through the words of Isaiah. He is the "Wonderful Counselor," the wisdom of the Father revealed to us. He is the "Mighty God" who with great strength saves us from our doom and asks us to walk with Him. He is the "Everlasting Father" who demonstrates fatherly care and tenderness for His people. He is the "Prince of Peace" who commands and creates peace in us. His peace will never end!

CONCLUSION:

A. Jesus still gives hope.

ILLUS. Participants at the 1989 World Congress on Evangelism in Manila heard the moving testimony of a Chinese believer who had been imprisoned for his faith. Demeaned as a human being and isolated from human contact, his cell was in a dark dungeon. His work assignment was to clean the sewers deep in the underground darkness. He told of standing up to his knees in human waste going about his repulsive work. Yet against the stench and pollution of the sewer, he began to sing the old song "In the Garden." When his captors realized that they could not break his spirit nor dim the brightness of his song, they released him. He has told his story far and wide.²

Jesus brings hope where there seems to be no hope! The spiritually lost should be encouraged by the mercy of God, who is willing to forgive sin and give the hope of eternal life. While others see only a hopeless end, the

Christian rejoices in an endless hope. If you have not received His hope, you may. In fact, you must! Hope is God's gift to you, but it is a gift you must accept. He offers hope to you today. Without Him, you have no hope; with Him, all hope belongs to you.

1. Paul Deutschman, "It Happened on the Brooklyn Subway," *Focus on the Family*, December 1996, 2.

2. David McKenna, *Mastering the Old Testament: Isaiah 1-39*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 16A (Dallas: Zondervan, 1984), 139.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Welcome
- Songs of Praise "Rejoice, the Lord, Is King"
"Living by Faith"
- Choir "Emmanuel: Lord of Life, Lord of All"
- Scriptural Responsive Reading "Our God Comes"
- Songs of Worship "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
"Emmanuel"
- Open Altar Prayer
- Giving Our Tithes and Offerings
- Moments for Friendship in Worship
- Songs of Worship "The Family of God"
"More of You"
"I Love You, Lord"
- Message "CHILD OF HOPE"
- Song of Invitation "Hiding in Thee"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

OPEN ALTAR PRAYER

Give the people opportunity to quiet their hearts and minds before the Lord in moments of silent prayer.

Do You Have a Broken Heart?

by Timothy B. Pusey

Jer. 8:18-9:2

INTRO:

ILLUS. A church lost their pastor. The people were in the anxious process of selecting a new one. In their traditional approach, they had each candidate come to preach for them. The first candidate preached on hell. The second candidate preached on hell as well—and got the vote of the congregation. When people talked about why they selected the second preacher, someone commented, “The first one spoke as if he were glad that people were going to hell, while the second seemed brokenhearted over those same people.”

Jeremiah cried God’s tears for lost people. His heart was broken over sinful people. He shared God’s deep grief over the sins of his people and the tragic consequences of that sin. Jeremiah appeared on the scene about 100 years after the prophet Isaiah. For 40 years Jeremiah warned the people of Judah of coming disaster if they did not turn back to God. Eventually, the army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon broke into Jerusalem, destroyed the city, took the people captive, and exiled most of them to Babylon. Jeremiah resisted but was compelled to go to Egypt soon after. As far as we know, he lived out his remaining years there, still declaring God’s words to people who refused to listen.

This portion of Jeremiah’s message pours out the burden of his heart. The passage is a dialogue. As it begins, Jeremiah calls out to the Lord (8:18-19). Then he quotes the despairing cries of the people (v. 19). God answers their questions immediately (ibid.). Knowing the true state of things, the prophet cries with great sorrow (8:21-22).

The town of Gilead had become a symbol of hope as the source of healing balsams for the Eastern world. Jeremiah laments that if there is no balm in Gilead, there is no balm anywhere on earth!

Yet Jeremiah knows the answers to his questions. He knows that the reason the people are still under attack, still not “healed,” is that they have ignored the Great Physician. They have neglected the one sure Source of their help. Spiritually blind and stubborn, they are rushing headlong toward the precipice of doom. The shepherd heart of the prophet breaks under his load of grief, and the compassionate cry bursts from his lips (9:1-2).

I. SIN IS A GRIEVOUS THING

A. Sin breaks the heart of God. The sin of the people was shameless and destined for punishment. While sin seemed so innocuous to the people, the Lord knew what

it was doing to them. Like a parent whose heart is tied in knots as he or she watches a rebellious child sow devastating seeds in life, our Heavenly Father is sick at heart when He sees the people heading for destruction because they refuse to turn from their sin.

B. Sin breaks the heart of God’s people. Jeremiah stands out as a lonely figure, isolated by a message from God that made him increasingly unpopular. He was imprisoned. His life was often in danger. Like Jesus, Jeremiah was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3, KJV). Yet this tenderhearted man could not compromise his message. He hated sin. Jeremiah cried over the sin of people!

C. Sin breaks the people it consumes. For this very reason God hates sin so much! Sin destroys people.

Dermatologists warn those who like to get deep-dark tans that today’s deeply tanned beauties are tomorrow’s wrinkled prunes! Sin is like getting a great tan—it may look great today, but tomorrow is a different story!

ILLUS. When Leonardo da Vinci was painting his masterpiece *The Last Supper*, he looked a long time for a model from which to paint the face of Christ. One day he discovered Pietro Bandinelli, whose face seemed kind and pure. Bandinelli’s face became his model for Jesus. Years passed; all the disciples were painted except for Judas. His face was hard to envision. Da Vinci determined that he needed a face hardened and distorted by sin.

One day, on the streets of Rome, he spotted the face for which he had been looking. The man was a beggar; his face carried the sad, despairing, empty, rebellious look of Judas Iscariot. He hired the man to sit as he painted the face of Judas. When the session was nearly over, da Vinci realized he had not asked the man’s name. The man quietly responded, “My name is Pietro Bandinelli. I also sat for you as your model of Christ.” Sin destroys people.

II. GOD’S COMPASSION REACHES OUT TO SINNERS

A. God hates the sin and what it does to people, but He desperately loves the sinner! God despises the way sin destroys people and destroys their relationships. He detests the way sin takes young people and snatches from them the blessed future He has prepared for them. But, oh, how God loves the sinner! God’s love for us does not depend upon our actions.

B. As God’s man, Jeremiah also loved the sinner. His heart was broken for the lost people of Judah who had refused to turn back to God. He loved the people, even though they did not like his message and even though they ignored his warnings. Jeremiah’s patience in mourning the sin while loving the sinner gave an early glimpse of what Jesus would be like.

C. Through His people, God’s compassion continues to reach out to sinners. God continually seeks to reestablish relationship with people who will turn from their sins and turn to follow Him.

III. WHEN GOD’S COMPASSION FLOWS THROUGH US, OUR HEARTS WILL ALSO BREAK OVER THE SINS OF OTHERS

A. When we allow God’s tremendous compassion for lost people to flow through us, seeing what sin is doing to

Jesus Certainly Had Strange Friends

by Timothy B. Pusey

Luke 15:1-7

INTRO:

ILLUS. On a family vacation some years ago, we somehow lost our address book. Having searched every inch of our van, we concluded sadly that it must have fallen out when someone was getting out of the vehicle somewhere between Ohio and Kansas. With friends and family coast to coast and around the world, we were disappointed to lose it. Thus, we lost contact for a few years with a few friends.

