



THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

YOU ARE SIGNIFICANT

CALAMITY AT
CHRISTMAS

THE CHURCH'S IRON
CURTAIN

IS THE BEST COMING
FROM YOUR PULPIT?

WHAT IS MY TASK?



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*"Preaching
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to a
particular people."*

—A. W. Tozer

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—A. W. Tozer



Success in Ministry

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

In a conversation at a recent staff meeting, I asked my friends, "Do you know what I would like to have on my tombstone?" I replied in jest, "He isn't here yet!"

One staff member asked on a more serious note, "What would you really like your tombstone to say?"

Though I didn't answer then, many thoughtful moments later I decided on what I hoped would fit with spectators' memories: "He loved much and faithfully pointed to Jesus."

In June of 1990, the Consultation on Clergy Preparation met in beautiful Breckenridge, Colo. During our discussion times the same question kept reappearing: "What is success in ministry?" Church administrators, professors, and pastors sincerely avoided giving glib answers torn from the success catalog of worldly kingdoms. We seek the model of servant leadership revealed in Jesus. In God's kingdom, success in ministry builds on the consistent character of Christ being revealed in the servant leader. Success is being faithful to God and serving God's people.

My understanding of success in ministry was recently enhanced by a book I was asked to review: Leslie B. Flynn, *How to Survive in the Ministry*, by Kregel Publications. Leslie Flynn retired after 40 years in one church. He said, "Forty years is a long time! Forty years without fireworks, though not without flare-ups!" (p. 7). The book is full of personal experience and reflections by a good and

godly man who loved his people and served God faithfully. He felt the rapture of rising tides of attendance and enthusiasm. He held steady when the disappointing downturns inevitably came. Flynn's book echoed the thoughts of a well-balanced minister who continually worked at improving his ministerial skills and insights.

Reflecting on his lengthy tenure in one church, Leslie Flynn concludes: "When a church blossoms, the credit may not totally belong to the pastor, for there may be other contributing factors. Contrariwise, when a church fades, the blame likely does not rest fully on the pastor either, for other factors probably enter in. What we call success is relative, but if one has been called to the ministry, faithfulness is what the Lord requires" (p. 29).

In a five-page section of chapter 11, Flynn gives five suggestions on "How a Pastor Helps Build a Supportive Congregation." Though each is elaborated, one senses the heart of a faithful, loving, successful pastor:



"Regard Your People as Friends, Not as Enemies."

"Treat Everyone Alike."

"Make Few Demands on Your Congregation."

"Encourage Members to Have Concern for Each Other."

"Never Nurse Resentment."

In his last chapter, Flynn reminds us: "A pastor should be the first to recognize that any seeming success comes from the Lord. When all goes well—increasing crowds, growing budgets, building programs, souls won and edified—a mature leader knows where the credit should go. . . . Samuel Chadwick summed it up well, 'If successful, don't crow; if defeated, don't croak'" (p. 144).

This week I celebrate 10 years as pastor of my church. Most of my contemporary peers have been "promoted" from pastoral ministry. It seemed over the past several weeks that I, too, might have a career-changing "promotion." The final phone call never came. However, the process extended long enough for me to reevaluate God's call to preach and to appreciate deeply my placement by Him as a long-term pastor among an eager, warmhearted congregation. If the Lord tarries and He allows me to continue serving in my present assignment, I seek to please Him and to love my people.

Perhaps someone someday would review my ministry and conclude, "He loved much and faithfully pointed to Jesus." ■

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Randal E. Denny

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WORSHIP AND

PREACHING HELPS

Randall E. Davey

Can You Be Prepared in the Imperial Realm for the Mysterious Mission Field?



by Millard Reed

Nashville

Editorial Note: This thought-provoking article was delivered at the Consultation on Clergy Preparation at Breckenridge, Colo., on June 21, 1990. The author has since joined "the imperial realm" as president of Trevecca Nazarene College.

My Thesis: That the culture of the institutions of preparation is distinctively different from the culture of the local church, thus making it very difficult—virtually impossible—for those institutions to prepare for leadership in the local church.

My Question:

Can professors prepare persons to pastor?

CONSIDER HOW DIFFERENT OUR CULTURES ARE

It is our normal pattern as pastors and professors to focus on how we are similar. Our colleges each make a point to emphasize that they are not an "institution of the church" but "are the church education." I agree with that. And more, I thank God for that.

But it is also true that we are different. Our roles are distinctive. As we fail to honor our distinctives, we make theological intercourse with its resulting creativity impossible between us. It is my desire to point out differences, not in order to alienate,

but to facilitate toward creative dialogue.

So while I affirm our association in the household of faith, consider with me how we are different. Very literally, how you as professor and I as pastor are different.

WE SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

The realm in which the professor functions demands that he speak with the precision of prose—words that describe a world that is organized in settled formulas, speech that is unencumbered with concreteness but has ontologies well in place, that

exercises reason as a technique, whose "high country" is the abstract.

I appreciate this language—prose. It is the essential language for the transfer of knowledge. The great thought of the ages cannot be communicated in a different tongue. Expertise in it is not only helpful but essential in the dialogue of the educational institutions. Professors must be able to speak in prose.

PASTORS ON THE OTHER HAND MUST SPEAK IN POETRY

The truth is they must be bilingual. Walter Brueggemann, in his recent book *Finally Comes the Poet*, says, "By poetry I do not mean rhyme, rhythm, or meter, but language that moves like Bob Gibson's fastball, that jumps at the right moment, that *breaks open old worlds* with surprise, abrasion, and pace" (p. 3, italics added). It is unembarrassed about concreteness, is unencumbered by ontologies, "assaults the imagination," and questions presumed objectivity as only "imagined." This poetry spo-



ken by the pastor purposes to "destablish" all settled "facts" and call into being new life and new power.

I might have opted for the biblical term "prophet" rather than "poet," but the point is the same. The pastor must not only have a facility with prose but also break out with the language of the poet/prophet. That poetic/prophetic word must be strong enough to shatter an old, settled world where even the gospel has been "flattened, trivialized, and rendered insane" (p. 1).

To speak in poetry is dangerous. The pastor runs the risk of being heard as the purveyor of fantasy and falsehood. But it is a risk that he must take, for the message has within it an invitation—an invitation that holds the only chance for changed behavior. Those to whom the poetic invitation is addressed are not ultimately in need of new insights; they need new strengths, new courage, new freedom. They need to hear the announcement that they are authorized to act upon the promise of God.

The pulpit and the lectern accommodate different languages. Each is essential to its realm/field. Both pastors and professors must be bilingual. But a failure to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the two would be as debilitating for a pastor as ignorance of the local language would be for the newly arrived missionary.

Pastors and professors speak different languages.

WE ALSO FUNCTION IN DIFFERENT TIME ZONES

In the realm of the professor, everything runs on "*chronos* time." The whole of the operation—the requirements for graduation—are well specified, measurable, predictable. The whole—the total—may be broken down into measured parts: semesters, terms, credit hours, class hours, number of teaching sessions per hour, and number of teaching minutes per session. It is the nature of the "beloved realm." Accrediting associations see to it. There is a certain contractual accountability the school has to the student.

This *chronos* time is the stuff of contracts. It makes possible job descriptions, where expectations are measurable and either party may be faulted and finally sued for noncompliance.

By contrast, a pastor's primary time ingredient is "*kairos* time." The pastor must comply with the demands of *chronos* time, but his essential function is not defined by *chronos* nearly so much as it is by *kairos*. It might more precisely be called "timing."

Pastors' and professors' roles are distinctive.

A few nights ago I was called to the bedside of the dying mother of two of my fine young men. Both fellows are professionals who, along with their wives, are very active in the life of the church. All four of them play in our handbell choir. After a couple of shared hours, it was nearly 2 A.M., and the children began to urge me to return home "to get my rest."

My response to them included this comment, "Pastoring is like playing the handbells. You can tarry ever so long just counting time, as long as you are there at the moment when the orchestration calls for that tone. Miss it, and the whole of the presentation is irretrievably marred."

Summa cum laude does not prepare a person for the creative function of pastor.

This is the kind of timing that is crucial for a pastor. Like music, it demands the skill of an artist. It is more difficult to measure, and so it does not lend itself to "contract" easily.

Job descriptions are not adequate for it. A job description for an organist might say, "Play the organ at certain times!" But a job description is blind to the great skill of the accomplished organist as compared to the novice. *Kairos* time finds its comfortable expression in covenant rather than contract—and says things like "whithersoever thou goest," "thy people . . . my people," and "till death do us part" (see Ruth 1:16-17, KJV).

As pastor and professor, we function in different time zones.

WE ALSO OPERATE WITH A DIFFERENT CURRENCY

I use the term *currency* as my effort to describe the "basic measure of wealth" that is negotiable in our distinct areas of service. I borrow the terms used by J. Mortimer Adler, who lists "information, understanding, and knowledge as the first three of the four categories of learning."

The basic currency for the professor is knowledge. It is the coin of the realm for the classroom—although, in some classes I have taught, I had to be satisfied with a glimmer of understanding. In some cases I prayed that the information was at least in the student's notebook for future reference. But the bright hope of the classroom is knowledge.

Accrediting associations insist that professors have a comprehensive awareness of the information within the discipline. The function of the professor is, in the first sense, derivative. That is, he dispenses that information to the student from class session to class session (in *chronos* time) in such a way that the student "understands" it well enough to return it to the professor at examination time and, in the exercise, accumulates knowledge. It is further desired by the professor that the student will be so stimulated by this "aided" exercise that in time he may acquire information with understanding so that it becomes knowledge unaided by a professor.

I find great personal and philosophical delight in the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. It is an impressive currency.

I even enjoy the ostentatious display of that wealth—the academic procession. Each hood, each symbolic color, each mortarboard and tassel, and the occasional tam from the old

aristocratic academia or gaudy robe from a European school is testimony to knowledge—the currency of the classroom. Professors must be able to deal in the currency of knowledge.

**Timing,
like music,
demands the
skill of an artist.**

A pastor must also have some accumulated knowledge, but the currency that is negotiable in the congregation is not knowledge. It is wisdom, the fourth quality identified by Adler. He speaks of wisdom as the “political” quality. He uses “political” in the broader sense as that quality that enables one to function with and give leadership to people. I am sure that you are not taking offense with this figure. I am not saying that it takes no wisdom to teach a class of graduate students. I am not saying that at all. I am saying that grade point average is no indicator of wisdom. And I am saying with emphasis that *summa cum laude* does not prepare a person for the creative function (not derivative) of the pastor—creative in that the pastor must respond to undomesticated people, make judgment calls, speak or not speak at a precise but unpredictable moment in time, and do so in wisdom. He is not in a laboratory. The atmosphere is not sterile. It is laden with all kinds of ideological and theological “infections”—some carried by the pastor himself. The effects of his “care of souls” is far more weighty than grades or degrees. The welfare of individuals, families, and the congregation are often at stake as well as the eternal destiny of never-dying souls. The currency called for here is wisdom.

Some argue that our separate currencies (knowledge/wisdom) may be exchanged like other great currencies of the world. I would observe that the “office of exchange” is experience, and that the “officers of the exchange” seem to serve some far more rapidly and at a more favorable ex-

change rate than others. As a personal aside, Adler comments that he has seen few, if any, wise persons younger than the age of 50. That is not an encouraging thought when we consider the age of most first-year pastors.

Let us acknowledge, then, that the language, time zone, and currency of the professor and the pastor are different.

OUR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IS ALSO DIFFERENT

I am not saying here that all professors are Republicans and all pastors are Democrats. I am saying that our difference is more basic and comprehensive than that.

The professor functions in an elite, “patrician” world. Please do not recoil too quickly. I do not judge critically. I just observe it to be so. With the greatest facility of the language, control of the *chronos* time zone, and with the far superior accumulation of the currency of the realm (knowledge), the professor is the imperial head of the realm. He attracts his own kind to himself. The professor is model. I delight in this. I have been powerfully impacted by those who were my chosen mentors. At times I have tried to *talk* like them and *walk* like them, thinking that that would enable me to *be* like them.

The route to the aristocracy in this realm is clear: i.e., speak the language (prose), acquire the currency (knowledge), dispense it at the right time (*chronos*), and become *summa, magna, cum*. It is the social order of the “beloved imperial realm.”

In contrast is the pastor whose intellectual and emotional matrix is sacramental. He presumes to accept the call of One who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:7-8). The pastor’s world is a plebeian world (opposite of patrician). If he were to minister only to those with whom he was ideologically compatible, he would exclude a very large portion of his congregation. And he would be destroying the Body of Christ. He would not be pastoring a church but a “sect,” that is, a “section” of the church. His function would no longer be pastoral. He must practice neither intellectual nor personal elitism. The

shepherd cannot be selective in his care of the flock.

Vulnerability is the primary, not the secondary, quality for a pastor, who must function from that vulnerable point on the behalf of all persons regardless of philosophical or theological suasion. “The one who delivers the sacramental word,” says Urban Holmes, “and serves the sacramental rite, must himself be sacramental.”

In the field to which Jesus has called the pastor, the first must be last, and he that would be the greatest must be servant to all. Our Lord nailed it down tightly by saying, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

The political philosophies of the professor and the pastor are not only different but well-nigh polar.

HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER?

To summarize these thoughts, I have named our different areas of service. To the area where the pastor functions I give the title “the mysterious mission field.” I call the place where the professor functions, “the beloved imperial realm.”

**Grade point
average is no
indicator of
wisdom.**

The pastor functions in the field. The term *field* is intended to describe boundlessness. There are no fences, no limits. It is *inclusive*. By saying, “The world is my parish,” John Wesley was not giving mission philosophy but rather was declaring the essential *inclusiveness* of the gospel. The term, *mission* is used to express the fact that the pastor is called to “shout forth” with wisdom the incredible word of the gospel in poetic/prophetic language until every person hears the transforming word and until the Lord of the field brings the final ingathering. All of this is *mysterious*—not mystery that is solvable, but *unsolvable*. That is, a mystery

that is of the essence that will not and cannot be resolved in terms of understanding. It remains a mystery to the most experienced pastor. It also remains fascinating.

So, the pastor must function in the mysterious mission field. That is, he must speak the gospel in the language of the poet/prophet with a wisdom that causes it to effectively confront every person at the appointed time.

The professor, on the other hand, functions in the "beloved imperial realm." Again, each word is essential to this title. It is a *realm* in that it is not the whole of the church. It is an essential part of it. Since it is essential, it is *beloved*. It is also beloved for personal reasons. Many of us treasure the familiar specifics of this subculture genuinely. It is also *imperial*. Its hierarchy is well defined, its "elitism" specified.

So the professor functions in the "beloved imperial realm." He must be able to speak in well-structured prose from his wealth of knowledge in the prescribed *chronos* time to those who have qualified to enter the realm.

All this brings me to repeat my earlier stated thesis: The culture of the institutions of preparation is distinctively different from the culture of the local church, thus making it very difficult—virtually impossible—for those institutions to prepare for leadership in the local church.

Now to restate my early question:

Many have been
powerfully
impacted by
those chosen
mentors.

CAN PROFESSORS PRODUCE PASTORS?

I acknowledge that it is impertinent of me to raise the question, but it is an impertinence that is not mean-spirited. I raise the question and then suggest that it may be impossible for professors to produce pastors. Pas-

tors and professors speak different languages, function in different time zones, have differing currencies, espouse radically different political philosophies. We are continents apart. It simply is not reasonable to assume that professors cohabiting with professors will produce pastors. It violates the genetic code. God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature *after his kind*" (Gen. 1:24, KJV, italics added). It is reasonable to conclude that professors cohabiting with professors will, from their intellectual and theological intercourse, produce *professors*.

This impertinence as a pastor addressing professors is *not* mean-spirited, and it is not intended as an insult. It is intended as a flirtation. We are different—you and I. But as the young couples who come to me for premarital counseling unanimously exclaim, "*Vive la différence!*" They *celebrate* their differences. They see potential in their differences. They are downright passionate about their differences.

I do not want my flirtation to be subtle. I boldly suggest that we share their mind-set. We too should celebrate our differences with mutual regard. I have admiration for you whose primary place of service is the "beloved imperial realm." I admire and am sometimes well-nigh awestruck by your ability to speak the language, negotiate the currency, and manage the time schedule of the realm. Like most pastors, I blush at my own inferiority and my own ineptitude when I make the occasional junket into your land of primary ministry. I feel my own awkwardness in the presence of your grace. But, like the young lover, I bear that embarrassment in this very presentation in order to declare my regard and admiration of you. Also like young lovers, we pastors yearn to hear and need to hear that we are highly regarded by you—that you might be a bit awestruck by the mystery of the field, that you admire those who can speak the language and function in the time zone of our plebian atmosphere.

There are rumors about our "romance" that are disquieting. They say that we are alienated, that we disregard each other, and that we distrust each other. Since I am insecure in this courtship season, I have been,

from time to time, inclined to believe it. From time to time, I have heard pastors speak despairingly of "ivory tower" professors who have no regard nor knowledge of "the real world." I have wondered from time to time if the professors, long removed from the "mysterious mission field," remembered how delicate the art of pastoring is, how difficult the language, how devastating or how glorious the sacrament.

We should
celebrate our
differences with
mutual regard.

I wish that any new curriculum or education procedure would be the product of our shared procreation and result in shared celebration.

I am pleading that we see the fertile potential in our differences. It is not reasonable to expect that the cohabitation of professors with professors would produce pastors. On the other hand, a covenant cohabitation of professors with pastors would produce at least some pastors. Maybe some who are pastor-professor and others who are professor-pastor, some professor-professor and some pastor-pastor—but, in this case, the genetic code is in our favor toward the production of pastors.

This is not the time to present innovative curriculum changes. It *is* the time to declare that there is a significant and obvious value to be gained by programming significant practitioner input into the training of clergy. How else will young pastors-to-be begin to learn the language, become familiar with the currency and time zones, and invert their political philosophy to that of the field?

Traditional intern programs are helpful to this process. I admit that they are difficult to operate. Few have been done with success. But this fact should not keep us from making creative efforts toward effective intern programs.

Other adjustments can be made within the "realm" to simulate something of the atmosphere of the "field." Here are modest examples:

Rumors about our "romance" are disquieting.

1. Classes with two or more professors integrating more than one discipline. With two or more imperial heads in a single class, the imperial atmosphere is compromised, and the student is a step closer to the field.

2. Draw in a qualified pastor or pastors to coteach a class along with a professor. In this case, make sure to identify which "language" will be spoken, etc., before the class begins. The greatest good will not be gained by forcing the pastor to adjust to the realm. The greater good and the greater effort for the professor and the class will be to adjust to the field. Let it be a plebeian rather than a patrician exercise.

3. Intentionally devise ways in which the atmosphere of the field may be simulated in the realm. A simulation is the best you can do and all you want to do. The real thing might

be fatal. And I am only jesting when I suggest that you might have the students vote on "professorial arrangements" with two- or four-year "renewals," and, of course, the possibility of being voted out.

Here is another plebeian idea that is less a threat to the professor: Suggest that the grade for a student's term paper depends totally on your mood at the time he delivers it—or if you are present at all on the morning that he delivers it. Do you see how this is like it is on the field? A pastor can pour his best into preparation only to have it missed because they did not show up or, although they were present in body, their minds made no recognition.

Crucial to the facilitation of such field simulations as these within the realm is the continuing and significant involvement of the professor in

the life of a particular local church. There he retains his use of the language and deals in the currency of the field within its political philosophy. Being an itinerant guest preacher does not qualify one to ap-

ply for a "resident's visa."

These three feeble suggestions are only a token of the potential that is ours as professors-pastors. I ask us to look for the creative potential that springs from the dialogue made possible by a candid acknowledgment of our differences.

Beyond the acknowledgment of

our differences, there must be within both of us a passion to create. Without that passion we will find the unproductive corners of the Kingdom, each convinced of our singular cause, but each also finding a certain incompleteness in our roles.

I am pleading that we see the fertile potential in our differences.

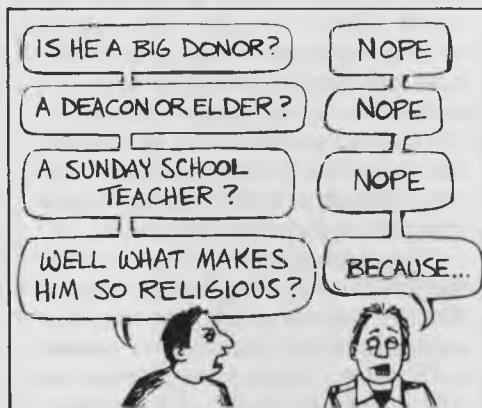
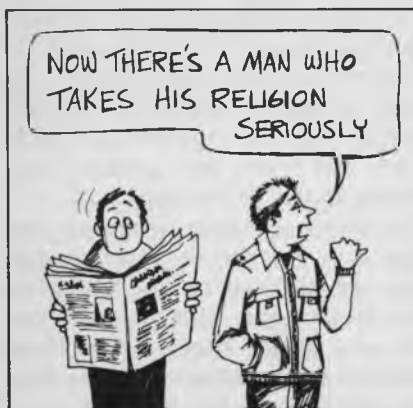
Illumined by the passion, we can see that our engagement is serious. It must be other than and more than a short-term infatuation. We can also see that it is dangerous. It may force us to change to adjustment and to mutual humble submission, a quality not natural to either of us.

Empowered by the passion, we will engage each other, persuaded that the task is too great and its result too significant for us to grow faint-hearted and quit the pursuit. The field has never been more mysterious, more demanding, more painful than it is now. But the realm has never been better manned, more fully equipped, nor more fully facilitated than today.

If we as pastors and professors engage in the preparation of clergy together, we can accomplish the desired and effective result.

There must be within both of us a passion to create.

BEYOND BELIEF



The Preacher as Storyteller

by C. Ed Bryson

Lafayette, Ind.

I was struggling to keep my congregation's attention. The more energy I poured into communicating the significance of the Greek meaning of grace, the more frozen peered the eyes of the saints. How could I break through the icy stares and inflame their hearts?

Then it happened. I began telling the story of the thief on the cross. Lights came on all over the church. Minds that had wandered to the four corners of the universe suddenly came stampeding back.

How had I missed it?

Several years ago I became interested in the art of storytelling. It had become my hobby, and I'd become well known in the community as a folk storyteller. I'd watched rowdy inner-city kids settle in rapt attention and follow the plot of rather involved traditional stories. I'd strung along sophisticated community leaders, then watched their facades crumble in laughter as the punch line of a folk-tale took an unexpected twist. But I'd not taken my art into the pulpit.

Why? Because I was a serious preacher—a scholar who believed it was my job to teach people in my care as I was taught. Expository preaching was the only way to see God's Word bear fruit in the lives of the saints. That meant long hours with the text and abstract exegesis presented in a threepoint outline. The poem was optional. The people were absent.

The worst blow of all was that people could not remember my sermon beyond the steps of the church. But that day I'd seen the lights come on.

How could I tell stories and still be faithful to preaching the Word? Strong Christians need meat on which to mature. But they turned up their noses at the steak I tossed before them as if it was rotten.

So I seasoned the meat. Drawing on my artistic skills as a folk storyteller, I began my sermons with a question or a story. All attention focused on me. People actually listened to my sermons. But I felt guilty—it was too much fun. And I was wasting valuable time telling stories when I could better use it to pack in more abstract truth.

Overcoming

My guilt drove me to investigation. I observed why the Gospels are called narratives. I noticed that Jesus rarely said anything without telling a story.

Experimenting, I learned to punctuate my expository scripts with stories and illustrations. Images in the stories emerged as causeways from the glassy abstract to the stone reality of life. I decided that if I communicate one tempered brick of truth each Sunday, the people could better build their castles of faith. Before, I had filled their hands with packed sand that would sift away onto the parking lot before they reached their cars.

I found that scientific literature also supported the use of story to communicate knowledge. Link emotions to knowledge, and it's likely to be remembered and acted upon. Was that not the goal of my preaching?

Where do I start?

It's said that Billy Sunday kept a stack of cards on which were written his favorite stories. Each night in each

new town he picked through the cards and arranged the stories he felt led to tell that night. But where do you get great stories that can penetrate hearts and leave them open to receive the truth?

My primary source is the Bible. The Old Testament is mostly made up of stories strung along like a bedouin caravan. The gospel narrative lends itself perfectly to story. Simply exegete the passage, and let the story teach the truth.

The newspaper, public television, and radio have been good sources for me. National Public Radio (NPR) is a fabulous source for human interest stories.

A valuable source may be found at your public library: Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, published by Indiana University Press. If you can remember anything about a story, illustration, or joke, you can likely find a sketch of it in Mr. Thompson's comprehensive five-volume index.

If you're still not convinced that using story can more effectively communicate your expository material, check out the book *Learning to Preach like Jesus*, by Ralph Lewis and Gregg Lewis.

Set free

"I finally understand the religious significance of the struggle in the Middle East," I overheard as two of my parishioners were discussing the morning sermon.

Returned the other, "I always felt guilty that I'd forgotten the sermon every Sunday by the time I got home. Since he started telling stories, I find our family often discusses the sermon over lunch."

I felt the guilt lift from my shoulders. I'd been set free. Jesus had been showing me the way of story all along. Now I'm home to stay. ■





Is the *Best* Coming from Your Pulpit?

by Keith A. Price

Victoria, B.C.

Whether you are in the pew or behind the pulpit, you should know why the Bible is being presented in an expository manner—if it is—and why this type of preaching will make your local church stronger.

In recent years, I have sat on several convention planning committees whose task it was to select and invite effective Bible expositors to speak. I have come to the conclusion that such people are increasingly rare.

I know the heavy demands that expository preaching makes. [Expository preaching might be defined as the explanation and application of a portion of Scripture in an organized way to achieve a specific spiritual purpose—*ed.*] Pastors and teachers, already submerged from the pressures of a fast-moving society, are not really looking for more work. Nevertheless, I want to plead with those who are called to shepherd God's flock to make every effort to recover what could become a fast-disappearing practice.

After nearly 30 years of communicating God's truth by expository preaching, I am more convinced than ever of its value. Why do I believe the exposition of Scripture to be so important? Let me share my reasons:

1. It is the most biblical form of preaching.

While other types of preaching may have their rightful place—even from the pulpit—the man called by God to proclaim His truth will surely focus all attention on the Word. He

will not only use Scripture in a general sense but also make it that unbreakable thread, which, like a necklace, holds together those Holy Spirit-inspired gems of explanation, illustration, and application.

Some preachers use the Bible only as a launching pad—to propel them into propounding their own views on a selected topic. After the reading and an initial brief comment, the Bible is closed in both pulpit and pew.

Should we not rather be like Ezra, who "opened the book in the sight of all the people . . . blessed the Lord, the great God . . . read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:5, 6, 8, RSV)? If we hold that Scripture is inspired by God in a unique sense, then the most biblical form of preaching is to read it clearly—giving the sense. This is the essence of exposition.

2. It is the way that I can teach with authority.

Most of us are bombarded daily with scores of commercials. We usually have no way of determining what is true advertising and what is false.



Similarly, "spiritual" advice or ideas that are not based directly on the passage read or referred to may or may not be God's truth—it is not always easy to tell. I've known preachers to take secular material—particularly in the fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, or leadership—then search for a verse that appears to back it up and preach it as their Sunday morning message. I've even heard one preacher call that style "exposition." Nothing could be further from the truth.

The preacher is to explain or amplify the written and visible Word. His words then have the authority of truth about them. One celebrated preacher, with whom I recently sat on a convention platform, actually preached without using a Bible. He spoke on God's strategy in evangelism, quoting Scripture but always from memory. His message, though biblical, lacked that stamp of authority that the public visibility of his Bible could have provided.

I recall when preaching in one church in Communist Europe that most people had no Bible. Thinking there were no more available, I asked how many owned a copy. To my amazement, almost everyone raised a hand. Apparently, the pastor was a "launching pad" type; and the Bibles, even when brought, were not really used. Bad habits had naturally developed. I delayed the message while they went to their homes to find their Bibles—something we could not do in North America because of our addiction to clock-watching.

3. It magnifies Christ.

Some preaching magnifies the preacher, especially when—as A. W. Tozer used to put it—“the scintillating personality replaces the burning bush.” The preacher’s style may be remembered more than his message.

Other preachers magnify their pet theories. They have a doctrinal ax to grind, and use it at every opportunity to prove their point—sometimes at the expense of more fundamental truth or the teaching majored on in the passage.

True Bible exposition will, of necessity, magnify Christ. We are on safe ground when we are working with the Spirit’s illuminating the sacred page. For it is God’s Book, and He always magnifies His Son.

4. It emphasizes God’s priorities, not man’s.

Some preachers can effectively handle topics chosen from popular films, current news items, or the emphasis of the lecturer at the counseling seminar run by the hospital administration last week. While this often attracts attention, creates interest, and bespeaks admirable creativity on the part of the preacher, it can, when mishandled, fail to really feed the flock with the diet planned by the Chief Shepherd. The world must neither set our agenda nor determine our credenda. The Holy Spirit has given us in the Word those topics that should be majored on in our preaching. The frequent recurrence of certain themes throughout Scripture surely indicates something about what is important to God.

Bible exposition on a book of the Bible will ensure majors on God’s majors—not man’s. I have noticed that weak Christians often prefer “problem-oriented” messages—especially when they touch a felt need. They want the experiential while secretly detesting the “dry, doctrinal subjects.” We have somehow conveyed the misconception that oft-mentioned biblical themes like sin, the Cross, the Resurrection, repentance, and faith are dry and boring. Could I suggest that this is because we either ignore the practical scriptural context or fail to illustrate it and apply it to daily living. We sometimes preach in an experienceless, atmosphereless vacuum and give the impression that while practical Christian living is for every day, doctrine is

only useful on Sundays or for those going into “the ministry.”

5. It has something for everybody.

Almost invariably while preparing a passage for exposition, I find myself marking those verses that more clearly express the essence of the Good News. I’ll be sure to use them to full advantage. Those preachers who find themselves more at home with evangelistic messages will find that preaching through a book will force them to minister to growing Christians also—who otherwise get starved.



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Most Bible passages not only have something for Christian and non-Christian but also have both milk and meat content. The young and the mature in the faith can be fed from the same plate. Ignoring the expository method sometimes leads the academically inclined preacher to fire above the heads of most in the congregation. Because I learned a lesson 20 years ago is no reason to assume everyone else knows it too. Exposition will force me to visit both kindergarten and campus in the same message. This is also true with age differences. Practicing Jesus’ way of teaching by illustration (55 percent of His recorded words) will keep the interest of the 10-year-old, while rein-

forcing the point for the grandparent. We tend to forget that Jesus was once a child, and that God had thought this problem through before He provided the material that would best do the job for all. Let’s be sure to use it.

6. It impresses on all the relevance of the Bible.

I have seen people weep as they sat under effective expository preaching and felt the Word of God speak so directly to their situation. It’s as if they realized for the first time that God truly has “seen the[ir] affliction . . . heard their cry . . . [and] know[n] their sufferings” (Exod. 3:7, RSV).

Take Rom. 8:37 or Isa. 43:2 and put it into the hands—and the heart—of a loving, devoted pastor who has spent his week ministering to the walking wounded, and see what happens. It’s likely that several will say: “Pastor, that message was aimed right at me this morning,” or “Who told you I had that problem?” The Word becomes so relevant that they realize God understands human beings like nobody else ever did.

7. It whets people’s appetite for the Word of God.

How often have you heard someone say, “I can hardly believe how much he got out of those two verses.” What is most impressed upon them is that the verses were in their Bible all the time. They have likely read the passage again and again, yet failed to see the gems of truth and wisdom that were hidden beneath the surface. You have shown them the potential of their own copy of the Scriptures to convey the voice of God—especially in a time of need.

With a regular diet of this “giving-the-sense” preaching, it doesn’t take long for even the least mature to see that what makes the difference is the time taken for meditation. It’s “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34, RSV), and the heart rarely gets filled with a five-minute glance at a text. Your expositions will have whetted their appetites for serious study of the Word.

Soon they’ll not be satisfied with spoon-fed meals but will want to study the Word themselves. Expository preaching—more than any pushed-down-the-throat technique for getting Christians into the Word—will ultimately produce the quality of disciple and potential teacher that would otherwise be little more than an unfulfilled dream.

8. *It puts fire in my bones.*

Francis Dixon, a beloved British pastor, wrote a book called *Running up the Stairs*. He was addicted to a ministry of Bible exposition. He was the kind of person who, if you didn't know what to preach, would say, "Just turn over the page, there's plenty more on the other side." Every passage he turned to would yield its secrets to his Christ-filled mind. After hours in one paragraph—or even one verse—he would be so bursting full that, like Jeremiah (see 20:9), it was like fire in his bones—so much so that he could hardly wait for starting time. When it came, he would *run* up the pulpit stairs to preach.

This had been my joyous experience too. I can hardly wait for the great sense of fulfillment I get when I am able to open the lid of the treasure chest and display the wealth of the King of Kings. This is the unique privilege of the expositor, and it's worth far more than all of the hours we sacrificially put into preparation.

9. *People take home the notes.*

There are very few words of praise or thanks that can equal seeing dozens of people taking notes as you expound the Word. Often—especially when you outline your points as you start—you can hear the rustling and tearing of paper or the clicking of a purse as someone searches for a pen. How many of these note sheets are ever read again is anyone's guess; but even then, the points are better remembered for having been written down.

But what about those who take no notes? I have found that the more faithfully I expound a Scripture portion, the more precisely are my notes found right there in the text. This means that everyone—not just the notetakers—take home the notes. In addition, if you've done your work well, one or more of your points will come back to them each time they read that passage. This is even more the case if they mark their Bibles as you preach.

Then again, they never lose the notes! Your message can go on work-

sage this morning!" My "What did he say?" suddenly chills the atmosphere, as a look of embarrassment or an unspoken "Why did I open my big mouth?" replaces the carefree joy that characterized the earlier comment.

Saintly Bishop Taylor-Smith was known for asking young Christians, "And what did the Lord give

you this morning?" Whenever there was a blank look or a clumsy excuse, he would say, "Well, let me tell you what the Lord gave *me* this morning." Then—as much for his memory's benefit as theirs—he would share the gems he had found in the Word that day. Do this with three people each day, and you'll likely remember the thoughts for years.

The Christian message is meant to be passed on, not kept. We are sometimes like sponges sitting under a dripping tap—always wet and soggy. We are meant to be squeezed so that others will benefit from what has blessed us.

But what if our memories are short? Those who preach rarely suspect that the fault may lie just as much at their door as with the hearer. For if the entire church has taken home the notes—in the text of their own Bibles—then it's no great hardship for them to look up the passage and say, "Oh, yes, here's what he said."

So that's why I choose to preach by exposition. I should add, however, that I recall some years ago vowing—rather overzealously, I'm afraid—never to preach except by this method. I now realize that there are special occasions when other methods are particularly appropriate, such as at certain parents' nights, church banquets, ball club chapels, and so forth. Yet, they are still very much the exception. My calling is to a ministry of Bible exposition. To this I have committed myself; and from this, by God's grace, I will not be detracted.

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ing long after the nonexpository-type message is forgotten. It's no wonder that regular exposition produces such quality and quantity growth in the churches that practice it.

10. *It's easy to pass on.*

I've often felt quite uncharitable after yielding to the temptation to further pursue someone's "Wow, did the pastor ever preach a great mes-



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My Mind Went Back

by Wendell Wellman

West Covina, Calif.

Blame it on my advancing years. Blame it on the nostalgic bent in my nature. Whatever the explanation, I was genuinely excited by a service I attended recently. It was the closing service of the Los Angeles District Camp Meeting.

The beautiful sanctuary of Pasadena First Church of the Nazarene was well filled. You could feel the excitement as you came in. There was electricity in the very atmosphere. You had the feeling that this would be no ordinary Sunday evening. It wasn't!

