



THE

# Preacher's

MAGAZINE

## The Year of Preaching

BRINGING THE WORD  
INTO THE WORLD

PREACHING TO WOMEN

CULTIVATING THE FINE  
ART OF STORY  
PREACHING

THE THREE MOST  
COMMON MISTAKES  
EVEN GOOD  
PREACHERS MAKE



*O God, let me preach with  
enthusiasm because of what  
Christ did, not because of what  
the crowds think; because of  
the salvation we have, not the  
size of the group we have. Use  
me, O God, not because it's the  
hour for the message, but  
because You've given me a  
message for the hour.*

*—Ed Towne*



# Preaching— Putting Light into People's Faces

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

**W**hen Edward Rosenow was a small boy, his brother became seriously ill. The family was panicked with fear as they watched the physician examine his brother. Edward kept his eyes riveted on his parents' anguished faces. At last the doctor turned to his parents and said with a smile, "You can relax. Your boy is going to be all right."

Young Edward was profoundly impressed with the visible change in his parents' expressions. Years later he said, "I resolved then and there that I was going to be a doctor—so that I could put light in people's faces."

That is also the joyful privilege of preaching the good news of Jesus—putting light in people's faces! Elizabeth Achtemeier, in her book *So You're Looking for a New Preacher*, said, "Most church members rank preaching as their highest priority in selecting a minister to lead them. . . . The list of a modern minister's roles could be expanded almost endlessly. But nothing that your minister does will be more important than preaching" (pp. 1, 4). She noted also, "The first impression that visitors . . . will have of your church will be formed largely by what they hear from your pulpit" (pp. 4-5).

This year has been designated "The Year of Preaching." To me, such an announcement urges us back to the basics of our call from

God. Pastors can do nothing with more direct and eternal results than preaching God's written Word to our generation.

One fellow wrote of his major denomination, which is losing members by the shiploads,

The church is making promoters out of preachers. . . . Looking over some current promotional materials, I am wondering how a preacher today can find time to prepare an effective sermon. Sermons do not come out of thin air; they come out of hours spent with God in prayer and study.

Our world needs preaching with biblical depth and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Gerald Sloyan insisted, "Preaching well is a great labor. That is the chief reason it does not happen very often. . . . People are dying of triviality" (ibid., 15).

The value of good preaching cannot be relegated to the sidelines of our ministry. When I am studying and thinking and praying and preparing with diligent care, I am doing ministry. Our people work hard all week in secular employment, and they come before us in our sanctuaries to see how we have spent our week with Jesus and His Book. They are asking, "What have you found that will help us through our coming weeks?"

Gerald Griffiths, a pastor in Toronto, remarked, "Every week God gives me bread for my people."

His friend and fellow preacher Stuart Briscoe replied, "That's true, but you spend a lot of time in the kitchen."

Someone has paraphrased, "Now abideth administration, counseling, preaching, but the greatest of these is preaching." Achtemeier insists, "Where the pulpit leads, there the church follows, and no matter what his or her other qualifications, if the candidate you choose cannot preach,

you will be left adrift on a glassy sea, with no wind of the Spirit to carry you forward toward God's good kingdom of life" (p. 21).

Every pastor I know has to learn how to handle interruptions that hinder the sermon—unscheduled social events; ringing telephones; emergencies that necessitate his immediate help; physical tiredness from welldoing; the unending, ceaseless, required committee meetings; and on and on. But God has called the preacher to preach—and to preach with expectancy and enthusiasm and inspiration and consistency. He has commissioned us to deliver His "mail" to a world that needs good news that will light up their faces!

G. Ray Jordan, in his book *Preaching During a Revolution*, wrote:

The minister's task makes such demands that he must become devoted to the hours of daily study. Besides preaching there are many other skills he must learn and numerous activities in which he will have to engage. If, however, he does not know how to preach, he may not get the chance to participate in the others (p. 41).