Recently, my wife was driving the van and had to stop suddenly. Seemingly from nowhere, the now dusty address book slid across the floor of the van! We could hardly believe that what we thought was hopelessly lost had suddenly been found.

You could probably tell some great "lost and found" stories. Jesus told the best lost and found stories. He had great purpose behind the stories He told. On the day that Jesus shared the story in this passage from Luke, He had an important lesson He wanted to teach people.

I. GOD LOVES THE LOST AS MUCH AS HE LOVES THOSE WHO ARE FOUND!

A. Sinners liked Jesus—and He liked them too! An amazing thing was happening in this scene. The sinful people of their society were flocking around Jesus—and He was welcoming them! Some of them were tax collectors. Some were prostitutes. Some of them were simply people living their lives indifferent to the religious laws of the Jews, alienated from Jewish life by their own design. It was an odd lot to surround Jesus.

This is the third time in Luke's Gospel that Jesus is accused of such degrading associations with outcasts. The first was the banquet Matthew hosted in order for his sinner friends to meet Jesus (5:29-32). The second occasion was the dinner at which the repentant woman washed Jesus' feet with her hair (7:36-50).

After these three occasions, we read later of Jesus inviting himself to Zacchaeus's house for dinner (19:5-10). Understand, now, that these people would not have flocked to Jesus if they had not somehow sensed His warmth, compassion, and acceptance. People don't flock to someone who is harsh and unkind! Jesus offered hope and encouragement to people who lived without any sense of hope at all. Jesus really did love these kind of folk!

B. The problem for Jesus was that His relationship with these people was a scandalous thing in the eyes of the re-

ligious leaders. His choice of friends surprised them. No self-respecting Jew would allow himself to get involved with persons of such bad character, but that never stopped Jesus. He had a mission to the outcasts, the underprivileged, the needy people of our world. Jesus embodied God's love reaching out to them. He reflected the wonderful love of our Heavenly Father who loves the lost people of our world as much as He loves those who are already found.

II. GOD FINDS JOY IN THE "LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT"!

A. That's the central theme of this parable and the two parables that follow it. In each story, something is lost: a sheep, a coin, and a son. The sheep is innocently lost, the coin carelessly lost, and the son willfully lost. In each case, the lost object is found, and the finding produces great joy. The key phrase jumps out, "There is rejoicing . . . over one sinner who repents" (vv. 7, 10). God rejoices because He forgives. God rejoices because the lost is found. That's the heart of God! The words of Jesus certainly imply that the Pharisees should also be thrilled when one ungodly person finds forgiveness and mercy and peace in the Lord.

Whenever Jesus found himself in the Lost and Found Department, religious folk bristled. They deliberately intended to avoid every contact with the people who did not measure up to their religious standards. A Pharisee could not entertain such a person or be a guest in his or her home. It was an offense to them that Jesus associated with sinners. They held no mercy for such people. Somehow they piously yet sadistically looked forward to the destruction of the sinner.

ILLUS. I am reminded of the people who delighted and cheered when Carla Faye Tucker was executed in Texas in February of 1998. Carla was convicted of a brutal pickax murder that took place 14 years earlier. Obviously the Lord had transformed her life since that horrendous event. She had such a tremendous testimony. I appreciated her spirit and attitude about her possible execution, regardless of whether or not her appeal was rejected. I was saddened by her execution. I chafed to hear televised coverage of crowds cheering when her death was announced.

The Pharisees would certainly have been right in there, cheering her execution.

The Lord rejoiced when Carla found Jesus as her Savior. He surely welcomed her into His arms even as some cheered her execution.

The Pharisees had no mercy for sinners. They could not find joy in the Lost and Found Department of life. Yet, over and over, Jesus did!

III. FOLLOWING JESUS BRINGS US JOY IN THE LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT TOO!

A. When we immerse ourselves in following Jesus, we'll discover a love and even an attraction for lost people as well. When we get close to the heart of Jesus, His compassion for lost people rubs off onto us. As Jesus embodied God's love reaching out to the needy people of His

The Big Assignment

by Timothy B. Pusey

Matt. 28:16-20

INTRO:

ILLUS. I can still remember the major panic that would come over me on those stressful days when a teacher would announce, "Now let me tell you about a major project that you must submit by the end of this term." It was the biggie. Those words seemed to capture everyone's attention. You'd see pens begin to move across pages as we tried to get down details of the big assignment. Everybody knew it was extremely important—vital to passing the course.

In the last few days and weeks before the end of the term, the most common question among students related to the big assignment: "Have you started yet?"

"What are you doing yours on?"

On the night before, you'd stay up until the wee hours of the morning finishing it up. With dark circles under your eyes, you'd sigh with relief when it was finally done and submitted.

After the Crucifixion and after Jesus' resurrection from the grave, our Lord set the stage for the "Big Assignment" He was about to give His disciples. Jesus met with His disciples and other believers over a period of 40 days. He appeared with words of peace and assurance. Matthew's Gospel concludes with what appears to be the Big Assignment that Jesus left for His disciples to complete. It was the biggie. And it is consistent with everything else we read in the Bible to understand that the assignment given to the disciples is our assignment too. This is the assignment for which you and I will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. It's found in Matt. 28.

I. JESUS, THE ONE MAKING THIS ASSIGNMENT, HAS THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO DO SO

A. We are servants of the Master whose authority upon earth in heaven is something we dare not neglect. Not only did Jesus claim the highest authority and power in this world, but He claimed all power and authority in this world and beyond (v. 18).

ILLUS. It is awesome to tour the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and know that it is within those walls that men and women perceived to have great power make decisions that affect everyone in the United States. It is an ominous feeling to walk down the halls walked by people of such earthly power and influence.

Yet, if we take seriously the words of Jesus, we recognize that all such authority and power fall under control of His authority and His power.

B. Jesus' power and authority have everything to do with the assignment that He gave. Making His power and authority clear sets the stage for taking His assignment seriously. If it were not for His authority, the assignment would not make much of an impression.

ILLUS. Can you imagine being a student and having a fellow student "assign" the members of the class a 20-page paper? You wouldn't bother with it. What if a co-worker came to you demanding that you come in early every day for the next month to do an assignment for her? You'd arrive at your normal time for the whole month anyway, right? If your boss insisted that you do so, or if the professor of a class you were taking made the assignment of the 20-page paper, it would change your response altogether. Why? Because your boss and your teacher speak from positions of authority over you; at least, over one area of your life.

II. UNDER JESUS' POWER, THE CHURCH CAN FACE THE HERCULEAN TASK OF MAKING DISCIPLES OF ALL PEOPLE

A. The assignment Jesus outlined is universal in the sense that the salvation He offers is available for everyone. When Jesus commissioned His disciples and as He commissions us in our era to "go and make disciples of all nations" (v. 19), it leaves no room for racial or social prejudice. All are invited to become brothers and sisters in Christ. This also takes our assignment beyond local borders. This involves us in a mission around the world. We are not saved in order to simply relish our own salvation; we have been saved in order to see others receive the same salvation—people who live where we live and people who don't, people who look like we look and people who don't.