Dwight and Carol Mullen were the song evangelists. Dwight opened the service with a medley of old favorites—"The Unclouded Day,"

"When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," "I'll Fly Away," and "Because He Lives." It had been a while since I had heard such spirited singing from a congregation. It set the tone for the entire evening. Special music featured the combined choirs of Los Angeles Grace and Pasadena First. They sang a rousing song under the dynamic direction of Sharon Densford with an enthusiastic response from the congregation. A vocal duet by Dwight and Carol rounded out the special music.

Evangelist Charles (Chic) Shaver preached on the theme "A New Creature in Christ." He captured and held the attention of his audience from his



opening remarks. It was one of those messages that build steadily toward a climax. And what a climax it was! Without pressure. Without psychological tricks. Without gimmicks. Just a simple, sincere invitation under the obvious leadership of the Holy Spirit.



The long altar was soon filled, as were many of the front seats, with needy people seeking spiritual help.

Throughout the evening I reflected on the need to return to a stronger evangelistic emphasis on Sunday nights. Granted, a crowd of nearly 2,000 adds a dimension not possible in a crowd of 200. But the same elements can be present in a small or average-size congregation. The music can be soul-stirring. The message can be genuinely evangelistic. The same Holy Spirit can be present to draw needy people.

Since attending that service, I have been unable to shake the feeling that many of us have all but given up on the Sunday night evangelistic service. We have given it different names. We have changed the focus and the purpose. And we have lost something vital in the process.

Perhaps it is nostalgia, but this camp meeting service revived memories of a time when the Sunday night evangelistic service was the big service. This was true where I first encountered the Church of the Nazarene. It revived memories of the days when revivals were a regular part of the church year and camp meetings were anxiously awaited events each summer.

I left that service wishing we could experience more Sunday nights like that one. ■

Three Theologians Discuss Their Suffering

by John E. Stanley

Portland, Oreg.

Recently three contemporary Christian writers opened their hearts and shared their experiences with suffering. Their books, which tell how they encountered and lived with suffering, are accounts that illumine the relationship between their experiences and their theologies. J. Christiaan Beker in *Suffering and Hope*, Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Lament for a Son*, and Madeleine L'Engle in *Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage* analyze their experiences of suffering and provide encouragement and wisdom for others who suffer. Wolterstorff and L'Engle wrote narrative theologies. After a three-page description of his sufferings, Beker described what the Bible says about suffering.

J. Christiaan Beker, professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, confessed his reticence about sharing his subjective response to his suffering, which he suggests might seem "puny" in the larger context of the world's suffering.¹ Beker notes that he composed *Suffering and Hope*, not primarily as an academic venture, but as his existential attempt to reconcile his suffering with his belief in God's goodness.

Suffering stalks Beker in three forms. In World War II he felt utterly dehumanized when German troops took him from Holland and placed him in a labor camp. For Beker, like many other victims of war, personal effects of the war lingered long after the political armistice. Following his return to Holland after the war, a manic-depressive cycle produced extreme mood swings from suicidal depression to ecstatic states accompanied by irresponsible behavior. Sadly, the illness was not properly diagnosed for years. And the tragic absurdities of the late 20th century haunt

Beker's spirit. The Holocaust, wars in Vietnam and Nicaragua, the plight of the homeless and mentally ill, and the deterioration of the quality of life awaken agony in Beker's sensitive spirit. His mind aches as he surveys the world because he detects "more reason for hopelessness than for hope—especially because so many expressions of hope are simply projections of false hope."²

Lament for a Son, by Nicholas Wolterstorff, professor of philosophical theology at Yale Divinity School, chronicles how Wolterstorff responded to the sudden death of his 25-year-old son, Eric, in a mountain climbing accident. Like Beker, Wolterstorff noted that *Lament for a Son* is "intensely personal."³ The heartbroken father wrote to honor his son, to voice his grief, and "in the hope that it will be of help to some of those who find themselves with us in the company of mourners."⁴

In *Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage*, Madeleine L'Engle's theology of suffering emerges from her narrative description of how she and her family responded to her husband Hugh's treatment, pain, and death from bladder cancer. Hugh was a Broadway and television actor. Although L'Engle is a writer and conference leader, any doubts I had regarding classifying her as a theologian diminished as I read *Two-Part Invention*, especially as she shared her disciplined reading program in theology. *Two-Part Invention* documents her willingness "not to be afraid to ask the big questions that have no answers."⁵

Wolterstorff asked, "What is suffering?" He answered,

When something prized or loved is ripped away or never gained—work, someone loved, recognition of one's dignity, life without physi-

cal pain—that is suffering, or rather, that's when suffering happens. What it is, I do not know.⁶

All three writers regard suffering and death as evil. Wolterstorff said, "Death is awful, demonic."⁷ "In death one faces not love but malevolence."⁸ Three times Beker spoke of death as a poisonous reality⁹ and notes that suffering threatens to suffocate the meaning individuals experience in their private lives. L'Engle is not as explicit in defining suffering and death as evil, except she does speak of terrible and tragic events.

Questions pervade these three accounts of suffering. The questions in *Lament for a Son* fill up a single-spaced typewritten page. Initially Wolterstorff reflects, "The pain of the *no more* outweighs the gratitude of the *once was*. Will it always be so?"¹⁰ "How can I bury my son . . . ?"¹¹ Months later he talks to himself and to God, asking,

Will my eyes adjust to this darkness? Will I find You in the dark—not in the streaks of light which remain, but in the darkness? Has anyone ever found You there? Did they love what they saw? Did they see love? And are there songs for singing when the light has gone dim? The songs I learned were all of praise and thanksgiving and repentance. Or in the dark, is it best to wait in silence?¹²

Wolterstorff's penetrating questions provoke as much thought as a seminary class in the philosophy of religion.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" the lament from Ps. 22:1 and quoted in Mark 15:35, framed L'Engle's questionings. She kept returning to that lonely question, acknowledging it is "all right to ask why," even while "knowing there

are no easy answers, perhaps no answers at all."¹³ While watching her husband die of cancer, she did not "want to be afraid to ask the big questions that have no answers."¹⁴

Beker's *Suffering and Hope* attempts to state what the Bible says regarding suffering and death. Although it is not in diary or narrative form like *Lament for a Son* and *Two-Part Invention*, *Suffering and Hope* reflects Beker's struggle to answer the question of why there is suffering. He begins with an extremely personal statement covering three pages, explaining why he had to write *Suffering and Hope*. Like Dr. Rieux in Albert Camus' *The Plague* and like Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Beker asks, "Can the present, unjust suffering of one child of God be righted and compensated for by that sufferer's future restoration in the kingdom of God?"¹⁵ These questions of Wolterstorff, L'Engle, and Beker are contemporary versions of the perennial inquiries asked by all of us who suffer. Their questions remind us it is natural and all right to question. Questioning cushions the emotional shock caused by suffering.

Recognizing that their questions document how these descendants of Job stared into an abyss of despair, were these three theologians tempted to renounce their faith? Or as a friend of Wolterstorff asked him, "Why don't you just scrap this God business? . . . It's a rotten world, you and I have been shafted, and that's that."¹⁶ All three writers wrestled with the temptation to throw in the towel. Their varied accounts of why they remain believers illumine how faith can fortify during suffering.

I felt as I read *Suffering and Hope* that Beker's faith still holds because he is reliving a form of Pascal's wager. Beker is betting that God will finally provide an answer to personal and cosmic suffering in a future resurrection. Despite his personal suffering and his anguish because of what he calls "tragic or meaningless" suffering, Beker remains a Christian believer because of his deep convictions regarding the ultimate relationship of suffering and hope.

Beker is grappling with the dilemma of believing in the goodness of God while aware of the enduring mystery of human suffering and the

deterioration of the planet Earth. He believes God hates suffering and that suffering is alien to the kingdom of God. He values the promises of healing and care in Rev. 21:3-4 as well as the cosmic wholeness envisioned in Rom. 8:18-25. Beker weighs the Bible in the balances of suffering and hope. He distinguishes between explanations for suffering in Job, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Deuteronomy, Revelation, and 1 Peter. According to Beker, Paul delineates between deserved suffering, redemptive suffering, and the meaningless suffering of created life in the world due to the world's bondage to sin and decay. Some of those understandings are acceptable to Beker. Cumulatively, they are still inadequate because they do not address the unequal causal relationships between sin, punishment, and suffering. As an apocalyptic theologian—one who affirms that God who is good and who created a good world will ultimately redeem us in and through the world—Beker remains a believer because he hopes for a final victory of Christ over death and suffering through the resurrection. Until then, Beker will face the future, trusting his hope will prove true. His hope seems as strong as his vivid depiction of sin, suffering, and death.

If Beker lives by faith, facing the future as hope, L'Engle's response to her husband's illness seems to be based on a combination of reason and relationships. L'Engle shared how she kept her faith earlier in life amid a series of tragedies to close friends and the suicide of her godson. Amid Hugh's dying, she again decided to maintain her basic attitude of faith toward the universe. On the one hand, she rationally explains her husband's cancer as the consequence of human freedom:

Cancer is a result of consequences. It is not sent as a punishment. I do not have to make the repulsive theological error of feeling that I have to see cancer as God's will for my husband. . . . Cancer is not God's will. . . . Tragedies are consequences of human actions, and the only God worth believing in does not cause the tragedies but lovingly comes into the anguish with us.¹⁷

L'Engle's intellectual understanding of suffering and tragedy as the price to be paid for living with human freedom would not satisfy Ivan Karama-

zov, or perhaps even Beker, but it is an answer with which she can live. On the other hand, perhaps that is a livable solution because of her relationship with God of whom she testifies, "Terrible things happen, and God does not prevent them, but the purpose of a universe created by a loving Maker is to be trusted."¹⁸ Elsewhere, when a student remarked on her optimism amid suffering, she shared her "belief that God is not going to fail with Creation, no matter how abominably we humans abuse free will."¹⁹ Like Beker, L'Engle needs to believe in an ultimate resolution of the problem of suffering and evil. She states, "We have to know in the very depths of our being that the ultimate end of the story, no matter how many aeons it takes, is going to be all right."²⁰ One reason she can trust the rest of the story to turn out well is because she knows God as a caring God "who is with us always, everywhere, in the deepest depths as well as the highest heights."²¹

Midway through *Lament for a Son*, Wolterstorff declares he can offer no explanation for his son's death and his grief as a father. Even though he has read all the theological justifications for suffering, Wolterstorff concludes, "I find them unconvincing. To the most agonizing question I have ever asked, I do not know the answer. I do not know why God would watch him [Eric] fall. I do not know why God would watch me wounded."²² In the last few pages, Wolterstorff shares what he has learned about God and character development through his lamenting for Eric. Like L'Engle, Wolterstorff learned that God suffers with us. "Instead of explaining our suffering, God shares it"²³ and "The tears of God are the meaning of history"²⁴ are two quotations affirming God's participation in our suffering. Wolterstorff refuses to affirm all suffering, especially the death of Eric, as redemptive. Some suffering might bring peace and justice, but not all. He grudgingly acknowledges that he has learned from his suffering while regretting the cause of his character development—Eric's unnecessary death. He knows that the same valley of death through which he walked brews bitterness

(Continued on page 19)

Should Sinners Be Served?

by John W. Dally

Burbank, Calif.

A few months ago I was leading a midweek Bible study through the doctrines of the church. This particular evening, I was speaking on the subject of Communion. At the conclusion of the talk, I asked for any questions. One gentleman asked, "Would you serve Communion to a sinner?"

Thinking it over, I responded that I would. He asked how I could do that in view of the understanding of Communion as a "meal" for believers. We discussed the matter at some length after the service, where we found a great deal of disagreement.

I began asking a number of my fellow pastors how they felt about the matter. Some were very adamant that no sinner should be served Communion. When asked what they interpreted "sinner" to mean, they would usually respond that they were referring to people who had not previously professed a faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I asked if they had ever prevented someone from partaking in the Communion on these grounds. "No," was the common answer.

It was impractical to try to check the "credentials" of each person as they came to the table. The problem was dealt with by strong warnings as part of the ritual. These warnings included the statement of Paul that there would be judgment and even death for those who took Communion unworthily. If a person decided to take it anyway, he was taking fate into his own hands.

On the other side, I found some that were very adamant that we should allow anyone to partake in the Communion table. They saw an invitation to partake in Christ as an avenue to conversion. Some shared how people had accepted the Lord in the Communion service. But, for the most part, these pastors supported their position by feelings more than facts.

After studying this subject at great length and from many perspectives, I decided to put the whole idea to a test. I decided to apply John Wesley's four-fold test of doctrine: tradition, Scripture, experience, and reason.



Wesley believed that unless a doctrine could meet all four tests, that belief could not be held as doctrine. Here's the question: "Are there any preconditions required before receiving Communion?"

To begin, let's look at the test of tradition. In seeking tradition, I examined church histories, theological works, Early Church documents, and creeds of the major churches over the past centuries. I discovered a fairly consistent position on Communion. A person must be a professing, baptized believer prior to receiving Communion. An early-third-century document called the *Didache* is very



stern about who can take Communion: "You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord's name" (9:5). It goes on to quote Matt. 7:6, "Do not give dogs what is sacred."

This requirement was held throughout the early and Middle ages of the church. When the Reformation occurred, there were many changes, but not so with the Lord's Supper. For even among the early Reformers, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, there were preconditions. In the Reformed creeds, the threat of condemnation is stated for any nonbeliever who takes the Communion. A person must believe that Christ came to save, and believe that he is "in the number of them that are delivered by Christ and saved; and whether he has purposed to change this wicked life."¹

As the Reformation moved to England, the tradition continued in the Thirty-nine Articles (1563).² Even the Anabaptists, who stood out as opposed to infant baptism, still required adult baptism before Communion. Later, in America, the Baptist creeds of 1833 reconfirmed the requirement of baptism prior to taking Communion.³

It is in the Methodist Articles of Religion (1784) that a departure occurs. Baptism is called for but is not linked to Communion. Instead, there is mention of taking Communion "rightly, worthily, and with faith."⁴ Communion is to be administered to all Christians alike. As for the Church of the Nazarene, there is an emphasis on the believers table. "Let all those who have with true repentance forsaken their sins, and have believed in Christ unto salvation, draw near."⁵ Although baptism is not a requirement, prior conversion is implied.

In this quick overview, it does appear that tradition generally supports, with a few exceptions, a precondition of baptism or at least conversion prior to receiving Communion. But

before we settle the argument, we must remember that in order to be doctrine the belief must pass three more tests: Scripture, experience, and reason. Therefore, let's look at Scripture to see if Communion, or the Lord's Supper, had any required preconditions.

The passage most often cited as the source for our view of Communion is 1 Cor. 11:23-34. In these verses, Paul sternly criticizes the Corinthian church for abuses during the Lord's Supper. He calls for a remembrance of the night Jesus was betrayed, and he proceeds to lay out requirements for participation in the supper. These requirements include worthiness, examination, and orderliness. These requirements most influence pastors who feel that the Communion is exclusive to professing Christians. But, are we looking at these passages as they were originally stated or are we taking words and statements out of context?

To begin, let us look at the context of the passage. The chapter is dealing with some criticisms Paul has for the church in Corinth. In verses 18 and 19, Paul scolds them for their factions and divisions, which betray the whole spirit of the Lord's Supper. "Therefore," Paul states, "when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" (v. 20). Paul then describes the problem of some who were overeating and getting drunk while others went hungry. After telling them how they should act, he states that abusiveness at the Lord's Supper resulted in weakness, sickness, and even sleep, a euphemism for death.⁶ From the beginning until the end of the admonishment, the warnings are addressed to the "saints" of Corinth (1:2, KJV) and not at nonbelievers.

Oscar Cullmann sees this passage as a turning point in the Lord's Supper.⁷ Previously, the supper was a joyous time where believers came together in expectation of Christ's appearing. This was based upon the post-Resurrec-

tion appearances, where Jesus would appear at the supper table when all were gathered together. We find a description of this in Acts 2:46-47, NASB:

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This feast is also called the agape feast or love feast. We do not know much about it, but we do know that the poor were invited to attend. Noting the results in the above passage, it appears that the meals were not just fellowship-oriented but evangelistic in nature as well, much like first-century potlucks.

This joyous celebration got out of hand in Corinth, and people forgot why they came together. The result was divisiveness, strife, gluttony, and drunkenness while the poor who were guests went hungry. This was counter to the whole intent of the meal, which was unity in Christ. To remedy the problem, Paul refocuses the Corinthians from the joyous side of the gathering to a remembering of the Last Supper of Jesus in the Upper Room.⁸

If the situation Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians was the agape feast, then the warning was not against the unbelievers, but against the Christians who, by their abusiveness and drunkenness, were preventing the visitors from seeing Christ in the feast and being convert-

ed. Another element of the passage is the term "unworthily" (v. 27, KJV). I

have heard many explanations of this term. I have heard it used to describe

a person with a bad attitude toward another, a person who is not a professed believer, a child who cannot comprehend the meaning, even someone of another denomination. But, if worthiness is a re-

quirement, no one would be worthy, for "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). A simple view of the term in its context reveals that it refers to none of these.

"Unworthily" is an adverb. It describes an action, not a person or the state of a person. In context, the term refers to the manner of receiving the Lord's Supper. As described in the passage, this manner was seen as gluttony and drunkenness. Following Paul's admonition, this is resolved by waiting for one another and eating at home if one is hungry to be sure some is left for the poor. Observing these rules would assure that the participants were receiving Communion "worthily."

Another term is "examine" (v. 28). The participant is called to examine himself (not others). Someone told me that by examining oneself, the nonbeliever would see that he is unworthy and therefore should not take the supper. But this is not found in the context. The person is told to examine himself rightly, and then let him eat.

What does it mean to judge rightly? In context, Paul was criticizing the Corinthian believers for their factions and divisions. The next chapter deals with pride and jealousy among the devoted. Following that, Paul teaches them about love, where he tells them, "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, . . . but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (13:3, NASB). Paul is calling for self-evaluation, in light of the gospel, to see that the unworthiness of man and the grace of God are displayed in the Lord's Supper. If anyone fulfills this self-examination, he should not be denied the supper, even though there may not be any previous profession. "And so let him eat of the bread and

"Would you serve Communion to a sinner?"

"An invitation to partake in Christ as an avenue to conversion"

drink of the cup" (11:28, NASB).

Another point of Scripture to be considered is the Gospels. Since Paul brings our attention to the last supper of Jesus, we might look there to see if there are any preconditions to be met. First of all, in a technical sense, no one at the Last Supper was converted, because Jesus had not yet died. As for worthiness, they all left Jesus, and Peter denied Him. Finally, Judas, who Jesus knew would betray Him, was present and received the Last Supper (cf. Matt. 26:23; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21; and John 13:2-3, 18, 30). In view of these passages, there does not appear to be any preconditions in the Last Supper.

Scripture does not support the exclusion of anyone except those who approach the table carelessly and without self-examination in the light of the gospel. In fact, there are scriptures that would say the opposite. In the Gospel of John, the Early Church (i.e., Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and especially Cyprian) recognized the following passages as references to the Eucharist: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (6:35, NASB). "And the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (v. 37, NASB). "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves" (v. 53, NASB). If we view these passages as the Early Church did, we would be denying access to Christ when we denied access to the table of Communion.

In summary, when the idea of preconditions is placed against the Scriptures, it fails the test. But there are still two more tests to be used, experience and reason.

The third test is experience. For years I have heard the warning that if Communion is taken unworthily, it could result in weakness, sickness, and death. Yet I know no one who has died from taking Com-

munion. I cannot even say that I know anyone who became sick as the result of taking Communion prior to conversion. Yet, on the other hand, I know people who have come to know the Lord, and some who have gone into full-time Christian service, even though they had taken Communion before conversion.

Personally, there are two cases in my life of people who have taken Communion "unworthily," and the results of these acts are noteworthy.

One Sunday, a young boy was attending church with his brother and his friend. That day they served Communion. The boy asked his brother what it was all about. Being funny, the brother told him that it was snack time. The boy proceeded to take a handful of the dried crackers when he was stopped by the usher, who told him to take just one. He was puzzled by the small cups, thinking it was a rather small portion. His brother's friend decided to have some fun and began to lick out his cup, which caused them all to laugh uncontrollably. Yet after all that "unworthiness," my brother, his friend, and I

are still alive, and today I am a pastor.

The second event was with my father. I attended a church where we had Communion once a month. It was customary to include all the warnings and threats of "sleep" for unbelievers who took of it. One Thanksgiving we had a dinner where we were

encouraged to invite family and friends. My mother and my father, who had not attended church for many years, were there. The pastor

thought it was a good time to have Communion. He began the ritual, then looked around and saw all the guests. For the first time in the two and one-half years I took Communion

at that church, the pastor did not give the warning. My father took the elements. At the conclusion, he looked at me and said, "I've never done that before." Today he is a faithful member of a church, and for the first time in years we share about church.

This is the type of experience that John Wesley had in his ministry. "Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep conviction) was wrought at the Lord's Supper."⁹ He goes on to state, "There is no previous preparation indispensably necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever he pleases to give."¹⁰ Wesley saw Communion as a converting as well as a confirming ordinance.

From these experiences, we can see that people do not die from taking it "unworthily"; and, in fact, to some it is the beginning of their walk with God. Therefore, the doctrine of preconditions to Communion does not pass the test of experience. But what about reason?

Communion is called a sacrament. Sacrament, by definition, is a means of grace. It is not only an outward expression of an inner reality but also an act that brings one closer to God where one might encounter Him. If one can receive grace from Communion, why would we seek to deny anyone that grace? If one can have an encounter with God from Communion, why would we seek to prevent it? Our task is to bring men to Jesus, not to send them away from Him. If we stand the chance of bringing someone to salvation, why even hesitate?

If a person does come to the table without examining himself by the light of the gospel, will he be judged eternally? If a person is already under

"Requirements for participation—worthiness, examination, orderliness"

"Wesley's fourfold test of doctrine: tradition, Scripture, experience, and reason"

judgment for not being a Christian, what difference will it make? If later in life he seeks salvation, will he be prohibited? The answer to all these questions is no. A person may, after 100 Communion, finally understand the depth of the symbolism and find conversion as did those John Wesley knew.

On the practical side, if we attempt to hold to the idea of required preconditions, we must also be responsible and prevent people from "risking" their lives and spirits. We would have to have evidence of one's fulfillment of the preconditions before allowing him to take Communion. We would

"Warnings are addressed to the saints, not to unbelievers"

have to be like some churches that allow only members to receive Communion because that would be the only way we could be sure they knew the potential consequences of their actions. Rationally speaking, the argu-

ment for a precondition to receiving Communion is impractical.

Taking into consideration the fact that people do not die from taking Communion, that they still can repent and be saved, and that many find Communion to be a converting event as well as a confirming event, reason tells us that we should not fear serving Communion to anyone who follows the course of the ritual. A doctrine of preconditions for Communion fails the test of reason.

Although there might be ample evidence to support the requirement of preconditions for Communion in tradition, there is no support in Scripture, experience, or reason. Therefore, the idea fails the test of doctrine.

But we can still learn from all this. Communion can be a center for worship. If we have done our job and showed the true meaning of the ordinance and have called everyone to examination under the gospel, we can lay out the Communion before saint and sinner and feel confident that Communion is not only a time of confirmation for the believers, it can be a converting experience for the nonbeliever. Should we "serve sinners?" Jesus said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall

find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30, KJV). ■

"'Unworthily' is an adverb—an action, not a person"

1. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 175.
2. *Ibid.*, 276.
3. *Ibid.*, 338.
4. *Ibid.*, 358.
5. *Manual* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1989), 247, par. 802.
6. The term "sleep" as a euphemism for death always applies to believers. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:51; Matt. 27:52, KJV; John 11:11; Acts 13:36; 1 Thess. 4:13-15.
7. Oscar Cullmann and F. J. Leenhardt, *Essays on the Lord's Supper* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1958).
8. This refocusing appears to have resulted in the creation of a different ritual separate from the agape feast. Early Church documents show a ritual calling for the return of the Lord and fellowship, while another calls for remembrance of the death of Jesus. The present-day Church usually follows the latter. See Cullmann, *Essays*, 5.
9. *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 1:279.
10. *Ibid.*, 280.

Three Theologians Discuss Their Suffering (Continued from page 15)

and breaks others. Like Beker and L'Engle, Wolterstorff affirms the resurrection of Christ and anticipates further victory over sin and death by God.

All three theologians dialogue and debate with other stories of suffering. L'Engle and Wolterstorff frequently draw upon the Psalms and provide anthologies of memorable quotations from others who have suffered. The promise of healing envisioned in Rev. 21:1-4 comforted all three. L'Engle and Wolterstorff, especially L'Engle, duel with Harold Kushner's thesis in *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* that God is powerless to change situations of suffering. The constant references to other literature on suffering document how their minds tried to make sense of experiences that shook their lives. When suffering became

their companion, their clashes with suffering catapulted them into encounters with what Christians traditionally say about suffering.

These three theologians remind us that *the best theologies of suffering are the stories of those who share how their faith relates to their experiences of suffering*. Personal stories, rather than propositional statements, are the most persuasive theologies of suffering.

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1. J. Christiaan Beker, *Suffering and Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 10.

2. *Ibid.*, 22.
 3. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 7.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. Madeleine L'Engle, *Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 195.
 6. Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 89.
 7. *Ibid.*, 34.
 8. *Ibid.*, 50.
 9. Beker, *Suffering*, 11, 90-91.
 10. Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 13.
 11. *Ibid.*, 16.
 12. *Ibid.*, 69.
 13. L'Engle, *Two-Part Invention*, 170-71.
 14. *Ibid.*, 194.
 15. Beker, *Suffering*, 87.
 16. Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 76.
 17. L'Engle, *Two-Part Invention*, 172.
 18. *Ibid.*, 148.
 19. *Ibid.*, 149.
 20. *Ibid.*, 152.
 21. *Ibid.*, 125.
 22. Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 68.
 23. *Ibid.*, 81.
 24. *Ibid.*, 89.

You Are Significant!

by C. Neil Strait
Grand Rapids, Mich.



Marshall Shelley, in a *Leadership* magazine column, shares an observation from an interview with Jack Hayford, author of the song "Majesty." It has particular bearing on the point of this article.

Hayford tells of visiting Winston Churchill's boyhood home in Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England. He described the beauty of the landscaped grounds. As he walked to his car from the rose garden, he said to his wife, "In a place this magnificent, it's easy to see how a person raised here could readily imagine himself to be a person of destiny. There's something about the environment that makes you feel, I am significant."¹

The visit to Churchill's boyhood place left a deep impression on Hayford, and from it came the inspiration for his song "Majesty." Before Hayford left Oxfordshire, he said, upon reflection, "I thought about all the majesty and dignity we've been endowed with in Christ. If that would dawn on all God's people, if they would sense their significance in Him, then we all could become more aware of His purpose in us."²

Every pastor needs a fresh reminder of his significance and of God's purpose in his life. Amid all the pressures of pastoral ministry, some of which can be eroding to a pastor's self-image and purpose, it is important to have a perspective of significance and purpose.

How does one keep a healthy view of significance and purpose? May I offer that a pastor's time communing with God must have highest priority. While nearly everyone would agree with the priority, all of us know how those priorities can be challenged by the "things to do" and the many activities that crowd our lives. One cannot love people, as an authentic pastor does, but what the claims on his time become numerous. What evolves is a constant challenge to keep spiritually fit and to serve those under our care.

Despite the challenge of time and the claims of people, our time alone with God is the only thing that will prepare us for authentic service to people. Without a time to talk and commune with Him, our significance drains and our purpose fades. No ministry was created by the Lord to be stretched across the panorama of human needs and to serve in human initiative. Where the divine is missing as the key ingredient for service, then significance and purpose soon diminish.



Only in the communing times with God does life see the greater view and feel the uplift and touch that enables one to serve with dignity and joy. In Hayford's words, "There's something about the environment that makes you feel, I am significant." From his communing times with Him, the pastor hears the word he needs to hear: "You have been called for a purpose."

Every pastor, at some point in his ministry, comes to crisis, confusion, and criticism. When the barrage of negative assaults come, it is important for the pastor to have had a fresh and current encounter with God. If the pastor goes to his work without some word from God ringing in his heart, the negatives will erode the joy and dampen the significance of service.

Leonardo daVinci, the great painter, was accustomed to long pauses as he painted. When someone inquired about those long pauses, he replied: "When I paused the longest, I made the best strokes."

Pastor, be encouraged! God has a word for your ministry that will encourage, will reignite your significance, and will clarify your purpose for ministry. The caution of Quaker Rufus Jones is good: "Keep a window open on the Godward side." ■

1. *Leadership*, Summer, 1991, 3.
2. *Ibid.*

Prayer in the City

by John Hay, Jr.
Indianapolis

Since the day I began ministry in the inner city, prayer has become much more a daily necessity than ever before. The heavy demand of prayer is not just for me personally, but for my church, my neighbors, and my city. Prayer has become for me the most basic act of ministry. This reality I have come to embrace.

Walter Wink wrote: "We are not easily reduced to prayer."¹ I believe the utter honesty of his observation. We seem to live out the quip "When all else fails, pray." We are "reduced" to prayer. After exhausting our personal resources and expending energy with little or no effect, we finally pray. At last, we confess our inner powerlessness, our inability to "make it happen," and our feeling of being overwhelmed by circumstances in our lives and in those we seek to serve.

We pray, says Wink, "not because we believe certain intellectual propositions about the value of prayer, but simply because the struggle to be human in the face of superhuman powers requires it."²

Nowhere is the grip of evil more raw than in the neglected quarters of our cities. Its vulgarities have driven many well-intended believers outward in retreat. While the form of spiritual warfare elsewhere may be subtle and indirect, in the inner city we face a frontal clash of powers. Youth gangs roam the streets dealing drugs as brazenly as the corner prostitute sells herself or himself. Landlords accost low-income renters caught in a larger web of greed and neglect. Basic needs outstrip apparently dwindling resources at a paralyzing rate.

This calls for prayer, not as a casual exercise or list of "give me" requests, but as an act of survival. Prayer provides the power to stand and confront the powers of evil.

My prayers do not center primarily on funds for our urban ministry. Granted, without financial resources we could not offer the relieving and empowering care to the homeless and struggling urban dwellers we've come to know. Instead, my prayer centers more on the need for spiritual power, insight, and wisdom needed to redemptively address the hurts and hopes of my neighbors. My prayers have become prayers of intercession for our broken but beloved community.

Prayer makes the difference in my personal ability to minister in the city. Aware of my vulnerabilities, without prayer I feel easy prey to their reducing effects. My own cleverness and intellect are no match for daily demands in conversation with neighbors about needs. Yesterday's insights and academic answers do not suffice today's challenges. But in prayer I touch the Source of life, finding identity in Christ, and receive the Spirit's power to live compassionately.

Our staff and volunteers literally serve on the front battle lines. Daily we face the tide of evil, the overwhelming needs of our neighbors, and the fight against despair. "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12).

I am constantly aware of the danger that the cup of cold water given in Jesus' name (see Mark 9:41) will be reduced to handouts. Ministry dedicated to redemptive change can, in

fact, become merely social action.

Spirituality and the power of prayer make the difference. In prayer, we engage the "principalities . . . powers" (Eph. 6:12, KJV) at an unseen level, challenge their devious assertions, and find Christ's victory. In prayer, we find freedom from evil's oppressive delusion and throw off the weight of its false agendas. In prayer, we gain heaven's perspective. Thus, the act of prayer becomes the most basic act of ministry. We work at two levels. While we share food, clothing, and hospitality, we also pray for God's salvation to break into a person's life. At one level we offer Christian care for children after school. At another level we pray for spiritual breakthrough over the powers designed to bring about their adolescent demise.

When I pray, therefore, I not only confess my complete dependence upon God for grace but also intercede over the outcome of the persons and city to which I have been called. I believe God desires a different future for children and adults than spiritual bondage, social depravation, and economic bankruptcy. Therefore I pray for God's transformation in persons, as well as in the larger arena in which we all live.

Breakthrough comes when we engage in prayer. God's kingdom has a chance to break in to us and break through the powers that debilitate. Prayer moves ministry from defensive maintenance to redemptive intervention. My prayer for my own life, for our neighbors, and for the community is this: "Lord, may your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Amen. ■

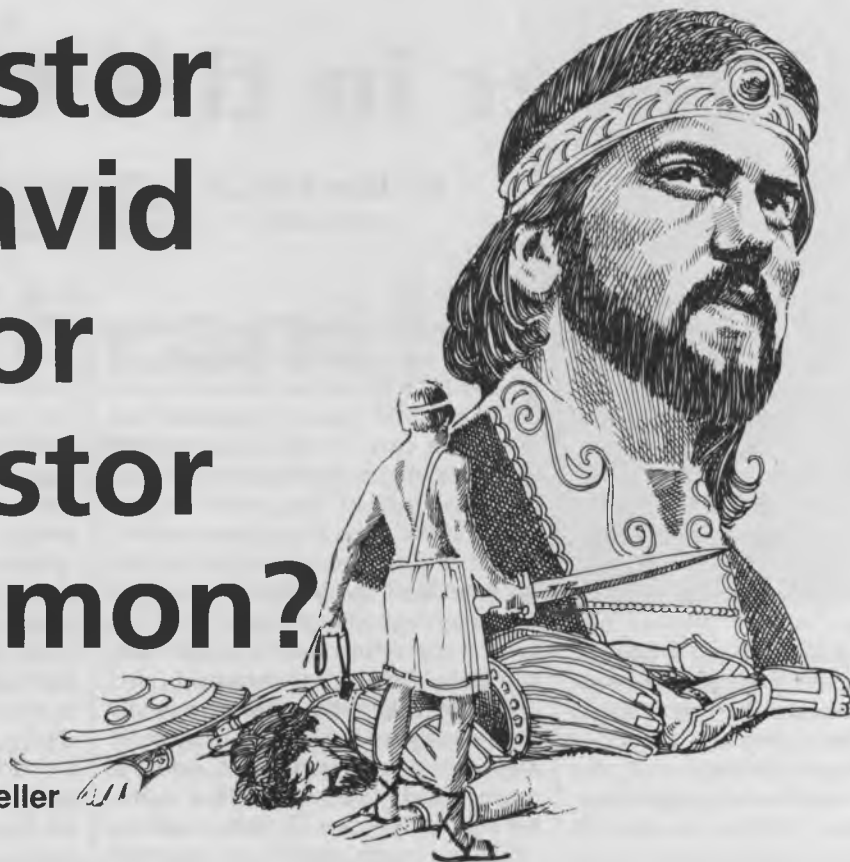


1. "Prayer and the Powers," *Sojourners*, October 1990.

2. *Ibid.*

Pastor David or Pastor Solomon?

by Robert L. Moeller
Deerfield, Ill.



My two pastorates differed greatly. Two Sunday afternoons, less than three years apart, typify the contrasts.

The first afternoon began with an awkward lunch. The atmosphere reminded me of the meal following a funeral—people smile and comment on the food, but inwardly their hearts are broken. I knew mine was.

Joining us at the table was our district superintendent and an elder from a sister church in town. They had come at the request of our elder board to spend the afternoon listening privately to the complaints and accusations of individuals in our congregation.

What had begun 16 months earlier as minor skirmishes was now full-blown conflict with several individuals. The surface tension was over issues as petty as my decision to rearrange the office furniture. We also struggled with an undercurrent of controversy over the practice of certain spiritual gifts. But as I saw it, the

real conflict was the issue of control—a small group in the church had served notice that *they* were in charge, not the board or the pastor.

I hoped that with the help of these experienced men from outside, we could confront the issues directly and resolve the conflict. But despite the encouraging words from the D.S., a longtime friend, I knew the truth: regardless of who emerged victorious from the confrontation, the long conflict had taken its toll. There had been too many hurts, too many rumors, too many innuendos and feelings of mistrust.