In this "Year of Preaching," would you join me in going back to the basics of our God-given assignment: "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift" (1 Tim. 4:13-14). Rekindle the personal thrill of standing before your people to preach the good news of Jesus. Said James S. Stewart:

Every Sunday morning, when it comes, ought to find [the preacher] awed and thrilled by the reflection—"God is to be in action today, through me, for these people; this day may be crucial, this service decisive, for someone now ripe for the vision of Jesus" (*Heralds of God*).



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

## Preacher's Exchange

After 56 years preaching and evangelizing, I have plenty of good books, which I would like to dispose of at a very reasonable price. Preferably I would like to sell all together. Colleges may be interested in them for their library.

Please contact me at:

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Glen Burnie, MD 21060  
301-760-4513

—H. Slater



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# Bringing the

by Ian Macpherson

# Word into

# the World

**Y**ears ago, when we lived in London, I was walking alone one day across Clapham Common when, with dramatic suddenness, something happened that radically altered my whole outlook upon my work and introduced into it an entirely new dimension.

It was, as I recall, a Monday morning, a "blue" Monday morning, a Monday morning when I was suffering from what doctors describe as "neural drain." Brooding gloomily on the apparent futility and fruitlessness of my ministry, I was strongly tempted to give it up. In the language of Hamlet to Polonius, it all seemed just "words, words, words." And what were words? Mere puffs of air or black scribbles on white paper.

Better, I told myself bitterly, pack up the pointless job and devote my energies to something practical. And then, like a bolt from the blue, there broke in upon me what I can only call a revelation. All at once, I saw with startling clarity that I was not simply a webster of human words, but a conveyor of the divine Word; not just a grinder out of grammar, but a communicator of the living God; not a mere minder of a literary loom, but a vehicle for the transmis-

sion of the vitalities of eternity. Out there on the Common I sang my Magnificat; and ever since, my ministry, preached and printed, has been different.

Now when people ask me, "Do you find preaching and Christian authorship easy?" my stock reply is, "About as easy as a first confinement."

When I say that, I am not indulging in a rather cheap and indelicate jest. I am in dead earnest. That is, quite literally, what my ministry is to me—a means of bringing the Word into the world. The wonder is that, in some mysterious manner, He can come by paper and ink as well as by flesh and blood. Compositors know well what they term a matrix. As Christian authors, it is our business to fill that matrix, that womb of the Word, with letterpress that will mediate to mankind the omnipotent Lord.

Amplifying the analogy, we may note that there are three stages in the stupendous process: (1) verbal pregnancy; (2) literary gestation; and (3) publicity obstetrics.

### VERBAL PREGNANCY

What is it that makes anybody want to write? What is it that puts

ink into a person's veins? What is the author's motivation? It may be one or more of a number of things. Sometimes it is what has been dubbed in dubious Latin *itchus scribendi*, the itch to write. Sometimes it is human vanity.

Sometimes it is the love of lucre, although those it has financially enriched are few and far between. Sometimes it is the lust for fame. Sometimes it is God himself who thrusts a pen into a man's hand and orders: "Write!" Why marvel at that? Nothing could be more natural. We have a literary Lord. Each of the three Persons in the Blessed Trinity

is related to letters. God the Father is literary. He wrote immortal literature in nature and on the granite of Sinai. God the Son is literary. "How has this one become a man of letters, having never been educated?" the Jews asked in the Temple long ago. (Cf. John 7:15, NASB.) The wonder was not that He was *literate* but *literary*!

One modern version of Heb. 12:2 reads thus: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (NIV). And God the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the imperishable fluid in which the message is inscribed: "Written not with ink, but with the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:3, KJV).

It is, of course, a mere curiosity of language that the word "Pentecost" begins with "pen" and ends with "cost"—instrument and commitment—two essentials of the writer's craft. Nevertheless that verbal coincidence may serve to remind us that Pentecostals—overshadowed, as they are, by the Holy Spirit and in-

dwelt by the everlasting Word—ought to be the finest writers in the world.

The difficulty with authorship is that so often there is a hiatus between the afflatus and the apparatus. It is the seed of the Word alone that can bring them together. Before undertaking Christian ministry of any kind, whether in preaching or in printing, make sure that you are verbally pregnant. And for this it is of no use turning to human sources of inspiration.