B. This calling by Jesus to make disciples has two parts. The first is summed up in Jesus' command to "baptiz[e] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 19). Baptizing represents the reaching ministry that brings about the conversion of men and women and boys and girls to Jesus Christ. Baptism represents their acceptance into His Church. Actual water baptism is a sacrament signifying entrance into Christ's Church. Jesus speaks here of actual water baptism, but also to conversion.

Disciplining also includes a teaching ministry. Jesus places upon the Church responsibility for instructing Christians in the way of life commanded by Him. Christians need to become lifelong students of Christlikeness. Such teaching prepares the new Christian to join other believers in the Big Assignment in order that more people may be reached for Jesus Christ.

III. THE ASSURANCE GIVEN WITH THE BIG ASSIGNMENT: JESUS ASSURES HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE WITH US

A. If it were not for Jesus' presence, His assignment would be overwhelming. It must have been a staggering thought for 11 humble Galilean men to be sent forth to reach the world for Jesus Christ. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have skipped a beat.

"He wants us to do what?"

"All nations?"

No sooner was the command given than the powerful promise followed. They were sent out, as we are, on the greatest task in the world. With the greatest task comes the greatest Presence in the world.

B. The promise Jesus extends to us is sufficient. He is

The Church as Community

by Mike Barton

Purpose: To instruct and encourage the Church in their attempts at reaching the unchurched.

Proposition: God wants the Church to connect with the unchurched.

INTRO:

In order to make a long-distance call anymore, you must go through a series of numbers to get the party you are calling. In order to catch the appropriate flight at the airport, you must follow a specific path to the next terminal. To log on to the computer, you must be able to make your way through the maze of computer prompts to get where you are going.

Life is full of situations and circumstances, from the simplest to the most complicated, that require us to move successfully from point A to point B. Successfully bridging the gap requires all of us to make the right connection. Allowing this to occur is vital if we are to make it through life. Not making the right connections usually results in people becoming lost, uninformed, uninvolved, and incomplete.

We all strive to connect—to attach ourselves to that which we are after, whether it is to the information on the computer, to the voice on the other end of the telephone line, or to the highest ideals of life. Yet we often find that willingness to make the connection is met with complications. We find too often that we become frustrated when our desire to connect is not met with a plan or system that enables us to connect.

Popular authors in this realm have concluded that making the right connection is rooted in a *systematic approach*, going through a tried and proven plan and approach. They recommend following a prescribed formula that will assist in making the desired connection, rather than following no system at all.

This thinking applies in the spiritual world as well. As Christians who desire to obey the Great Commission, we must make the right connections to the lost. Connecting and Christianity go hand in hand. Our willingness to laminate our lives to the lost is foundational to our faith. It is mandatory! Making the right connection was often the main focus of Jesus' ministry. If we were to boil the Great Commission down to one word, it might be "CONNECT!"

The longing of Jesus' heart is that we connect with the lost. We must continually find ourselves in their midst, connecting through contact. Christ, the Master of systems thinking, left us with a prescribed formula, a plan of attack

by which this objective could be met. It is neatly prescribed within the pages of the Bible. As responsible Christians, our task is to continually make good on this system. It's all here—neatly packaged. We simply need to unwrap it.

One of the most helpful systems I found was developed from the Word by Bill Hybels and is revealed in his book *The Contagious Christian*. This system illustrates this idea of making the right connection. Here it is:

$$\text{HP} + \text{CP} + \text{CC} = \text{MI}$$

It almost sounds algebraic, doesn't it? Translated, this formula means: **H**igh **P**otency Christian character + **C**lose **P**roximity to people + **C**lear **C**ommunication of the gospel = **M**aximum **I**mpact on people's lives.

The ability and desire to connect can only survive in an atmosphere where the system supports it. This is precisely the stuff from which connections are made.

By looking at Hybels's formula, we can see there are many pieces. Our goal today is to tackle just one of them—*High Potency Christian Character*. This is vital to the whole system. It is strength beyond the usual in the character of Christians that plays an important role in making the right connection with the lost.

In Acts 2:42-47 we find four elements that enable the Church to connect with those needing Jesus. The potency of Christian character is grounded in (1) Growing up, (2) Growing together, (3) Growing out, and (4) Growing more.

I. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS GROUNDED IN GROWING UP

A. To insure a healthy, thriving fellowship, the Holy Spirit instilled an overwhelming desire to grow up. (Read vv. 42 and 43.) This heart overflowing with devotion finds its focus in worship as it relates to the study of the Bible, the life of the Body, remembrance of the Resurrection, and the general enhancement of individual lives. Evangelism in the Early Church was a by-product of an intensity and constancy in worship.

B. This growing up commanded deviating from the norm. The Church was beginning to take form. Luke describes it all like "a rushing mighty wind" (v. 2, κλυ). It was a wind that breathed new life into many. Devotion, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer (v. 42) were nothing new, yet *now* executed for all the right reasons. Now one's faith was audible, visible, and expressed as never before. Rather than a private and exclusive faith, it was now both seen and heard by all the world. The arena, previously the aisles and pews of the Temple, was now the *highways and byways*.

As was the case then, so it is today. Saturating oneself with the things of God will allow the Church to penetrate the many wonders of God, including His will for us. Growing up was a vital component that made up the *system* in the Early Church.

II. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS GROUNDED IN GROWING TOGETHER

A. In verse 44 we find the believers were *committed* to one another, willing at a moment's notice to get involved in one another's lives. A great majority of this passage has to do with the word *together*. We find they "were togeth-

er," "ate together," and did "meet together" (vv. 44, 46). This infers more than just hanging out together or "coffeeing" after church on Sunday nights.

B. The outward manifestation came through the distribution of material goods and the sharing of meals. Eating together denoted a common bond, an unbroken chain of believers responding *together* to the Spirit's call on their lives. In order to dispel division, we must be involved in one another's lives. The spiritual Body must come to the aid of sickness just like the physical body. What does the physical body do? It pulls all its resources together to eradicate the enemy.

C. The believers' ministry to one another was in effect providing ministry to their own hearts. Ministered to by our own ministry is one of the side effects of a healthy, fruitful Christianity, one that is so attractive to the unchurched. Why? Because for so many, *church* has deteriorated into a factious, hypocritical, hurtful institution. As a result, many unchurched people have their guard up when it comes to religion.

ILLUS. Wayne could not come to grips with the Church due to heavy baggage from the past. He'd been hurt and offended by his church as a teenager. As a result, he carried this stuff into adulthood and could not cross the bridge to a personal relationship with Christ. The gap between Wayne and Christ was finally spanned as a result of a series of breakfasts, fishing trips, and the birth of his son, which exposed him to some potent Christians. Potent Christianity making its way into life's routine melted Wayne's preconceived notions about religious people.

**III. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS GROUNDED
IN GROWING OUT**

When growing up and growing together are evident in the Church, growing out is always a by-product. Successful outreach always has its roots grounded deep in the soil of diligent in-reach. When Christians are demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, when our character is above reproach, when our relationships with one another do not bear the residue of a factious spirit, those to whom we are reaching will sit up and take notice.