As in most church battles, the combatants were relatively few in number. I was reminded of a tactical lesson from military history: guerrilla forces need only be one-tenth the size of a conventional army to keep it hopelessly enmeshed in a no-win situation.

My wife and I were exhausted from the hit-and-run warfare. We had nothing left to give. As I sat at the lunch table, waiting for the day's uncertain events to unfold, I recalled another, much different, Sunday afternoon.

This other afternoon was farewell day at my previous pastorate. We were finishing five years of difficult but fulfilling ministry in the inner city. A group of people who once had been ready to disband and give their building to a parachurch organization were now alive and aggressive in their purpose and mission.

The church had grown. It was feeding local street people and attracting Native Americans to worship services. It distributed hundreds of

pounds of clothes to the destitute. At times, so much food was donated from supporting churches to be given to the poor that we had to stack it in the front pews of the sanctuary. The shewbread was once again in the Temple, feeding the hungry.

My wife and I were overwhelmed with the love we received in that small, urban church. One cold, winter day, a 94-year-old woman from the congregation walked to our home with her Norwegian stew because she'd heard I was ill.

The Sunday afternoon we left, I held back tears as the church chairman and his wife cried while saying good-bye. It had been a sweet experience, working together to build God's house in that place.

Two Different Roles

As I look back over these experiences, a metaphor from the Old Testament helps me make sense of the two polar-opposite pastorates: the life and destiny of David compared with that of his son Solomon.

David dreamed of building a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. But he was prevented from doing so. God explained that it was not for him to be the architect and builder. David had been a warrior; he had shed too much blood. It would be his son Solomon who would construct the sanctuary and witness the glory of the Lord descending upon it.

Solomon reigned during a time of nearly unbroken peace in the land. He watched as his land blossomed with prosperity undreamed of by his ancestors. He watched as the Temple grew and took form, and he led in the exhilarating experience of dedicating the building as God himself appeared in theophany to enter the holy of holies. His string of successes were untarnished for years on end.

Reflecting on my experiences and those of other pastors, I've noticed that each of us may find ourselves following the path of a David or a Solomon or both during our ministries. That is, we may play the role of a warrior in one setting and that of a Temple builder in another. Perhaps both are in the will of God. Certainly both have inherent in them certain advantages and risks.

What Happens to a David

Some pastors find themselves,

however reluctantly, in the role of a David; they're perceived as warriors who challenge well-established and powerful forces. Such an individual endures conflict and confrontation in order to address moral and spiritual issues vital to the well-being of the body, hoping to clear the way for the church's future growth and ministry.

The small group served notice that *they* were in charge.

Few if any Davids remain in such a setting long enough to witness the joy of completing the Temple. The cost of battle often is so high that they become casualties themselves, even if their cause prevails.

These are not contentious, controlling personalities who thrive on conflict and see their lives as a martyr's lot. Such are not the traits of a David. A true David finds such conflict in the church sad, painful, and regrettable, but at times necessary.

What happens to a David? Let me suggest some advantages, dubious as they might seem at first, that result from serving as a David.

You lay the groundwork for future church growth and spiritual prosperity. The maxim of church history is that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. In less dramatic terms, that means the sacrifice and pain borne in guiding a church to spiritual health will someday be evident.

I once asked a friend why he was leaving a Christian organization. His reply: "Once you tell the truth, it's

often impossible to stay." To a certain extent that can be true in a pastorate.

I recall a situation that existed in a women's Bible study early in my ministry. Under the guise of prayer requests, some women were telling stories about the failings of their husbands (or husbands of their friends) that were potentially embarrassing, if not damaging. Though several women felt uncomfortable as a result and vowed never to return to such a study, the practice went on.

When I asked some of the leaders to exercise more discretion, they felt I was intruding on "their ministry." It proved for me an unpardonable sin. From that day on, I was in trouble with them.

Yet, the conflict that ensued eventually led to new leadership that improved the group's atmosphere and even opened the way for new women, particularly non-Christians, to be welcome in the group.

You learn that God is more concerned with what happens in you rather than to you. In short, you attend the graduate school of character. As Chuck Swindoll says of suffering, "The tuition is free. It only costs you your life."

As I became more bewildered over why I was in such hard circumstances, I began to believe God was in all this in some way I couldn't fully understand.

Guerrilla forces need only be one-tenth the size of an army to keep it hopelessly enmeshed in a no-win situation.

Interestingly, the Psalms became more practical and essential to my life than ever before. And I learned to some extent what David learned: God is in control, regardless of what people may do. I came not to loathe criticism, but to see it as an opportunity for God to examine my life and test my character: Was I able to respond gently, in an honorable way?

Though it pained me, I sensed a foundation being laid in my life of

faith as I looked at what needed changing.

You develop close and meaningful relationships with key church leaders. There is rarely racism in foxholes. Likewise, the barrier between pastor and laity diminishes as you weather intense storms together. I came to love as brothers those who stood with me on the elder board. At great personal cost, they took action to discipline certain members of the congregation. Having been through some difficult hours together, we were friends who had become not a group but a caring team.

Such commitment is not found among "sunshine soldiers," as Thomas Paine called them. Neither is such deep camaraderie.

David had shed too much blood.

But besides the advantages, there are also some definite risks to serving as a David.

You are misunderstood by those who have an inadequate theology of conflict. Basically these are the people who see all conflict as sin. Their conclusion: you must be in sin (or at least an incompetent pastor) for there to be this trouble. In their minds, the only spiritual church is one that's free of conflict. While a conflict-free environment is everyone's goal, it is often only arrived at by working through significant and difficult issues. One individual in the heat of the moment in a congregational meeting pointed at me and said, "The trouble started with you!" While that may or may not have been true, it didn't mean that trouble was unnecessary or unredemptive. I thought about the history of the patriarchs, the prophets, and Jesus, and the conflict characterizing their ministries. As they challenged wrongful behavior or attitudes, they were perceived as the real problem instead. Some were sawn in two.

There were times when I had a good idea how that must feel.

Once you're cast as a warrior, it's almost impossible to change people's perception. It seems like a version of the Leonard Nimoy syndrome. Nimoy, as you recall, is the actor who played Mr. Spock in the television series "Star Trek." His distinctive character became so well known that no matter what other roles Nimoy played in later years, no one could forget he was really Mr. Spock.

Once a pastor is identified as a warrior, that reputation is extremely hard to shake. During the conflict, I spent hours with individuals in counseling or in visitation after a death in the family or in personal ministry. I worked to keep a balanced pastoral stance. Yet, to those who wanted to believe it, I was simply a tough guy, the one who "can't get along with so-and-so."

A few of my critics were so outspoken in this regard that one Sunday morning I met a real estate company president who was visiting our church. Thanking me for the morning message, he confessed he had come just to meet the man about whom his employees could say nothing nice. They were so one-sided, he had to find out for himself.

After prolonged conflict, you tend to lose perspective on people and issues. While you try to focus on issues and not personalities, the longer the battle, the more they change places.

I once read that after decades of bloody feuding, the Hatfields and the McCoys couldn't remember what the initial argument was about. But it didn't matter any longer. The real issue was whether you were a Hatfield or a McCoy. So it goes in churches. A warrior can easily forget he is battling issues and not people.

In such moments the words of Jesus to love your enemy and to be kind to those who spitefully abuse you take on new significance. I knew I was making progress when I honestly could tell the husband of a woman who had caused me great suffering that I loved both of them. I knew I meant it, and it gave me the freedom to go on.

But many are the temptations to cover your buried anger with more

acceptable rationalizations, such as righteous indignation.

What Happens to a Solomon

Now let's consider what's involved in being a Solomon. Obviously, there are some advantages.

You receive great affirmation and support from the congregation during your tenure. Unlike a David, often controversial and misunderstood, a Solomon is liked by nearly everyone. After all, the visible signs of growth and prosperity are evident, and it's easy to attribute at least some of that success to the pastor.

You don't leave such a church with many enemies, and even those who disagreed with you begrudgingly admit you helped the church. Given a little time, your accomplishments tend to grow in the retelling.

Solomon watched his land blossom with undreamed-of prosperity.

I've never enjoyed a larger-than-life reputation, but I did find people remembered fewer of my mistakes and more of my successes in that small urban church. During the height of the crisis in our second church, I took a summer vacation that included a stop at my previous parish. After my brief one-minute update on my family and thank-you for their ministry to us while we were there, the audience broke into spontaneous applause. I was stunned. Such affirmation seemed almost schizophrenic, given my current dilemma at the time, but it was deeply appreciated.

You observe the glory of God descend upon your church. One of the great rewards of life in ministry is to see the hand of God touch your efforts. Quite apart from your own merit, God chooses to do something beautiful if not miraculous in your church. Solomon's life wasn't the rea-

son the glory of God descended on the Temple at the day of dedication, yet he was privileged to observe it and participate in that supernatural event as worship leader.

In a similar way, I witnessed God at work in our little church. The first night we ever opened our church to the community was Thanksgiving. I'd been there about three months, and though we had only 75 regular attendees, we ran an ad in the large city newspaper, inviting anyone who wished to come for a free turkey dinner. The board members were nervous: What if we have problems? What if no one comes? What if everyone comes?

That night as we opened up at sunset, I watched a stream of humanity pass through our doors and down to the basement—white, black, Hispanic, and Native American. Several of our ushers stood grimly with their arms crossed, ready for trouble. By the end of the evening, the spirit of joy and celebration was so evident from feeding 250 men, women, and children from the community that our 63-year-old church chairman was seen skipping across the empty room.

Some pastors are perceived as warriors.

While I didn't see the glory of God descend just as Solomon had, I knew I was in the presence of the Almighty that evening. It was the beginning of good things to come.

Your church is attractive to visitors as they sense the unity that prevails. I believe the atmosphere of a church can be read by visitors within five minutes of arriving. Warmth, acceptance, and joy seem to exude even from the narthex of some buildings. On other occasions as a visitor, I've entered churches to a stale, deathlike pall that seems to linger in the air. Tension, routine, and isolation seem the order of the day.

I've also noticed that churches that can state their reason for existence in one sentence or less are the ones that

are growing and unified. In our urban church we knew what we were about: we were there to offer food, clothing, friendship, and the gospel. People seemed to enjoy knowing where we were going, and they seemed to experience a certain security in that knowledge. That atmosphere was picked up by visitors.

With all these heady benefits, it's easy to become oblivious to the disadvantages and risks of being a Solomon. But, as many of us have learned, success can be far more treacherous to our spiritual well-being than failure. Consider some of the following not-so-obvious pitfalls of leading a united and prosperous parish.

You're tempted to believe your leadership alone is responsible for the great things that happen. Watching programs expand and your budget rise is fun. It's also dangerous, particularly if, like me, you're young and in your first pastorate.

It takes a more seasoned and less presumptuous pastor to realize that if you're experiencing a time of relative peace and prosperity, others probably have paid an anonymous but enormous price to help pull that off. Somewhere on your property there ought to be a monument to the Unknown Pastor, that brave and selfless soul who gave some of his best years to lay the groundwork for the good things now happening.

The notion that the church's growth was triggered by our arrival is as deceptive as the lie that says all the trouble began when we arrived. Let's be honest; we inherit more than we create as pastors, whether for good or ill.

Looking back at my inner-city experience, I can think of a long line of pastors who invested their lives in that place, and the one who served immediately before me perhaps deserves more praise than all the rest. He stayed only two years. But in that time he argued that "business as usual" was no longer possible. By the time I came, the people were ready to listen. I owe that young pastor and his wife credit for most of our subsequent success, though few would know it.

You are tempted to embrace a neo-prosperity theology. In short, you're led to believe that God's will for every pastor is to experience un-

broken success and growth. To paraphrase Garrison Keillor, "All the programs are good looking, and all the attendance figures are above average." How wrong. Perhaps even diabolical.

The Book of Hebrews tells us God used many individuals in the past to accomplish feats of wonder. They conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gave the dead back to the living. Yet, that is not where that chapter ends. It ends by talking about a second group, a group too good for this world. They were persecuted. They went about in animal skins. They even lived in holes in the ground. But from God's perspective, they are even greater heroes than the first group.

The barrier between pastor and laity diminishes as you weather intense storms together.

How many of us think the true heroes of the church are the men and women who remain faithful while struggling in some lonely and forgotten setting with carnal and angry critics constantly sniping at them? How can such sorrow and hurt be part of God's will? Doesn't He want all of us to live on an ecclesiastical roll? We'd all answer no, but at times, especially when the church was doing well, I tended to forget that.

During my second pastorate, it hurt to go to denominational get-togethers where others could boast of building programs and staff additions, while I thought of people abandoning our church because of the conflict. I realized how smug I must have appeared the years the figures were in my favor, and how it hurt other pastors to be asked by their parishioners why they weren't doing things like we were. I wonder if I don't owe some of them an apology.

Finally, *you are tempted to become shallow, unable to identify with others in pain.* According to the Arab proverb, "All sunshine makes a desert." That is also true in living the life of a Solomon. It's easy to become, little by little, a one-dimensional person, less and less sensitive to people in pain.

If you are
experiencing
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enormous
price.

In the midst of my better times, I enjoyed being around people I considered winners. I had little time for someone who seemed headed nowhere. If colleagues were in trouble, it was their fault, or so I reckoned.

Granted, my success was limited, but at the time it appeared significant to me and to those struggling to hang on. And as they reached out, I didn't listen. I'm afraid I walked past many a wounded pastor on the road to Jericho.

When the tables were turned, I saw how shallow I'd become. I gained a moment of self-awareness when I was sharing my hurts with a fellow pastor. He listened with something of an obligatory attitude and then replied, "You know, I've never experienced anything like that. Everywhere I've gone I've had a wonderful experience. I can't remember anyone leaving my churches in anger."

At first I felt hurt, then anger, and finally pity. He couldn't help me at that moment because he was handicapped. His own relative ease had disabled him. From that time onward I no longer cursed my problems but began to ask what God wanted to do in my life through my pain. If possible, I wanted Him to use me and what I had experienced.

Farewell to Arms

The day we drove away from our second church, a difficult but precious chapter in our lives came to a close. So many people had been so kind to us. For example, during the worst of the controversy and while my wife was quite ill expecting our last child, women came on a daily basis and cooked, did housework, and encouraged her.

In the face of such love and support, it was difficult to leave. When we submitted our resignation, the congregation voted overwhelmingly to reject it. We were deeply touched by their confidence in us. They insisted instead that we take a leave of absence to reconsider our decision, which coincided with the birth of our child.

During this leave, the board dealt aggressively with the remaining church problems. It was soon evident that the conflict had ceased. A David was no longer needed. Ironical as it may sound, the fact that the church's problems had subsided gave us the reassurance that we could leave. It was for someone else to build the Temple.

Ecclesiastes teaches that there are seasons to God's will as it relates to the events of our lives. Our season of service was ending, not with bitterness or rancor, but with the joy that comes from having completed a task. I was genuinely grateful for the experience, and I continue to hear good things about the church's concern for

the unchurched and desire for service.

Years earlier when we left our first church—more as a Solomon than a David—we clung to our friends as we said good-bye. Little did we know the Temple doors were closing behind us and the time of relative peace in our lives was ending.

"All sunshine
makes a
desert."

So which experience do I value more, that of being a Temple builder or a warrior? My answer might surprise you.

Sigmund Freud once said something to the effect that someday, given enough time, those life experiences that have been the most difficult will become to us the most precious of all. He was unwittingly borrowing truth from the Psalmist, who said God makes everything beautiful in his time.

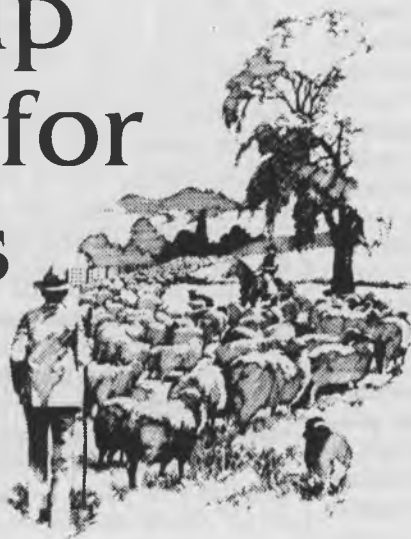
I would gladly serve a thousand churches like the first, but I wouldn't trade all of them for my years in the church that struggled so deeply.

Should a pastor be a warrior or a Temple builder? Probably both. ■



Vital Leadership Questions for Holiness Pastors

by William E. Stewart
Moncton, N.B.



The call to the pastorate is a call to lead. We are to "lead" the sheep (1 Pet. 5:3, TLB); we are to be "overseers . . . of God's flock" (v. 2); we are given "authority" (Titus 2:15) and "rule" over the church (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24, KJV). The matter of leadership is much discussed. Qualities and attributes that make a good leader are the subjects of many books and seminars.

In the context of holiness churches, however, the path to leadership not only must satisfy the usual requirements of leadership but also must come to grips with some special factors, more pronounced in holiness circles than elsewhere. Those persons called to leadership in the holiness church must reconcile those particular factors in their own mind and spirit if leadership is to be exercised. Pastors, especially in the holiness tradition, must become comfortable and of easy conscience in their role as leader. Three questions must be highlighted and resolved in holiness circles if our leadership is to be strong and confident.

Three questions come out of our traditions and from our distinctive emphasis on sanctified personality. We express great desire to maintain purity of purpose, cleanliness of motivation, and quality of character.

There is keen sensitivity, especially among our leaders, that high levels of moral and ethical excellence be maintained. Growing out of our insistence that leaders exhibit a high quality of spirituality, at least three questions are built into our system and consciousness. If not faced, these issues can become a serious detriment to the effectiveness and strength of our leadership role. When dealt with, they free the spirit of the leader to pursue his call to lead. Any person aspiring to God-called leadership in holiness churches must resolve these questions to the satisfaction of his own conscience and spirit.

QUESTION OF SPIRITUALITY

The first question in the area of developing our role as leaders relates to the spirituality of the leader. "How can you be humble and an effective, successful leader at the same time?"



Some people think it is hard, if not impossible, to be both successful and humble. How can you receive honors for achievement and plaudits for fruitfulness and yet remain meek?

In holiness circles, holy character and godly spirit are highly prized attributes. These graces should outweigh all else. Thus, some leaders, in their desire to be spiritual, sense a conflict between humility and success. If this conflict is not resolved, some feel they must opt for humility and not be motivated by the crass, unholy desire to achieve. When this issue is unchallenged, a pervading, secret suspicion may develop that it is not quite possible to be truly humble and a great success at the same time. If you achieve great things, then some people doubt your true humility. This pervading suspicion turns humility into something bland. Humility, they think, is passive and mild. Humble leaders are supposed to accept the ineffective with grace and good spirit. Qualities associated with success—drive, vision, great faith, big thought, large imagination, confident faith—are not considered in keeping with a proper spirit of holy humility. It seems easier to be humble when you are not doing anything worth boasting about.

This concept of humility is neither

scriptural nor spiritual. It is, however, a sure recipe for draining the spiritual dynamism and enthusiasm out of our leadership. It almost makes prime leadership qualities of faith and vision into a sin. It casts a quiet but deadly doubt on a leader's desire to achieve for God. It robs a leader of the spirit, inspiration, and enthusiasm of achieving faith. This false kind of humility shrivels the happy hopes of fruitfulness. There is nothing spiritual about it. Far from being spiritual, it is a deadly killer of the spirit of leadership.

It is not scriptural. The Scriptures teach the opposite. True humility is a prelude to being exalted by God. True humility releases His power and grace. James tells us, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (4:10, KJV). Similarly, Jesus taught, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11, KJV). It is important to notice in these verses human action and divine action. We humble ourselves; God exalts. The man who humbles himself is more likely to find God active in his ministry. Humbling ourselves opens us to His blessing and power. He trusts those who know how to humble themselves. He acts in their lives and ministries. He exalts those who humble themselves. On the contrary, His blessing and fruitfulness retreat from those who seek glory and career advancement and exalt themselves.

Some leaders sense a conflict between humility and success.

Low achievement must not be equated with humility. There is nothing humble about being content with nonachievement. There is nothing spiritual about unfruitfulness. The opposite is true. God's power, grace, and blessing are exhibited in the ministry of those leaders who know how to humble themselves. He can trust them. The call to holy humility does

not negate great faith nor dampen enthusiastic vision.

THE THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

A second question that must be reconciled for leaders in holiness churches is more theological in nature. "Aren't we to be faithful and leave the results to God?" Does faithfulness count more than fruitfulness? The Scriptures tell us the thing that pleases the Lord is not just faithfulness but also fruitfulness. Great rejoicing was stirred up when the lost sheep was found. The Lord is not pleased with lost sheep that are never found. Bringing in the harvest causes rejoicing. But the Lord expresses no joy over ripe harvest fields that are wasted. The Divine Husbandman was so displeased with fruitless branches that He cut them off and burned them. And what happened to the fig tree that bore no fruit? It was shriveled up by the word of the Lord. Even worse, remember what happened to the unprofitable servant!

Leaders must not think that it is enough to be faithful but not fruitful. The leader must believe that God's power and blessing in his ministry comes when he becomes fruitful. God expects that sowers will reap, seekers will find, branches will produce fruit, and seed will produce harvest. If we accept the proposition that good leaders should be satisfied with being faithful and not pressing toward being fruitful, we lose the challenge and excitement of achieving faith and condemn ourselves to spiritual stagnation and a life of uninspired and unexciting service.

Faithfulness is important, very important. You cannot be fruitful without being faithful, but you can be faithful without being fruitful. Faithfulness drives the shepherd out to seek the lost sheep, but he should not be satisfied to just put up a good search. He must really want to find the lost. Faithfulness makes the farmer prepare the ground and sow the seed, but he anticipates the result of his faithful sowing—a harvest. Faithfulness is part of the leadership process, but it is not the objective. The vision of leadership is fruitfulness.

Leaders want to achieve goals, to produce fruit, to obtain harvest, to find lost sheep. Leaders are not satis-

fied to tend the shop in the vague hope and fine intention that these things will be accomplished somehow. Faithfulness leads to exciting, rich, and rewarding fruitfulness. The objective of leadership is fruitfulness.

You cannot be fruitful without being faithful, but you can be faithful without being fruitful.

God urges fruitfulness. The call of leadership is a call to fruitfulness and effectiveness. There may be periods when we are faithfully tilling and sowing with no harvest in sight. There are times when we faithfully go on seeking without any sign of the lost being found. Harvests vary. Jesus explained, "Bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred" (Mark 4:20, KJV). Some servants have five talents, others two, and others one. The size of the harvest varies according to complex and unpredictable factors.

Leadership demands faith and expectation that there will be a harvest. Leadership knows that the point of ministry is not to put on a good performance with nothing to show for it. The point of ministry is to produce harvest, to find the lost, to produce fruitful branches. This is the call of leadership. To be satisfied with less is to enshrine a philosophy of leadership that accepts unfruitfulness, elevating it as an acceptable and spiritual life-style. Rather we are urged as leaders to have faith in God's power and grace to give us identifiable harvest and fruit.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTION

Church organizations vary. In most holiness ministries leadership faces an organizational question. The organizational question asks, "Can you be a strong leader in a democracy?" How can you lead in a church where the

church board makes the decisions? How do you lead in a church where the people don't want to go anywhere? By misunderstanding our representative system of government, there is the danger that pastors see themselves, not as leaders, but as paid staff members whose job is to carry out the directions of the church board. They may think they are to respond to the desires of the people. These pastors feel they don't make the decisions and set the directions. The church is supposed to do that. They simply implement the objectives set by the church. In short, they are not the leaders.

Our system of government is good for development of strong pastoral leadership. However, the dynamics of leadership and authority in the church must be understood. The church does not operate like an army where you are trained to obey orders unquestioningly and where success is determined by a proper chain of command. The church is not a business where you tell employees, "Do what is expected or you are fired." Leadership and authority in the church run in different channels.

The church is a volunteer organization. In a volunteer organization, you cannot make anybody do anything they do not wish to do. They choose to do it. If they choose not to do it, there is little a pastor or leader can do about that. Rank, money, and power to punish may be the keys to leadership and authority in the world, but they are not the keys to leadership and authority in the church.

Leadership and authority in the church come from a different source. Authority in the church is given. Au-

thority in the church is granted by the people. No leader has any more power to lead than the people are willing to give to him. If a pastor says, "I cannot do anything in this church because the people will not follow," he is correct. He cannot make them do what they are unwilling to do. He does not have that authority. If the people grant him authority, he can lead them. They say, "We believe in you; we trust in the quality of your character and the authenticity of your faith. You have convinced us of your trustworthiness and the wisdom of

Leadership and authority in the church come from a different source.

your guidance. We have confidence in where you want to lead us, so we will follow with excitement." Then the pastor has been granted the authority to lead the church somewhere. Leadership in the church is not based on making people do something, but in obtaining the agreement and support of the people to accomplish it.

Where does the leader obtain authority to lead? Jesus told us how authority and leadership are developed in the church. He said, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35, RSV). Authority is granted when the people

sense their pastor is there to serve them, to genuinely care for their welfare, and to have their good on his heart. The people perceive that he gives himself in wholehearted commitment to God's will. The people will grant him authority to lead. In the kingdom of God, authority is given to those who serve.

Let a congregation perceive that its pastor views them as a stepping-stone to a better assignment, that he is more concerned about his career and personal ambitions, that his real wish is to develop the prestige of his own name, then that congregation, quite correctly, will refuse to grant him authority to lead. They will not trust him to lead them anywhere. They know that when he is offered a better position or a significant problem arises, he will "feel it is the Lord's will" to move on.

CONCLUSION

If God has called a person into the ministry, He has called him to lead. Leadership is not easy. The environment in which the leader serves greatly influences the effectiveness of his leadership. In holiness circles, leadership needs to develop in the context of these unspoken but frequently felt questions. The pastor's call is to lead, to take his flock somewhere. Let's accept that responsibility with accountability. To be strong, our leadership cannot be harassed by unsettled moral and ethical questions about our role as leaders. If God has called us to lead, He wants us to feel comfortable and at ease in the role He has chosen for us. Our ease and comfort in the role make us stronger and more confident leaders. ■



Pontius' Puddle



© Joel Kaufmann

Hang-up of Unreality

by Raymond C. Kratzer

Yakima, Wash.

In building the kingdom of God, there must be a balance between vision, faith, and reality. If one is too visionary, he is liable to get lost in a dream world. His daydreams may turn into nightmares. On the other hand, if one is too realistic, dealing only with the hard facts of life, the romance of serving the Lord will diminish, and miracles of grace will be few and far between.

Some pastors revel in the milieu of plans, hopes, ideas, and projections, ever building air castles, but never getting them down to earth. It is so easy to think of what could be done if this or that would happen.

Occasionally a pastor will make a broad statement based on some isolated incident or an imaginative figment that sounds terrific. For example, one pastor years ago declared his church would be running 200 or 300 in a year or so without any doubt. It had only been running about 60 or 70 for many years. The small town did not warrant fantastic growth on this scale. It was sheer folly to vocalize such a goal unless certain factors were present.

What was the outcome? After three or four years, the attendance of his church was in the 40s and 50s with a continual pattern of diminishing returns. Why? He was hung up on unreality! He thought that by dreaming and projecting, the crowds would flock to his church. He failed to put into operation the necessary ingredients that would cause some growth. It appeared that the smaller his attendance, the more fantastic his ideas

would become. He felt that if he prayed enough, shouted enough, planned big enough, growth would naturally happen. It doesn't.

Of course we need prayer; we need optimism; we need plans; and we need God. But God needs us to work in a productive fashion, putting together adequate plans, energizing them with perspiration born of hard work. We need to be aware that there is no such thing as "instant success." We are too indoctrinated by our modern age with its instant coffee and tea, instant foods, and other quickie schemes. Someone has said, "They want to sow in the morning, reap at noon, and have hot biscuits and gravy for supper." Saints are not made that way, nor is church growth accomplished by this method. The tried and true method of success in God's work is spelled with eight letters: *H-A-R-D W-O-R-K!*

The hang-up of unreality is a cop-out on the basics of Christian growth, whether the individual and his personal spirituality or the work of the church in its growth patterns. The person who attempts to enrich his soul by an overemphasis upon the

emotional finds his spirit sated and shriveling. He is living for thrills, not God's will. Unless emotional "highs" result in obedience and service, they do more damage than good.

The church that expects continual outpourings of God's blessings sooner or later learns that these high moments of ecstasy are only God's trade winds to propel us to action. They will not be productive if they are only enjoyed. Nor will they be beneficial if we depend upon them to bring the results we desire.

Take revival, for an example. Some good people contend that revival only comes when through much prayer a great outpouring of spiritual blessing descends upon a congregation in which emotions are touched and uplifting joy surrounds the church. Usually, if revival begins in this fashion, there has been a great deal of groundwork laid that eventuated in the outpouring and subsequent awakening.

The formula for revival involves much more. The Bible says: "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*" (2 Chron. 7:14, KJV, italics added).

Note the action between the "if" clause and the "then" clause. Four words stand out: *humble, pray, seek, and turn*. These indicate action by the church. Only one-fourth of the quartet of verbs mentions prayer, and it is placed second on the list. This is not to say that prayer is less impor-



tant than the other three, but it indicates that many aspects are involved in revival.

To *humble* oneself is to gain an insight into the problems of which you may be a part. If we see ourselves as God sees us—and perhaps as many others see us—we will be driven to *pray* for ourselves first, and then for others. Attitudes, disciplines, and behavior patterns may have gotten out of line and need correction. In the exercise of this humbling experience things begin to happen. We progress toward revival by *seeking* God's face. Basically, this means to align ourselves with His will as He reveals it to us through the study of His Word and a better understanding of His purpose.

As light is given, we see some corners to *turn* to open the way for revival. To turn from our "wicked ways" might be interpreted in a pastor's situation to "turn from unproductive ways." To adjust our program in such a way that our efforts begin to produce better results.

These four ingredients are God's provision to help us solve our problems, especially the need for a spiritual awakening. When we have humbled ourselves, prayed, sought, and turned, *then* God promises to hear us, forgive us, and heal us!

It's so tempting to want God to do everything as we wait upon Him in hopeful prayer and anticipation. If this is our mood, then we are stymied on the hang-up of unreality.

During an altar call in a revival meeting, as people were standing with bowed heads, a good Christian prayed earnestly for another person near her who needed to go to the altar. She prayed: "O God, put Your finger on them and cause them to go forward."

The Lord seemed to speak back to her: "You are My finger."

I have known good saints who were meticulous about their own spiritual condition, who prayed earnestly for others, but who failed to implement their prayers and concern with personal contact. What a difference could be made if their prayers and faith were coupled with work!

As ministers of the gospel, we need to get off the deterrent of unreality. God says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou

shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee" (Ps. 32:8-9, KJV). God is saying that He has given us a mind to use for His glory. He has laid down certain principles and laws as guidelines for us to follow. But He encourages us to use our brains and devise ways and means to build His Church. We should find things that work and use them. Study the plans of others that are producing, and adopt them. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13, KJV).

We need more vision concerning the possibilities in our area. We need more prayer to get our spirits touched with the power of the Holy Spirit. We need more faith to see beyond the apparent to what can be done. But we need to keep our feet on the earth where results come through an adherence to God's instructions.

A good friend of mine attempted a livelihood by selling vacuum sweepers. He was young and impressionable. We purchased one from him to help get him started. After a short time he announced that at the rate he was selling for that week, his income would be fabulous. His eyes were on the stars. However, before the month was out, he was rather disillusioned because the bonus moments made possible by a few friends had dried up. He failed to go down the difficult path of "causes" in order to have "results." He had been foiled on the hang-up of unreality. He had counted his chickens before they hatched.

Church work is often like that. This is especially true when a pastor takes a new charge. The "honeymoon" often sweeps him off his feet until he calculates his growth on the basis of this psychological impetus. Soon he finds himself off his wings, slowing down to a fast trot, and then plodding along in the humdrum of unresponsiveness.

In times like these we need to get unhooked and settle down to discovering ways and means that are viable, to pray and trust the God of miracles to give us the victory! ■

Have You Read These How-to Books?

by Hazel Jaycox Brown
Seiling, Okla.

1. *How to Be Irregular in Church Attendance and Still Make It to Heaven*, by U. R. Strong.
2. *How to Skip Daily Bible Reading and Prayer and Continue to Be a Good Christian*, by I. M. One.
3. *How to Break Only One or Two Commandments and Still Please God*, by H. E. Didit.
4. *How to Ride the Fence Between Christ and the World*, by C. I. Cann.
5. *How to Love Your Neighbor and Not Care About His Future Destiny*, by B. Justin Good.
6. *How to Get to Heaven Without Lifting a Finger*, by Wanda Doolittle.
7. *How to Get Blessings Poured Out upon You Without Tithing*, by Rich S. Almine.
8. *How to Get By Without Honoring Your Parents and Still Have a Long Life*, by Nast E. Kidd.
9. *How to Be an Intercessory Prayer for 30 Seconds a Day*, by Jack B. Quick.
10. *How to Claim the Promises of God's Word While Disregarding the Conditions Required*, by A. Jerk.

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Rededication of Pastoral Staff

by Wilbur Brannon

Kansas City

South Church of the Nazarene in Lansing, Mich., has a rich heritage. For many years, she has been a strong church. Since 1983 Dr. Harold DeMott has served as senior pastor at Lansing South. Over the period of his ministry there, the church has experienced a 57 percent growth in Sunday morning worship attendance. That growth has necessitated the expansion of facilities. In addition to purchasing and remodeling the house next door to the church, which is used for youth Sunday School classrooms, the church has built a new sanctuary, which seats 600. The sanctuary was dedicated May 19, 1991.

During the building of the new sanctuary, the church board worked diligently to free Pastor DeMott and his staff from the task of building in order to allow them to continue their ministry in the church. The continued growth of the church and the success of the building program are both evidence of the wisdom of this decision. As they approached the time to complete and dedicate their new sanctuary, they chose first to rededicate the entire staff and congregation to the work of ministry. On Sunday, May 5, 1991, Dr. Wilbur Brannon, director of Pastoral Ministries, led a reconsecration service for Pastor DeMott and his staff.

As a part of this reconsecration service, each member of the pastoral ministry team was presented with a symbol of his responsibility and a charge from a member of the church board. Pastor DeMott was given a Bible—a symbol of the preaching ministry. Minister of Outreach Rev. Don Weston was presented with a vessel of water, the water of baptism—symbolizing outreach and evangelism.

Rev. Brian Reams was presented a piece of original pottery. This symbolized his task as youth minister in molding the lives of young men and women to be committed to Christ. Mrs. Anna Ruth Pence, minister of music, was presented a hymnal—a symbol of her leadership in worship and music. Following are the charges given from board members and the responses from the pastoral staff to each of these presentations.

A board member presented a Bible to Pastor DeMott with these words:

"Accept this Bible and be among us 'a man of one book.' As Mr. Wesley said, 'Be among us one who proclaims the Word.'"

Pastor DeMott's response:

"In response to the gracious call of God and in gratitude for the confidence you have expressed in me, I receive the Bible as a symbol of pastoral leadership."

"I pledge to be a steward of these resources and covenant with you to make ours a living, witnessing church—a church in which sermon and sacrament are based strongly on the Word and enlivened with the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit."

A board member presented a vessel of water to Rev. Don Weston with these words:



"Receive this vessel of water, the water of baptism. Be among us an evangelist who brings many to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to the affirmation of the faith pronounced by baptismal waters."

Rev. Weston's response:

"In response to the gracious call of God and in gratitude for the confidence you have expressed in me, I receive this vessel of water as a symbol of outreach evangelism."