When told by the angel of the sublime motherhood that was to be her destiny, Mary naturally enough inquired: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34, KJV). Artificial insemination is altogether out of place. Inspiration must come direct from above. "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (v. 35, KJV). That is the secret. You may be a verbal virgin. No seed thought may lie in the matrix of your mind. You may have no idea what you are going to say. But as you wait upon the Lord, as you attend your holy calling, you will be inseminated with divine inspiration.

Only, you must be holy. To put it at its crudest, it is unthinkable that the Holy Spirit should have come upon a harlot. Mary was a maid. She was as pure as the driven snow. So the Christian writer finds that ink flows freest humble. Mary of Nazareth was that. She was no leisured lady living in a palace; she was a peasant girl inhabiting a smoky cavern in a smelly town. A humble lass of a humble class, yet the Lord made her the mother of the Messiah.

One day as Jesus was walking along a road in Israel, the magnificence of His manhood evoked from a woman in the crowd the outburst: "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." Jesus immediately responded: "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:27, 28, KJV).

To become pregnant with the Word, we must hear the Word of God and keep it. Meditate on it. That is, be in the middle of it. Steep your soul in it. What matter whether people call you "absentminded," if for you, to be absent from the *mind* is to be present with the Lord? You must also be submissive. "Be it unto

me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38, KJV).

There are men who have pet themes, promotion lines, subjects of which they have made themselves masters and to which they revert on all sorts of occasions. Nevertheless, that chosen theme of theirs, important though it may be in its place, may not be the message the Lord wants them to deliver in some given instance. It is well to look to the Lord for His leading. The Word comes by His will. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:20-21, KJV).

Has it ever occurred to you that by doing the will of God, you enter in a way into Mary's sublime motherhood? Matthew records that once, as Jesus was talking to the people, "His mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

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◇

## Jesus comes by paper and ink as well as by flesh and blood

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◇

Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (12:46-50, KJV). In a special manner, therefore, the Christian author may in this sense become maternal to the Word. Impregnation is the first thing. Verbal pregnancy.

### LITERARY GESTATION

"Having then . . . ministry, let us wait on our ministering" (Rom. 12:6-7, KJV). One of the major mis-

takes preachers and writers make in this connection is that of confusing the Annunciation with the Incarnation. "Conceived in joy, brought forth in sorrow," says the proverb, and it applies here. It's a long way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Nine months is roughly 270 days.

What abortions result in preaching and in print from supposing that the Annunciation is the Incarnation! How many homiletical and literary hemorrhages have stemmed from that mistake! I have myself listened to and read many that reminded me of the story of how, in the British Parliament, after an M.P. had delivered at great length a speech that was all gush and no guts, someone on the opposite side of the House rose to remark that, quite evidently, the Honorable Member suffered from the same complaint as the father of Publius in the Book of Acts! To avoid that, allow a period of gestation to elapse between conception and delivery.

Sir Winston Churchill's daughter, Mary, has told us that her father took infinite pains in preparing his deathless orations. She records that, within the family, he was said on such occasions to be "with speech" as a woman is said to be "with child."

Here are a few hints as to how best to spend the antenatal period.

First, where possible, do most of your work in the open air. Never fall into the folly of supposing that there is any special merit in laboring in a stuffy study. Jesus was a man of the great out-of-doors. He was no pale product of the cloister. And those priceless parables of His are redolent of the fresh air of Galilee.

A minor revolution took place in my own ministry, such as it is, when it dawned on me one day that the mission of Jesus was accomplished to a very large degree in the open air. I started doing all my studying outside, and I discovered not only that my general health improved immeasurably, but also that the clean winds blew my brain clear and facilitated the processes of thought. I recommend the practice to you.

Second, make the most of the morning. If you are an author, almost inevitably you are an introvert. Modern psychology has recently been telling us that, while the ex-

trovert is at his best in the evening, the introvert is at his best at day-break. "Hast thou commanded the morning . . . ?" J. H. Jowett used to inquire, quoting Job 38:12-13, KJV. Dr. James Denney was careful to warn his students to distrust any literary work done by artificial light. Therefore, take the day by the forelock. Make the most of "the pure, strong hour of the morning, when the soul of the day is at its best."