**IV. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS GROUNDED
IN GROWING MORE**

When *contact* manifests itself by *impact*, the fourth component is just a matter of time—growing more. And boy, did they! We read, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). It was not uncommon for 2,000 to 3,000 people to make a decision for the Lord in one sitting. It was miraculous! So much so I fear, at times, that we relegate this to mere fairy tale, too good to be true. Why? Is not the Spirit's power as real now as then? Is not God willing to *add* now as He was then? Are we to settle for a Christianity that bears no offspring? We must be ever tuned to being Christians of high potency Christian character who subscribe to the four components of growing up, growing together, growing out, and growing more.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Preservice Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Welcoming the Family
- Worship Through Song "Shine, Jesus, Shine"
"Song for the Nations"
"We've a Story to Tell to the Nations"
- Choir Ministry Through Song
- The Family Gathers for Prayer
"The Greatest Thing in All My Life"
- Presenting the Tithes and Offerings
- Ministry Through Song "Find Us Faithful"
- Message "THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY"
- Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Sing "We Will Triumph in the Lord." Congregation joins in after the choir sings one time. Words will come up on the screen.

Highpoint

Sunday Night Preaching Resources

In the '70s, Al Green hit the music charts with his soulful renditions of such songs as "Love and Happiness" and "Let's Stay Together." According to the story written about him in the magazine *Civilization*, Al Green was "'high-lifin' in those days, he says, with drugs, women, and a style that included being driven onstage in his Rolls Royce. Then everything changed. Al Green's conversion occurred in the middle of the night, as he lay abed in a hotel room in Anaheim, California. That evening he had performed at Disneyland. He awoke weeping tears of gratitude and joy. God was speaking to him, speaking almost plaintively. 'Are you ashamed of me?' Green recalls the Lord asking him. Green rose and paced the hallway, awakening his entourage with his shouts: 'I have found the Lord!' He wrapped a towel around his face to keep from making more of a disturbance. But he was born again."¹

His fascinating story continues with his awakening to God's call not only to conversion and the new birth but to the ministry as well. Leaving his life of secular pop music, he moved back home to Memphis, Tennessee, to found the church he currently pastors. The storywriter obviously picks up on the characteristics of his church and their traditional Pentecostal worship style. It is at once both entertaining and intriguing. The author, Richard Todd, cites the study done by Harold Bloom in *The American Religion*, where he "argues that Pentecostalism expresses the very center of our spiritual culture. He suggests that the impulse toward personal salvation, the yearning for surrender and transfiguration, long ago superseded the grim fatalism of the Puritan church and now informs much American worship."²

Todd goes on to describe one of those Sunday evening services that last sometimes for hours. "'I've been healed,' [Green] says, and then begins to sing, 'I was healed by the wound in my Savior's side. . . . I was smokin' and chokin' and cokin' till I met the man named Jesus. Free at last!'"³

As I read the article, I was intrigued by Todd's citing of Bloom's comments: "*The impulse toward personal salvation, the yearning for surrender and transfiguration, long ago superseded the grim fatalism of the Puritan church and now informs much American worship.*"⁴

Thank God, the grim fatalism that might have been a part of Christ's Church has been replaced by the joyful awareness of God's saving grace. Wesleyan-Arminian churches can capture the joy of God's incredible response to the soulful yearning for forgiveness, surrender, and transformation!

Why not make Sunday nights a *HIGHPOINT* experience in the life of your worshipers!

1. Richard Todd, "Let's Pray Together," *Civilization*, February/March 1999, 47-48.

2. *Ibid.*, 48.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

Practical Preaching

When do you have a better opportunity for unpacking the practical truth of Scripture for everyday living than in your Sunday night sermon? Regardless of the changes your church may be experiencing concerning the place and function of Sunday evening service, there will always be a place for practical preaching. Indeed, you may even be wondering what form and shape Sunday evening services will take in the coming future. Whatever happens, practical preaching will be a necessity for facilitating the spiritual formation of the people of God.

This quarter's series is provided by Rev. Ronald Blake, pastor, Westside Church of the Nazarene, Indianapolis. Ron is a gifted pastor. I had the privilege of meeting him at a conference, where we exchanged the nominal greetings of colleagues in ministry. Later, my mother-in-law was scheduled for surgery in Indianapolis, and Pastor Blake, along with others, ministered to our family.

On one of those weekends when I was speaking in another location, my wife attended Pastor Blake's church to worship with her family. Listening to her describe the way in which Ron opened God's Word prompted me to ask him to write this series. As I have edited these sermons, I have felt the heartbeat of a pastor who longs for the formation of his people and is prepared to provide the practical,

everyday truth from Scripture to help them reach this goal.

May God season and enrich these sermons as they pass through the filters of your own insight, experience, and journey. May they help you feed and nurture the spiritual growth of your congregation.

March
April
May
1999

DAVID J. FELTER
*Editor, Highpoint
Sunday Night
Preaching Resources*
KANSAS CITY



Meet Ronald Blake

Ron Blake grew up in Indiana. He graduated from high school in Fort Wayne and attended Olivet Nazarene University, where he earned a B.A. degree. He was awarded the master of divinity degree at Nazarene Theological Seminary in 1982.

With the exception of pastorates in Texas and Michigan, Ron's ministry has been in Indiana. He has been senior pastor of the Westside Church of the Nazarene in Indianapolis since 1996. Ron has been actively involved in hospital chaplaincy, weekday religious education, as well as teaching. He is a member of the Advisory Board for the Indianapolis District, the Board of Directors for the alumni organization of ONU, as well as a member of the ONU Board of Trustees.

*Sermons
for
Sunday
Night*

RONALD BLAKE
Pastor
INDIANAPOLIS



JUST ONE: THE POWER OF A GOD-GIVEN VISION

Part 1: Neh. 1—8

INTRODUCTION. God wants to use all of us to change the world. He cannot use us to change our world until He changes us—our hearts, lives, attitudes, and vision. Before you say, “I can’t change the world, I am only one person,” ask, “What could I do to make an impact for God?”

Let us look at one man with a vision and the difference that came as a result of his obedience.

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD

- I. THERE MUST BE A PROBLEM (1:3)
 - A. What would you like to see changed in your life?
 - B. What would you like to see changed in your world?
 - C. For whom do you shed tears?
- II. THERE MUST BE PRAYER

Some four months later God is moving and directing the events in Nehemiah’s life. Nehemiah prays for wisdom and direction from the Lord. In Nehemiah’s prayer we find the following components: (1:5—2:4)

 - A. Worship (1:5)
 - B. Confession (1:6)
 - C. Repentance (1:9-10)
 - D. Petition (1:11)
 - E. Follow-up (2:2-4)
- III. IF I AM GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD, THERE MUST BE PREPARATION (2:11-16)
- IV. IF I AM GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD, THERE MUST BE A PURPOSE (2:17)
- V. IF I AM GOING TO BE USED BY GOD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY WORLD, THERE MUST BE SOME PAIN (2:17)
- VI. IF I AM GOING TO BE USED BY GOD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY WORLD, THERE MUST BE PERSEVERANCE IN MY LIFE (6:15)
- VII. IF I AM GOING TO BE USED BY GOD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY WORLD, THERE MUST BE

GOD’S PROVIDENCE AT WORK IN MY LIFE (6:16)

CONCLUSION: Am I willing to live in such a manner that God can use me? Am I willing to be the one that God can use in our congregation and in our world? Can I say truthfully and sincerely today, “Yes, Lord, yes to Your will and to Your way”?