"I pledge to do my part to advance the kingdom of God by witnessing to those in need of the gospel and training men and women from our midst to evangelize our community."

A board member presented a piece of clay pottery to Rev. Brian Reams with these words:

"Receive this pottery and mold your youth into young men and women, committed to Christ's love and service."

Pastor Ream's response:

"In response to the gracious call of God and in gratitude for the confidence you have expressed in me, I receive this clay pottery as a symbol of my responsibility to mold our youth."

"I pledge to do my part to mold the lives of our youth, with God's help, that they may become young men and women dedicated to Christian love and service."

A board member presented a hymnal to Mrs. Anna Ruth Pence with these words:

"Receive this hymnal, which represents the Cross, and be in this place a leader of worship. Lead us to the foot of the Cross so



Back (left to right): Rev. Brian S. Reams and Dr. Harold M. DeMott.

Front: Rev. Donald E. Weston and Mrs. Anna Ruth Pence.

that we may worthily magnify the name of God, our Savior, even Jesus Christ."

Mrs. Pence's response:

"In response to the gracious call of God and in gratitude for the confidence you have expressed in me, I receive this hymnal as a symbol of worship.

"I pledge to do my part by providing music that prepares your hearts for worship and by providing opportunities for many of you to assist in the presentation of music that lifts our souls."

It is certainly exciting to see a church continue its growth even as God allows them to build their facilities. Certainly, people are the reason for the building. Lansing South Church continues to experience God's blessing and growth. This rededication of their pastoral staff to the Lord and His service is a vital part of that growth.

Pastor DeMott extends to his church board and church family deep appreciation for their kindness and sensitivity to the pastoral staff. He would also encourage congregations all across the country to give serious consideration to rededicating existing pastoral staff to the ongoing ministry of their church. ■

Thank You

by Jeff Wedge

Port Orange, Fla.

After almost a year of working in the congregation, I was experiencing all the doubts and regrets that are common when it is time to leave. In a few days I would be gone. It was time to go back to school, but the prospect of leaving was not easy.

As I sat in my office, my thoughts were about all the things that had happened during the year.

What difference had any of it made? Had the congregation grown during the year, or was it still the same as it had generally been? Was anything different? Or had I simply filled a place for a year, doing nothing of importance? The questions were easy to list; the answers were almost impossible to find.

Then, on the last Sunday, I was bustling around getting ready for the final worship service. An older woman stopped me. During the year she had often said, "There's a little something for you in the refrigerator down in the kitchen."

When I would go and look after the services, I would find a box crammed with baked goods and homegrown popcorn that would make even Orville Redenbacher proud.

On this day she had a different message. She looked at me and said simply, "Thank you."

That simple phrase caught me unawares. "For what?"

She smiled a little shyly and told me: "My husband and I have been coming to this church for 52 years. We have only been married for 50 years, but we came to youth group meetings here before we were married. And in all that time, you are the first person who smiled at us during worship. Thank you."

As my throat choked and my eyes filled with tears, I thanked her.

Now, looking back after many years, I sometimes wonder why it seems so hard to smile in church. Of course, we are about serious things, but that shouldn't blind us to the fact that smiles are something we can all afford to share with each other. Smiles that come naturally during the children's message. Smiles that come naturally when we are gathered in the church. Smiles that come as naturally there as anywhere else.

I thanked that lady. I was really thanking her for reminding me that God would find a way to work through me. That He would find a way to make himself known to people, even when I got in the way. That the beginning of knowing Him could all be found in that simple smile. ■

The Preretirement Years: A Checklist for Success

by John C. Oster, Editor
*Board of Pensions and Benefits USA
Church of the Nazarene*

At Any Age:

- ☐ 1. Develop a life strategy that includes the postemployment years. Write it down and share with other significant persons in your life. File in a safe place for occasional review.
- ☐ 2. Begin contributions to a personal retirement annuity.
- ☐ 3. Accurately report all earnings to Social Security. They cannot credit you with what you do not report.
- ☐ 4. Develop the habit of recording all necessary expenditures for analysis and review.
- ☐ 5. Regularly confirm your record of contributions to Social Security.

Five Years Before Anticipated Retirement:

- ☐ 1. Undergo a thorough medical examination. Take care of any anticipated problems that exist or can be anticipated.
- ☐ 2. Begin preliminary research on anticipated costs of retirement living according to different contingencies. (Where you will live, early retirement option, part-time work, etc.)
- ☐ 3. Secure a Social Security report listing the estimated retirement income you can expect from this source.

- ☐ 4. Confirm standing in your pension plans, and estimate probable retirement income from this source.
- ☐ 5. Confirm amounts in any other retirement annuities and other investments, and estimate probable retirement income from these sources.
- ☐ 6. Review changing life and health insurance needs, and make changes indicated upon consultation with professionals.
- ☐ 7. Estimate as closely as possible your probable necessary living expenses in retirement based upon most likely contingencies identified in Step 2.
- ☐ 8. If anticipated income does not equal or exceed anticipated expense, develop a five-year strategy to bring these two into alignment.
- ☐ 9. Write down the results of Steps 1-8 and file them in your safe-deposit box for annual review.
- ☐ 10. On the same day each year, review your preretirement analysis, and make whatever changes are necessary to bring you to retirement in good order.

Final Year Before Retirement:

- ☐ 1. Consult with the Social Security office for options, time frames, request forms, and procedures to claim Medicare health insurance and monthly retirement income benefits.
- ☐ 2. Consult with your denominational pension board for necessary forms and procedures to start pension.
- ☐ 3. Notify your denominational officials of your intent to retire, and secure the necessary reports and procedures.
- ☐ 4. Notify your present employer concerning your approaching retirement date.
- ☐ 5. Confirm housing arrangements for after you retire.
- ☐ 6. Complete necessary changes in life and health insurance status due to anticipated retirement.
- ☐ 7. Begin now to set daily, weekly, and monthly goals for retirement activity.
- ☐ 8. Look forward with anticipation to a new status in life for which you have properly and joyfully prepared. ■

Roses

by Carole Rowe

Marshfield, Wis.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

"Successful" preachers' wives have always enchanted me. Several women in my life have stood out like hybrid roses, their fragrance still filling my memory though miles and years separate us. Although I could tell of many, two of those Christlike, victorious women were extremely attractive assets to their husbands and their congregations. By example they taught that success comes through thinking positively about the power of God and about themselves. Their lives testified to Joshua's words—to be strong and courageous, to not be terrified or discouraged. God was with them wherever they went.

The first was Bea Berry, from the Wesleyan Church in Rice Lake, Wis. Bea raised her four children in the cramped rooms behind the sanctuary. Sunday School classes were held in her bedroom and kitchen areas, as well as perms and heart-to-heart talks at her kitchen table. Even after a new church and parsonage were built, the congregation continued to grow. Sunday School classes were again held in her kitchen as well as her basement. Every week I watched Bea uncomplainingly take her place at the piano. I learned during eight years as a teenager and young mother to admire her professionalism.

Bea taught me that I could often pull out of a depressed mood by shampooing my hair and dressing up in an attractive outfit—a demonstration through my actions that I would not allow my self to be defeated by my negative thoughts. Through her

example, I learned the importance of dressing well and acting in a manner proper for a child of God.

This pastor's wife did more than advise me; she lived what she taught. She dressed her family on the famous poor preachers' salary, yet they looked as good as any people in the city. Her resourcefulness taught me valuable lessons in money management and attitudes. Tithes and food came out of her budget first. She sewed, cut hair, hunted for bargains, and, in general, was wise with her money.

Saturday was cleaning day at the Berry household, and all the children pitched in to help. Bea's house stayed immaculate too. Everything had its place. But what amazed me most was her ability to get through a hectic Sunday morning of breakfast, dishes, beds, dressing four children, and to present that sparkling house again to several Sunday School classes.

She never missed a service. You would think she never got sick, but I know she did. She just never missed church when the doors were open. I admired the discipline in her life. One day Bea quietly went on a diet (no fanfare), stuck with it, and lost several dress sizes.

Best of all, she always had time to come over to the church to play the piano and experiment with us as we

practiced songs for hours. I never heard her grumble about dropping her busy schedule or about losing her limited leisure time. Often it took hours to slowly, painfully learn some of the rudiments of singing. Because of her sacrifice, many of us learned.

Bea was one of those people we never quite appreciated enough, because we only saw the finished three-minute song, or the clean room she had scrubbed after sloppy teenagers had gone home. I learned a valuable lesson from Bea: always to do a first rate job for Jesus. Always take the time and effort to do your best for Him. That lesson has brought respect and value to whatever I've tried to accomplish in my life since that time.

Those Berry children were never the ones to be screaming or causing disturbances. They never rattled toys or left cracker crumbs in the church. Once, one of her girls coughed rather loudly during a sermon. Bea's stern look said: "That's enough; don't do it again." We teenagers thought it was cruel and too strict. But over the years we saw that these girls had a discipline in their lives that we envied. Two daughters became preacher's wives: a good record, I'd say.

A few years later, I became a pastor's wife of a small Nazarene church. One of the rewards of my position was the friendship that grew between our district superintendent's wife and myself. A woman of great courage and compassion, Maudie Clack, stood beside me through the death of my daughter. She encouraged me as I worked to make our small salary stretch, giving me tips on where and how to get more for my money.

Looking as though she was plucked



from a dress shop window in her white tailored suit and pearl nail polish sat a woman of self-confidence, a stark contrast against the old plaster-board walls. Her presence made us feel comfortable as she easily blended with our hardworking copper miners. I liked her at once. It was her smile. It melted away any feelings of inferiority we may have had.

Maudie's patient handling of pain in her life has been an inspiration to me. The private hurts she has borne over the years have melted her into an understanding princess who could soothe a person's ache by just the touch of her hand or the invisible tear in her eye. It was as though the Father had placed an angel in our midst. I learned that a person's life can be beautiful even when adversity and limitations are placed on us. I never saw Maudie Clack withdraw or become bitter, even when physical limitations held her down, or through the caring of her quadriplegic son.

Following my baby's difficult birth, I was slow to recover. I had been having severe headaches. Later we discovered that the headaches were from gas leaks in the house. Thus, I was unable to clean my house properly, which for a preacher's wife is inexcusable. That was such an embarrassment to me that even today I hesitate to add it to my story. Maudie came to me in a quiet moment, slipped some money into my hand, and whispered, "This is for cleanser." The subject was dropped, forgotten, never mentioned again. I felt no judgment or pressure. In the years that followed, I worked harder to do my best for her because she believed in me.

Even when she wasn't around, her presence would find its way into my house via the mailbox with a card or letter of encouragement. I'll always want to be like Maudie: sensitive, genuinely caring, a rose like no other.

Not everyone has a chance to know such great women, to walk and talk with them, and even to learn from them regularly. I have been blessed by God to know these two ladies who were so intimately acquainted with God. The evidence of their faith in Him is clearly seen in their walk through life, just as a rose stands out in a garden and the world looks on with awe. ■

I Have Complete Confidence in the Gospel

by Charles R. Eble

I shared it with the young people
And it became their greatest challenge.
I shared it with the lonely
And they learned of a wonderful companion.
I shared it with the newlyweds
And it helped to fulfill their dearest dreams.
I shared it with the guilt-ridden
And they found gracious forgiveness.
I shared it with the quarreling
And they discovered reconciliation.
I shared it with the sick
And it aided their recovery.
I shared it with the dying
And it gave them hope.
I shared it with a prisoner
And he made a fresh start.
I shared it with mental health advocates
And they welcomed it warmly.
I shared it with economists
And it amazed both capitalists and socialists.
I shared it in a political caucus
And it reminded them of eternal power.
I shared it with nationalists
And it inspired thoughts of world brotherhood.

([see] Rom. 1:16, TEV)

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What Is My Task?

by Ross W. Hayslip

Tucson, Ariz.

Listen to the conversation among ministerial brethren as they discuss their work. Ask the simple question, "How are things going?" and hear the variety of answers. One will tell you how his building is progressing in its construction. Another will give you his record Sunday School attendance figure. One energetic pastor will tell you of the survey that he is conducting. You will hear of financial campaigns, new parsonages, and radio programs. Not often do you hear of the sermon preached, the new book read, or the person led to Jesus.

There is no question but that our churches need good administrators. The larger and more complicated the organization becomes, the more urgent is the need for persons with administrative skills. The great danger is that God's representative should fail to be either a good preacher or administrator.

One of the motivations that move us toward administration is the desire to set new records. One writer has termed our period in the religious world as "this record-crazy age." We must contribute our share to the new denominational record and knock ourselves out to achieve a few new records on the local level. As a result, we spend many hours on the telephone, in committee meetings, and poring over budgets and plans.

In an effort to show membership gains each year, there is often the temptation to pad the rolls or to lower the standard for church membership, receiving individuals into our

fellowship not fully in sympathy with the doctrines and demands of the church. Our stack of deadwood grows larger and our "live group" weaker as each year we juggle figures of the annual report to show the membership gain that is the symbol of success. The pastor who majors on administration lives by the statistical chart and record board.

The question that we must frankly face is "How can we administer the work of our church, cooperate with the denominational program, call on our people, do an effective job of counseling, keep up on our reading, maintain a semblance of homelife, bring our church to the end of the year with some new records, and preach like a prophet?"

I feel that the answer lies within myself. I must ask myself, in which phase of my ministry lies my greatest strength? A mediocre pulpiteer can build a church through sheer love of people and a dogged determination in ringing doorbells. A strong preacher of the gospel can make the pulpit his greatest thrust while supplementing it with visitation and counseling. A pastor must decide which is to be the dominant feature of his ministry and give his best efforts to it.

In the Early Church, certain administrative tasks were being forced on the apostles, robbing them of the time for what they believed to be their chief tasks. They had been criticized and were on the defensive. Instead of saying, "Thank you for the suggestion, we'll try to take care of it," they came out with a clear state-

ment of just what their responsibility was and how this matter could be referred to someone else. The response of the people was heartwarming. "And what they said pleased the whole multitude" (Acts 6:5, RSV).

People today are similar to those of that day. They are not above criticizing their minister for his failure to live up to their expectations. However, for the most part, they are reasonable individuals and have a sense of appreciation for their pastor. Once they come to understand the role that he has chosen and see his all-out effort to fulfill it, they can be depended upon to encourage him in his tasks and put their shoulders to the wheel to help him.

Too often the blame that we place on our congregation for expecting too much of us results from our unwillingness to define our task explicitly for them and then to give ourselves wholly to that task. This will show our people the areas of our ministry that we feel to be important.

Paul once boldly declared, "Christ did not send me primarily to baptise, but to proclaim the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17, Phillips). As a minister, I must determine what God has called me to do and, laying other things aside, declare my right to do it. This does not excuse me from being cooperative, nor does it nullify me from my responsibility to the church as an institution. Rather, this choice will give me a sound basis for cooperation and will help me render to my whole church significant service that will have eternal results. ■

The Church's Iron Curtain

by Arthur L. Rouleau

Garden Grove, Calif.

"Iron curtain: (1) a political, military, and ideological barrier that cuts off and isolates an area; (2) an intangible barrier against communication of information or ideas."—Webster

It was tough duty in the army. World War II had just ended. I was assigned to a post in Hawaii. (Of course, I jest on this point of "tough duty.")

The military struggled to retain men in the service. To make overseas duty more palatable, new legislation permitted military personnel the privilege of bringing their families to posts outside the continental United States. Upon my request, the army set in motion the necessary paperwork to bring my family—my wife, Barbara; daughter, Cherie; and son, David—to Hawaii as soon as quarters on the post were available. The paper machine in the army ground slowly. In the interval, before they ar-



rived, I looked for a church home for my little family. After they arrived and we were settled in our new home, we visited a church I had found and felt suited to our spiritual needs.

That first worship in a church together, following months of separation, thrilled our hearts. Everything about the service blessed us. Worshiping together as a family is completeness. After the benediction, we fell in line with other worshipers to meet the pastor of the church. Beside him, a lady welcomed us as visitors and requested our names and address with the assurance someone from the church would call on us. It never happened.

Convinced other churches should be given a try before moving our membership, a year was spent visiting churches in Honolulu and environs in the search for a church home. Finally the time for decision arrived. But, we felt that first church must have another chance, as it had ap-

peared best suited of all. We were a little concerned because of the unfulfilled promise of a visit.



That second visit, the worship service was great, and the pastor seemed most inspired. After the benediction, as before, we took our place with other worshipers to greet the pastor. The same lady was at his side. She didn't recognize us and asked our names, assuring us that someone from the church would call on us. Fishing in her purse, she brought forth a pencil and a piece of paper to inscribe our names on it.

That piece of paper was the same one she had used the year before. Our names were still there.

We had experienced the church's iron curtain. All was sweetness and light, friendliness and goodwill to everyone, until the church door closed on Sunday morning. Then the curtain came down as if it were the final act of a play.

That church service 40 years ago

should have been the opening act of several that week in the service of our Lord. If the minister and the lady at his side had been selling vacuum cleaners or encyclopedias on a commission-only basis and had an invitation to a home to demonstrate their product, nothing would have stopped them. What a difference the dollar makes!

The church's iron curtain is as disastrously effective today as that one 40 years ago.

A little over three years ago my wife and I visited a church in a small town in southern Oregon. It was a cold winter day, and churchgoers wore winter clothes. I admired the red leather jacket worn by the lady in the pew in front of me. Since we were from southern California, we didn't see red leather jackets on women attending church.

At a given point in the service, the friendliness-to-all signal prevailed. Worshipers moved into the aisles and hugged, shook hands, laughed, and talked with the enthusiasm of a Sunday School picnic. Red Coat turned around and gave my wife and me a hearty welcome and asked, "Where you all from? Do come back soon—you hear!"

On the way from church to our temporary residence in the area, we stopped at the only market of any size for miles around. To expedite the shopping, Barbara and I took separate routes in the market. Moving down an aisle, I spotted Red Coat.

I believe in reciprocity. I like to be friendly to people. One of the many great thrills in this faith of ours is the discovery of a brother or sister in Christ. I especially like to be friendly to people who have offered friendliness to me as a stranger. And this was a golden opportunity to gain a Christian friend in an area where we knew few people.

I offered Red Coat the friendliest "Hello!" in my repertoire. A cold stare impaled it midway between us, and it dropped with a thud. I am a bearded, bald old guy sometimes said to resemble the late Hemingway. When people meet me, they usually remember me. Forty-five minutes before, Red Coat was shaking my hand in the friendliest fashion. She had even asked our names. Between rows of

canned tomato juice on the one side and green beans on the other, her attitude implied that I had made an improper advance.

Shaken, I sought my wife and exposed my wounded ego. Barbara reminded me of one incredible fact. It was obvious, as far as Red Coat was concerned, the church's iron curtain slammed down when she exited the church. In the real world, no pastor signaled the friendliness-to-all time. Supermarket aisles were not for the joy of special Christian fellowship like church aisles.

Why do we have this "barrier against communication" of the love of God outside the four walls of the churches? It is 180 degrees from what Jesus taught.

The Great Commission wasn't "Build bigger church buildings, hire greater preachers, thrill with bigger choirs and programs." It was, and is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, KJV).

The "going" begins after the church doors close. Judging by the activity calendars of most churches, the bulk of the activity is confined within the walls of the church building.

In 1930 the missionary-evangelist E. Stanley Jones wrote the book *The Christ of the Everyday Road*. His title lays bare the intention of our Lord for the propagation of His good news. It is to be told everywhere. That means, "Tell it beyond the doors of the churches and in the aisles of the supermarkets as a part of 'all the world.'"

Jesus didn't come to build beautiful churches for comfortable Christians to confine their faith. He rejected the suggestion of His disciples to build a tabernacle on the mount of His transfiguration. His was the gospel of the marketplace, the well, the seaside—"The Everyday Road."

Today people hurt, feel hunger, are sick or confused, live under a bridge, in a park, in a condominium, in a car, or scores of locations other than church. They wait for, they want, and they need the healing love of Jesus from someone who will take that healing love beyond the "barrier against communication" that is all too often the church's iron curtain. ■

Celebration and Experience in Preaching

by Henry H. Mitchell

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990
PA068-704-7447, \$11.95

Mitchell's chapter 12 gives the basic theme of his writings: "The Holy Spirit and Holistic Preaching." From his vantage point as professor, preacher, and dean at Virginia Union University and School of Theology, the author brings scholarship and practice together. He lets Scripture tell the reader that preaching is best served when it speaks to the whole person via the power of the Holy Spirit. While he demonstrates the function of behavioral science in helping one understand the personality, he emphasizes that more than information must take place. Scriptural preaching enriches the mind, feelings, and imaginations as persons hearing the message make the gospel their own story.

Celebration and Experience in Preaching sets forth a way to help ministers use imagination, emotive expression, and celebration as a means to meet the mental and emotional needs of congregants. Much of the focus on the book is on the correct use of literary passages in the biblical narrative to bring hearers in touch with real characters of the Bible. He urges ministers to preach with conviction, to preach so that people can grasp the message both by their use of intuition and rational conceptualization. He views preaching as an act of worship that embodies and enhances genuine worship and celebration of the Christian faith.

One need not be steeped in homiletics or hermeneutics in order to understand and use the concepts provided herein. Find a copy and sense the upbeat the author feels in the great event of preaching.

—Montford L. Neal

Evangelistic Music in Worship

Part 2

by Daniel Steele
Kansas City



In thinking of how we are to use evangelistic music, there are at least two givens. One is that congregational music is the most significant music for evangelism. Everyone, including visitors and prospects, should be able to participate. This means when songs are used that are not in the hymnal or songbook, they should be either printed in the worship folder (bulletin), on a bulletin insert, or in a special booklet. Or, they should be projected onto a screen or wall. It is an embarrassment to stand mute in a crowd of enthusiastic singers because one doesn't know the lyrics. Consent to reprint or project words and music protected by copyright must be obtained from the publishers.

A second given in an evangelistic worship service is that there will be an invitation. The music of an invitation should be either a direct appeal, such as "Let Go and Let God Have His Way," or a song that expresses what the prospect should think, feel, or do, such as "Just as I Am." The most effective kind of invitational music is usually that which the entire congregation sings. The power of suggestion is at work when the prospect joins in singing "I Am Coming, Lord." In planning a worship service for evangelism, adequate time needs to be given for response. There needs to be respect for the prospect's process of

decision making. On balance, what the prospect is thinking is more important to his commitment than what the preacher is telling him. Therefore, he needs time and opportunity to think, to consider, and to decide.

For the best response and spontaneity throughout the service, the planning needs to be so thorough that points of change can be anticipated, not feared. The service may begin with a great propositional declaration of some part of the kerygma such as is found in the hymn, "To God Be the Glory," then followed with music that testifies to what the death of God's only Son has meant to a believer. This would be called a deductive structure. Or an inductive structure might be used, with witness music leading up to some gospel declaration. For instance, if the evangelistic sermon is going to be on "Saving Faith," perhaps the music leading up to it should be experiential expressions of God's love, our lostness, and what Jesus Christ has done. This lays an experiential and theological foundation for placing our trust in Him for salvation.

The service should have a sense of progress and direction leading to a definite objective. There should be connectedness between events of the service, providing meaning for each element and continuity for the whole. Worshipers need to be kept involved

in a dialogue with God, with the alternating of revelation and response, that is, God's revelation and our response to that revelation. A Scripture lesson on God's claims, commands, or acts on man's behalf should be followed by some expression, perhaps musical, of our response to what God has just revealed to us.

To achieve maximum evangelistic response, there should be a varied pace, beginning perhaps with a series of shorter events (invocation, call to worship, hymns, scripture) in the first third, leading to the longer, heavier events (prayer, creed, scripture, song, sermon, invitation) midway, which carry a sense of climax.

Dr. Don Hustad claims that the vocal solo is the "most powerful force in musical communication of the gospel." It can have great emotional impact because of its dramatic potential. Therefore, experience has shown that it is very desirable just before the sermon. After the soloist has shared something of a personal experience with God in salvation terms, such as "It Took a Miracle," the preacher should be able to begin immediately to declare what the Word of God says about the miracle of regeneration and exhort prospects to trust God for it.

The last part of the service should quicken in pace again with choruses of praise, offertory, etc. Following the intensity of the climax of the service,

there should be resolution or release. We are not going to win everyone in one service, so we want them to come back. Whether or not they do depends on what they experienced the last time they were with us. The way the service ends will be remembered. Therefore, whether anyone comes forward or not, the service needs to be planned to end with a positive affirmation, a "lift."



The service needs a sense of progress.



To encourage spontaneity and responsiveness in worship, choruses can be useful. Because they contain very little of the kerygma, they should be used sparingly and never replace hymns. But their simplicity offers an opportunity to respond without fumbling in a book for a song with a more involved text. They can be used effectively in response to an anthem, a prayer, a Scripture lesson, a testimony, a solo, or a congregational hymn. Choruses, such as "He Is My Everything" or "He Is Lord," come naturally to our people. We sing them spontaneously.

Most of the time the use of choruses should be carefully planned. Occasionally they can be effective when unexpected. Of course, when used impromptu, the text will not be printed for the newcomer. To keep accompanists and music director from feeling lost, a list of standard choruses in the church's repertoire should be kept available. The choruses should be listed both alphabetically and according to key. A copy should be at the piano, the organ, and in the hands of the song leader for immediate reference.

Another way to encourage spontaneity is to sing several songs in sequence as a medley. Usually only the refrain or one familiar stanza of the songs will be used. Again, for that

part of the medley the congregation will be singing, the text should be printed or projected.

Several factors need to be considered in planning a medley. First, the theme should be considered. Do the songs relate to one another in what they say? Second, progress is important. Are the songs repetitive or redundant, or does their content lead us forward? Third, consideration must be given to key relations. Are the songs all in the same key, or in close relation so that an immediate modulation—change of key—can take place? Or does the accompanist need to play several chords or measures to lead us to the new key? Fourth, style must be considered. Are the songs similar in style or will the accompanist need to bridge between songs to avoid the jolting experience of going from "Dwelling in Beulah Land" to "Something Beautiful"? Put together, the medley should be as unified as a single song would be. Lilienas Publishing Company has provided some medleys arranged by Tom Fettke in collections called *Great Is the Lord* and *Magnify the Lord*.

The effectiveness of the evangelistic song in a worship event depends on more than just the music. It is a compliment to the leader when someone says, "You handled the music in the service with spiritual sensitivity."

Evangelistic music is simple and direct. For many it might seem weak and dull, but in the hands of strong leaders it can be effective. The evangelistic effectiveness of the music will rise no higher than the stature of the leaders. They must have a vibrant personal relation with Christ, a passion for evangelism, a sensitivity to what the Holy Spirit is doing in a service, a gift for communicating through music (vocal, instrumental, or directing), and a sense of the fitness of music for evangelistic purposes. Performance, accompanying, and directing skills should be as high for evangelism as for any other kind of worship leadership.

Music leadership in the service includes the pastor, the song director, the accompanists, and the choir. Each has a critical role to play. Each needs to be thoughtfully prepared both spiritually and mentally. There should be

a strong sense of being a team, working together toward a common objective, with appreciation and respect for the function and contribution of each.

The pastor should not defer all musical leadership to others. Not only should he be involved in the process of deciding what music should be used, but also there may be times when the pastor would plan to be the one to start a song, with the music director supporting along with the choir in the background. This would be no threat to a confident music director.

On the other hand, the music director should not assume the role of a mechanical arm, suppressing personality and squelching all urges to communicate significant ideas verbally when responding to or preparing for a song. Without breaking the dialogue between worshipers and God, and without using stunts to manipulate the congregation, the director should identify with the congregation. He should be worshipful, communicate warmly, and lead with sensitivity to the message and the mood of each song and the pace and flow of each service.



The vocal solo is the "most powerful force in musical communication of the gospel."



Accompanists should be thoroughly prepared to support evangelistic music in worship. The first person responsible for that preparation is the pastor or song director, who communicates with the accompanist what is being planned for the service. When informed far enough in advance and with sufficient information, the or-

ganist can, by skillful accompanying, bridging, modulating, and soloing, help unify and keep the forward progress of the service. The organist should facilitate, not dominate, the congregation in song. The accompaniment would be kept simple with clear support of the melody line.

There is a style of piano accompaniment called "evangelistic style." It involves many techniques for embellishment of chords, melodies, and harmonies and improvising rather freely. It can easily fall into virtuosic display. In a worship setting, it must be handled with restraint and care. The nature of the evangelistic song may call for introduction by the piano, though a good organist can handle it well, to give a certain rhythmic lift. That helps give variety to the service and may give the evangelistic song greater impact.



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The choir also is important in evangelistic music leadership. Vitality, inspiration, expression in appearance, as well as sound, can have great impact on the congregation. To achieve this, the choir should be given sufficient introduction to what is being done in order to anticipate each part of the service. Beyond this, words of encouragement and direction from the director are important to the choir's effectiveness. Usually, if the director has harangued the choir just before the service, there is going to be very little support for an enthusiastic service with an evangelistic objective or any other objective.

Acoustical environment is also critical to evangelistic music in worship. James White writes, "Few things affect worship more profoundly than the way sound behaves in space." It would be hard to keep up with the number of times congregations have anticipated moving into their new sanctuary, which they hoped to fill with new people, only to discover that the great congregational singing in the old place has been lost because of the comfort of full carpeting, padded pews, acoustically tiled ceilings, and window drapes. The services seem dead, and new people go away disappointed.

A congregation whose singing is dampened by "dead" acoustics or a choir, ensemble, or soloist who cannot be heard or understood will be hindered from having an effective evangelistic impact, however clear the spoken word might be.

In creating a sound environment in which both worship and evangelism can take place, there must be balance achieved by compromise. The acoustical needs for music (good resonance and reverberation time) must be balanced with the needs for the spoken word (clean, straight line sound). The needs for great congregational singing (lots of sound reflection from hard floor and wall surfaces, and good sound dispersion from the ceiling above the congregation) should not ignore the need for hearing those who are singing from up front. On the other hand, where there is great sound projection from up front with a dampened sound condition in the congregational space, there will be a tendency toward passiveness and spectatorism in the congregation.

Also, a choir with limited electronic sound reinforcement should not be put in the position of competing with a vocal ensemble in which every singer has a mike, by scheduling them to sing back-to-back. The choir may have four times the number of singers, but the difference in volume of sound will still be in favor of those who are singing directly into the amplification system. This reduces the impact the choir can have on the worship service.

Finally, in accommodating to the needs of the seeker or prospect in

the midst of our regular worship services, we don't have to "give away the store." Becoming artificial by trying to be something more than, less than, or other than ourselves is both unnecessary and unfruitful. Denying who we are and where we are by reducing everything to the lowest common denominator, presenting only the currently popular music and ignoring our heritage, and anything else that may look like a bridge to the unbeliever really becomes a substitute for reality and contradicts the very gospel of truth we are proclaiming.



"Few things
affect worship
more profoundly
than the way
sound behaves
in space."



The most important element for effective evangelism in worship is enthusiastic, authentic participation of believers worshipping the God whom we love and honor. That is our world. When we are excited, that excitement will be contagious. In evangelism, we need to touch base with the nonbeliever at common points. But the unique world of our worship needs to attract them beyond those points of commonness. If something in our world gives us identity, meaning, and joy, it will draw those who are looking for something better than the world in which they are now living.

It is time to quit evangelizing the evangelized and begin to intentionally plan to get the message to and response from nonbelievers who come to the traditional Sunday morning worship service. With forethought and planning, it can be done appropriately and effectively. ■

Stories Preachers Tell Each Other



A Sign of the Time

by David Olds
Bonaire, Ga.

The Greek pastor was desperate. His church was located at the bottom of Mars' Hill, and, overly inspired by the sensation of preaching in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, every guest speaker was unbearably long-winded.

The congregation grew less tolerant with each new speaker. Now some did not even bother to conceal their sleepy yawns during the sermon. And some even openly examined their wristwatches, pretending to make sure they were still running.

The distressed pastor sought advice from an American missionary friend. "What do you do in America to stop preachers from preaching too long?" he asked.

The American suggested that the pastor might clear his throat a couple of times in quick succession when he wanted the speaker to close. If that doesn't work, he added humorously, the pianist might begin to play softly.

Several weeks later the two friends met again, and the Greek pastor was all smiles. "I see by your smile that my suggestion worked," the American said.

"Oh, no," answered the Greek. "Your Western approach didn't work. But come with me to my church. Let me show you. I've found a solution at last."

The missionary could hardly wait to find out what solution his friend had come up with.

Inside the church, the Greek pastor hurried to the large white column he always sat beside when he had guest speakers. "See!" he exclaimed proud-

ly, as he flipped a small switch on the column and pointed toward the back of the church. "I just turn on the sign when I want them to quit preaching."

The missionary doubled up with laughter when he read the large, flashing, neon sign that seemed to reach halfway across the back of the church. It read, "Please shut up! Please shut up! Please shut up!" ■

Chicken Little, Chicken Little

by Art White
Clements, N.S.

My first pastoral charge was the 120-member church in Groveport, Ohio. After nearly 35 years, I continue to treasure many vivid and pleasant memories of those early years in my ministry. None of these returns more inner smiles than the day the ceiling fell in on one of the congregants, a guest, and made such a "big hit" with him.

The sanctuary was a large, single room. The front doors opened directly to the outside. While reading the morning scriptures, I noticed a middle-aged couple enter quietly, engage the usher in animated conversation, then, with a gesture of recognition, point to the near left side before tiptoeing across the back and three rows down to the pew where Mr. and Mrs. Peer were seated. Lawrence

and Roberta looked up in surprise, immediately breaking into wide-eyed grins as they scooted over to make room for the latecomers.

This part of the pantomime I watched in snatches while reading the lessons. Later, during my sermon, my eye-corner snapped another shot of this voiceless sitcom: A large, 3" x 3", multi-layered paint chip fell from our peeling ceiling, hit the gentleman latecomer on the shoulder and landed "ker-thunk" in his lap—an invasion of both couples' attentiveness, which resulted in much back-of-the-hand whispering, stifled guffaws, and recurrent, broadly enjoyed smiles.

As I say, this part of the passing pantomime I could only snatch-watch while preaching. After the service, the Peers apologized for the distraction, introduced Bob and Marilyn Randall, whose friendship dated back to grade school, and spun me the unabbreviated tale of the story I had only observed from afar.

Bob and Marilyn had decided at the last minute to stop and visit "Boney" and Roberta, whom they hadn't seen in years. The Peers' daughter-in-law explained that they were in church, that they surely would be very, *very* disappointed to miss seeing them, and, pointing across the backyards to the steepled building, urged the Randalls: "Why don't you go over and surprise them. It's just around the corner. They've already started. Just walk in and sit down beside them! Oh, do!"

They insisted otherwise, of course, but the more Carolyn pled and appealed, the more attractive and inviting the idea became. At last Marilyn said, "Come, Bob, let's *do* it. We've come all this way. It should be fun. Let's go over and surprise them!"

"OK, I'm game," he agreed, "but don't be surprised if the ceiling falls in." ■

A Response to "No Forty-Hour Week"

by Keith D. Schwanz

Milwaukie, Oreg.

The ordination service began with the singing of "Holiness unto the Lord." The district secretary introduced the class of ordinands. A pastor read from Paul's second letter to Timothy. Then the soloist stepped to the pulpit. No doubt, the soloist intended for each ordinand to personalize the song. I wondered if any of these pastors were disgusted by what they heard.

Let me burn out for Thee, dear Lord;

Burn and wear out for Thee.¹

If I burn out, my light does not shine; my spirit becomes cold. If I wear out, I don't contribute to Kingdom work; my usefulness as a pastor breaks because of fatigue. Listening to the soloist, I thought, there must be a better way.

Eugene Gerlitz, in an article titled "No Forty-Hour Week,"² chastised a young pastor for his attempts to control his work schedule. The young pastor was correct; some ministers harm themselves by their work habits. Churches, children, and spouses have suffered because of the compulsive behavior. In the final paragraph, Gerlitz does state that pastors need "moderation in the number of hours worked."