Third, soak your soul in prayer. According to Catholic tradition, Mary was on her knees when the angel Gabriel visited her. He surprised her in the midst of her devotions. With some demanding appointment looming up on our ministerial horizon, some editor pressing for copy, some publisher crying out for a manuscript, we are sometimes inclined to think that time spent in prayer is wasted time. *Laborare est orare*, we quote to ourselves. "To work is to pray." But we are wrong. It is in prayer that the true source of inspiration and illumination lies. The oratory must take precedence over the library, the place of prayer must have priority over the place of study, or the Christian author or preacher will become like some old spinster midwife who knows all about gynecology without ever having had a baby of her own! Never forget Alexander Maclaren's searching interrogation: "Is there in your home a little bit of carpet worn thin by your praying knees?"

And now a word as to the mechanics of the matter.

We begin with reading. How is this to be done?

#### *Read voraciously*

No one will ever be a writer who is not a reader. Spurgeon read six books a week for years. Alexander Whyte reported in a letter to a friend: "I am reading like a famished wolf." J. Cyndylan Jones claimed to have read five-and-a-half tons of books. Get to know the Bible most of all, but like D. L. Moody, read any book you can lay your hands on that helps you understand the Bible. Read voraciously.

#### *Read variously*

Don't study one style too much. Don't be a mere ditto. Don't be an echo. He who slavishly imitates another liquidates himself. There are preachers and writers of considerable

capacity, who have a message of their own to deliver, had they but the confidence to do so, but who are such shameless replicas of others that you cannot hear what they say for thinking of whom they resemble. Vary your authors.

#### *Read viscerally*

Learn, like the great lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson, to "tear the guts out of a book." Don't just sample it in dilettante fashion. Get down to it.

## Steep your soul in God's Word

There are, to be sure, different types of books, and if you are wise, you will peruse them in different ways. I myself, when young, wasted no end of time reading every word of all the books I bought. My literary conscience would not let me slip a single syllable, nor did I ever read without taking copious notes. As I grew older, however, I got wiser. I began to discriminate. Some books I scanned simply for bits and pieces—quotations, illustrations, outlines, and so on. Where they were concerned, I merely ran my eye vertically down the middle of each page, spotting and transcribing anything of value, and so had skimmed the work in a bare hour or two. Other volumes I valued for their anatomy, their logical structure, the skill they exhibited in the organization of their materials. These I filleted as a fish-monger bones a haddock.

Other books—and these are the ones that, on opening, one feels like Charles Lamb that one wants to say "grace," where every word is hand-set, where in Shelley's expressive phrase, "every rift is loaded with ore," and which to alter would be sacrilege—I read with patient care, perhaps over and over again. When it is patent that an author has taken infinite pains to produce a piece of literature—it took Thomas Gray 17 years to write his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and Charles Morgan spent a whole month on a single paragraph in his famous book *The Fountain*—when, I say, an author bestows such labor on a literary effort, it is surely not asking too much

to expect the reader to lavish like care on its perusal.

#### *And now writing*

Write epigrammatically. Not jerkily and jumpily, like P. T. Forsyth, but in brief, clean-cut, telegraphic portable sentences.

Always remember that the reader of a book is like someone drifting in the sun on a raft along a slow river; now and then he dips a cup in the water to slake his thirst, but for the most part he just glides on, letting the broad flood flow by untasted. Those cupfuls are the aphorisms in the narrative or argument. Cultivate the art of shaping them. It will well repay whatever labor you bestow upon it.

Here are several from other pens and then some from my own: "A man's life is not measured by its duration but by its donation" (Peter Marshall). "I would rather be found in Christ than lost in God" (James Denney). "Stop wrestling and start nestling" (Corrie ten Boom). "Live simply that others may simply live" (anon.).

"When we abase ourselves before God, we never debase ourselves." "Christianity is a lifelong loyalty to a living Lord." "Some people have ability but lack stability."