NOTES

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Interview Work and Witness volunteers. Have them tell how they are helping change their world.

JUST ONE: THE POWER OF A GOD-GIVEN VISION

Part 2: Neh. 4

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Use songs and music that emphasize overcoming the obstacles present in daily life. Have a healing service, and anoint those who come forward, encouraging their faith in God's grace and help to overcome their obstacles.

INTRODUCTION. To develop and maintain a vision for God you often must work through various setbacks. There will be times when you will be tempted to give up. Let us look at some of the things God provides to help us overcome.

- I. IF YOU ATTEMPT SOMETHING GREAT FOR GOD, THERE ARE TWO THINGS THAT YOU WILL EXPERIENCE
 - A. Sarcasm (4:1-3)
 - B. Threats (4:8)
- II. IF YOU ATTEMPT SOMETHING GREAT FOR GOD, THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU ARE GOING TO NEED TO WORK THROUGH
 - A. You will need to keep the family together. (4:13)
 - B. You will need to remember the Lord. (4:14)
 - C. You will need to remember your family. (4:14)
 - D. You will need to maintain balance. (4:16-18)
 - E. You will need to find a rally point. (4:19-20)
 - F. You will need to serve others. (4:21-23)
 - G. You will need to maintain the joy of the Lord. (8:10)

CONCLUSION: Receiving a vision from the Lord involves more than just one moment in time. Life has a way of dimming our vision. We maintain the vision by keeping our focus on Christ and His kingdom. What vision is the Lord wanting to instill within you? Are you willing to make His vision the priority of your life?

ABRAHAM! THIS IS A TEST

Gen. 12

INTRODUCTION. In the 12th chapter of Genesis we read of the beginning of Abraham's faith journey with God. Conventional wisdom says the longest journey begins with a single step. Likewise, we are told that to end well, we must have a good start. God requires that you and I respond to Him in obedience. Therefore, every opportunity that is presented to us is an opportunity for a test of our obedience.

I. OBEDIENCE IS A STARTING POINT (vv. 1-4)

Commitment is a decision. I must accept responsibility for my obedience and commitment to the Lord.

- A. *A* Acknowledge personal responsibility for thoughts and actions.
- B. *C* Choose to look at circumstances in the past and present from a biblical point of view.
- C. *C* Commit to eliminate whatever hinders biblical change.
- D. *E* Exert energy toward the goal.
- E. *P* Persevere in obedience.
- F. *T* Trust God for the strength and resources to change.

(Introduction to Biblical Counseling, by John MacArthur [Dallas: Word, 1994], 269-70).

II. ABRAHAM'S FIRST TEST OF OBEDIENCE (v. 10)

- A. Abraham took matters into his own hands. This serves as a reminder to each of us that we must always consult with our Heavenly Father when we are faced with important decision making.
- B. God has creative alternatives. Remember, He is the One who parted the Red Sea, multiplied the loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine. We have to be reminded nothing is too difficult for God.

III. LESSONS LEARNED FROM ABRAHAM

- A. There will be frequent tests in our lives.
- B. There will be the temptation to solve our own problems in inappropriate ways.
- C. There is the need to remember that God is faithful.

IV. HOW TO FOLLOW GOD OBEDIENTLY

- A. I must consult the Scriptures.
- B. I must consult the Body of Christ.
- C. I must consider the circumstances surrounding my decisions.
- D. I must consider my emotions and feelings. What would have happened had Jesus based His decision of going to the Cross strictly on emotion alone?

CONCLUSION: The only way for the believer to live is to live in accordance with Prov. 3:5-6.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Interview a student/athlete. Have the person share his or her discovery of how commitment and obedience work to help produce superior performance.

Have a wedding/marriage affirmation fellowship time. Have a refreshment time following the service, and interview couples to discover the power of commitment in preserving marriages.

NOTES

WHEN GOD VISITS

Gen. 18

INTRODUCTION. Many of us have fond memories of singing the words to the old hymn "In the Garden." Before we get caught up with sentiment and the feeling of nostalgia, let us ask ourselves, do we really believe that God walks with us and talks with us? The Bible makes it very plain that our God both speaks to us and comes to us. He desires to fellowship with us as well. Abraham reminds us that God does indeed make house calls. What happens and how do we respond when God pays us a visit?

I. GOD'S VISITS ARE TIMES OF WONDERFUL FELLOWSHIP (vv. 1-8)

II. GOD'S VISITS ARE TIMES FOR GREAT ANNOUNCEMENTS (v. 10)

A. The announcement that next year things will be different.

Many of us need to see changes in our lives. One of the greatest ways to have change come is as a result of a visit with God.

B. Sarah's response to the announcement was to laugh out loud. (v. 12)

The God who visits us is a God who can do the impossible. What seems humanly impossible is possible with the Lord. What are the impossibilities that you are facing? Have you visited with the Lord concerning these matters?

III. GOD'S VISITS ARE TIMES TO CHECK OUR PERSPECTIVES (v. 14)

Remember nothing is too hard for the Lord. Claim His promise from the Scripture. Perhaps it is time for us to check our perspective of things. Are we looking at it solely from a human perspective? Do we need to have our perspective changed to a heavenly one? God's visits remind us of our need for the correct perspective.

IV. GOD'S VISITS CAN BE A CALL TO INTERCESSION (vv. 16-33)

Abraham feels the need to intercede for the people.

God has planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. Abraham pleads with God for the people. Today in our world we need individuals who will go to God and plead and intercede for the lost and dying of our communities and the world. God's visit prompts us to visit Him regularly and often to bring the needs of our world to Him. Do we care enough to become involved, and do we care enough to go to God in prayer for our world?

CONCLUSION: Just one. Just one man, but that one man believed God for the impossible. He measured his world not by his own limitations, but by the power of his God. Who do I love enough that I am willing to intercede with the Lord for their salvation? I am just one, but I want God to use me to touch my world.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Encourage Sunday School classes to have an evening fellowship time following the service. Consider having classes sponsor teacher/worker appreciation times for appropriate personnel.

WHAT IS YOUR EXCUSE?

Exod. 3:1—4:17

INTRODUCTION. God appears to Moses and commissions him to service. Moses was 80 years old when God called him. As one preacher put it, life for Moses began at 80.

God loves to confound the experts. Just as He knew exactly where Moses was and what was happening to him, He knows where you are and what you are going through today. God wants to use all of our abilities and talents. Remember, one person totally dedicated to Him can accomplish great things for the Kingdom.

I. GOD IS LOOKING FOR INSTRUMENTS HE CAN USE (3:6-10)

- A. God knows exactly what He is doing and how He wishes to accomplish His will. He wants us to enter into a partnership with Him. Moses became the instrument of God's saving love. This sounds wonderful, except many times, too many of God's people really have no desire to be servants.
- B. Most of the time we would rather have someone listen to our problems than to actually save us from them. God's people are not always really excited about being led; they would rather be asked to fill out a questionnaire or a spiritual gifts inventory.
- C. The children of God wanted Moses to solve the problem of slavery. They were not really excited to have to cross the Red Sea and move to Canaan.