RISKS AND ILLUSIONS IN MINISTRY

The minister collides with many temptations to overwork. Some are risks that come with the responsibility. Some are illusions growing in the mind of the minister.

First, the pastor faces the risk of few points of closure in his ministry. There is always someone else who should be visited or another issue to bring before a committee or board. I struggled with this hazard in the first years of my pastoral ministry. I didn't think I was doing my job because just

as I finished one pastoral task, two more started screaming for my attention. In response, I began taking office tasks home. This had an unhealthy impact on my family life. At that time of my life, this dilemma was self-imposed. There are persons in some congregations, however, who make sure the pastor always has something else to do. I finally realized that I never would have a clean desk on Friday afternoon. This understanding of the nature of ministry blew the clouds of condemnation out of my mind.

A second risk in ministry comes with the reality that some days end with few tangible results. There is little to write in the journal at night except that you're exhausted. It's not that the day had been empty. It's just that the day was filled with chores that needed attention but seemed not to take you anywhere. I call it a junk food day; the stuff fills you up without providing nutritional benefit.

Part of the pastor's dilemma comes from the difficulty of measuring success in ministry. Attendance figures and total monies raised are easily identifiable indicators of success. But the absence of growth in these areas does not necessarily expose failure. Spiritual success may not blossom for years. Paul planted spiritual seeds, Apollos watered and cultivated the

young plants, but God produced the fruit in His time (1 Cor. 3:6). Our responsibility as pastors is to remain faithful and to minister with integrity, especially when progress seems slow.

The appearance of a determined commitment to God's work may be only a mask for compulsive behavior and is another risk that the minister faces. An addiction to work may be spiritualized so that the abuser becomes a church hero. I know pastors who worked like crazy and their efforts resulted in church growth. These pastors were applauded at district meetings. Denominational papers told of their great success. As their notoriety spread, they started speaking across the country. Young pastors decided to emulate them and developed a compulsive work style. Danger emerges from the dark lagoon, however, in the fact that addictions often exist in constellations. An addiction to work is often accompanied by other compulsive behaviors. In too many cases, a celebrated, compulsive, ministerial success unveils a sexual addiction with news of adulterous acts.

The fire of compulsive behavior finds fuel in illusions that can blind the minister. One **illusion is the idea that the pastor can and must meet every known need.** The spiritual strong man must use his strength to rescue those who are weak. Men and women who believe this lie and are sensitive to others' needs often find themselves exhausted and discouraged. They collapse from fatigue because they have expended every resource. They lay in a disheartened heap because they have not comforted every wounded soul.

Closely related to the first **illusion is a second: "If I don't do it, it**



won't get done." Some pastors add the trauma of perfectionism by saying, "If I don't do it, it won't get done RIGHT." God's strength is not diminished by human frailty. The work of God will go on. God has always had a people, a remnant, a holy nation. The spread of the gospel is always the responsibility of the Church, not the obligation of just one person.

BALANCE IN THE MINISTRY

Gerlitz was correct when he stated that moderation in all things needs to guide the minister. If we place work at one end of the continuum and leisure at the other, then the minister must find a balance point somewhere in the middle. The pastor prone to work long hours must monitor his use of time as did the young pastor Gerlitz described. Hobbies and exercise will help. Attention by the pastor to his family—quantity AND quality time—is a biblical requirement that will help establish an equilibrium.

I reject attempts to organize life in a hierarchy, such as "Jesus first, Others second, Yourself third." Life simply doesn't fit neatly in those niches. Taking care of yourself doesn't have to compromise your commitment to Jesus or result in the neglect of others. Maintaining personal health—physical, emotional, and spiritual—is not the pinnacle of selfishness. We need a holistic view of life. We need to recognize that physical fatigue or emotional exhaustion or intellectual delusion often result in spiritual defeat. We need a balance in ministry that promotes health and prevents burnout.

I have come to see pastoral ministry as a life-style, not merely a job. Crises and seasonal demands will increase the hours a minister works some weeks. I willingly work the long hours because I am a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be a week in the near future, though, when the demands of ministry will quiet. I'll follow the example of my Master and take the time to find refreshment, renewal, and re-creation away from the needy crowd. ■

1. Bessie F. Hatcher. Copyright 1929. Renewal 1956 by Lillenas Publishing Co. All rights reserved.
2. Eugene F. Gerlitz, "No Forty-Hour Week," *Preacher's Magazine*, December 1991, 7.

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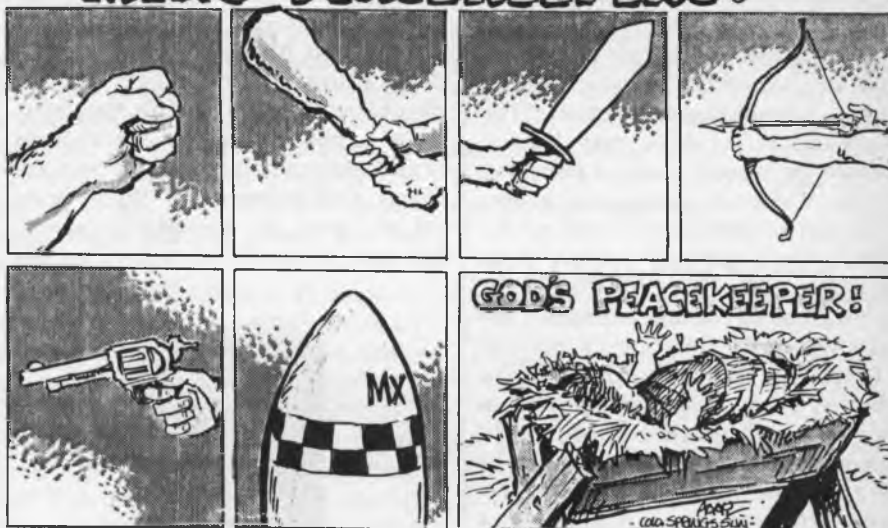
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MEN'S PEACEKEEPERS!



Samuel Logan Brengle: The Cleansed Life

by J. Ray Shadowens

Spring, Tex.

The year 1860 was a noteworthy milestone in the history of Wesleyan tradition. It marked the births of Samuel Logan Brengle and Samuel Chadwick. The American, Brengle, was born in Fredricksburg, Ind., on June 1. The Britisher, Chadwick, was born in Burnley, England, on September 16. These sets of proud parents would reach back into ancient Israel's history to select the given name of one of the most respected prophets for their sons, Samuel. Both were destined to become illustrious proponents of Christian holiness. The records they left behind speak convincingly of their worthiness to bear the revered name of Samuel. Although each journeyed to the other's native land, there is no indication that these admirable representatives of Wesleyanism ever met or joined labors.

V. Raymond Edman's book *They Found the Secret* briefly studies the religious experiences of 20 committed Christians. It provides an interesting mixture of Keswickians, Wesleyans, and unlabeled personalities who have given testimony to "the crisis of the deeper life." This volume includes Samuel Logan Brengle, "The Cleansed Life." One may be impressed by Edman's use of clear and concise Wesleyan terminology in covering this abbreviated account of the Salvationist's spiritual venture from his conversion as an early adolescent through one of the most dramatic descriptions of the Holy Spirit's infilling.

Clarence Hall's *Samuel Logan Brengle: Portrait of a Prophet* provides a much more complete and thoroughly inspirational biography of the outstanding evangelist-officer-writer. His literary production does not begin to match that of his British counterpart, Chadwick.

In an open-air meeting in Boston, "a drunken tough" almost ended the life of this devout disciple. In his characteristic manner, Brengle credits the production of his most prized work to that harrowing incident. He quipped: "Well, if there had been no little brick, there would have been no little book!" This was his book *Helps to Holiness*.

While yet in his early teens, Brengle was converted to Christ, largely through the diligent efforts of a godly mother. This marked the beginning point of Sam's pursuit of a Christlike life that progressed through a most impressive "personal Pentecost." He became an ardent student of the Bible, which continued to influence the development of his life and contributed directly to molding him into the convincing scriptural preacher and soul winner he later became.

During the last semester of Brengle's senior year in DePauw University, while wrestling with an unrelated issue, this young Hoosier settled the matter of his call to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He recounts that he had been sent to a convention in Providence, R.I., to plead for the survival of his fraternity, Delta Kappa Epsilon, on the campus of the university in which he was enrolled. Hall informs us, "While praying this time, the thought of preaching was suddenly presented to his

mind. He exclaimed aloud, 'O Lord, if Thou wilt help me to win this case, I will preach!' The whole room seemed instantly to flame with light."²

While he was a graduate student at Boston University, the glorious revelation that "he could be filled with the Spirit" burst into his spiritual consciousness. Personal ambition, the secret desire to become a great preacher, became the major conflict that had to be resolved in his pursuit of Christian holiness. No amount of rationalizing would banish this persistent struggle that was being waged in his inner being.

The Holy Spirit finally triumphed at this decisive point only to confront him with a soul hunger for heart cleansing. One verse supplied exactly the authoritative word he so desperately needed: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). He responded confidently, "Lord, I believe that." A great sense of peace flowed over his soul.³

Brengle gives his own account of the blessed assurance that followed:

I awoke that morning hungering and thirsting just to live this life of fellowship with God, never again to sin in thought or word or deed against Him, with unmeasurable desire to be a holy man, acceptable unto God. Getting out of bed about six o'clock with that desire, I opened my Bible and, reading some of the words of Jesus, He gave such a blessing as I never had dreamed a man could have this side of heaven. It was a heaven of love that came into my heart. My soul melted like wax before a fire. I sobbed and sobbed. I loathed myself that I had sinned against Him or doubted Him or lived for myself and not for His glory. Every ambi-



tion for self was now gone. The pure flame of love burned like a blazing fire would burn a moth. I walked out over Boston Commons before breakfast, weeping for joy and praising God. Oh, how I loved! In that hour I knew Jesus, and I loved Him till it seemed my heart would break with love. I was filled with love for all His creatures. I heard the little sparrows chattering; I loved them. I saw a little worm wriggling across my path; I stepped over it; I didn't want to hurt any living thing. I loved the dogs, I loved the horses, I loved the little urchins on the street, I loved the strangers who hurried past me, I loved the heathen—I loved the whole world!⁴

This radiance never seemed to diminish as the years of glowing service continued unabated over five decades.

Nothing could more appropriately characterize the message and the messenger than an event that occurred almost immediately following his entrance into "the cleansed life." While preaching in Eggleston Square Church from Heb. 6:1, Brengle reported in detail his own personal Pentecost. So powerful and Spirit-anointed was his proclamation of entire sanctification that following the benediction, those moved by this truth ablaze, with one voice declared: "Brother Brengle, if that is holiness, we want it."⁵ What greater response could any exponent of New Testament holiness properly covet?

The very fact that he cast his lot with the Salvation Army, as the movement through which he elected to pour out his life in a labor of love, is an indice of his complete commitment to the Way. Ecclesiastical preferment seemed never to figure in his decision of the place where this Spirit-filled servant would minister to the needy of this world.

An interesting incident lifted out of the routine of his day-to-day efforts in behalf of others points up the fact that the subtleties of Satan still confront the holy person:

When stationed in Danbury, Connecticut, [Brengle] led his little contingent of faithful ones, consisting of a lame lieutenant . . . and a little hunchbacked girl, to a street

meeting to the tune of 'We're the Army that Shall Conquer!' Suddenly he came abreast of a large and imposing Methodist church and for a moment red hot were the thoughts that burned through his soul, *Fool, you might have been a pastor of a great church like that!* But the sting was only for a moment, for the Sanctifier steadied the soldier to obey His orders.⁶

In this candid disclosure of one so devout as Brengle there is a message for present-day ministers of the gospel. They, too, may be likely to be caught up in aspirations for more influential pulpits or administrative offices.

"If that is holiness, we want it."

In the chapter entitled "On the Platform," biographer Hall summarizes the characteristics that contributed to Brengle's effectiveness as a preacher of full salvation: simplicity, logic, the Bible, and his own heart. His eyes also held the attention of many. His pictorial manner, and a phrase of his preaching that was especially noted, however, was that he related neither reward nor punishment exclusively to the hereafter. He had a way of seeming to move the future into the present. When he preached, both bliss and brimstone moved, as it were, out of the obscure tomorrow into the living today. "Under his preaching, men were led to think not so much of golden streets and seraphic music as of the gold of grace and the joybells of holiness. To the sinner, his preaching was indeed a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death—and that present and immediate."⁷

In the book *The Path to Perfection*, W. E. Sangster writes admiringly of an obscure early Methodist: "He made the paths of holiness winsome by a piety that was irrepressibly [joyful]." Nothing could be more appropriate in attempting to arrive at what these two Samuels shared in common. There is little question that some

Wesleyan theologians would be ranked above Brengle or Chadwick. It is doubtful, however, whether one could find two who date their birth in the year 1860. Hall's assessment of Brengle's sterling qualities could have been employed by Norman G. Dunning in his book, *The Story of Samuel Chadwick*, which reflects,

As Brengle became more widely known among churchgoing people, his reputation became one of sane sanctity and sanctified sanity. Those who knew him told others that here was a man who preached and lived holiness while maintaining his spiritual balance. He had not slipped eccentric, nor had he allowed his lens to get out of focus. It was really seen that he had attained that ideal combination of an exemplar Christian: glowing emotion and cool perception.⁸

Edman gives no guidelines by which he determined how these outstanding evangelicals were selected to be the subjects of his significant work. That the spiritually radiant Brengle qualified for a place among the 20 widely different personalities who found the secret of "the deeper life," ranging all the way from "John Bunyan: The Unchained Life" to "Robert E. Nicholas: The Satisfying Life" (a prominent businessman), should come as no surprise to any who heard him or were exposed to his writings. Knowing something of the transparent humility that was one of the most obvious qualities of this Salvationist, we imagine he would likely demure at his inclusion.

Beneficiaries of the Wesleyan heritage have reason to be eternally grateful that the year 1860 gave to Christians everywhere two Samuels who were the very embodiment of Christian holiness and who gave their lives to lead growing disciples into this glorious experience. ■

1. V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret: Twenty Transformed Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 28.

2. Clarence W. Hall, *Samuel Logan Brengle: Portrait of a Prophet* (New York: The National Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1933), 40.

3. *Ibid.*, 50.

4. *Ibid.*, 52.

5. *Ibid.*, 53.

6. Edman, 27.

7. Hall, 123-33.

8. *Ibid.*, 145, 146.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Last of the Puritans 1834-1892

by James L. Snyder

Glen Burnie, Md.

Whenver preachers gather and the subject of preaching comes up, invariably someone mentions Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Among preachers, he has become the measuring rod for good sermons. January 1992 marks the 100th anniversary of the great preacher's death. It is remarkable that, though he has been dead for so many years, he still influences Christianity.

Some have suggested that more people have been converted to Christ through his ministry than any other's. His record is unparalleled in church history.

His remarkable life and ministry continue to serve as the subject of scores of biographies. Few people in history have been the subject of more profiles.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in the small English village of Kelvedon, Essex, on June 19, 1834. Both his father and grandfather as independent ministers performed their ministries in the rural area surrounding Essex. His father worked as a businessman during the week and on the weekends ministered as lay pastor to a small congregation.

Because of a large family and scanty funds young Charles spent most of his early childhood with his grandparents in Stambourne. He spent his time well among his grandfather's large library and was well schooled in religion—a foundation that would stand him in good stead throughout his life. He excelled in his studies and soon became an assistant teacher.

Even though brought up in a strong religious environment, young Spurgeon was restless in spirit. He sought many ways to relieve this restlessness, but nobody could help him.

Nobody could simply explain the way of salvation to him.

Finally, on December 6, 1850, relief came, but not as young Spurgeon had planned. In later life he delighted to tell the story of his conversion.

At last, one snowy day—it snowed so much that I could not go to the place I had determined to go to, and I was obliged to stop on the road, and it was a blessed stop to me—I found rather an obscure street and turned down a court, and there was a little chapel. I wanted to go somewhere, but I did not know this place. It was a Primitive Methodists' chapel. I had heard of these people from many, and how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they made my head ache ever so much I did not care. So, sitting down, the service went on, but no minister came.

At last a very thin-looking man came into the pulpit and opened his Bible and read these words: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Just setting his eyes upon me, as if he knew me all by heart, he said, "Young man, you are in trouble." Well, I was, sure enough, but I had not been ac-

customed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance. Says he, "You will never get out of it unless you look to Christ." And then, lifting up his hands, he cried out, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Look, look, look! It is only look," said he.

I saw at once the way of salvation. Oh, how I did leap for joy at that moment. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, they only looked and were healed. I had been waiting to do 50 things, but when I heard this word, "Look," what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh, I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away, and in heaven I will look on still in my joy unutterable.

Following his conversion, Spurgeon was convinced from reading his New Testament that baptism was the next step. So on May 3, 1851, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was baptized at the Isleham Ferry on the River Lark by a local Baptist minister.

Before his baptism he talked to his mother about his decision. She said, "Ah, Charlie, I have often prayed that you might be saved, but never that you should become a Baptist."

He replied with all the fervor of a modern prophet, "God has answered your prayer, Mother, with His usual bounty, and given you more than you asked."

His commitment to and fervor for the Lord quite naturally led to gospel preaching. Early in his Christian life, he joined the St. Andrews Street Church, Cambridge, which involved its members in many evangelistic ministries,



which delighted young Spurgeon. There were many small Baptist groups in the surrounding rural areas with neither chapel nor resident pastor. The St. Andrews Street Church regularly sent young men to these villages to preach.

Very eager to assist in every way he could, Spurgeon agreed to go to one of these preaching posts. As he traveled with his companion, he happened to remark, "I trust God's blessing on your preaching today."

At that comment, his companion turned to him in alarm. "My preaching? I was asked to come along and assist you in your preaching. I have never preached in my life. You are the preacher, and, if you don't preach, these poor folk will get no sermon. I trust God's blessing upon your preaching."

This stunned young Spurgeon. He had never preached before either. Several times he had given short addresses in the Sunday School, but never a full sermon. As the two walked on in silence, Spurgeon lifted his heart to the Lord. "Surely," he prayed, "I could give a few words of encouragement to these poor country folk." With that his heart seemed to latch on to a verse of scripture, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:7, KJV).

Arriving at the cottage where the service was to be held, Spurgeon saw the eager, expectant faces of the people and immediately felt compelled to preach. The sermon seemed to flow from his heart. This was the beginning of a growing preaching ministry in the rural villages surrounding Cambridge. Wherever he could—chapel, cottage, open air—young Spurgeon preached the gospel with increasing power and effect.

In preaching, Spurgeon made it a point to use the simplest words he could find. He remembered how he felt before his conversion. People around him believed the gospel but were not able to explain it in terms he could understand. He vowed that in every sermon he would make the gospel as clear and simple as possible.

One year later, 1852, when only 17, Spurgeon was called to pastor the Waterbeach Baptist Church. The small rural congregation met in a run-down chapel, but within weeks of Spurgeon's ministry the congregation outgrew the facilities. The chapel was repaired and enlarged. Remarkable conversions attended his ministry as he fearlessly declared God's truth. Some

of the worst sinners in the area fell under the gospel spell and gave their lives to Christ. It was prophetic of the full ministry awaiting Spurgeon in London.

In 1854 the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, London, invited Spurgeon to become their pastor. The building was the largest Baptist church in the city, but the congregation had dwindled to less than 100. The prospects were as dismal as the treasury was empty. The building itself was in need of repair, but no funds were available.

With some hesitation, Spurgeon accepted the call, and immediately the church took on new life. Under his evangelistic preaching, not only did the pews fill but also conversions took place at every service. From the beginning to the end, conversions were characteristic of Spurgeon's ministry. He never preached but that he expected and looked for conversions.

**Whatever
Spurgeon's
hands could
find to do for
his Savior,
he did with all
his might.**

"You don't expect conversions every time you preach, do you?" Spurgeon inquired of a young preacher complaining of no results from his preaching.

"Oh, no," he replied to Spurgeon. "I don't expect that."

To which Spurgeon said, "That is your problem. Expect conversions when you preach, and God will give them."

Within a few years the congregation outgrew the facilities of the New Park Street Chapel. In 1861 Spurgeon opened the Metropolitan Tabernacle, seating almost 6,000 people. For the next 30 years the tabernacle was jammed for every service—Sunday morning and evening. Spurgeon once commented that there was not a seat in the tabernacle that had not witnessed a conversion. Although Spurgeon gave no public altar call, conversions took place week after week.

His ministry was not limited to the pulpit. His evangelistic energy would not let him sit still for a moment. Despite physical affliction, whatever his hands could find to do for his Savior, he did with all his might. He established orphanages (12 houses with over 500 children), a Pastors' College to train young men for the ministry, a monthly magazine, the publishing of weekly sermons, mission work and Sunday Schools surrounding the tabernacle, Bible and tract distribution, homes for the aged, day schools, and the list goes on. Surely he was the first to develop what we call today a mega-ministry.

Before 30, Spurgeon had a worldwide reputation, and the Metropolitan Tabernacle was the most known church of the day.

An unquestioned master of the spoken word, Spurgeon never missed an opportunity to fearlessly declare God's truth. He preached daily in some church or gathering through England.

After preaching an unpopular message, he was approached by a friend who said, "I hear you are in hot water."

Spurgeon replied, "Oh, no. It is the other fellows who are in hot water. I am the stoker, the man who makes the water boil."

Throughout his life, he suffered from gout and other problems. Long periods found him laid up from illness. In spite of this, he labored long and hard for his Lord, often 18 hours per day. He had a restless energy that had to be spent for his Lord.

Spurgeon was not a perfect minister by any means. He had his faults. He could be dogmatic, provincial, intolerant, and abrupt. But God's blessing rested on him, and many people found Christ through his ministry.

Hard work, heavy responsibilities, and the strain of controversy took their toll. By 1891 Spurgeon was too ill to continue preaching. His health broke, and he journeyed with his wife to Menton, France, to seek rest and healing. Healing never came. On January 31, 1892, near midnight, Spurgeon died.

The death of Spurgeon did not close his ministry. Even though he died 100 years ago, his sermons, books, and sterling evangelistic example still stir people toward God. His influence will continue until Jesus comes. ■

Calamity at Christmas

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Windham, Maine

What a handsome tree we had! It stood tall in the corner of our living room. With water having been placed in its stand, all we needed to do was string the lights and place the intricate ornaments.

My wife traditionally places the lighted angel atop the tree. Then she balances the strings of lights from right to left all the way down the tree. The rest of us then enter in with the decorations on the limbs.

This year we had everything in place when all of a sudden the tree collapsed. Our older daughter was caught beneath it all. Lights went helter-skelter. Ornaments flew across the carpet. Water poured out of the stand, soaking into the rug. A forlorn angel lay on its side beneath the branches. What a mess for a December Saturday afternoon!

It was not with the best of moods that we hoisted the tree upright again. Then we concluded that we had better locate it in another corner so that the wet one could dry out. Once more the stand was filled with water. The angel was straightened atop the tree. The lights were strung, and the decorations laced the branches.

Our cat, Happy, looked on as if she understood our crestfallen hearts. To help lift our spirits, we played the traditional carols throughout the house, filling the rooms with melody. Someone made a fresh pot of tea. Another discovered cookies in the kitchen cupboard.

Then the front doorbell rang. Jay, our son, opened the door to find a neighbor standing there.

"Is your father home?" he asked. Jay invited him inside. In short order I came to greet the visitor, wondering what brought him to our house that day.

"Do you think I could chat with you, perhaps even have a prayer?" The man looked intently into my face.

"Certainly. I would be glad to visit with you, Richard."

Because there was so much bustle in our house, I quickly reasoned that it would be best for the two of us to walk across to the nearby church sanctuary.

Once inside the church he spilled out his woe.

"I need prayer. My family needs prayer. I knew when I passed your church sign that God told me to stop and ask for you to pray with me."

I was curious as to what was bothering this young man. Often we had waved to one another in passing. From time to time I stopped by with baked goods for them. He had even spoken to me once about his alcoholic brother, asking me for counsel.

"It is Christmas; yet my family is heavy in heart this season," he began.

"My wife got the news that she has cancer," he said softly, not quite sure he had the courage to say those words. "She is going to chemotherapy. Her weight is affected. Her hair is going. Yet she has such courage. She puts on a strong front, particularly for the children." There were six children.

We sat together on the front pew. To our right the church tree shone with bulbs and balls. To our left the baby doll representing Jesus lay peacefully. Each of the windows had been decorated. Yet in the midst of this festive atmosphere, two men's hearts sank within them.

"I am so sorry to hear this," I said. "We must take this to the Lord. I am so glad that you stopped by to have this prayer time."

We left our places, made our way to the simple altar, and knelt. Our

hearts spilled before the throne of heaven. In the calm of the church a serenity began to blanket our troubled souls. It became quite easy to pray as the Spirit of a loving God drew near to bring special comfort.

I heard this man sobbing beside me, especially when I mentioned his children in prayer. I knew this would be the heaviest part of his burden. He and his wife gave their lives for the good of their children.

"Lord, be near these little ones in their private worlds of anguish. In their tears, talk peace to them. In their confusion, come with heaven's understanding."

Presently the Spirit released us from our prayers. We knew that, for that moment, we had done all we could do.

Richard reached out to embrace me, thanking me for being a praying friend as well as a neighbor.

"When you were praying, Pastor, a special glow of the Lord settled upon my heart. The burden has been lifted considerably," he whispered.

We walked out of the church together—one man with a healthy wife and children, ready to celebrate Christmas. The other had a sick wife and caring children, ready to attempt to celebrate.

Then it was that I thought back a few hours to a fallen tree with lights scattering like disobedient children across our living room carpet. Our hearts that sank; our day was not as perfect as planned.

Now I reconsidered the meaning of calamity. The touselled tree was nothing compared to a troubled neighbor. Yet in the hurt of this man I knew God was working to lift up the fallen, set aright the downcast, and bring help to the scattered children's hearts. It would take time. It would take prayer. But in the end, because these belong to Him, their lives would be lightened, one of heaven's ways or another. ■



An Intergenerational Night of Bible Fun

by Marilyn DeYoung

Reedsburg, Wis.

Does the social life of your church family need perking up? Try an intergenerational family night! At our church, we have had many family nights over the past several years.

Some of our most interesting family nights have been Bible teaching sessions, with a variety of activities for all ages. We usually begin with a light supper. Everyone brings sandwiches to share, or we bring the ingredients for a one-dish meal. We include a devotional period with songs and prayer sometime during the evening. The unique element is scheduling the activities around a theme to make the evening fun.

This takes thoughtful planning, but it is worth the time and effort. Shared here are some of the things we have done. Try it! You'll like it!

BIBLE PERSONALITIES

We planned a series of four events, using a different character from the Bible as our focus each night. The first night a man did a monologue on Noah. The next time a woman portrayed Ruth. The third night a father and son did an interview of Jonah. Finally, there was a flannelgraph story of Joseph.

Each night, after the main presentation, we planned special activities around the theme. On the "Noah" evening, we played "Who Am I?" using pictures of animals that could have been on the ark.

On the "Ruth" evening, small groups made a family tree from Ruth to Jesus and then made seed pictures using grains of wheat. For "Joseph," a box of alphabet macaroni was spilled out on a table for people to spell out Joseph's brothers' names.

Each evening included some paper-pencil activities such as a word search or crossword puzzle.

Sometimes we played charades. Each group was assigned a Bible text

to be studied and dramatized for the rest of the assembly. The text must be acted out well enough so that others can figure out the story.

Bible baseball and Scripture hunts are also longtime favorites. Scripture hunts help people learn the sequence of books in the Bible. Children enjoy having adults play these games with them.

THE PARABLES

Another time we planned a series using a different parable each time for our theme. Some of the parables were presented in filmstrip form. Others were read from the Bible or Bible story book. Once, a record told the story while church members acted it out. Again we used a variety of activities related to the theme.

THE PSALMS

The Psalms make for a good family night. Many hymns and choruses are based on the Psalms. Sing some of these before or after reading the appropriate Psalms text. From your church members, amass a group of slides of God's outdoor beauty to be shown while reading the scripture and singing the songs. Make up a word search using only praise words taken from the Psalms. Divide your people into groups of six or eight to make collages using pictures from nature that have been gathered for this purpose.

GAME NIGHTS

Doing a takeoff on some of the television game shows works well too.



Try "Win, Lose, or Draw" using Bible topics such as Daniel in the lions' den, Joseph's coat of many colors, the birth of Jesus. Divide your group into two teams, giving each one a chance to "draw." If your group is large, you may want to have two or three groups playing. Since many of us draw rather poorly, this can get pretty funny.

"Family Feud" can also be fun while at the same time it uses Bible facts. Watch the game on television a few times to figure out how it is played and scored. Make up some questionnaires and pass them out a few weeks ahead so that they can be tabulated. Some examples of questions are: What was your favorite Sunday School song? Name one of Jesus' disciples. Name a New Testament book. Ask about things with several possible answers. Then tabulate the results.

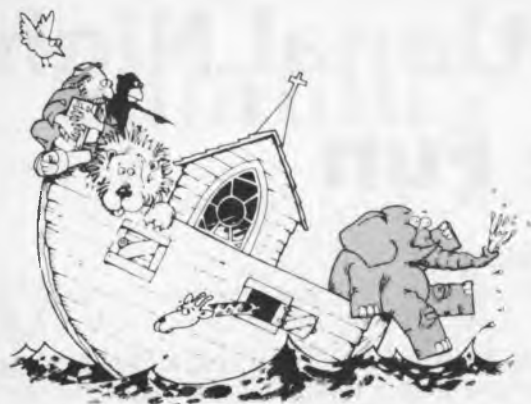
A FOREIGN THEME

You can use a foreign country for the theme. If possible, have a missionary come to introduce the country to the group. If this is not possible, perhaps someone would be able to share slides of a trip he took to that country. Plan a meal around the foods of that country. Plan activities that pertain to that country.

One time we chose Japan. The first night missionaries from Japan made a presentation. A Japanese lady came and taught origami. A man from the church made kites, so he and his group made a Japanese kite and flew it. We also tie-dyed T-shirts.

Many libraries offer artifacts from other countries. Maybe someone from your church or community has been to that country and can share some things they brought home.

Intergenerational family nights are fun. But the best thing about them is that they draw the whole church family together. ■



There Was a Certain Rich Man . . .

Luke 16:19-31

Behold, I tell you a parable. The year was nineteen-something. The place: Northern Lights Holiness College. The event: a chapel service where a distinguished alum—prosperous grower, outstanding churchman—addressed the administration, faculty, and student body. He expressed gratitude for the values he learned in college. In the business department he discovered how the free enterprise system worked. On the basketball court he absorbed the “competitive edge.” It was during a chapel revival service that he committed his life to Christ.

He attributed his success to the fact that he had always put God first in his life: first in his day—never missed early morning devotions; first in his week—never missed church even during harvest season; and first in his finances. His avocation was world evangelism, and his passion, work and witness missions. He was proud of the churches, schools, clinics, and missionary homes he had either built or underwritten. “Matthew 6:33 really works,” he exulted.

He called the president to the podium and presented him with a check for \$1 million to be used for student scholarships, with preference given to those called to missionary service. The standing applause was deafening. Tears flowed. Camera bulbs flashed. Denominational write-ups followed. A dormitory was named in his honor.

It so happened that a short time later I held a revival in that generous layman’s church. Proudly he drove me around his spread. The fields and orchards crawled with migrant workers. I was astonished to see so many children and teens bringing in the har-

vest, since it was early October. Over dinner he mentioned the trouble he was having with his farm workers. Union organizers had slipped in. They were making exorbitant demands. They were pressing for a guaranteed minimum wage, health insurance, and social security payments.

After dinner he showed me his hunting trophies: an Alaskan brown bear rug, a Canadian moose head, and even a stuffed lioness taken before hunting was banned by the emerging African nations. He dramatized how he had bagged that cat on his first work and witness trip to central Africa.

While eating breakfast at the local coffee shop the next morning, a shabbily dressed Mexican with a weather-beaten face took the booth next to mine. I recognized him as the migrant tending watercoolers beside a pickup on my host’s farm. I asked if I could join him as I slipped in opposite him. He seemed wary of me at first but loosened up when I asked him questions about his family. He spoke with a heavy accent.

His parents, like their parents before them, had been migrant “illegals,” following the crops. He began working the fields when he was six and did so until his back went out a year earlier. When I asked why he didn’t get it taken care of, he gave me a look of incredulity, spread his hands in resignation, and responded: “No money. No insurance.”

His whole body seemed to sink with heaviness as he began to recount the struggle to keep his wife, aged mother, and surviving seven children going. Three had died in infancy. Always on the move. No place

to call home. Dawn to dusk in the fields—that is, when they were lucky enough to find work. Never enough money. Rarely enough food. Cars always breaking down.

I asked about his religious background. Though raised a Catholic, he couldn’t find a priest or even a Protestant pastor who would say prayers over the grave of their first baby. Finally he found a fellow migrant who doubled as an itinerant preacher to hold a service. They were so impressed by his sincerity and concern for the family that they converted to his Pentecostal religion. He told me about taking his whole family to church that first Sunday only to find out, the next morning, that their jobs in the fields had been taken by Guatemalan illegals. For the next six weeks they lived off of decaying vegetables and fruit they could scrounge in the fields and what meat they could salvage from supermarket dumpsters.

His voice broke as he told about their youngest daughter who, only three years earlier, had run a high fever. The clinic doctor diagnosed her as having viral pneumonia. She had to be hospitalized immediately. But they would not admit her: no money, no insurance. Not enough gas in the car to drive 150 miles to the nearest county hospital. He approached the farmer, whose fields they were working at the time, for an advance. Said he couldn’t do it. To pay workers before the harvest was in would set a bad precedent. They might take the money and run.

“She suffered so much, poor child, but she is with God now,” he volunteered.

"Where were you working at the time?" I asked.

He thought for a moment and then responded, "Here. Right here. For this same grower. Yes, this same one."

"Did he know? Did you ever tell him that your daughter died?"

"No. No, I didn't tell him. It's so hard, amigo, it's so hard."

He wept.

Indignation surged in my breast. A text for that evening's revival sermon leapt to mind: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:45-46, KJV). Would I ever let that grower, and those other heartless, insensitive, uncaring Christians, have it! I could hardly wait to get at them.

I looked again at my sad new friend. Something familiar about that face. I studied its leathery lines. No! It couldn't be! Not that young Hispanic who, with hat in hand and head bowed, stood at my door asking if I would hold a graveside service for his little baby. He apologized for bothering me. He explained that he had no money, not even for an undertaker. I felt for him. Yes, I did. Oh, I wanted to help him out so much. Unfortunately he caught me at the worst possible time. I was gearing up for a great "bikes, trikes, and tykes" Sunday School outreach campaign. There were just too many loose ends to tie up. I recommended the Salvation Army officer.

"Have you ever worked the fields around Centerville?" I inquired tentatively.

"Oh yes," he replied, "but not since our baby died there, many years ago."

I wept. ■



WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS



Randall E. Davey

December/January/February 1992-93

Prepared by Randall E. Davey

INTRODUCTION

During the 10 years that I have been privileged to pastor the Overland Park (Kans.) Church of the Nazarene, I have wrestled with what it means to be a worship leader. Somehow I managed to graduate from Nazarene Theological Seminary unscathed by historical understandings of worship.

After a brief stint as an associate pastor in a very traditional setting and then a four-plus-year term as a church planter, I had little to base my view of worship on, apart from my own experience.

Out of my own sense of need, I started studying Nazarene roots in worship and was surprised to discover Bresee's commitment to a more liturgical service, which certainly reflected his roots. So, my interest in Bresee, coupled with readings in Wesley, influenced the order that appears on the following pages.