"A man in the thick of things is often in the thin of thought." "The natural must be made spiritual if it is not to become the carnal." "The Lord rarely deeply uses anyone who loves the limelight." "There is no pardon for the persistent sinner, but there is plenteous pardon for the penitent sinner."

Statesmen and politicians are not ignorant of the value of the striking epigram. We recall the late Chairman Mao's oft-quoted dictum: "Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun"; Edward Heath's "Not by the bullet but by the ballot will peace in Ulster be attained"; John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Learn from the political spokesmen. Write epigrammatically.

Next, write graphically. Some men, as Dr. Sangster said, can be confidently counted upon to dehydrate any subject they tackle. About one such wielder of the pen John Dryden, England's first poet laureate, wrote a caustic couplet:



*The midwife laid her hand  
on his thick skull  
With this prophetic blessing:  
"Be thou dull."*

One way to avoid such dullness is to employ what the *Reader's Digest* calls picturesque speech, colorful terminology, vivid vocabulary. Another is to introduce metaphors and similes into one's text. "Music yearning like a god in pain"; Milton's tremendous line "shone like a meteor streaming to the wind." A word picture I came on lately of a wealthy sinner going "like a laden beast to the grave" has proved to me unforgettable. Illustrations also, as their very name implies, can greatly brighten literary work.

### **PUBLICITY OBSTETRICS**

Few women ever have to bear a baby alone. Nearly always they have the benefit of medical attendance. Doctor or midwife and nurse are usually at hand.

Nor can the author contrive to bring his book to birth without professional assistance. This is the special and specific function of what I have called publicity obstetrics. "The world expects results," remarked Arnold Glasow. "Don't tell people about the labor pains. Show them the baby." Editors, publishers, reviewers—without such literary gynecologists the author's manuscripts are likely to be stillborn.

Just a brief note about each of them.

## **The author cannot contrive to bring his book to birth without assistance**

First, editors. Of editors, I, who also am an editor, having "suffered many things" at the hands of such bookish obstetricians, and to my own thinking, "was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26, KJV), speak with deep feeling.

Being an editor is at once a taxing and a testing task. It puts a man on his moral mettle as much as any job I know; that is, if he is the editor of a magazine. Is he selfless enough to

give the best space in his journal to others or does he hog the headlines and reserve the eye-catching pages for himself? Is his principal concern to add to his own literary reputation or is his main aim to make the most of his contributors? Is his paper a shopwindow for the display of his own talents or does he hold up in it a mirror to the work of others?

And, incidentally, however busy a redactor may be, it would be much appreciated by young, aspiring writers if he could spare the time to explain why "The Editor regrets."

Let us be grateful to the editors, especially perhaps to the lesser breed, the subeditors. On the whole they serve us well. But for them how many split infinitives, non-sequiturs, and redundant "thats" would find their way into our published work!

Second, publishers. When Harold Macmillan resigned from public office, he was asked by a television interviewer if he intended issuing his memoirs. With a smile, he quipped: "Yes, if I can find a publisher!" As head of one of the world's biggest publishing houses, he had not far to seek. With most of us it is otherwise.

Publishers are, through bitter experience, wise and wary men. They do not rush into print. They have too much at stake to risk a mistake. The author is well advised, therefore, not to print at his own expense a manuscript for whose production no publisher can be persuaded to pay.

You may remember Byron's mischievous misquotation: "Now Barabbas was a publisher." Having, in the course of my literary life, had to do with about a round dozen of such gentlemen, I am sure that is a case of mistaken identity. I have never been disposed to confuse a publisher with Barabbas, but I confess I have often been fain to confound one with Rip van Winkle!