II. GOD IS LOOKING FOR INSTRUMENTS. WE ARE USUALLY LOOKING FOR EXCUSES.

- A. Moses knew about his limitations. Moses asked the age-old question, "Who am I?" (3:11)
- B. Moses realized he had an inadequate knowledge of God. (3:13)
- C. Moses felt he had no authority. (4:1; Matt. 28:18)
- D. Moses had little confidence in his speaking abilities. (4:10)

III. GOD WILL ALWAYS CHALLENGE OUR EXCUSES (4:14)

- A. God knows what we can and cannot do. God is looking for obedient vessels—people who are totally committed to His cause.
- B. It is not the duration of our life that is important. Rather, it is the determination to put the Lord first and to live as fully devoted followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: Moses had to face up to both the responsibility and the opportunity that the Lord presented to him that day by the burning bush. Each of us have been given both responsibility and opportunity from the Lord. I am just one, but today let me seize both the responsibility and the opportunity that the Lord has given me.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

This sermon offers an excellent segue into a time of worker recognition or recruitment or both. Perhaps this would be a good time to emphasize lay ministry, compassionate involvement, and so forth.

DARE TO DREAM

Gen. 37, 39

INTRODUCTION. Joseph was a person who was always dreaming. His dreams were a part of the reason his brothers resented him. When they saw him approaching the fields, they said to one another, "Here comes the dreamer." They were not giving him a compliment. They were being sarcastic and critical. The world has never been a friendly place for dreamers, especially if one goes public with his or her dreams. Joseph's brothers hated him. He had dreamed strange dreams of one day ruling over them. There are several things that may be said about people who dare to dream:

- I. DREAMERS WILL BE TESTED (37)
- II. DREAMERS WILL HAVE BAD DAYS (38:2-20)
- III. DREAMERS WILL EXPERIENCE CHANGE (39:20-21)
 - A. Joseph was constantly finding himself in circumstances that changed rather quickly, but God was always with him. (v. 21)
 - B. Change is inevitable. Perhaps the only ones who like change are wet babies. Throughout our lives, we will experience many changes. We must be willing to give this area of life to the Lord.
- IV. DREAMERS NEED TO LEARN (39:23)
 - A. Dreamers need to learn that God is in control.
 - B. Dreamers need to learn that God's way is not always our way.
 - C. Dreamers need to learn that you can trust God with everything.
 - D. Dreamers need to learn to forgive.
 - E. Dreamers need to learn that God's dreams are forever.
- V. HOW DO I DEVELOP A DREAM/VISION FOR GOD?
 - A. Get to know God through His Word.
 - B. Get to know God through communing with Him through prayer.
 - C. Get to know yourself. How has God uniquely gifted and blessed me, and how do I fit into His plans to reach the world?

CONCLUSION: Perhaps the most famous speech made

in the United States in the 20th century was Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream." Dr. King reminds us that we must have a dream, a vision, of what the possibilities of the future can hold for each person dedicated to his or her dream. Do you have a dream—a God-given dream? Consider the following:

1. Dream that God will use us and mobilize us to reach our community for Christ.
2. Dream that God will mobilize us as a congregation for ministry.
3. Dream that we will deepen in our love for the Lord.
4. Dream that we will deepen in our commitment for the Lord.
5. Dream that we will make peace with our past and that He would use us to make a difference in the future.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

The five concluding points of this sermon offer an array of potential emphases for this service. Here are just several suggestions:

1. Launch a visitation program.
2. End the sermon with an invitation to experience God's power to heal our memories and restore our dreams.

AN OFFER WE MUST NOT REFUSE

Rom. 12:1-21

INTRODUCTION. In the Old Testament, the person making an offering to God selected the choicest animal from his flock. Bringing it to the altar, he would present it there as an atonement for his sin. The people were exhorted to give themselves up in the spirit of the sacrifice; to be as wholly the Lord's property as the whole burnt offering was, with no part being devoted to any other use. Let's discover the parallel lessons from ancient scriptural practice for our lives today.

I. GOD'S WAY FOR ME IS THE PATH OF CONSECRATION (12:1-2)

Consecration means the act of setting apart or dedicating something or someone for God's use.

II. HOW DO WE CONSECRATE OURSELVES TO GOD?

- A. Offer yourself as a living sacrifice. (12:1)
- B. Self-sacrifice pleases God.
- C. Self-sacrifice is a spiritual worship.
- D. Be a nonconformist. (12:2)
- E. Have a transformed mind. (12:2)

Let the inward change produce outward results. (Eph. 4:23)

- F. There is a disease in the world today that mostly affects Christians. It is called "attitudinosclerosis." Arteriosclerosis is a chronic disease in which thickening and hardening of arterial walls interferes with blood circulation, producing hardening of the arteries. Attitudinosclerosis is a chronic disease of the human spirit by which a changing of attitudes produces interference with the Holy Spirit in the life of its victims. It is highly contagious, but it can be cured. You can stop it. Here are some suggestions taken from God's Word:
 1. Be transformed. (Rom. 12:2; 8:5-6)
 2. Test things and their relationship to God's will.
 3. Approve that which is in harmony with God's will.

4. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Col. 3:2)

III. WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF A CONSECRATED LIFE? (Rom. 12:3-21)

- A. A right view of oneself (v. 3)
- B. A right view of the Church (vv. 3-8, 10)
- C. Love (vv. 9-10)
- D. Hate evil (v. 9)
- E. Be dedicated and zealous (v. 11)
- F. Have a spirit of servanthood (v. 11)
- G. Be joyful (v. 12)

It is our evident joy, when the world can see nothing in our life to be joyful about, that is the cutting edge of evangelism. No one can steal my joy. I can choose to squander it, or I can refuse to allow my joy to be stolen.

- H. Be patient (v. 12)
- I. Have a prayerful attitude (v. 12)
- J. Be generous (vv. 13-15)
- K. Live in peace (vv. 16-20)
- L. Consecrated people are overcomers (v. 21)

CONCLUSION: There is no area of our lives of which we can or should say, "This is my domain, not God's." God is not satisfied with less than our all.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

As Holiness ministers, we should never neglect opportunities to invite people to experience the deeper walk with God in holy living. This chapter offers an opportunity to exhort believers to follow the biblical pattern of presenting the transformed life unto God, in entire consecration, allowing the Spirit of Jesus to "sanctify . . . through and through" (1 Thess. 5:23).

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED FROM WALKING WITH THE LORD

1 Kings 18—19

INTRODUCTION. As we walk with the Lord, we learn many valuable lessons. Lessons are not always easy; in fact, some are quite difficult. They all are valuable tools in one's spiritual development. Looking at the life of Elijah shows us some valuable lessons that can be applied to each of our lives.

I. OTHERS WILL NOT ALWAYS EVALUATE OUR LIVES CORRECTLY

What is truly important is to know the Lord's evaluation. (18:17)

II. WE HAVE TO DECIDE IF WE ARE TRULY GOING TO FOLLOW THE LORD (18:21)

III. I HAVE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE HAVING TO DECIDE (18:21)

IV. I HAVE LEARNED THAT AT TIMES IF YOU SERVE THE LORD, THERE WILL BE LONELINESS

We have to stand for the Lord whether it is popular, or whether others affirm us in our decisions.

V. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THERE WILL BE THOSE TIMES WHEN WE HAVE TO TAKE A STAND (18:22)

VI. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THERE WILL BE TIMES OF CONFLICT IN OUR LIVES

A. Most of us desire not be involved in conflict, and we should do all that we can not to stir up difficulties.

B. Perhaps one of the best ways to deal with conflict is to expect it. We need not be surprised by its appearance. (19:3)

VII. I HAVE LEARNED THERE WILL BE TIMES OF DISCOURAGEMENT IN OUR LIVES

A. Emotions are such an ineffective barometer of

what is happening in our lives.

B. We, like Elijah, need to rest and allow God to restore our body, minds, and emotions. (19:4)

VIII. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE NEED TO REST (19:9)

A. We need to let the Lord fight more of our battles.

B. God has promised to see us through every difficulty that the enemy will bring our way.

IX. I HAVE LEARNED THAT WE MUST EXPERIENCE GOD (19:11-15)

A. Many times God speaks to us in a still, quiet voice.

B. We have a tendency to run after the spectacular, but it is in the cultivation of our devotional life where we will most often meet the Lord and hear His voice.

X. I HAVE LEARNED THAT WE ARE NEVER ALONE (19:18)

There are many believers who stand with us and believe in us. There is wonderful power and care in the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSION: Like Elijah, we must learn many lessons. We need always to remember that the Lord is always with us, enabling and encouraging us along the way. We must never quit, never give up. God will bring us through every problem to victory.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

If you have a praise band, you may want to invert the order of service tonight. Open with some music and prayer, then preach this sermon. Following the sermon, have your praise band present a praise concert.

HOW TO CROSS A RIVER WITHOUT A BRIDGE

Josh. 3:1-15

INTRODUCTION. There are times we are called to move ahead, yet the very concept fills us with fright. We understand the sentiment behind the statement in verse 4 that we “have never been this way before.” It is moving into new areas that we concern ourselves today. Before you can cross a river, you have to get prepared. Let us examine this section from the life and times of Joshua, Moses’ successor, looking for lessons for living victoriously.

I. DETERMINE YOUR DIRECTION (v. 4)

II. CONSECRATION ALWAYS COMES BEFORE THE CROSSING (vv. 5-13)

A. Consecrate today. (v. 5)

B. There will be amazing things tomorrow. (v. 5)

III. WHEN YOU GET TO THE EDGE—GO FOR IT

IV. GOD CAN DO IT AGAIN

CONCLUSION: The Hebrews were willing to walk by faith in the living God. They, with God’s help, crossed the river of impossibility. Do you have any rivers you think are uncrossable? Do you have any mountains you can’t tunnel through? God is a specialist in impossibilities. God always does what no other power or person can do.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Make tonight a youth emphasis evening.

1. Have youth lead the service, provide the music, etc.
2. Interview young people, letting them give their testimonies of faith.
3. Have a youth fellowship time.
4. Don’t overlook young adults in your fellowship. Encourage them to attend together and go to fellowship following the service.

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A SIMPLE CURE FOR A MAJOR PROBLEM

2 Kings 5:1-14

INTRODUCTION. Naaman was a commander. Unlike most of us, he was not taking orders—he was giving them. He had a powerful position, yet he had a potential problem. The cure for his problem was simple yet difficult. The cure involved obedience. Tonight we shall explore a biblical story, looking for insight and strategies for problem solving.

I. THERE IS A PROBLEM (v. 1)

A. Problems are everywhere.

B. We all experience problems.

C. What we do with our problems is the important issue.

II. OUR CIRCUMSTANCES CAN BE USED TO PRODUCE SPIRITUAL RESULTS (v. 2)

III. GOD WANTS US TO BE FAITHFUL (v. 3)

IV. MAKE SURE YOU SEEK HELP FROM THE CORRECT SOURCE (v. 7)

V. GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS WORK IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR PLANS OR IDEAS (v. 10)

VI. OUR PRIDE CAN KEEP US FROM RECEIVING HELP (v. 11)

VII. UNTIL WE ARE OBEDIENT TO GOD, WE WILL NOT RECEIVE THE HELP WE NEED (v. 14)

CONCLUSION: Am I walking obediently in every area of my life? Is there reluctance in my life regarding something the Lord wants me to do? Like Naaman, let us find the simple cure: obedience.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

This would be a good night to emphasize mature adults. Why not have an after-church fellowship time and interview selected individuals. Ask them these questions:

1. Are there problems that must be repeatedly solved, and if so, what are they likely to be?
2. What is the first thing you do when confronted with a problem?
3. When a problem seems unsolvable, what do you do?

NOTES

SANCTIFICATION FOR SERVICE

2 Tim. 2:20-26

NOTES

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Contact the *Jesus Film Partnership*, P.O. Box 4256, Olathe, KS 66063-4256; phone 913-393-FILM. You may want to take this opportunity to show their abbreviated version video or simply alert your congregation to this powerful tool God is using to witness to millions around the world.

INTRODUCTION. We are aware that as Christians we are to live a life of service. Discovering what that service is and how we are to carry it out is part of our obedience and walk with the Lord.

I. THERE ARE TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHRISTIANS: THE USABLE AND THE UNUSABLE (2 Tim. 2:20)

A. 1 Cor. 2—3

B. Heb. 5:12-14

II. THE DIFFERENCE LIES IN REMAINING IN SIN (2 Tim. 2:21)

A. The hindrance to service is sin.

B. Sin can be cleansed.

1. 2 Cor. 7:1

2. Titus 2:14

3. 1 Cor. 5:7

4. 1 John 3:3

III. THE KEY TO SERVICE IS SANCTIFICATION

Three marks of the usable Christian (2 Tim. 2:21)

A. Sanctification. What I give, He takes; what He takes, He cleanses; what He cleanses, He fills; what He fills, He uses.

B. Serviceability, "useful[ness] to the Master."

C. Versatility, "prepared to do any good work."

1. 1 Tim. 3:16-17

2. Titus 2:14

• CONCLUSION: John Wesley said, "Lord, let me not live to be useless." In the matter of service, P. T. Forsyth said, "The greatest service I owe the kingdom of God is my personal holiness."

THE SIX STEPS TO PEACE

Phil. 4:1-9

INTRODUCTION. Peace—it seems so elusive, and everyone seems to be seeking it. Yet few seem to find the kind of peace they desire. Paul reminds us in this passage that peace comes to the Christian because of our relationship to God. In Phil. 4, Paul show us six steps to peace.

- I. PEACE COMES THROUGH STANDING FIRM (v. 1)
- II. PEACE COMES THROUGH UNITY (vv. 2-3)
- III. PEACE COMES THROUGH REJOICING (v. 4)
- IV. PEACE COMES THROUGH A STRONG GENTLENESS (v. 5)
- V. PEACE COMES THROUGH PRAYER (vv. 6-7)
- VI. PEACE COMES THROUGH POSITIVE THINKING (vv. 8-9)

CONCLUSION: What we think is what we become. Our thoughts shape our behavior. W. D. Cornell reminds us of “Peace! peace! wonderful peace, / Coming down from the Father above!” Peace is not something we work ourselves into; rather it is the result of living for God.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

This sermon is quite short. Why not combine it with an informal small-group Bible study, using the following outline as discussion starters?