Almost always persons who see the suggested order say, "That's too formal for me." "Stifles the Spirit, I would think." As much as I understand the response, I haven't experienced it that way. On the contrary. The more ordered we have become, the more informal and spontaneous we have become.

Two other points may be worth noting. I have found the church calendar to be valuable to an international denomination. We tend not to celebrate national holidays but opt to observe significant days in the life of the Church (Advent, Epiphany, Transfiguration, Baptism of the Lord, Pentecost Sunday, Trinity Sunday, et al.).

Further, for the past several years, I have submitted to the discipline of preaching through the lectionary. I continue to be amazed at the ways in which the Spirit works to address timely and sensitive issues throughout the year. I have found it to be demanding and stretching. For that I'm grateful.

Though I have never had occasion to write a manuscript sermon, the thought of writing 13 of them a year ago didn't seem to be that big of a deal. One year later, I would have to say that I will add this experience to the file of those things I'm glad I've done once but will probably never do again!

PRAYING FOR THE PERFECT CHURCH

by Randall E. Davey

1 Thess. 3:9-13

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 6, 1992

INTRO:

What would a perfect church look like? How big would it be? What kinds of ministries would it have? Is it reasonable to assume that a perfect church would have a perfect pastor and staff? Would one assume that the church would have a perfect church board, perfect Sunday School teachers, perfect musicians, and, yes, perfect parishioners. Perish the thought!

No, we are not given to such fantasy as perfect churches. We are rugged realists: things are far from perfect. Every sick person for whom we have prayed might not get well. Every unemployed person for whom we have prayed might not get a better job. Regardless of how much we pray, some persons will still choose to abuse others. Unjust and unnecessary wars will still be fought; sons and daughters of humankind will die.

Instead of expecting perfect churches or perfect marriages or perfect governments, we've grown accustomed to mediocre churches, average pastors, tolerable marriages, and incompetent politicians. Such is our world.

Following a brief but stormy ministry in Philippi, the apostle Paul moved to Thessalonica and attacked both mediocrity and heresy (Acts 17:1-9). In the synagogue, he preached Christ. His ministry was not marked with wide acceptance and popularity. On the contrary, he was beaten, imprisoned, and repeatedly run out of town. What drove Paul to preach such a controversial and revolutionary message?

I. Paul had confidence that Jesus was coming again

Paul risked his life to start Thessalonica First Church. His preaching incited a riot. With Silas, he was forced to escape to Berea, where he met with a similar fate (cf. Acts 17:1-14). He had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi for similar antics prior to his Thessalonian crusade, but his commitment was unswerving. He was convinced that it was his responsibility to prepare believers for the imminent return of Jesus.

ILLUS. A discouraged preacher friend called me a few Sunday nights back to say that he was thinking of resigning. Somewhat surprised, I asked why.

"Closed doors".

"Closed doors?"

"Yes, a few board members shut me down on my plans to remodel the foyer. It's obvious that they're not going to let me lead."

Paul wouldn't have understood "closed door" talk. Opposition seemed to fuel him.

A. Paul prayed that the Lord would establish their hearts. Paul recognized that only God's Holy Spirit could convince the new converts of Resurrection truth. Apart from the witness of the Spirit, they would be unstable.

B. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians' hearts would be "unblamable in holiness" (v. 13, NASB). "Unblamable" seems to say, "Be perfect or without fault at the Lord's return." It shouts of impossibility. Let's take a closer look.

Paul is praying that the Church for which Jesus died will respond to grace so that believers will be found sanctified, "set apart for His purposes," loving each other as Christ loved them. Now that's a perfect church!

ILLUS. I attended a weekly Tuesday morning prayer meeting frequented mostly by older adults. One morning a conversation about how holiness people ought to look ensued. One argued that jewelry of any kind was out. Another talked about clothing, while another talked about hairstyles. Every point was illustrated by someone who attended the church of which we were members.

One of our group happened to be blind, and in his characteristic way, he said, "I can't see what holiness people look like, but I sure can hear how they sound."

II. Paul believed that God wanted to complete the transformation that He started

He prayed not only that God would let him see them again but also that he could "complete" what was lacking in their faith (v. 10, NASB).

A. Paul was grateful that the converts had survived under peer pressure. Their conversions were not without notice. Paul was convinced that God was mightily at work in them. Their conversions weren't in question. However, he wasn't blind to their needs.

B. The word "complete" is used in the material sense of mending nets. We might say that Paul wanted to "fix" what was lacking in their faith.

C. Paul affirmed them in conversion. He noted their dramatic turn from idols (1:9) and their willingness to be imitators of the Lord (1:6). He had heard from Timothy that they had stopped working in order to wait for the Second Coming. In so doing, they resented local authority. Some had begun to slander Paul. Others were tempted to slip back into habits of immorality. Without surprise, there was division in the church. Paul wanted to fix what was lacking in their faith as evidenced by that litany of ills.

ILLUS. Devotionally, I frequently pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me" (Ps. 139:23-24, NASB). I pray it slowly, asking God the Holy Spirit to help me see what is lacking in my faith life. God is seldom silent.

III. Paul suggests that lack of faith is betrayed by lack of love

The life of the community signaled that something was fundamentally wrong at a deeper level, something that needed "fixing."

A. Paul doesn't discount the extent to which love was operative in the community. He prays that the Lord would cause them to "increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men" (v. 12, NASB). The picture is near perfect. A community where persons love and are loved not because of accomplishment, race, color, creed, financial standing, or worth to society. They are loved simply because they are. Paul envisions that kind of community as one that is established, unblamable in holiness.

B. Paul did not leave them with lofty exhortation. That kind of loving was the same kind that he illustrated toward them (v. 12).

ILLUS. In a restaurant I watched two parents, two children, and what I guessed to be two grandparents, having breakfast. Bites of pancake were punctuated with admonitions, exhortations, threats, and stares. The children were apparently used to the exercise and acted out monstrous behavior, undeterred by potential punitive action. Before the second cup of coffee was poured, Mom jerked the little two-year-old girl from her booster chair and set her down on the floor. The little wide-eyed juvenile stood braced for lecture No. 971. "Can't you be nice? Grandma won't want to come to breakfast with you ever again! Now sit down, be nice, and shut up!"

I wonder what "being nice" means to a little two-year-old. I wonder if she thought it was the same thing as sitting down and shutting up.

Paul didn't confuse his audience as this mother had confused her little girl. He said, "Love each other as I have loved you."

C. Let's reflect for a moment on our community. What does it mean to be Christ's Church in the 20th century?

I wonder if the gathered church is the primary time and place where we learn what it means to love and be loved. I wonder if that gives added significance to our regular participation. I wonder if only by worshiping, studying, serving, and witnessing together do we have context in which we learn to love together.

CONCLUSION:

Paul prayed that the Lord would "direct" his way to the Thessalonians. In the meantime, he prayed that the Lord would "cause" them to increase in love (vv. 11-12, NASB).

Paul realized that he could not talk them into being a loving community. He prayed that God would cause them to be convinced that love was the necessary standard for Christ's community.

In holiness churches, we have believed that before one can love as Christ loves, one must be cleansed of preoccupation with oneself, of inbred sin. Paul prayed for their sanctification, that they would be set apart for God and His service. He knew they needed fixing, but he knew he couldn't do it.

Celebrating this Advent season, we sense our need to prepare for the Lord's imminent return. I invite you to open yourself to the Spirit's loving, cleansing work of grace, making it possible for you "to increase and abound in love for one another . . . so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father

at the coming of our Lord Jesus" (vv. 12-13, NASB).

At His return, will Him find us alert, watching, waiting, serving—imitating Him and acting like a perfect church? "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20, KJV)!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Joy to the World"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Phil. 4:4
 Processional "Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
 Prayer of Blessing
 Choral Response "Gloria Patri"
 Ministers of Music "Rejoice! A King Is Born"

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Jer. 33:14-16
 Choral Response "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
 The Second Lesson 1 Thess. 3:9-13
 A Moment for Meditation
 Hymn of Response "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
 The People's Prayer at the Altar
 Congregational Response "Emmanuel"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture Mai. 3:10
 Offertory Prayer

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Luke 21:25-36
 The Doxology
 The Sermon
 Closing Hymn
 "PRAYING FOR THE PERFECT CHURCH"
 "Cleanse Me"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"We come believing, O God, in You, as the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And we come believing in Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord, who was virgin born, crucified, dead, buried, and raised, and who is coming again. We come believing in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Our gathering today is an indication of our love and adoration. Receive our worship, which we render in spirit and in truth. Amen."

Prayers of the People

During the final stanza of the hymn that is sung before the prayers of the people, the pastor moves toward the altar and kneels. The worship folder includes a note that says, "Congregation may join the pastor at the altar."

After the congregation concludes singing the hymn, the pastor asks if there are those at the altar who want to be anointed. If so, they are asked to raise their hands. If persons respond, the elders of the church are invited to come to the altar for the laying on of hands.

Benediction

"May the mercy and grace of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen."

A PROPHET FOR ALL TIMES

by Randall E. Davey

Mal. 3:1-4

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 13, 1992

INTRO:

Some 400 years before Jesus' birth, a preacher called Malachi wrote a heated letter to the Jewish nation. The stinging rebuke exposed Israel's darker side.

To say that the Jews felt abandoned by God was an understatement. They were riddled with doubt and crippled by indifference. They were forced to believe that the God of justice had turned a deaf ear on them.

Those weren't hasty conclusions. After all, their worship center had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and they had been held hostage for some 50 years. Their unceremonious release and trek home didn't make for a photo opportunity. Persian domination continued, replete with exorbitant taxes. The relatively few square miles of barren land from which they were forced to eke out an impoverished existence was surrounded by vengeful neighbors.

They were permitted to rebuild the Temple. As the walls rose, so did their hopes. But their dreams proved to be nightmares. The building was built, but the glory of God was absent.

Their pagan neighbors fared better than they did. They soon gave way to hopelessness. Their hopelessness turned to skepticism.

Worship was in form only. They kept the best of everything for themselves and gave the sickly animals to the Temple (1:8). They lost concern about racial purity and married the enemy. Adultery was common, divorce was rampant, sorcery abounded, and oppression of widows, orphans, and laborers was normative. All of this didn't happen overnight. It was so gradual, even priests had grown blind to their own condition.

They had dreamed of prosperity and worldwide domination, but here they were at the bottom of the pile, depressed beyond measure.

If the Lord would come, they would fare far better.

I. The prophet sent a mixed message to an indifferent crowd

It was both good news and bad news. Good news was that the Lord was indeed coming. The "Behold" of verse 1 (NASB) is not announcing immediate fulfillment as much as it signaled a certain fulfillment. The speaker was the Lord of Hosts, and His promises are assured facts (Num. 23:19).

A. Promise No. 1. "I am going to send My messenger" (v. 1, NASB). Many Jews believed that Elijah would return before the "day of the Lord." Malachi says as much (4:5). All four evangelists unite in declaring that John the Baptist was the messenger of choice who mimicked the prophet Elijah. Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist was the ignored Elijah of prophecy (Matt. 17:10-13).

B. Promise No. 2. "He will clear the way before Me" (v. 1, NASB). They weren't ready for the Lord's coming. The messenger would call them on their sin—that was

bad news. They weren't bothered by their own unbelief, doubt, crookedness, and perversity. They ignored the Law, which said, "He [God] will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Exod. 34:7, NASB).

ILLUS. A mean-spirited, narrow-minded, and unforgiving veteran of the church scolded his pastor for not preaching on judgment, damnation, and hell. The elderly straight shooter knew that the young folk needed a good dose of old-time preaching to stop them dead in their tracks, but he clearly saw no need of such preaching for himself.

C. Promise No. 3. "And the Lord . . . will suddenly come to His temple" (v. 1, NASB). The word "suddenly" is never used to denote immediacy; it always means unexpectedly, regardless of the lapse of time, and usually was associated with a calamitous event.

Undoubtedly, the Temple built by Solomon and rebuilt by Zerubbabel was understood as Jehovah's dwelling place (Hag. 1:9). Ezekiel told of a day when God's dwelling place would be with His people, a New Testament understanding of temple. Jesus did come to the Temple built with hands and through the ages has repeatedly come to His Church.

II. No news was not good news

The bad news is, "Company is coming, and you're not ready." They looked for a messiah who would grant them the blessings they deserved, one who would punish their enemies and oppressors, and make Israel once more a prosperous, powerful nation, ruler over the hated Gentiles.

A. Many won't be able to endure the day of His coming. Certainly this crowd had cause to quake. Their standard of doing business was completely out of whack with God's standard: "Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44, NASB).

B. The priests were premier examples of unreadiness. The sons of Levi needed help! They had been instrumental in seducing the people (1:6ff.; 2:1-9).

C. "Who can stand when He appears?" (v. 2, NASB). The question is borrowed from battle imagery (2 Kings 10:4, NASB) and means, "Who will stand his ground?" The prophet suggests that no one will pass the penetrating tests the Lord will impose. That was bad news. Yet the purpose of the refiner and fuller was not to destroy but to purify and whiten.

ILLUS. We used to sing a lot of songs about the second coming of Christ. By the end of verse 1, Mrs. Huff would raise her hand, wave her hankie, and start shouting. I didn't question *her* readiness, but I did wonder about the rest of us who remained conspicuously silent.

III. There was a bright spot on a dark horizon

The prophet was not limited to doom and gloom. He was a rugged realist. The Jews weren't coming close to

living the way God had called them to live. They were in trouble.

ILLUS. The *Kansas City Star* reported the story of a murderer's trial. He admitted guilt. But the family of the victim was even more enraged when the killer laughed as he recalled for the jury the very act of murder.

"Are you sorry for your crimes?" asked a doubtful judge.

Without hesitation the killer answered, "Not a bit."

The indictment Malachi leveled at the Jews could be filed against the 20th-century church as well.

A. Isaiah warned his audience to remove every obstacle that stopped them from being what God had purposed. God is sensitive to a broken and confessional spirit (Isa. 57:14-15).

B. Malachi affirms that God wants to prepare persons for judgment, not destroy them. He compares the Lord to a refiner's fire and fullers' soap, a smelter and purifier of silver. Fire burns and soap consumes what the sinner so dearly loves, not only transgressions of God's Law but also all self-righteous works. Yet, the refiner comes not only to burn and the fuller not only to consume; they come to refine and to purify.

C. The Lord promises to remove the heart of stone and give us a new heart and a new spirit, His Spirit (Ezek. 36:26). Our sins will be forgiven and remembered no more (Jer. 31:34). We'll be "clothed . . . with garments of salvation . . . a robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10).

CONCLUSION:

Malachi wouldn't be a family film or Christmas bedtime story. It is marked with pathos, despair, and heaviness.

One is tempted to walk away from it all, contending, "That was then, and now is now, and never the twain shall meet." But there's a real sense in which "then is now" and "now is then," and Malachi could be called a prophet for all times.

We're not as apt to think about world domination. We remember "days of infamy" and Berlin walls. We reckon with a crumbling Soviet empire and a weakened world economy. We're more likely to think in terms of surviving than conquering. All of that is masked by Christmas routines of getting and spending, partying and musicals, increasing rates and decreasing benefits, and stress, stress, stress.

So worn-out are we that divorce, adultery, oppression, abject apathy, and indifference are no longer head turners. The Church stands begging for ministers and money but knows it will stand in line with museums and good causes for less than a fair share. Where there's little money, there is even less time. The world stands wanting for those who would minister.

Worship can understandably be lackluster. Hardly can we be called celebrants, people of praise, offering ourselves unto Christ Jesus, when we have to hang on just to survive.

More than a few times we have said to each other, "I would love just to get away from it all." "I wish just one Christmas wouldn't be so awful and hectic." Some dear soul may even be heard to utter, "I just wish the Lord would come." It's a faint voice, but the message is clear. Somehow things would be better if the Lord would come—or so we think.

But the prophet speaks—it's really God talking. He speaks through the prophet, who calls us to purity. He speaks through John the Baptist, who calls us to repentance (Luke 3:3). He speaks through the risen Jesus; and He speaks through the apostle Paul, who prays that we may be "blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10).

The prophet for all time speaks to our time.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Good Christian Men, Rejoice"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading	Ps. 103:1-5
Processional	"Joy to the World"
Prayer of Blessing	
Children's Choir	"O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
Ministers of Music	"Canticle of Praise"
Greetings	

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson	Mai. 3:1-4
Choral Response	"Sing Praise to God Our Rock"
The Second Lesson	Phil. 1:3-11
A Moment for Meditation	
Hymn of Response	"As with Gladness Men of Old"
The People's Prayer at the Altar	
Congregational Response	"Emmanuel"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture	Exod. 35:5
Offertory Prayer	
Vocal Offertory	

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson	Luke 3:1-6
The Doxology	
The Sermon	"A PROPHET FOR ALL TIMES"
Closing Hymn	"Lo! He Comes, with Clouds Descending"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

Invite the congregation to sing the Lord's Prayer in lieu of or as part of the Prayer of Blessing.

Greeting

Invite the congregation to greet each other with a Christian greeting. The pastor may begin by saying, "The Lord be with you" or "Peace be with you" or "Greetings in the name of our risen Lord."

When one says, "Peace be with you," the Christian tradition recognizes the richness of the greeting to mean, "May all be well with you in body, soul, and spirit."

Prayers of the People

Consider inviting the congregation to participate in "bidding prayers." The pastor may pray, "Let us remember those of our number who are ill," after which he pauses. The congregation then offers only the names of those who are ill. The same kind of prayer could be offered for the unemployed, the bereaved, etc.

Benediction

"May the blessings of the Lord be with you now and evermore. Amen."

THE WORD OF THE LORD THAT CAME TO MICAH

by Randall E. Davey

Mic. 5:1-5a

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 1992

INTRO:

In the second half of the eighth century, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah ruled Judah in succession. These three kings worked in a turbulent political climate. Domestic issues took a backseat to foreign affairs, but the administration failed to achieve independence.

The rebellion was short-lived against Assyria. Samaria fell in 722 B.C. Deportation, begun 10 years early, resumed.

In 701 B.C., 21 years after Samaria fell, Assyrian troops inhabited Judah, and Hezekiah was fined and lost part of his territory to the Philistines.

The influx of military money boosted the economy and improved the locals' financial lot. Financial gain meant power, and power bred independence. Attitudes toward religion became complacent. Personal and social values disintegrated.

Land barons squeezed farmers out of business. Age-old sanctions associated with the divine covenant were forgotten. Priests and prophets preached in concert with the new age, conscious of the hand that fed them.

Government did nothing to check the rich. Policies defended wealth gained by illegitimate means. The poor became poorer. Self-interest was the standard by which political decisions were made.

The prophet Micah attacked with disgust and vengeance the absence of justice. "They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance" (2:2, NASB).

He rebuked them for portraying God apparently as a benevolent and forgiving grandfather figure, doting over the sins of the people. Priests were granting the people false assurance. They were sure that God would tolerate their ventures into the occult and their spirit of self-reliance.

Micah reminded the community of the saving acts that started with the Exodus and ended in their arrival in Canaan (6:4-5). It was nothing new. They recited these deeds in worship, but they failed to be moved to carry out the terms of the covenant. They knew the Exodus story but lived as if it never happened.

Sunday by Sunday, believers gather for worship and stare out stained-glass windows, yawning as Scripture is read, dozing as the Word is proclaimed, and living as if it were a fable told for the amusement of children.

ILLUS. An uninvited consultant told his pastor, "Start the service with something peppy. You have to get my engines started before I feel like singing. It's been a bad week." Apparently he sensed no need to sing or knew of no reason to sing.

The believer can look a little farther back in history to find reason to sing. It's about the Cross. It's reason enough.

Reflecting on the mighty acts of God, we have reason to enter worship with thanksgiving in our hearts.

I. There is something worse than recession on the horizon

Micah identifies with Jerusalem (v. 1). He sees the details

of doom associated with Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C. and ultimate destruction that comes a century later.

A. The call to gather in troops was to prepare for that which is sure to come. The enemy is at the door.

ILLUS. The world awaited the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev. Boris Yeltsin, his savior in the coup, had proven to be Gorbachev's political captor. Gorbachev, who months ago enjoyed worldwide admiration, is fading in relative obscurity.

B. The venerable judge has become a whipping boy.

ILLUS. Judges are not immune from criticism for the opinions they render. Newspapers frequently vent public outrage over one ruling or another. But the outrage is at its zenith when a judge violates the law and stands before a peer for sentencing.

President Bush's selection of Clarence Thomas illustrated the point as Thomas was made out to be less than judicious or prudent. His alleged offenses were noteworthy in view of the fact that he may be called upon to rule in a sexual harassment charge.

C. Though the citizens of Judah will not quickly recover, God has not forsaken them. Within this drab context of misfortune Micah paints a contrasting picture.

ILLUS. A friend was shocked when he lost his job. He first responded with dismay, "I've always tithed." He concluded that he was recession-proof via his tithe contract. His job loss had to mean that he was in trouble with God. But circumstances don't mean all that much about God's attitude toward us. However, our attitude toward Him is reflected in the way we respond to circumstances. He will not forsake His people.

II. A Ruler born in Bethlehem is certain

Micah sees through Israel's despair to a better day. From Bethlehem Ephrathah, the "Fruitful House of Bread," a Ruler would come.

A. Bethlehem Ephrathah was the birthplace of the Davidic dynasty. David's father is described as "an Ephrathite . . . from Bethlehem in Judah" (1 Sam. 17:12). Apparently Ephrathah is the district in which Bethlehem lay.

B. The Davidic covenant, referenced in Psalm 89, says, "Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun" (35-36). Micah reminds Israel that God will not allow them to slip into oblivion.

C. This Ruler hails from "the days of eternity" (NASB). Some scholars contend that Micah simply meant, "from the distant past." Others argue that he insisted on a Ruler with heavenly origins, an ideal David.

But most agree that he believed that the Ruler to come was a person of destiny.

D. The Ruler-Savior will come after judgment. Israel's foes will close in, and God's chosen people will be taken captive; but it will be a temporary phenomenon. They will remain prisoner, Micah believed, until the Royal One is born.

III. What kings couldn't do, God's Ruler can

When God's Ruler comes, the captives will be delivered! Micah promised that "the remainder of His brethren [would] return" (NASB).

ILLUS. For the first two years of my college work, I attended Mount Vernon Nazarene College, which, at that time, was a two-year program. Because I happened to be part of the school's first two years of existence, the ambience was unique and unrepeatable. I remember a distinct feeling of dissonance at the thought that the vast majority of the graduating class of 1970 would never be together again as a class. And we haven't been. Some went to Eastern Nazarene College, some to Bethany Nazarene College, others to Trevecca Nazarene College, and a few to Olivet Nazarene College, and scores of others to one place or another. The few times I went back, I left depressed. Most of the teachers I had are long gone. It's not the same, and it never will be. But what if—? What if somehow, someone could pull it off?

That's the kind of hope with which Micah teased his audience. When the Ruler comes, He will usher in a grand homecoming.

A. The Ruler will work like a shepherd tending his flock. This figure embodies an ideal of Israelite kingship. It brought to mind stories of David, who was taken from his care of sheep to care for the people of God (2 Sam. 7:7-8).

B. He will rule with strength, evidence of divine enabling. In the coronation ode recorded in Psalm 21:1, strength is the divine enabling of the king, by which alone his reign is a success.

C. He will be great. God promised David that Israel would be planted, and they would remain where they are, never to be disturbed again (2 Sam. 7:10). This ideal would take place in the sweeping reign of the Coming One, whose fame was to be spread worldwide. In fact, the "ends of the earth" depict a worldwide empire.

D. He will be our Peace. The One who is coming, Micah preached, was One who could manage what no one else could.

CONCLUSION:

"O little town of Bethlehem." So long ago they hoped for a military Leader who could conquer. They believed He would be born in Bethlehem. So long ago they believed that an ideal Ruler would come and deliver them. So long ago they were confident that the Ruler would be a Shepherd, Protector, and Guide. So long ago they believed that peace would result. So many lived and died without seeing their hope come to fruition.

But we live and celebrate the coming of One born in Bethlehem. He didn't muster armed forces, but He conquered. He didn't rule like potentates. He served and washed feet

and spent time with outcasts. He delivered all who would be delivered. He was a shepherd. In fact He said of himself, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, NASB). In Him we have peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading	Isa. 60:1
Processional	"The First Noel"
Prayer of Blessing	
Ministers of Music	"Canticle of Joy"
Children's Choir	"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson	Mic. 5:1-5a
Choral Response	"O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
The Second Lesson	Heb. 10:5-10
Hymn of Response	"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"
The People's Prayer at the Altar	
Congregational Response	"Emmanuel"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture	Lev. 27:28
Offertory Prayer	

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson	Luke 1:39-55
The Doxology	
The Sermon	"THE WORD OF THE LORD THAT CAME TO MICAH"
Closing Hymn	"O Little Town of Bethlehem" (final verse)

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. . . . Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created' [Rev. 4:8, 11, NASB]. As your created ones, grant us blessing as we give You that which You alone deserve. We offer our worship in the name of our coming Lord. Amen."

Prayers of the People

"We praise You, we worship You, we adore You, for You are our Shepherd. While we talk about our wants, You supply our needs—eternal ones. While we try to squeeze more out of a day than we should, You purpose to grant us rest and renewal. While we fill our waking moments with radio, TV, conversations, and videos, You lead us in quietness. While we nigh on kill ourselves to make a dollar, You purpose to restore our soul. While we company with evil and are bombarded with filth of every kind, You purpose to lead us in righteousness. In ignorance and self-reliance, we march until we drop. And then You comfort us, and feed us, and bless us, not as reward but as expressions of Your loving-kindness. And in spite of ourselves and all because of Christ Jesus, we may abide with You all the days of our lives. To God be the glory. Amen."

Benediction

"May the mercy and grace of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you now and forever. Amen."

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

by Randall E. Davey

Titus 2:11-14

December 27, 1992

INTRO:

During the summers of my elementary school years, my sister and I fended for ourselves during the day, since both of our parents worked. My sis and I typically awakened to a quiet house and unstructured days, punctuated by the daily TV episode of "The Millionaire" and an occasional chore. My sister, being a few years older, was the designated boss, but she rarely tried to pull rank.

One daily ritual remains fixed in my mind. Since my mother left for her factory job in the wee hours of the morning, she invariably left a note for us on the kitchen table. It was predictable and read something like this. "There is lunch meat in the fridge for sandwiches. Bread and potato chips in the cupboard. Fix Kool-Aid to drink. R, don't forget to mow Fanny Crown's yard; and B, fold the clothes."

Nothing on the note was new information. We had gone over it the night before. The note was just a reminder. Paul's letter to Titus, both personal and official, was basically a reminder. The reminder wasn't just to shore up Titus' memory. It was designed to encourage him in his ministry.

Titus, a Gentile probably converted under Paul's ministry, was a third generation Christian. He was like a son to Paul (1:4), and the letter is laced with paternal tones.

Titus probably received the letter during his ministry to the Cretans, of whom it was said they were among the most contemptible, despised, and oppressed people of the Mediterranean world. He worked specifically with the poor and dispossessed.

His task was even more difficult since the future of Christianity seemed highly doubtful to any discerning soul. Persecution threatened the very existence of the loosely linked house churches.

Facing overwhelming odds, Titus served in a hostile environment, passing on the Christian message. Paul wrote to remind Titus of basic truths that Titus' crowd needed to hear over and over.

That letter, written in antiquity, has a contemporary ring.

ILLUS. Since the November 9, 1989, fall of the Berlin wall, one cannot help but feel part of the rapidly unfolding worldwide drama being played out with daily scene changes. Plummeting real estate prices, bank failures, the fall of the communist regime, nuclear disarmament, food shortages, the AIDS epidemic, recession, and talk of global depression fuel survivalist thinking. Credible authors are urging persons to hoard food, buy guns, move to warm climates, away from all cities as steps to survive the coming rough times. One can easily become preoccupied with mere survival and lose sight of eternal matters.

The Lord spoke through Paul's pen to an anxious audience: "I encourage God's own people to have more faith and to understand the truth about religion" (1:1, BTF).

I. Paul reminded Titus that God wants a people for His own possession

God rescued us from evil that we might be a people. It had to be a word of comfort to early-century Cretan ears. They were considered the scum of the earth. Now they were hearing that God wanted them to be His possession.

A. As used in the Bible, the term "people of God" typically refers to common folk as opposed to the ruling class. Ordinary people are linked to a common origin—none other than Jesus.

B. Things were going from bad to worse. Some of them were soon to be slaughtered. Undoubtedly, they felt abandoned and disconnected. Titus was to reassure them that they were God's possession, dead or alive.

C. We children of the Enlightenment pride ourselves on such things as individuality. Instead of thinking as a people, we revel in our separateness.

ILLUS. One Sunday a parishioner commented on the way out of service, "If you're interested, I'll tell you what I think that passage means, and I don't know Greek or Hebrew!" He went on to discount the value of commentaries before giving a view of the passage that sounded very American and very male and very unchristlike, yet he was proud of it.

"But the Bible was written to a people," I countered. "What do you think the passage means to the community of faith and how do you respond to the way the church has historically understood this passage?"

"Don't know and could care less"; and with that, the conversation ended.

D. God isn't interested in a bunch of lone rangers who argue from their own vantage point. He rescues us from ourselves, born with the self turned inward, born with a bent toward sin. He redeems us from a life given over to the pursuit of self-centered interests and delivers us into the context of relationships, persons with whom we can hammer out the basics of salvation—as a people.

The Church exists today as "the called-out ones," gathering around the Word, informed and Spirit-shaped.

II. Paul reminded Titus that the people of God were distinctly different

The Cretans were about to go under in every way imaginable. Paul urges Titus to remind them that God had already saved them. God's kindness was evidenced in Jesus, who saved them and was present as Savior. He would save them for all of time. In that they were distinctly different from so much of the world who had to rely solely upon might. They were distinctly and uniquely God's.

ILLUS. Not long ago, a researcher from Princeton University interviewed me as part of a study on religion in Ameri-

ca. "Nazarene?" she said quizzically. "How is that different from the church down the street? What is your distinctive?" Paul could have answered more quickly than I.

A. The people of God are trained to deal with their wicked ways by repenting and purposing to imitate Jesus. It's not so much a matter of the will as it is a response to God's graciousness that makes it possible.

B. The people of God are taught to live in harmony with the person, work, and ministry of Jesus. That means, they want to live sensibly and in right relationship with God and humankind. They believe the Christ of the Resurrection is presently at work in them. With Paul, they confess, "I have died, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20, BTF).

C. The people of God are instructed to be a people of hope. The word "hope" has become synonymous with wish. Interchangeably, folk may say, "I wish I would win a million dollars," but they know it's just a wish. That's not the hope about which Paul wrote.

To those soon to die, Paul encouraged Titus to remind them that Jesus promised to come back. That enabled them to look beyond present circumstance to see that which really mattered.

ILLUS. "I'm ruined. I worked a lifetime to have what I have, and now it's all gone. I'm ruined." The confession of a homeowner whose home, furnishings, and personal memorabilia had been destroyed by fire. Ruined? Not for the people of God. Murdered? Awful, but not the worst thing that could happen for the people of God. Unemployed? Terminally ill? Crippled? Maybe. But not ruined! As Paul penned the reminder, one can imagine the early strains of "My hope is built on nothing less . . ." straining to be penned.

D. The people of God are purified. They are the product of God's handiwork, as much as trees and streams and mountains. We were slaves and He freed us. The mystery of the Cross! The wonder of the Resurrection! The coming Lord set us free from every wrong, and He cleansed us. That's a distinction!

III. Paul reminded Titus that the people of God are zealous for good deeds

The word "zealous" (NASB) was not a new one to this crowd. They knew of Zealots, fanatics bent on overthrowing any kind of political rule. Zealots they could be, but zealots for Christ's sake. They were to be a sign to the unsaved that God in Christ makes humankind distinctly different.

A. They were to pour themselves into the lives of fellow Christians, especially the poor. Those beyond "the household of faith" were to be the recipients of their care (see Gal. 6:10, KJV).

ILLUS. A friend was reading a popular economic forecaster. In response he concluded that he would do everything possible to flee the coming rough times. He planned to squirrel away food, clothing, medicine, and

gold-backed currency. Not long into the project, he realized that if he saved all he could and then met someone thirsting, he would be compelled for Christ's sake to give a cup of cold water until there was no more to give.

B. Oppressed, maligned, and persecuted Cretans were reminded to be model citizens, even unto death (3:1ff.). Grace would make possible the reshaping of sinful humanity into the people of God.

CONCLUSION:

Only by grace can we be called the people of God. Are you numbered among His people? Redeemed? Purified? Full of hope? Living rightly? Denying evil? Zealous for good works? If not, you can be. The invitation to receive God's saving grace has been extended by Jesus Christ himself.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Antiphonal Scripture Reading	Isa. 6:3
Congregational Hymn	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
Prayer of Blessing	
Responsive Reading	"The Ten Commandments"
Gloria Patri	
The First Lesson	Isa. 9:2-7
Psalm 96 (read in its entirety)	
The Second Lesson	Titus 2:11-14
Congregational Response	"Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
	Luke 2:1-20
The Gospel Lesson	
The Sermon	"THE PEOPLE OF GOD"
Confession of the Apostles' Creed	
The People's Prayers	
The Lord's Prayer	
The Celebration of Communion	
The Offering	
Congregational Response	"Arise, My Soul, Arise"
The Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Offertory Sentence

"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:14).

Communion

During the ministration of Communion, appropriate hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.

INTERESTED IN THE PRIESTHOOD?

by Randall E. Davey

1 Pet. 2:9-10a

January 3, 1993

INTRO:

According to First Clement, Peter, a leader and spokesman for the early disciples, fell victim to Nero's great persecution. Some speculate that his First Epistle was written in the early 60s, a few years before his tragic demise.

The tone is pastoral, warm, and supportive, written to persons converted from paganism to Christianity. In so doing, they were subject to misunderstanding and cruel treatment. Peter tried to help them see their present sufferings in light of eternity, a perspective with which he died.

Since they were under surveillance, this passage deals with the duty of Christians to be holy in their conduct. While Paul tells new converts to "put off . . . the old man" (Eph. 4:22, KJV), Peter encourages them to make a distinct break with their past. Put aside every kind of evil, deception, and malevolence. These folks were soon to die.

ILLUS. I visited an acquaintance who was in prison for crimes against persons. While incarcerated, he underwent mandatory therapy. Though it didn't lessen his sentence, he felt somewhat relieved to know that persons most frequently act out aggressively when under pressure. He had lost his job, his wife, and his home. To people under equally significant stress, Peter wrote.

In Peter's mind, believers start life over. He compares them to "newborn babes," who should "long for the pure milk of the word" (2:2, NASB). This alludes to a custom of drinking milk after baptism, which, mixed with honey, was considered to be Messianic food (Exod. 3:8). Here it is a symbol of the Word, for which the Christian is to hunger and thirst so that one may grow.

The metaphor changes from "babes" to "living stones" (v. 5). Later, the new converts are called "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (v. 9, NASB), terms of honor initially reserved for Israel. These collective "identities" stand out as significant. Living stones compare with Jewish altars on which priests make offerings. When Paul speaks of such offerings in Rom. 12:1, he refers to committing one's whole life to God.

The duty of the truly chosen people is to proclaim the wonderful deeds of the God who has called them. Proclamation consists in irreproachable conduct.

The recipients of the letter lived in various degrees of duress. Beaten down for a new belief! Alienated for being different! Persecuted and killed for a way of life! Hardly a sign of honor.

ILLUS. As professional football teams near the playoffs, there are winners and losers. Some of the losers aren't all that bad. One team that fell to the bottom of the pile this year has lost all of its games by 7 points or less. Their coach was asked, "How can you keep your players psyched to play the final game when they know that they will finish last regardless of the outcome?"

"I tell them that they are winners, that they can and will play like winners, and will probably win the game."

More than one team has risen from defeat to eliminate a contender.

God in Christ reminds us that we are new creatures, given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-18, NASB).

I. You have something significant in common

Peter tells his readers that they have a common life and descent; they are people of the same nature. They are holy, a word from which 20th-century readers recoil. "Holy" does not denote perfection in terms of performance. The word "holy" in the Greek text means literally "set apart for the service of Deity."

Peter told them that they were God's own possession.

ILLUS. Possessions have worth largely because of their possessor. I'm still amazed when I read that persons bid thousands of dollars for Michael Jackson's glove or Elvis Presley's car or some such memorabilia. If the "glove" were found independent of the Jackson tag, it would be discarded, deemed worthless since its counterpart wasn't found.

The Christians to whom Peter wrote felt they had no worth or were of little value to God, since things weren't working out well for them. With job loss and other economic adversity, one is tempted today to assume that God has turned a deaf ear. In that moment, one should read 1 Pet. 2:9—true then and true now.

These persons to whom Peter wrote were valued as a chosen race, owned and set apart by God for His purposes. He chose to use His "possession" as priests.

A. Being labeled with terms exclusively used of Israel must have been an obstacle. The concept of "holy" did not fit 1st-century Christians any more than 20th-century disciples. Peter contended that their holiness would be expressed in their identity as priests.

B. Believers are "king-priests" associated with the Lord Jesus, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Calling the Church a "body of priests" emphasizes its corporate nature.

C. The 1st-century understanding of "priesthood" was like a 20th-century view.

ILLUS. The 1st-century priesthood referred exclusively to the Levites. Today, 20th-century Protestants would assume it refers to Catholic clergy. In either case, the term applied to "professional" religious persons through whom laypersons make contact with God.

For centuries, the priests held exclusive rights to certain ceremonial, religious acts. The thought that everyone was a priest seemed ludicrous.

II. You are a royal priesthood

In view of life or death, they were to be a royal priesthood, and that was an old idea.

A. God through Moses addresses Israel, saying, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6, NASB). Israel had arrived where

God would make them into a religious community peculiarly His. The multitude that had escaped from Egypt was unified into the beginnings of a nation. This period has great importance for understanding God's will as it was revealed in the heart of the law.

B. They were to be a ministering community. Everyone had a unique religious task as though he were standing at Sinai, hearing the thunder and the horn and the Voice.

Fearing for their lives, they had a tendency toward self-preservation. But, in face of death, Peter calls them to think of others.

C. As a priest mediates between God and man, God called Israel to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth. This was written before the "professional priesthood" developed. Nevertheless, it represents God's intent.

D. "And has made us to be a kingdom and priests" (Rev. 1:6). The Scripture is saying, "You shall be, you are, you were made to be" a kingdom of priests.

III. You are who you are—that you may proclaim

When I have looked at this passage, I have been lost in the idea of priesthood. I've reflected on the Reformation's celebration of the "universal priesthood of believers" and the marked regression the church has experienced since then. As priesthood is an expression of holiness, proclamation is an expression of priesthood.

A. The priesthood praises God for His gracious dealings and glorious attributes. The Church is to "advertise" the noble acts of God in history.

ILLUS. An old adage says, "A satisfied customer is the best advertisement." That thought convicted me. What have I advertised?

B. Christians are reminded of God's action in bringing them "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (v. 9, NASB). "Those who look to him are radiant" (Ps. 34:5). "Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:14, 16, KJV).

C. The church is to be a joyous community, constantly and gratefully declaring the "wondrous works" of God.

ILLUS. I grew up hearing testimonies of fairly short order—long before the "care and share" style of the '80s and '90s. "I'm saved, sanctified, and satisfied," they would say. But Peter saw testimony of life and lip as an opportunity to "declare."

J. G. Morrison was known for saying that testimony was second only to preaching in terms of its convincing value to the non-believer. This passage informs the church concerning the content of profitable testimonies.

D. The sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving symbolize the fact that the holiness of the church is for the sake of the world. David sang, "My vows to thee I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life" (Ps. 56:12-13, RSV).

CONCLUSION:

You are chosen to be a people of priests! You have received mercy. You have been redeemed. Live and rejoice, showing God's praise.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Ps. 92:1

Procession "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

Prayer of Blessing

Ministers of Music "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

Choral Response "Gloria Patri"

Greetings

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Exod. 19:1-6

Choral Response "Thy Word"

The Second Lesson 1 Pet. 2:9-10a

A Moment for Meditation

Hymn of Response "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

The People's Prayer at the Altar

Congregational Response "Something Beautiful"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture 2 Cor. 9:7

Offertory Prayer

Vocal Offertory

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Matt. 21:33-46

The Doxology

The Sermon "INTERESTED IN THE PRIESTHOOD?"

Closing Hymn "Called unto Holiness"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"Lord, we are not inclined to give glory. Instead, we're more likely to want glory. We are not inclined to kneel in reverence. Instead, we're more likely to want folk to defer to us. Thank You for granting us grace to see, here and now, that one day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

"Until that time, may our Lord's days be opportunities to practice that which we will gladly do for eternity. This we pray in spirit and in truth and in the Name. Amen."

Prayer of Offering

"Habitually we ask for Your blessings, Father, on offerings we bring.

"Today, we ask for You to bless our understanding so that we can see how we fit into the scheme of things. Help us to willingly give of ourselves, our time, and our attention to the neighbors closest to us—those with whom we live.

"May all of our possessions be expressions of our attitude toward You and life in the Kingdom. Amen."

ANOINTED AND SENT

by Randall E. Davey

Isa. 61:1-4

January 10, 1993

INTRO:

This text reads like a preacher's idealistic, self-imposed job description delivered on his inaugural Sunday. At a glance, one may dismiss the rhetoric as good intentions overcome by optimism.

Obviously, the Word deserves more than a cursory glance. Perhaps it's the modern "can do" spirit in me that focuses on the "to do" list (vv. 1-3).

ILLUS. A few years ago, I passionately maintained that computers were toys of the affluent, something with which we have gotten along without for, lo, these many years and, frankly, something I never intended to have. But now I have one.

Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't tell me about a new software program that will save me zillions of hours with a punch of the key. I buy them and don't have a second to spare.

One of the programs installed on my personal computer is called "Task Manager." I used to have lists written on anything and everything. I now can conveniently transfer every list to the task manager. It asks me to give priorities to the tasks, the due day, and some pertinent note about it. When I turn my computer on, the Task Manager Program boots up automatically. When it does, the computer makes an obnoxious alarm clock sort of sound at the same time the screen is flashing, "21 Tasks PAST due!" The word, "PAST" is capitalized. The exclamation point is there also. I feel ashamed and blamed by my own computer. But it trains me to think in terms of tasks.

I'm dominated by time management and task lists. Many of us value being called "effective."

Added to that, I am a Type A personality. I've often wondered how men like Isaiah made it through their ministry not knowing if they were Type A or not. But I tend to read every Bible character through my Type A eyes and believe, that the bulk were similarly wired, Jesus being the notable exception.

All of that means that I tend to take charge, handle tasks in a timely and responsible way, believing that whatever the mind can conceive and believe one is addicted and driven to achieve. Three guesses, then, on how I initially read Isa. 61:1-4!

You're thinking, This is a terribly long and involved introduction for a four-verse text. There's reason to my method.

We are in such a habit of getting things done, being somewhere on time, and finishing with excellence that which we have started, that we can't divorce that mentality from the way we think about Scripture.

I jump past Isa. 61:1 and get on with the job. Too much work to do to sit around and reflect! But it's only when we allow the Word to shape us and the Spirit to speak to us that we reach the understandings that God intended.

I. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me

Isaiah said a mouthful when he confessed that he had been anointed. Anointing language was normally reserved for political types, not preacher types (see 2 Sam. 23:1-7).

A. Anointing was the method whereby one received the Spirit. With the giving of the Spirit came the power to carry out whatever one was called to do. The king had the power to carry out the law of the land. Since Isaiah was anointed, he had the power to fulfil his promises, unlike the politicians.

ILLUS. American President Bush admitted his frustration at the comparison being made between his Gulf War performance and his ineffective domestic policy. During the war, he was empowered to tell the military what to do, and they did it. On the domestic front, he can tell Congress what he wants done, but the legislation can be lost in committee, modified, or defeated. The president doesn't always have the power to get things done.

B. Isaiah's testimony had to be good news. They were in absolutely despicable condition. Many had come back to a home they never knew, born as children of the Exile. Though they had returned from captivity with high hopes, they were now given to hopelessness, depression, and poverty.

ILLUS. In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Kuwaitis were liberated from Hussein's murderous hand. The television network CNN revealed the impoverished look of the liberated, devastated and ravished by war. Inadequate medical supplies, bombed cities, and mine-laden fields brought the liberated economy to its knees.

II. The Lord anointed Isaiah to bring good news

To disadvantaged and economically oppressed, a warm coat or a loaf of bread may warrant a smile but not jubilation. Isaiah proclaimed "the favorable year of the Lord" (v. 2, NASB).

A. Commentators suggest that the favorable year of the Lord was actually the Year of Jubilee, mentioned in Lev. 25:8-55. It's a moving account of forgiveness that may never have been a social reality. The idea worked something like this.

Every 50 years came an economic leveling, which no 20th-century politician would have the nerve to suggest. Land was to return to its rightful owners. Slaves were released. Debts were waived.

B. Captives and prisoners were in debtors' prisons. If this was indeed the favorable year of the Lord, now they were candidates for release. In their despair, they were called to celebration. The released will surely rejoice.

ILLUS. I bought a small, two-bedroom house as rental property. Not long into the arrangement, I determined that one should know more than I knew and be more ca-

pable than I to be a landlord. So I sold it without the aid of a realtor. No problem.

Years later, I got a document from the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, notifying me that the couple to whom I sold the house had declared bankruptcy. That house, their delinquent payments, and fees were now my responsibility.

That news rained on our parade. It could have been financially devastating. For one year it was never far from my mind. Every purchase I made, I made in light of the debt that might fall my way.

For reasons I'll never understand, my attorney called to say that the bank had released us from liability. The case was closed. My heaviness of heart and yearlong sobriety of spirit was transformed instantly, and I couldn't hide the smile.

III. Good news makes a real difference

Isaiah's ministry was not relegated to a week of special services. His ministry resulted in real change.

A. The devastated community would be renamed "oaks of righteousness" (v. 3). A new name signaled a new reality. The new reality would bring glory to the Lord.

ILLUS. I walked through a park not far from home and counted 14 trees that didn't survive the Kansas drought of '91. They stood erect but lifeless, victims of an unquenched thirst.

I passed an old, scarred oak, home to squirrels and a poorly built tree house. One limb supported a homemade swing. The bark was stripped. But there it stood, full of life, resilient, a testimony to its strength and vitality.

B. The released are free to rebuild so that the ruins can become inhabitable again. They were released to rebuild to God's glory. Indeed it was a new day!

CONCLUSION:

On the heels of His baptism, Jesus visited a synagogue, read today's text from the scroll, and identified with it by saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, NASB). It has been called the mission statement of Christ's Church.

How do we release? I'm not empowered to release you from your debt. You don't owe me. I'm not empowered to right economic wrongs from which you have suffered. But as a member of Christ's Church, the message of release is mine to proclaim.

In a sense we hold sway over one another. To the extent that I want you to live up to my expectations, I hold you in bondage. It happens in marriages, in friendships, and in work relationships. Unless you act like I think you ought to act, or talk like I want you to talk, or think like I want you to think, I will not love you to the extent that I could. I simply choose not to reward you if you insist on being different from my expectations.

Sound familiar? It makes me wonder how someone would respond if I said that you can do life as you feel that you should. If it doesn't line up with my expectations, it's fine. Though I reserve the right to hold my own opinions and I reserve the right to grieve for you if I must, I will love you none-the-less. You are released to be who you ought to be for Jesus' sake.

That's foreign speech to most of the world. Especially

for those who haven't yet heard the Lord say, "Forgiven." "You're released." "Redemption is possible because of Christ Jesus." "You can be a new creature—to My glory."

Unless the Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, we'll expect folks to line up with our way of seeing things. But when the Spirit whispers release, we can't help but whisper it with Him.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading	Ps. 92:1
Processional	"O Worship the King"
Prayer of Blessing	
Choral Response	"Gloria Patri"
Confession	Pastor: "Christ is risen!"
	People: "He is risen indeed!"
Ministers of Music	"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"
Greetings	

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson	Isa. 61:1-4
Choral Response	"O for a Thousand Tongues"
The Second Lesson	Acts 8:14-17
A Moment for Meditation	
Hymn of Response	"And Can It Be?"
The People's Prayer at the Altar	
Congregational Response	"Because He Lives"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture	Rom. 12:1
Offertory Prayer	
Choral Offertory	"My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson	Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
The Doxology	
The Sermon	"ANOINTED AND SENT"
Choral Benediction	"Set Me as a Seal"

Creative Worship Ideas

Greetings

Invite the congregation to engage in the act of affirmation as they greet each other. Encourage congregants to affirm persons for evidences of Christian graces and acts of service.

Offertory Prayer

"All that we are and all that we have we owe to You. In giving of our means, we indicate our willingness to give ourselves to You and Your kingdom. It's another way of saying, 'Have Thine own way.' The offerings are made in Jesus' name. Amen."

Doxology

The Doxology is a response to the Word. Some communities of faith respond with a variety of verbal acknowledgments that God has just spoken through His Word.

Note

This order of service allows for a 60-minute service with at least 20 minutes to preach. The missing element is announcements, which are characteristically relegated to one page of the worship folder.

WHATEVER IS A PRETTY BROAD TERM

by Randall E. Davey

Col. 3:12-17

January 17, 1993

INTRO:

Colossae was the San Francisco of Asia. Richter scales were broken more than once by quakes in the Lycus River Valley. Neighboring city Laodicea was twice destroyed by destructive tremors. But, as a testimony to the area's deep pockets, reconstruction was accomplished without government grants or aid.

The beautiful valley had the makings of a national park. The chalk-laden waters of the Lycus formed incrustations that spread like a stony shroud over the ground. The description brought to mind Utah's Bryce Canyon, where formations remind one of the skyline of Moscow. Typical of volcanic areas, ground that wasn't covered by ash was extremely fertile and good ground for pasturing sheep. Reputedly, the area was a world center for the wool industry.

Actually, Colossae stood as one of three cities built in view of each other and ultimately was deemed the least important of them. Neighboring Laodicea became the political and financial headquarters of the valley, while Hierapolis found fame for its trade and healing spas. At one time Colossae was equally significant, but eventually it was said that "the glory had departed."

They remained noteworthy, however, in religious circles, but that wasn't Who's Who material either. On the contrary, their notoriety resulted from a sweeping heresy identified as gnosticism.

Gnostics believed that spirit alone is good and that matter is essentially flawed and evil. That understanding gave rise to a fully developed but destructive worldview. (1) They insisted that God did not create the world, because He couldn't have anything to do with evil matter. (2) Jesus, then, could not have had a "flesh and blood" body. Rather, He must have been a spiritual phantom. They even said that when Jesus walked, He left no footprints. (3) Since the body is evil, it either must be kept under and denied. If the body is evil, what difference does it make what one does with it? (4) Gnosticism was a highly intellectual way of life. Man must fight his way to God, and only a few ever attain contact with Him. (5) Jewish Gnostics insisted that the way to God was tied closely to ritual and ceremonial law.

The Christian church at Colossae to which Paul wrote was mainly a Gentile church that Paul had not founded or visited. Through Paul's partner, Epaphras, the church's probable founder, Paul learned of the problems that were brewing.

I. Paul addressed the Colossian Christians as the "chosen of God" (v. 12, NASB)

That sounds a bit like Peter's words, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9, RSV). Those had been terms applied to Jews and later to Jesus.

A. Paul was saying that there was no longer a "favored nation status." Now, all who responded to God's grace could be part of His great Christ-centered

community. Believers are not called to be holy isolationists.

B. Paul uses the language of clothing to convey his teaching. Colossians should put on qualities seen in the life of Jesus. In another letter, he simply says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14, RSV).

ILLUS. As a kid growing up in Cambridge, Ohio, I would traditionally ask my mother, "What can I get you for Christmas?"

Without fail, my mother would say, "Just be good." That wasn't the kind of response I had in mind. I was thinking more along the line of a coffee mug. If I pressed her a bit, she would say, "I mean it. Be good. Clean your room. Make your bed. Mow the lawn. Be nice to your sister. Obey."

C. Sometimes Paul said, "Be holy"; at other times, he spelled out what it meant to be holy. Paul knew that Jews had been cautioned to keep God's commandments (Deut 7:6-11) and to be holy, as He is holy (Lev. 11:44). Men and women of the new creation should inevitably exhibit something of His nature.

II. The chosen of God should imitate God's Chosen One

Paul explains how the church is to be Jesus to each other.

A. Put on a heart of compassion. In that day, there was no provision for the aged. The physically and mentally disadvantaged were barely tolerated. Jesus stood as the Model of compassion. With compassion He looked at the multitude as sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34).

B. Put on kindness. Josephus contended that Isaac was an example of kindness in that he dug wells and gave them to others, insisting they weren't worth fighting over (Gen. 26:17-25). Kindness is identified as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). "Taste and see that the Lord is good," says the Psalmist (34:8). Paul writes, "Continue in his kindness" (Rom. 11:22).

C. Put on humility. That has been a stumbling block for humankind who crave recognition and attention. Those who walk with God must humble themselves (Mic. 6:8) because He prefers to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit (Isa. 57:15).

D. Put on gentleness. Moses was very gentle in facing undeserved criticism without giving way to rage. Instead, he interceded for offenders (Num. 12:13). The Psalmist said, "The humble will inherit the land" (37:11, NASB).

E. Put on patience. God, who is patient (Exod. 34:6), demonstrates the same through His people. To the extent that we are patient, we testify of His patience. Paul contends that love is patient (1 Cor. 13:4).

ILLUS. Regardless of the severity of winter weather, our

seven-year-old Ashley has to be reminded to zip up her coat and don her hat. In her excitement to play, she will dash out into subzero temperature oblivious to danger.

Christ's Church must heed Paul's reminder to be properly clothed before entering into community.

III. Imitation of the Lord reaches its zenith in forgiveness

New clothes generally need alteration. "Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (v. 12) don't fit like tailored garments on bodies habituated to wearing "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed" (v. 5, NASB). When we try to be compassionate or kind, someone will suspiciously ask, "What's with you? You're not acting yourself!" And they're right. You are not acting yourself. You are allowing Jesus to be expressed in you.

A. Give your brother some room and forgive him. It has little to do with what he deserves or how you feel about it. It has to do with God's response to your own record (v. 13).

B. "Put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (v. 14). Love holds the whole Christian body together. Any body of people sooner or later tend to fly apart. Love is the one bond that will hold them together in unbreakable fellowship. In 1 Cor. 13:13, love is listed as the supreme Christian grace. Love checks the selfish, hard tempers that keep people apart. Love expresses divine life in the community.

C. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (v. 15). One scholar paraphrased it this way, "Let the peace of God be the umpire in your hearts" (see Williams). The way to right action is to appoint Jesus Christ as the Arbiter. If peace is sacrificed in hammering out differences, the body has been fractured in defiance of the will of God.

ILLUS. I grieve every time I hear of church splits, regardless of the number of folks involved. A split that results in one family or one person leaving a fellowship is just as tragic as a whole group seceding. It's a sad commentary on God's people saved by grace.

D. Be thankful. Paul said of the pagan world, "Although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks" (Rom. 1:21, RSV). If all humanity owes thanksgiving to God, how much more should the redeemed thank Him?

ILLUS. For a long time I have believed that worship should be rich with persons spontaneously "teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (v. 16, NASB). I can't escape the prophet's dream that the "chosen ones" were created to be a people of praise. That's the tenor of the community where the Word of Christ richly dwells within.

CONCLUSION:

The grand finale of the text is verse 17. Paul addressed basics for Christian relationships within the community. He summarizes with a life principle: "Whatever you do . . . in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 17). The Christian's whole life must be lived in obedience to Him.

"Whatever" I do—my labor, my leisure, my relationships, my solitude, my possessions, my dreams are all an expression of thanksgiving.

I suspect that you share my feelings of being overwhelmed at the "whatevers" of our lives. Join me in prayer, asking the Spirit to grace us sufficiently so that whatever we do in word and deed will be an expression of thanks for His redemptive work in us, reflecting the risen Christ at work through us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God Almighty"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Psalm 100
Processional "How Great Thou Art"
Prayer of Blessing
Ministers of Music "The Old Hundredth"
Choral Response "Gloria Patri"
Greetings

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Isa. 61:1-3
Choral Response "Sing Praise to God Our Rock"
The Second Lesson Col. 3:12-17
Hymn of Response "My Wonderful Lord"
The People's Prayer at the Altar
Congregational Response "He Touched Me"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture Eph. 5:2
Vocal Offertory

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Luke 2:41-51
The Doxology
The Sermon

**"WHATEVER IS A PRETTY
BROAD TERM"**
"Such Love"

Closing Hymn

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

"Lord, we gather as disciples this Lord's day to seek first Your kingdom. That reflects our intentions, even though our minds are racing in all directions.

"We can't help but think of the week that is forever history. We wonder about the way we did what we did. We wonder if it was good enough. And we think about the week to come and wonder if we'll make it. We think about ordinary things like jobs and cars and houses and bills. Yet we want to seek first Your kingdom.

"We're fortunate that You know our needs before we voice them. We know that we don't really know our needs, but we think we do.

"It's hard to think that today may make an eternal difference, but it might. Help us to hear what You choose to say, knowing that You might speak through a hymn or chorus, through testimony or prayer, through silence or sermon. Amen."

SOMEONE OUGHT TO READ SCRIPTURE

by Randall E. Davey

Neh. 8:1-4, 5-6, 8-10

January 24, 1993

INTRO:

An ad hoc committee planned this fifth-century B.C. dedication service held at Water Gate Square, Jerusalem. Phase three of the building project had gone over the cost estimate and the time estimate.

Father Ezra, a priest, had arrived in Jerusalem in 458 to promote religious reform. Jerusalem had been destroyed years earlier. The Temple was mere rubble. Religious life was nothing like the ceremonial past of tradition.

After a long stint of Babylonian oppression, the fate of the Jews had gone from bad to worse. Cyrus of Persia overran Babylonia and permitted displaced persons to return home to rebuild their centers of religious life in exchange for loyalty.

Not all the Jews in Babylonia took the offer. Some were doing quite well financially and opted to stay behind but donate to the "Rebuild Jerusalem Fund." The folks who did return to Jerusalem tended to be poor and unskilled. Though their building fund was impressive, it didn't take much opposition from the locals for their enthusiasm to be quelled. The work stopped.

Nehemiah, appointed governor of Judah by Artaxerxes, arrived in 445 and boosted Ezra's construction efforts. Both men were bent on pushing through religious reforms. Both were especially concerned about purity of heart.

So, 25 years into the project, the overanxious dedication committee planned a celebration to coincide with the New Year's celebration. The crowd gathered near the recently completed wall for the ceremony. Perhaps there were a few speeches and thank-yous before the "planned spontaneous" request for the reading of the Law.

No one thought the feast would take the sober twist that it did after the Scripture was read. It was supposed to be an innocent, ceremonial reading of the Law.

ILLUS. Being a preacher includes being the token prayer. I was asked to give the invocation for a convention of insurance underwriters. Prior to my spot on the program was a professional comedian whose humor was predictably raw. I was tempted to preach instead of pray. But one could tell that the planners of the convention banquet saw no conflict between the comedian's material and my prayer.

Regardless of the committee's motives, Ezra seized the opportunity and read the Word from dawn till noon!

I. All the people gathered as one

"The people gathered . . . as one man," a primitive kind of congregation. Though not a worship service, it was certainly a sacred celebration. All who could understand were welcomed there.

A. There was an air of excitement as they stood shoulder to shoulder, "clients of a common God." Some stared at the walls, remembering the rocks that

they had put in place. The finished product represented something that they had done as a people.

B. Babylonian captivity had devastated their sense of being a people. In the midst of celebration, they couldn't help but think of relatives still in a foreign land.

ILLUS. We 20th-century Americans find it difficult to understand the profundity of oneness, since individuality and "self-madness" are cherished. We honor the "man of the year," or the "woman of the year" while other countries think in more corporate ways.

The president of a major Japanese company was asked, "Who invented the product for which your company is famous?"

"Oh, 2,000 employees did," he responded. They don't think in terms of individual efforts but in that which is good for the company.

C. That fifth-century B.C. crowd gathered as a people and positioned themselves to hear what God had to say.

Every time the congregation gathers reminds us that we are a people, to whom we are called to minister and who are called to minister to us. We're not in it alone. We are a people.

II. Ezra read the Scripture to all the people

Ezra started reading at dawn. This might have been the first recorded sunrise service!

In preparation for the dedicatory ceremonies, workmen had built a scaffolding large enough to hold at least 12 men. A wooden podium served to support the Law from which he read.

A. Ezra stood to read, and the people stood as well. They remained standing as long as he read. Standing is a natural human posture for respect.

ILLUS. Out of respect for the law, persons in a courtroom stand when a judge enters the room.

B. Ezra prayed a prayer of invocation. "The people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands" (v. 6, NASB). In the longer tradition of the church, the "amen" was a corporate word, an expression of "peopleness." The lifting up of the hands indicated that one was open to receive from the Lord.

C. Then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. These physical gestures were tokens of honor and reverence, an antidote to pride. They witnessed to the presence of the Holy and indicated their spirit of submission in His presence.

D. "All the people were attentive" (v. 3, RSV). They listened with interest and openness.

ILLUS. A parishioner complained to me about the Scripture readings. "They're too boring. I don't like hearing someone read more than a few verses at a time!"

Surely a casual dismissal of the reading of the Word as

boring or a preliminary that could easily be eliminated for the sake of time misses the dynamic in the formation of the people of God.

E. The Word was read and explained. Even the church board got in on the act (v. 7). Several of them read and then moved through the crowd, explaining the import of the lessons. The Law was understood to be God's instructions for life. Ezra reminded them of what they had forgotten.

III. The attentive crowd responded to the reading of the Word

Some communities of faith respond to the reading of the Word by saying, "Thanks be to God," or "Praise be to Thee, O Christ." They say it in unison as a congregation. Ezra's crowd grieved and cried openly.

A. It had been a long time since they had been able to worship as a people. For the majority, this experience may have been a first.

B. They may have been reminded that they were to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors too.

C. Perhaps some prayed prayers of repentance. Others may have wept in fear of judgment.

D. They listened with attentive ears and responded with sensitive hearts. Every time the Word is read or heard, one can either be confirmed or convicted. God speaks through His Word. He intends for His people to hear and respond.

IV. Nehemiah and Ezra sing a duet

Both the governor and the priest respond to the weeping and wailing with an odd announcement. They say, "Don't worry. Be happy." The people are told to eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, give some food to the poor, and remember, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

A. I couldn't imagine saying to folks convicted by a sermon and moved to pray, "Don't cry! This is the day we celebrate the Resurrection. Go! Eat till you're full! Rejoice."

B. Regardless of their sin, God was a loving God, and eager to restore His people. A short line exists between tears of sorrow and tears of joy, repentance to reconciliation.

ILLUS. I don't know what I did wrong. But it must have been something major, resulting in a spanking when Dad got home. He routinely got home at 6:15 P.M., making for a torturously long wait for sure and certain pain. He used the line, "This will hurt me more than you." I so desperately didn't want him to hurt himself. But, he did. After the "board" meeting, we ate supper. The meal somehow made things all right again. It was neutral ground. By dessert time, I was restored to fellowship. I had bright hopes for the evening.

CONCLUSION:

The joy of the Lord! The Lord who is grieved by sin remains eager to forgive and reconcile the sinner—gladly. So I hear the Word. I listen attentively. I am grieved. I whisper a prayer and may even weep. Then I'm reminded of God, who delights in my prayers and is overjoyed when I rest in His forgiveness.

Well, I'm encouraged. My joy is not explained by circumstance. It rests in knowing that Jesus has whispered the last word on sin, and it's "forgiveness."

If you believe in that truth, let the party begin!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God Almighty"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Ps. 66:1
Processional "To God Be the Glory"
Prayer of Blessing
Ministers of Music "Lift High the Cross"
Ministers of Music "Crown Him with Many Crowns"
Greetings

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Neh. 8:1-4, 5-6, 8-10
Choral Response "Sing Praise to God Our Rock"
The Second Lesson 1 Cor. 12:12-30
A Moment for Meditation
Hymn of Response "Fairest Lord Jesus"
The People's Prayer at the Altar
Congregational Response "We Will Glorify"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture Ps. 96:8
Offertory Prayer
Vocal Offertory

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Luke 4:14-21
The Doxology
The Sermon "SOMEONE OUGHT TO READ
SCRIPTURE"

Closing Hymn "O Word of God Incarnate"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Notes on Worship

The portion of the service that begins with the prelude and concludes with the greetings is sometimes referred to as the "entrance" portion of the service. Typically, this is one of the more celebratory parts of the service and should be Christ-centered in music selections.

Gospel services frequently exclude hymns or choruses that focus on the Godhead, opting for lyrics that emphasize humankind's condition, decisions, or commitment.

The portion of the service that includes Scripture readings, prayers, and sermon is the "Service of the Word." Here, the congregation intentionally strives to hear that which the Spirit is saying through the revealed Word.

The concluding part of the service is generally understood to be the Service of the Table. Reflecting the influence of the American frontier tradition, the holiness movement basically replaced the historic celebration of the Lord's Supper at the close of every service with the "altar service," a modern adaptation that is geared more toward "seekers."

WHEN CHRIST IS PRESENT

by Randall E. Davey

1 Corinthians 13

January 31, 1993

INTRO:

With confidence that Jesus will meet with the two or three who gather in His name (Matt. 18:20), we marry and bury, worship and study, fellowship and do business as Christians.

To be Christ's implies one has responded to Jesus' gracious offer of forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation. Convicted of sin, we repent and open ourselves to the risen Lord's saving ways. To that we give witness by saying, "I'm saved," "I'm born again," or by confessing, "I'm a Christian."

When Christians meet, Jesus is present. The believer can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20, NASB). Jesus promised to be with the "believer-disciple" to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Corinth Community Church was having trouble integrating the idea of Christ's presence with everyday living. One church member was living with his own stepmother with the tacit approval of the congregation. Others were having sexual intercourse with prostitutes. Others, influenced by a Gnostic worldview, had given up sexual relations with their spouses. The same group overate at the Lord's table, got drunk, and were riotous. They did not oppose partying with non-Christian neighbors. They brought the same spirit to worship services. A district superintendent might have trouble filling this church.

ILLUS. I preached a revival meeting for a group who seemed little interested in or inclined to revival. The meetings were fairly routine and disappointing. At the close, a retired preacher explained. "The Spirit wasn't here. He just wasn't here."

I understood what he said. Undoubtedly God was present, but not in the ways we would have preferred.

Christ is present when His people meet. How Christ's presence is expressed and how Christ's presence is experienced is not so clear.

I. How is Christ understood to be present when the church gathers?

When the Church gathers for worship, what causes persons to say, "The Lord was really here today"?

ILLUS. A few weeks ago, we had an unusual service. It was different from anything we have experienced. Before I read the sermon text, a spontaneous testimony was given, followed by several others. Soon an hour had passed. No text was read. The Doxology wasn't sung. The sermon wasn't preached. Yet, obviously God's Spirit was present in an unusual way.

Admittedly, we use a very unscientific method in saying what we say. It is difficult to analyze that which can't be analyzed. But the church has always prized some expressions of Christ's presence more than others. Corinth was no exception.

A. The Corinthians valued speaking in tongues. Some

understand that to mean that they cherished gifted speakers. Others understand tongues to refer to languages. Still others think "tongues" refer to unknown ecstatic utterance. Whatever the case, some prized the gift. If they employed it publicly, they may have been perceived as being especially spiritual.

B. Some Corinthians esteemed the gift of prophecy. Some scholars understand it to mean preaching with special inspiration or preachers who were particularly insightful in exposing biblical truth.

C. Another segment gained notoriety by making no secret that they supported local charities. Some may have etched on the back of their secondhand wooden ox carts, "We support the poor." Probably they wouldn't have opposed seeing their name in print as members of the Heavy Duty Donors' Club.

D. Many among them went to extremes to insure their spirituality. These folk talked of martyrdom and their willingness to undergo it. Surely some would have concluded that these types must be spiritual to say those kinds of things.

E. Is Christ more present in one spiritual gift or another?

We are more apt to identify one who prays and "touches heaven" as a truly spiritual person. Others would point to one who cries when he sings. Others measure the audible responses in a service as a sign of God's real presence. For many evangelicals the altar service is perhaps the test case for God's obvious presence. I'm not sure where the sacraments would rank, but I suspect they would be a distant last.

Regardless of the criteria, we testify to the mystery of His presence. We understand that there are ways and times He seems to be present.

II. How else is Christ's presence expressed?

Paul argues in the "love chapter" that one can have all kinds of spiritual gifts and signs that are absolutely worthless if unaccompanied by love. He insists that Christ's community must be primarily known for its willingness to love each other and to die for each other (John 15:12-15). Admittedly, that is a far cry from where most of us live. But Paul asserted that only in loving do we understand Christ's presence.

A. In Jesus' community folks are patient with each other. That's tough to imagine in any time, let alone in an age in which we can fax and phone from our cars. When, for a moment, someone, somewhere extends patience to you, rejoice. Christ is present.

B. In Jesus' community folks are kind. They ease one another's pain and are sensitive to one another as Paul was to Onesimus! "Folks have been kind to me," you insist. Rejoice. Christ is present.

C. In Jesus' community folks aren't jealous or think too highly of themselves! It's so natural for us to be jealous of the position and status we think we've worked hard to achieve. What fun is it if we don't let a few friends in on our success?

"But," you say, "not everyone is a legend in his own mind, and not everyone seeks praise and exaggerates his accomplishments." No? Then rejoice. Christ is present in them.

D. In Jesus' community folks are not rude, do not insist on their own way, are not easily provoked, and don't keep records of wrongs! The description is getting more unrealistic. We've all encountered rude folk who explain themselves by saying, "I'm an up-front kind of guy. You never have to wonder where you stand with me." Sometimes we would prefer to wonder as we nurse our wounded spirits.

Of course, the conflict over which we came to verbal blows was induced by everyone insisting on his own way. But the apostle Paul dreamed of relating in love.

All of us know folks who are tactful and don't insist on their own way. They are not given to temper and don't keep bringing up the past. They are so few that we celebrate their presence and slowly recognize Jesus' presence.

E. The description of this new community grows more heavenly. A place where folks take no pleasure in doing evil or tale bearing, where they rejoice in the truth and are unbelievably supportive! Christ is present in them.

III. How is Christ's presence experienced?

We experience grace that makes it possible for us to turn to Jesus in conversion. We experience Him in marvelous outpourings of grace that may result in our sanctification and His calling upon us to be a community of persons, worshiping God in spirit and truth. We experience Him in the community of His people.

ILLUS. Years ago, I was part of a congregation given to singing any hymn, gospel song, or chorus that focused on Christian love. It was that kind of an era. One night, following board meeting, one member said to another: "If we are one in the bond of love, I'd hate to see what a meeting would be like if we weren't!"

A. John Wesley said that from the beginning there have been two kinds of Christians. The first try to live the Christian life. The second take up their cross daily. The latter want to be like Jesus.

B. Some may believe that they will experience Christ's presence if they worship this way or that, fast, pray, give double tithe, or run the aisles. Paul would contend otherwise. In Jesus' exemplified, spontaneous, self-giving love He is understood, expressed, and experienced.