Phil. 4:1-9

Questions:

Set the Background

1. What are some of the key areas of life that demand personal conviction?
2. How can we establish key convictions that can support us in times of change, uncertainty, etc.?
3. How does conflict affect our desire and pursuit of personal and spiritual stability?
4. What do you think Euodia and Syntyche were disagreeing about?

Explore the Directives

1. Why do our behaviors sometimes baffle us?
2. Are gentle people more peaceful than others, or do they just appear that way?
3. What do you think Paul is referring to when he writes of gentleness?
4. Is it a sin to worry?
5. When is the believer in danger of falling into unbelief regarding God's promises, especially as this relates to verse 6?

Capture the Promise

1. If you could eliminate one thing that worries you, what would it be?
2. What would be too good to be true concerning your life?
3. Why do you think Paul links the peace of God to the guarding of our hearts?
4. Have you ever tried “positive thinking,” only to find it less than satisfactory?
5. What is the link between our thoughts and attitudes, and the felt condition of our spirit?

THE FOUR KEYS TO SUCCESS

Phil. 3:12-14

INTRODUCTION. There is a movement that is trying to remind all of us of the need for constant improvement. Yet, we seem to be so mired in our past that we struggle with being all that God wants us to be. Let us look at the third chapter of Philippians as the apostle Paul reminds us of some keys to success as a Christian.

I. CONCENTRATE ON ONE MAIN GOAL (vv. 12-13)

A. This has to do with our focus. We have so many projects, and things we dabble in; but to be a success for the Lord, we must concentrate on one main goal in life.

B. We must be moving forward with the Lord.

II. CONCENTRATE ON CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT (vv. 12-13)

A. We never arrive. Even the sanctified life is one of constant growth and spiritual development.

B. We are on dangerous ground when we feel we have arrived and there is no area in which we need to grow.

C. God is continually stretching us and causing us to be conformed to His will and purpose.

III. FORGET THE PAST (v. 13)

To forget the past is a constant, deliberate discarding of any thought of past attainment or past failure.

IV. FOCUS ON THE FUTURE (vv. 13-14)

A. There is only one way to really forget the past, and that is to focus on the future.

B. Where is our focus? Is it one of past sins and past failures?

C. God wants us to focus on what we can become if we follow Him and focus on His grace and His possibilities for our lives.

CONCLUSION: Let us not forget to look to God for help as we each one seek to be all that He intended for us to be.

Variety Ideas for Sermon

Have a fellowship time to honor and recognize all birthdays, wedding anniversaries, etc.

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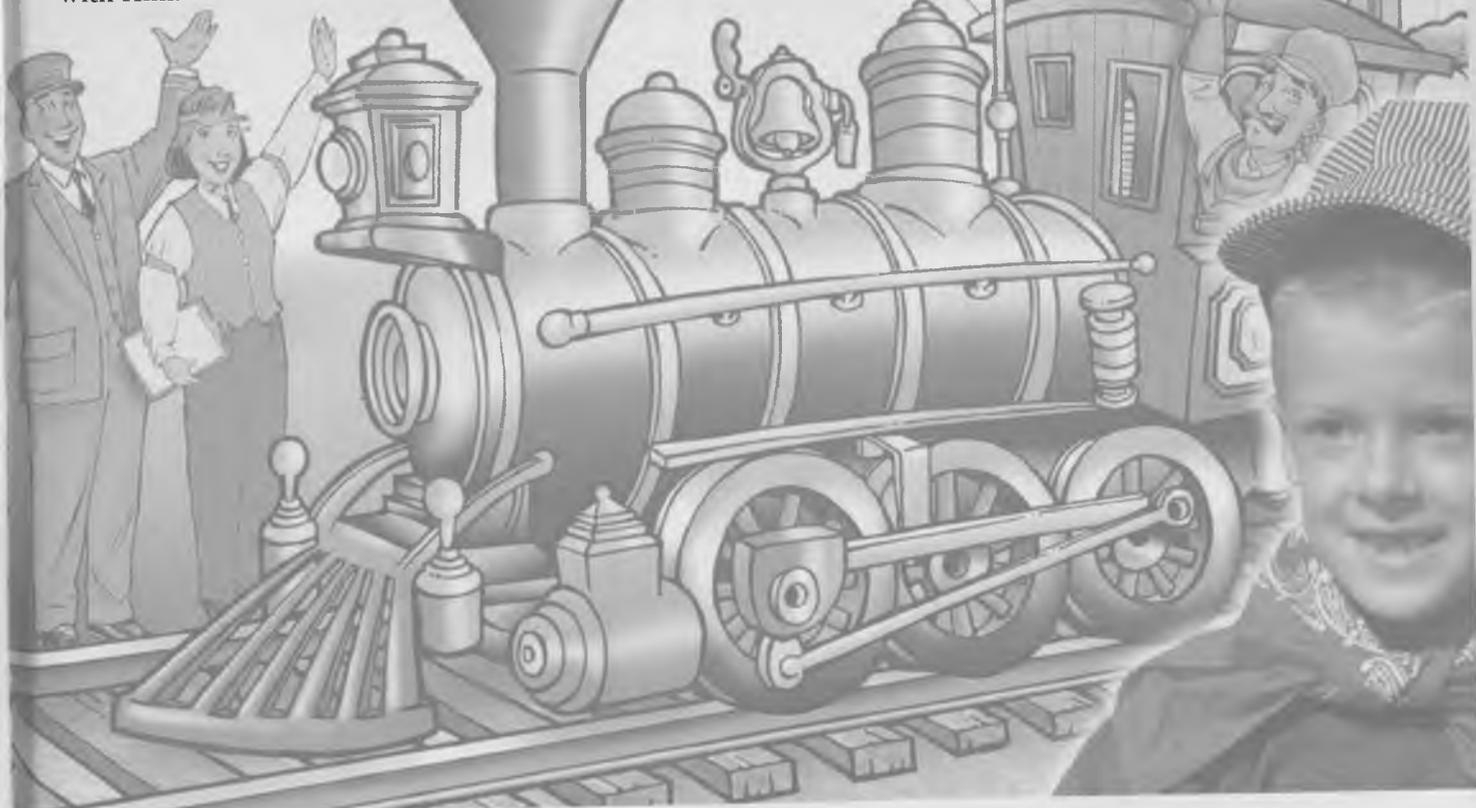
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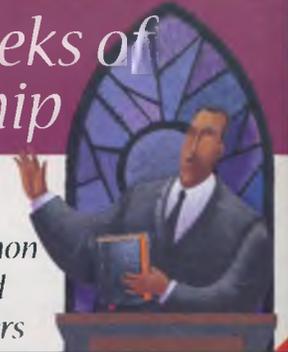
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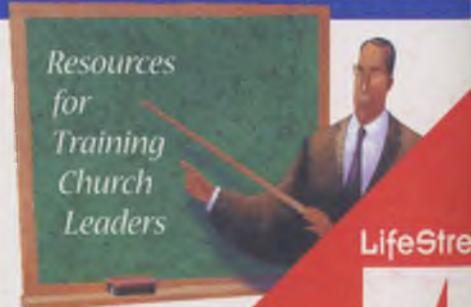
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