CONCLUSION:

If one purposes to be like Jesus, he must be like Him in loving, for God is love. Have you been loved when you felt you deserved less? Have you loved the unlovable and didn't know why or how you could do it? Rejoice. They could do no less. Christ is present.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "When Morning Gilds the Skies"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading	Ps. 48:1
Processional	"Lead On, O King Eternal"
Prayer of Blessing	
Ministers of Music	"Be Strong in the Lord"
Choral Response	"Rejoice in the Lord Always"
Greetings	

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson	Jer. 1:4-10
Choral Response	"Sing Praise to God Our Rock"
The Second Lesson	1 Cor. 13:1-13
A Moment for Meditation	
Hymn of Response	"Jesus, Lover of My Soul"
The People's Prayer at the Altar	
Congregational Response	"Be Glorified"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture	Exod. 35:4
Offertory Prayer	
Vocal Offertory	

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson	Luke 4:21-30
The Doxology	
The Sermon	"WHEN CHRIST IS PRESENT"
Closing Chorus	"We Are One in the Bond of Love"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"Bless our memories as we submit ourselves in worship. Help us to remember Your healing ways. Help us to remember the times and places where we have received forgiveness. Help us to recall Your redeeming work. Help us to reflect on Your mercy. Help us to remember Your many good gifts, granted to us in Christ, whose presence we celebrate in the spirit of the Resurrection. Amen."

Unison Scripture Reading

After years of doing an opening "monologue," I opted to start the service with God's Word versus my own. It sets a decidedly different tone and seems to start the service with the appropriate focus.

Unison reading underscores the fact that worship is an act of the people as opposed to something done for them.

Processional

The processional enjoys quite a significant tradition and generally symbolizes the church gathering from the far reaches of the world for a central purpose.

In some traditions, the processional includes the entire congregation, and the march begins outside the church proper (a practice that obviously isn't employed during Kansas City winters).

THE VISION

by Randall E. Davey

Isa. 6:1-8

February 7, 1993

INTRO:

I have never had a spiritual experience that could top Isaiah's vision or even come close to it. In fact, this vision is something with which I cannot identify, yet I find it engaging.

Is the vision to be dismissed as one of those infrequent God-man encounters, buried with His appearances to Noah, Abraham, or Moses? Is it fascinating but personally irrelevant?

It seems reasonable to believe that Isaiah was a man of God, long before he experienced this dramatic vision. Some contend that he had a history of preaching, pronouncing woe, warning his kinsmen of coming peril and the sure and certain consequence of their self-reliant spirit.

Others suggest that the vision occurred during some act of worship occasioned by a seasonal festival, such as New Year's, which called attention to the divine Kingship. If so, the Jerusalem Temple celebration would have had added meaning, since Uzziah (also known as Azariah), a popular and effective king, had just died of leprosy (2 Kings 15:5).

At Uzziah's death, Judah was gripped with fear. Uzziah was an efficient administrator, capable military leader, and competent politician (2 Chron. 26:1-15), a tough act to follow. With Assyria about to invade, Judah had no experienced and capable leadership.

ILLUS. In the U.S.A., President George Bush's selection of Dan Quayle as a running mate fueled nationwide insecurity. The public questioned Quayle's competency and doubted his ability to govern in the event of the president's death.

While Judah panicked, Isaiah had a vision.

I. "I saw the Lord" (v. 1)

Without explanation or fanfare, Isaiah recalls the experience that undoubtedly changed his life and ministry forever. He observes the glory of the king and overhears the deliberations of heaven.

A. "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne" (NASB). We would love to know the details of this story.

Normally people who saw God died (Exod. 19:21). Isaiah caught a glimpse of God. But in the instances when persons like Moses saw God and lived, they were never the same. The encounter enabled them to do what God required of them (Exod. 24:9ff.).

Isaiah leaves the reader with a sense of reverential awe for the One who was high and lifted up.

B. The throne and royal robe were furniture and garments of a king. God alone is the King so desperately needed but so rarely heeded by Judah.

God was exalted. The throne of Isaiah's vision was mammoth, and on it sat the Holy One. While Judah frantically searched for someone to lead them, Isaiah lay prostrate in the presence of the only One who is to be exalted.

The skirts of the royal robe filled the Temple! Isaiah

can't bring himself to paint a verbal portrait of God. The description rises no higher than the hem of His garment.

C. Seraphim stood above God. Seraphim are not part of current vernacular. The first group with whom Isaiah shared his experience understood seraphim to be creatures popular in Egyptian royal symbolism. The winged cobra was understood to be a divine protective spirit, guarding the king.

Others associate the word "seraphim" with fire, likened unto the "fiery serpents" mentioned in Num. 21:6, NASB. Isaiah paints them as winged creatures with some humanlike characteristics.

They were attendants or servants engaged in perpetual praise. John saw four living creatures, winged and singing similar hymn tunes, perhaps first scripted by their Old Testament counterparts. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev. 4:8, NASB).

The Old Testament seraphim choral group were singing antiphonally, first one group, then another.

D. "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts" (v. 3, NASB). At that time, only God could be called holy. Yet the entire nation has been called to be holy (Exod. 19:6). Hebrew understanding of holiness took on an ethical cast. To be holy implied right relationship with God and humankind.

E. "The whole earth is full of His glory" (v. 3, NASB). In the postexilic age, this was simply a way of saying, "God's presence is with us." Not only in Temple and not only in cloud but also in all the earth! Where God's glory is revealed, judgment for sin is inevitable. One can't help but think of Jesus, of whom it was said: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NASB).

F. The foundations shook at His voice, and smoke filled the Temple (v. 4). Some traditions include a ritual during which they dispense smoke, a reminder of the vision and a reminder that God is mystery.

II. "Then I said, 'Woe is me'" (v. 5, NASB)

Isaiah was reduced to grief and overwhelming self-assessment. He had doomed others, and now he doomed himself.

A. When confronted by the Holy One, Isaiah realized that he deserved his absolute and immediate destruction. He knew that he could not join the heavenly choir in songs of praise.

B. He linked himself with his kinsmen. "And I live among a people of unclean lips" (v. 5). With them and for them, Isaiah recognized that their lips were unfit for God. Instead of praise, Isaiah was reduced to abject silence.

ILLUS. I spent a few minutes near an electronic security

gate through which airline passengers had to walk before getting on board an aircraft. Most went through without interruption. But one tall fellow wearing cowboy garb had a few problems.

He initially walked through the gate with confidence, but the buzzer sounded. He was asked to de-belt and go through again. He did but met with the same results. He emptied his pockets, threw his brimmed hat to the ground, and tried it again. No luck.

With obvious exasperation, he angrily shouted, "Do you want me to take off every stitch of clothes I have on?"

The attendant replied, "If that's what it takes."

I read the passage and thought of the angry cowboy, and I thought about me. I can't carry baggage that is not in keeping with the character of God into His presence and expect to praise Him. Will I have to confess anything and everything to join the heavenly chorus? "If that's what it takes."

C. Without a prayer for mercy or a promise in exchange for mercy, God acts. Before we can think or act, God acts. That's grace!

Seraphim flew with a burning coal in hand, touched the lips of Isaiah, and pronounced him clean. "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven" (v. 7, NASB). He who expected to die was redeemed! Grace upon grace.

One wonders if Isaiah's mind raced to the thousands to whom he had preached. Folks who refused to give God the time of day, much less acknowledge Him! Folks who would be lost if called upon to lead in singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy!"

III. Then Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord

He listened in on conversations of the heavenly court. There was talk of sending someone with a message from the Lord.

A. Isaiah answered humbly but with a sense of necessity, "Here am I. Send me!" What else could he have possibly said? Life instead of death. Pardon instead of punishment. Guiltlessness instead of guilt. He had to go!

B. The rest of his life was a response to that which God had initiated and so graciously done.

ILLUS. A dear friend of mine was released from prison this past week. For six years and four months he was under strict and constant surveillance. But while in prison, he had a transforming experience with Christ Jesus. So many were faithful to the gospel in ministering hope to him.

He didn't learn of his release until 48 hours before he was set free. I talked with him on the phone and asked, "How does it feel to be free?"

"I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it."

At that, he rushed to tell me that he wanted to give the rest of his life ministering to inmates who would live out their days behind bars. Why? Because he felt compelled.

Isaiah had to go. He could do nothing else.

CONCLUSION:

Are you tempted to say, "If I had a vision like Isaiah's, I would more readily give myself to God in worship"? We

can't create visions, but neither did he. God initiated the action. We can't purify ourselves and pronounce ourselves forgiven, but neither did he. God initiated the action.

We can't genuinely worship God and sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy," while hanging on to acts, attitudes, or spirits incongruous with the character of God. Shall we praise or shall we pray?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Brethren, We Have Met to Worship"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Ps. 34:1-3
Processional "Come, Christians, Join to Sing"
Prayer of Blessing
Choral Response "Gloria Patri"
Children's Choir "This Is the Day That the Lord Hath Made"

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Isa. 6:1-8
Ministers of Music "Holy Is the Lord"
The Second Lesson 1 Cor. 15:1-11
Hymn of Response "Just as I Am"
The People's Prayer at the Altar
Congregational Response "He Is Lord"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture Ps. 96:8
Offertory Prayer

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Luke 5:1-11
The Doxology
The Sermon "THE VISION"
Choral Response "Holy, Holy"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"We gather as glory seekers to give glory. We assemble as persons given to the worship of things, our cars and homes included. We meet thinking of ourselves, our schedules, our jobs, our needs. We stand here with like-minded folk, desperate but unknowing. Bless us with Your presence so that we may responsibly give You glory, worship You, think of You, love You, and do what we do in Jesus' name. Amen."

Offertory Prayer

"That to which we hold so tightly, we lift to You and ask, 'How shall we manage it for Jesus' sake?' Grant us wisdom to be the stewards You have called us to be. Amen."

Notes

In addition to the "Gloria Patri," the worship leader may want to occasionally use the refrain from "Angels We Have Heard on High," Crosby's "To God Be the Glory," or even Crouch's "My Tribute."

More important is the understanding that following our asking God to do something, in this case for blessing, it is appropriate to give Him that which He is due—glory!

IF YOU'RE HATED, YOU MIGHT BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

by Randall E. Davey

Luke 6:17-26

February 14, 1993

INTRO:

I watched several minutes of a televised interview with politicians, all of whom hope to win their party's nomination for president of the United States. They were asked tough, pointed questions that could have easily been answered with a yes or no. Not one of them offered an easy, understandable response. Skillfully they answered "hot button" questions that they hadn't been asked, avoiding the simple queries.

ILLUS. One politician was asked, "Is it true that you had an affair?" The candidate fussed with semantics, suggested that the past was past and that he enjoyed the support of his wife, and told us that America needed to lower taxes, help the poor, and implement medical coverage for everyone. Did he or didn't he?

Why didn't they answer the questions yes or no?

One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to answer that. They wanted to address the kinds of topics the public wanted to hear. They only do that by controlling the interview.

The following morning, the city paper gave the interview as little attention as a recycling program. No one expected them to answer the questions. The candidates' primary aim was to please the audience in hopes that that would translate into votes.

How odd of Jesus, advancing a new kingdom, to say what He said. He didn't throw out crowd-pleasing tidbits. He talked in puzzling, upsetting, nonsensical ways about pertinent matters.

The text covers what some call the "Sermon on the Plain." It has considerable differences with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Volumes have been written on these passages given to disciples in the hearing of a larger crowd. Verses 22-23 and 26 will serve as a typical example of Jesus' teaching.

I. Blessed are you in the oddest of times

"Blessed" refers to the deep, religious joy that is the consequence of one's participation in the kingdom of God. One doubts the disciples could have imagined the things Jesus said would produce such an experience.

ILLUS. Friends of ours who recently returned from a minivacation called to say, "Hello!" The first thing out of their mouths was, "You want to know where to go for a great time?"

I bit. "Where?"

"Sanibel Island," they replied. It's February in Kansas City. I expected them to say Hawaii, the Caribbean, or some such exotic place. On the other hand, I would have been floored if they had said, "Go do hard labor in a prison camp. It's great."

Jesus was saying things that made no sense.

A. Jesus said one will have joy when one is hated. I wonder how many heard the rest of the story. I can't think of a soul who enjoys being hated. I can think of a whole flock who would do anything to be loved!

ILLUS. I drove past a high school the other morning about 7:30 A.M. As I pulled up to a traffic light, I noticed a few high school students standing in front of the school. One girl had on what appeared to be a cross between a David Bowie suit and a Madonna hairstyle. She looked pitiful and lonely. I wondered if she was saying, "All right, gang, will you love me now?"

One will experience joy in the face of overwhelming odds if one is hated for the sake of the Son of Man.

B. Jesus said one will have joy when, as a result of being hated, one is ostracized. Jewish converts to Christianity had been excommunicated from synagogues and banned by their own blood relatives. Merely confessing Jesus to be Messiah was grounds for ouster (John 9:22).

ILLUS. I met a woman who had been a church pianist for over 10 years in the same church in which she was raised. In her late teen years, she married her childhood sweetheart. They eventually had two children. For reasons I will never know, her spouse abused her, and she finally left him in fear of her life. The church, as she reported it, benched her from the piano since she didn't have "biblical grounds" for leaving him. She wept openly and told how she felt, being ostracized from her church family. After some time, she dropped out. Ostracism wasn't an occasion for joy.

C. Jesus said one would experience joy when insulted. The crowd must have questioned His sanity! "You will experience joy when you are hissed off the stage and your reputation mocked."

ILLUS. A television program attempted to launch persons into stardom. Serious contenders sang or performed in front of a live audience who had the prerogative to hiss and boo if they didn't like what they saw or heard. It must be devastating to be mocked and ridiculed right off the stage.

D. When one is hated, ostracized, insulted, and one's reputation ruined, take heart if it is for the sake of the Son of Man. If the Son of Man was rejected, those who follow Him can expect the same kind of reception. It did happen (John 16:2), and happen it will.

II. When most men would weep, you can leap

Jesus doesn't give mere lip service to keeping one's chin up in tough times. He doesn't stop with positive attitude or a "can do" spirit talk. He says that when folks are persecuted for His name's sake, they can leap for joy.

ILLUS. A commercial jingle went something like, "I love what you do for me, Toyota!" In the background, a variety of folks were jumping up in the air, kicking their heels.

Even from the lips of Jesus, it's so difficult to understand joy in the face of rejection and abusive treatment.

Jesus offered two reasons they could leap.

A. Leap because you have a heavenly reward in store. Jesus was saying, "Discipleship isn't one grand

picnic; but when times are tough, know that there is a final chapter about which your persecutors do not know."

Talk of immortality wasn't household conversation. Many of the crowd didn't believe in the resurrection. So His talk of heaven was one more confusing part.

B. Leap because you are being linked with the prophets who were mistreated and persecuted too. The messengers were hated because of the message.

III. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26a, NASB)

Who doesn't want to have a good reputation? Who doesn't give himself diligently to shaping and managing perceptions to insure that a reputation gained is a reputation kept?

Jesus was quick to say, though, that Joe Public spoke well of false prophets. If you want to be like the truth-telling prophets and the Son of Man, expect to be hated.

Since one may compare with a false prophet, it helps to know if that is a compliment or an insult.

A. They were a problem in Jesus' day (Matt. 7:15-23).

B. They were a problem in Paul's ministry (Acts 13:6) but frequently had amazing popularity with the masses.

C. They had a string of undesirable predecessors who drew crowds by hitting "hot buttons" and telling the crowd what they wanted to hear.

1. "Speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions" (Isa. 30:10, NASB).

2. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!" (Jer. 5:31, NASB).

D. False prophets still abound.

ILLUS. I heard a TV evangelist preaching that God wants His children to be affluent. He pitched Scripture out of context. In so doing, he set the stage for those who believe and will send a promise (offering) to mark their commitment to trusting Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus' message is sobering. The media says of a well-known pastor, "He's thought highly of and is well respected throughout the world as a religious leader." I wonder if that is a compliment or an insult.

I wonder about pastors who crave unanimous votes of confidence from the congregations they serve. Isn't there something about the nature of the gospel that invites crucifixion?

What does the message say of any who follow Jesus? Those who live a truly holy life will conflict with the values of the ungodly and the would be godly who want a modified Gospel?

Jesus forces His hearers to think. This Kingdom of which He talked was not a mildly different political agenda that would please the ears of the undecided. No. On the contrary. If the agenda is preached and heard and lived, one might be hated.

To the extent that you are hated for His name's sake, be glad and leap for joy!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "O for a Thousand Tongues!"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Ps. 33:1
Processional "All Creatures of Our God and King"
Prayer of Blessing
Ministers of Music "My Jesus, I Love Thee"
Children's Choir "Give Thanks unto the Lord"
Greetings

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Jer. 17:5-10
Choral Response "Thy Word"
The Second Lesson 1 Cor. 15:12-20
A Moment for Meditation
Hymn of Response "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
The People's Prayer at the Altar
Congregational Response Refrain of "I Will Praise Him"

BRING OFFERTINGS

Offertory Scripture 2 Cor. 9:7
Offertory Prayer
Vocal Offertory

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Luke 6:17-26
The Doxology
The Sermon "IF YOU'RE HATED, YOU MIGHT BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK"
Closing Hymn "I Am Coming, Lord"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer of Blessing

"May, O God, Your Spirit bear witness with our spirit, that we are indeed Your children. May we reflect the joy of knowing that we are Yours, creatures, servants, sons and daughters.

"May we sing and pray, hear and heed as children of the Most High. Your blessing we need and seek; for it we ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

Greetings

Consider beginning this time with an invitation to confess the Apostles' Creed. Having confessed the risen Lord, the church as community can express union with each other and the church of past centuries in using the creed.

Prayers of the People

"For things carelessly said and things thoughtlessly done, for things that should have been thoughtfully said, and things that should have been carefully done,

for labor and leisure that was to be done as unto You,

for witness and service poorly done, grant us forgiveness.

"For unkindnesses and meanness of spirit, grant us forgiveness and grace that we might be forgiving and gracious.

"For mercy, grace, and forgiveness received, we give hearty thanks. Amen."

MAJOR MESSAGE FROM A MINOR PROPHET

by Randall E. Davey

Zeph. 3:14-20

February 21, 1993

INTRO:

The scanty material provided in the writings of the seventh-century B.C. prophet, Zephaniah, is the sole source of biographical data available. He was a distant relative of Judah's King Hezekiah, making him a second cousin to the current king, Josiah. Probably, he was in his early to mid-20s at the zenith of his ministry. That would put his work at the 638 B.C. to 621 B.C. date, making him a contemporary of Jeremiah.

History looks kindly on Josiah. His administration came on the heels of Amon's, a short term ruler whose untimely, tragic demise by his enemies spelled an abrupt end to a questionable political career. Amon's father, Manasseh, served as king of Judah for 45 years prior to Amon. Manasseh's stamp remained long after Amon was laid to rest and Josiah had ascended to the throne.

Manasseh dictatorially ruled Judah with an iron fist. But he proved to be putty in the hands of Assyrian political and military bosses for whom he had fear-inspired respect. They knew that he ruled Judah at their Assyrian whim and will. The evil despot seduced his own people to win favor with the powers that be (2 Kings 21). Under Manasseh's directive, Judah was overcome with Assyrian customs, policies, and religion. So broad-minded was he that he opened his arms to child sacrifice (v. 6), witchcraft, the cult of the dead, and worship of astral deities. Intolerant subjects were candidates for a premature trip to the morgue.

Barbaric neighbors to the north, known as Scythians, posed a constant threat too. The Scythians were fierce mobsters, bent on destruction.

Onto the geopolitical stage walked Josiah, whose own spiritual crisis and "conversion" resulted in further change for corrupt Judah. Josiah's leadership was initially unpopular, but he wasn't to be intimidated. With the zeal of a freshman politician, he introduced sweeping changes that culminated in his first published work, the Deuteronomic Code.

Soon after Josiah found his way around the presidential rose garden, Zephaniah was on hand for a press conference.

Like his idyllic tutor, Isaiah, Zephaniah warned of the imminent day of the Lord, a day of promise for some, a day of destruction for others. Undoubtedly, he saw judgments in terms of "this world" events, unfolding through God-used military machines.

The "day of the Lord" was a necessary evil, a judgment that could have been avoided. But for the "humble and lowly . . . [who] tell no lies, nor . . . [are] deceitful" (vv. 12-13, NASB), good days are ahead.

I. Shout for joy!

These verses reflect the joy of the redeemed in the presence of the promised Lord on the climax of the day of the Lord. The verbs are labeled as prophetic perfect; the events, though yet in the future, are described as having taken place already.

ILLUS. A few nights ago, I heard a racket coming from Ashley's room. Theoretically, she was fast asleep, but I could tell she wasn't. I went "forthrightly" to her room and saw her bouncing on her bed like an Olympiad on a trampoline. Wide-eyed with excitement, she said, "Two more days until Amanda's party!" Though her enthusiasm was short-lived, she was already in the party spirit long before the balloons were inflated!

Israel was invited to celebrate now, based on that which was sure to come. Christians understand that. We celebrate, knowing that the victory was won in history, and the Victor is coming again.

A. "Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!" (v. 14, NASB). In verse 14, three honorable names are given to the Church of God: Daughter of Zion (cf. Isa. 1:8), Israel (cf. Gen. 32:28), and Daughter of Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 37:22). The remnant, the survivors who will be saved by God "on that day," are invited to rejoice "with all their hearts."

ILLUS. "I can't rejoice in the Lord always. In fact, I have trouble rejoicing at all." It was a confession of sorts. He explained why he left the choir. "I just couldn't sing anymore." "Why not?"

"Lost my job."

Both Zephaniah and Paul would remind us all that our celebration is not tied to the oppressive realities of every day but to the certainty of "the day of the Lord."

B. Our worship results from reflection. That really flies in the face of our experience. Typically, worship leaders assume that it is their task to "get people ready" for worship. Only after singing a few upbeat songs would folk likely testify. Zephaniah would insist that we come ready to engage in an act of worship because "the Lord has taken away His judgments . . . He has cleared away your enemies" (v. 15, NASB).

ILLUS. If I received a check in the mail from our church board for a million dollars, I would walk into our next service differently. I couldn't remain the same. The expression on my face would tell the story. We gather, having received the heritage of the Cross. We can't remain the same. We enter worship with a profound sense of gratitude.

II. The King of Israel is in your midst!

The occasion of celebration was not lost in an isolated historical event. It wasn't simply "Red Sea stuff," their own kind of Pearl Harbor, that they were being called to remember. Zephaniah contended that the Lord himself had delivered them from the scourge of the enemy. He would be in their midst!

A. Zephaniah's crowd lived in hopes of Messiah's coming but undoubtedly were more focused on the barbarians to the north and the soothsayer on the next block.

B. The Lord is present. He is with His Church always,

even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). Zephaniah's picture bypassed so much of that which is now history and that which John saw in his end-time vision: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them" (Rev. 21:3, NASB).

C. The Lord as "a victorious warrior" will save them (v. 17, NASB). Zephaniah employs a militaristic metaphor painfully obvious to his hearers. The presence of the Lord and the certainty of future deliverance cause present celebration.

ILLUS. My older brother has always been a hero-type to me. It was initially rooted in the status he gave me by simply being my bigger brother. The neighborhood in which I grew up knew nothing of gangs and street violence. But we could occasionally square off if someone spoke ill of "Gunsmoke's" Matt Dillon or "The Rifleman's" Chuck Connors. If the odds were against me, I only had to invoke the name of my brother, declare that he was soon to be home, and that very thought gave me confidence and strength.

The Victor is present. The Cross and Resurrection are part of our history, yet somehow part of our present and part of our future. Our adequacy is in Him (2 Cor. 3:5-6). Our hope is in Him.

III. He will exult over you with joy!

Zephaniah details the ways He understands that God will act in behalf of His people. We recite, "I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me" (John Wesley). The emphasis there is "for me." Zephaniah is certain, because of God's presence, the remnant have nothing to fear (v. 16).

I struggled with the idea of God's acceptance of me in Christ. Believing it to be true was an exercise of faith. But believing that God will delight in me was a bigger step yet.

A. "He will exult over you with joy" (v. 17, NASB). God rejoices over every repenting sinner (Luke 15:7, 10); He rejoices as he sees the Church and her individual members joyfully serving Him. As He sees their godly lives (Titus 2:12-14), their "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15, KJV), ready and eager to preach, He rejoices over them with great joy!

ILLUS. When Ashley was six years old, she figured it out. "Do you know why Jesus wants us all to get killed?" she asked her brother. "He wants us all with Him; and you know what? Up there, we can jump on beds, and they won't even break! And you can walk up walls."

It's all right with Jesus if you jump on beds! She has the idea that Jesus really wants to be with us and is interested in our enjoying the relationship. Zephaniah may have been a bed jumper! "He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy" (NASB).

B. "He will be quiet in His love" (v. 17, NASB). Silently He basks in love, an expression used to denote love deeply felt, which is absorbed in its object with thoughtfulness and admiration.

C. "I will gather . . . deal . . . save . . . turn . . . bring" (vv. 18-20, NASB). All in their behalf! During the coming days of Jerusalem's destruction, the captivity of her citizens, the disruption of worship practices, God's promises voiced through the prophets were absolutely essential to their survival.

D. "I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth" (v. 20, NASB). The deliverance will be observable. It will happen "before your eyes" (NASB).

CONCLUSION:

That's the way Zephaniah saw it! The day of the Lord would be the ultimate in salvation. He may have understood it strictly in terms of real dirt and real boundary lines and real enemies. But of deliverance he was certain. That was enough for praise.

The redeemed read the story of history a little differently. We know the Christ chapter. We know about the Cross. And we know about the Resurrection. We can't help but praise. Jesus is coming again!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "O for a Thousand Tongues!"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading	Ps. 68:19
Processional	"Immortal, Invisible"
Prayer of Blessing	
Ministers of Music	"Let Songs of Praise Begin"
Children's Choir	"Clap Your Hands"

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson	Zeph. 3:14-20
Choral Response	"There Is a Balm in Gilead"
The Second Lesson	Phil. 4:4-9
Hymn of Response	"Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee"
The People's Prayer at the Altar	
Congregational Response	"All Hail King Jesus"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture	Exod. 35:21
Offertory Prayer	
Vocal Offertory	

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson	Luke 3:7-18
The Doxology	
The Sermon	"MAJOR MESSAGE FROM A MINOR PROPHET"
Closing Hymn	"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Lectionary

A lectionary is a compilation of scripture that can be used in worship in a variety of ways. Typically, editors develop a three-year schedule.

Lectionaries include a Psalm for the Day, an Old Testament Lesson, a New Testament Lesson, and a Gospel Lesson. Lectionaries track with the church year, highlighting Epiphany, Transfiguration, Lent, Passion Week, Holy Week, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and Advent.

Preaching through the lectionary affords one the opportunity to deal with some very sensitive issues without appearing to be "gunning" for a particular problem in the congregation. Those who use the lectionary frequently comment on the uncanny way the text for a given day seems to be so timely and current.

Use of the lectionary opens the congregation to a full range of biblical thought and encourages the preacher to explore issues that might be tempting to bypass.

NO NEWS WAS GOOD NEWS

by Randall E. Davey

1 Thess. 2:13

February 28, 1993

INTRO:

Thessalonica was considered one of the most significant cities of the eastern Mediterranean area. Built on a rising hill and overlooking the gulf, Thessalonica was the leading harbor of Macedonia. Romans used it as a naval station. The Via Egnatia or "Overland Military Highway," connecting the city of Rome to the countries at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, ran through the city from west to east. In 146 B.C., Thessalonica became the capital of the entire province. Though a military presence was not obscure, the city was "considered a free city."

Two mystery religions, both fertility cults, were dominant along with hosts of other religions, including emperor worship. The environment was ripe for new thought.

Paul and his evangelistic association had just done a stint in Philippi, where they had suffered persecution and insulting treatment (1 Thess. 2:1-2). They moved on to Thessalonica and met with "much opposition" (NASB).

The text suggests that they stayed there three weeks. Some contend that it was more like three months. Their work certainly wasn't in vain.

While ministering, they were self-supporting. Paul worked as a tent or tent cloth maker. Though entitled to support from those to whom he ministered, he was not inclined to take it. Several "strolling teachers" made their living by their wits and not by their character. Paul didn't want to be confused with them.

Paul's tentmaking business was barely off the ground when his gospel team was unceremoniously evicted from Thessalonica. Though absent in body, they were never long out of his mind.

Paul worried about the young group and tried twice to return to them but was "hindered by Satan" (see v. 18, KJV). He wondered about their welfare. When his curiosity could not be abated, he sent Timothy from Athens to "encourage" the young church (3:2).

Paul prepared to hear the worst. Had nothing remained of his work, he would understand. There were no Bible studies, Christian literature, parachurch groups, Christian television or radio. Yet the young church survived in the face of opposition. How?

ILLUS. Years ago before church planting was a science, I planted a church. The experience nearly buried me. I vividly remember moving to a city where I knew no one. I remember the early days, leading people to Jesus, watching them grow in the Lord and me growing along with them. A little over four years later, I moved from the city and left a part of my heart with that group with whom I had celebrated and wept and worshipped.

To this day, it's difficult to call "back home" and find out about Heidi and Billie and Franz and Pat and on and on. I want to know, and yet I don't. I'm fearful that I'll hear that some have fallen away—and they have.

I. They received the Word of God

We get some insight from this passage: "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1:6, NASB). Young Christians need to imitate other followers who are following Jesus.

A. In less than ideal circumstances, they "welcomed" the Word as one would welcome a guest. The Jews were so opposed that they followed Paul to Berea. They would have molested the young believers.

B. Paul maintains that the message was "the gospel of God" (2:2, NASB). He is simply a herald. The function of a herald is to pass on the words given to him. He is not to give a message of his own devising, nor even to elaborate on what has been given to him. He simply passes on what he is told. Paul's forceful drive came not from some thought that he was abreast of contemporary trends in philosophy or religion or science, but from the deep-seated conviction that he was simply God's mouthpiece. What he spoke was the veritable Word of God.

ILLUS. I have frightening memories of an adult Sunday School class where the teacher ritualistically tossed the printed lesson aside and said, "Let's talk about something practical."

He couldn't make the connection between the Word given in antiquity and its application for the 20th century. Yet much of the 20th century won't make sense to the believer apart from a solid understanding of the Word.

The church ought to be a place where we hear and understand "the message" so that we can pass it on to someone else. In the old game one whispers something in someone's ear, who in turn does the same thing to someone else. Usually, the message heard differs from the message given.

Paul was anxious that the message given was the message heard.

II. They didn't take Paul's words as though they were mere men's words

They responded as though God were speaking to them through Paul. To whom do we listen?

ILLUS. We had guests in our home. On one occasion, I heard our adult guest discipline our youngest daughter. "Ashley, don't sit on the kitchen table."

For just a moment, Ashley eyed our guest and then said, "You aren't the boss of me."

It was clear that Ashley didn't think for a minute that our guest had any right to tell her what to do. Ashley was wrong, but nevertheless, she acted on what she assumed to be good conclusions.

A. If we conclude that the preaching we hear is simply the opinion of "some preacher," we can turn a deaf ear. But what if it is the Word of the Lord? Week by week, we hear God's Word. It was the Word of God that

provided solid foundation for the new church plant and the Word they received in the face of opposition.

ILLUS. Someone walked out of service and made a very typical comment. "That was truth-preaching today. I've always believed what you were talking about today."

I have preached from other passages of Scripture and been held suspect by the same well-wisher. Did he conclude that it was truth preaching because it lined up with his previously held notions or was it truth simply because it was truth?

B. Their reception of the Word was not merely attitudinal. According to 1 Thess. 1:6-10, (1) they became imitators of Paul and the Lord; (2) they became examples to all the believers. They received the Word, and it resulted in observable, behavioral, and ideological changes. They turned from idols to serve a living and true God (v. 9).

C. What does it mean to be a "pattern community"? Perhaps Paul knew that some persons learn by hearing, others learn by seeing, and still others learn by feeling. The church was to consist of believers who teach forgiveness, who demonstrate forgiveness, and who feel deeply about forgiveness as the basis by which all of us are reconciled to the Father.

ILLUS. I became acquainted with a small independent ministry in northwest Ohio. Doctrinally they were a bit unique, but one thing was inescapable. They were living examples of changed lives.

My barber was a member of that fellowship. I asked him, "Carl, why do you attend church where you do?" "Simple," he said. "They show you how to be a husband and father." *"They show you how!"*

III. The Word performs its work in those who believe

The verb "worketh" is almost always used in the KJV New Testament of some form of supernatural activity. Mostly it is that of God (1 Cor. 12:6; Phil. 2:13). Here the power manifested in the lives of the converts is not of this world, but divine. Where the Word of God is welcomed with obedient faith, there the power of God is at work.

A. No wonder Paul was full of thanksgiving. Converts responded initially and continued to believe.

ILLUS. A friend said of his wife, "She has never been a finisher." Have you ever "signed up" for something—an exercise regimen, a diet, or a commitment to begin something new, only to drop out after a few weeks? How many of us have "starter kits" of one kind or another—or a basement full of products of some sort or another? These indicators show that at one time we believed someone's report, but over time, it didn't ring true.

B. We catch the vibrant spirit of the Thessalonians. Like baby birds with open mouths, they received the Word and appropriated it.

Receiving the Word takes discipline. It says something about the way we listen and what we expect to hear.

ILLUS. I conducted a very unscientific survey one Sunday morning as people were coming to Sunday School. I met them in the parking lot and asked, "Do you expect to hear something today that could make an eternal difference?" With some, I modified the question. "Do you expect that you might have to think differently or do something differently as a result of your presence in church?"

In both cases, people were pleasant, intrigued, and answered, "Yes," in an intellectual but unconvincing way. The Word can shape us only to the extent that we are willing by grace to be shaped.

CONCLUSION:

The Thessalonians imitated Paul, endured sufferings, grew, and were identified as Paul's "glory and joy." Our purpose, our mission, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our ability to do that is tied to our responsiveness to the Word that became Flesh. Hear the Word, receive the Word, hide the Word. Let's welcome it. Let's respond to it and be shaped by it—to His glory. Amen.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship "Joyful, Joyful,
We Adore Thee"

GATHER TO WORSHIP

Unison Scripture Reading Ps. 149:1
Processional "O Worship the King"
Prayer of Blessing
Ministers of Music "He Lives"
Choral Response "Gloria Patri"

HEAR AND RESPOND

The First Lesson Deut. 6:4-9
Choral Response "Thy Word"
The Second Lesson 1 Thess. 2:13
Hymn of Response "I Am Thine, O Lord"
The People's Prayer at the Altar
Congregational Response "I Will Praise Him"

BRING OFFERINGS

Offertory Scripture Matt. 5:23-24
Offertory Prayer

HEAR THE PROCLAMATION

The Gospel Lesson Matt. 10:16-23
The Doxology
The Sermon "NO NEWS WAS GOOD NEWS"
Closing Hymn "Wonderful Words of Life"

RECEIVE THE BENEDICTION

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayers of the People

"We who come confessing Christ as Lord come with the scars of the week. We are called to be Christ to each other; and if we have been that, it's a testimony to Your great grace.

"We have been called to be patient and kind. If we have been impatient and unkind, we seek forgiveness.

"We have been called to be humble and sensitive. If we have been arrogant and rude, we seek forgiveness.

"We have been called to put others' needs before our own and to forget those times when people have wronged us. Forgive us for insisting on our own way and for nursing old injuries.

"We have been called to love as Christ loved. Forgive us for not wanting to be inconvenienced in small ways, not to mention laying down our lives.

"Grant us eyes of compassion that we may see the world around us and the will to respond in Jesus' stead. Amen."

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