Third, reviewers. It used to be cynically said that if a man could write books, he would write them; but, if he couldn't write books, he would review them. Let us not, however, underestimate the power of the reviewer. A reviewer can either make or break an author. By the general reading public a reviewer is regarded as an expert, a literary connoisseur, possessing in his own line something little short of omni-

science. Yet reviewers have been wrong. One thinks of the scurrilous scribes who blasted the verse of John Keats and thus sent a young man of Shakespearean potential to his grave at 26. One thinks of Lord Jeffrey, who in the *Edinburgh Review* excoriated the poetry of William Wordsworth, dismissing it with the curt comment: "This will never

## **You will not be disappointed if you are ignored**

do!" Nevertheless, reviewers are often right. Long before struggling authors have achieved popular recognition, such reviewers detected exceptional qualities in their work and said so. Here one remembers particularly Alice Meynell's discovery of the wastrel poet Francis Thompson, discerning in a social derelict the gifts of a man of genius. Sometimes one suspects that certain reviewers do not bother to read the books they write about, but some of us will be eternally grateful to generous-minded members of the tribe who set us on our literary feet.

This brings me to the last thing I want to say. When, finally, you have brought forth the living Word, you will be delighted to discover that men, wise and simple, old and young, royal and rural, will come, like the Magi of old, to bow down and to offer their presents. You will not be surprised or upset or disappointed if you are yourself ignored. Of the wise men from the East it is recorded (Matt. 2:11, KJV): "When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped"—whom? Her? No! Him! The Word! It was to Him that the Magi opened their treasures and proffered their gifts. And Mary—bless her heart—was well content that it should be so!

Not otherwise will it be with the author who has truly brought the Word into the world.

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# Preaching to Women

by Jill Briscoe



**G**enerally speaking, women are generally speaking! It's hard for us to stop and let someone else have a turn! But Sunday by Sunday we do stop and let the preachers—generally, a man—speak to us.

Please make sure you arrest our attention, challenge our spirits, address our attitudes, and fill our souls with singing. And how are you supposed to do that? "Well," you may reply, "by exegeting the Scriptures. That is what we went to seminary to learn."

Well now, while you were there, did anyone ever explain half the human race to you? Most of you have more of us looking at you and listening to you on a Sunday than our male counterparts. Many of us run the program of the church, care for the children of the church, polish the woodwork of the church, sing in the choir of the church, cook the pot-lucks for the church (in fact, the pots would have no luck at all without us), and generally "do" the work of the ministry. *We need you to feed us as thoroughly as you need us!*

To do this, you have to know where we're coming from. For example, where have we been on Sunday morning before you ever see us sitting in a pew? By the time we sit down, our minds are often hectic, our spirits frantic, and our souls arctic. By 9 A.M. we already have journeyed (in our minds) right through the day. We've had our Sunday—this day of rest (the wicked and women being exempt from the rule).

For some of us that are married, plans have to be made to feed more mouths than on any other day of the

week, to juggle the ever-present necessities of homelife more artfully than on any weekday, and gear up for more family fights than usual.

Realize we sit there trying to corral our thoughts. First of all, our children didn't want to come to church with us. "The preacher preaches too long, Mom!" We sit there worrying about all this while our husbands are somehow able to put it on one side and deal with it later. And just what are our little horrors doing to their Sunday School teachers, we worry next! You can see you have quite a job on your hands to chase our minds back to the Scriptures!

Many of us work outside the home as well as within it. What do you know about our world? Hopefully more than your sermon shows! Do you listen to us regularly as we try to explain what it's like for a woman out there? Have you any idea what it feels like, for instance, to go up for a job with a man of equal merit, get the job, and then receive less pay for it? Let us tell you about that!

Do you ever have a group of us women round to the parsonage and just *listen* to us so that you can see where we are coming from? Some of us love it and some of us hate it out in the marketplace; and more and more of us need encouragement to catch the vision of evangelism, rather than feeling added guilt about working.

Women are practical creatures—geniuses with schedules—keeping all parts of a dinner hot, dispatching three kids or more in as many different directions at once, and feeding them all by the next "gathering"

time. Maybe you could be more "practical" in your applications of the truth for us. Tell us the steps 1-2-3 to achieve the principles you pray about so eloquently. Men, we understand, work in broad concepts in the boardroom. They debate philosophy and work with goals. We need you to tell us the way your sermon can put boots on and walk into our kitchen, living room, bedroom, and office!

Women are relational creatures. This is where we live our lives, dream our dreams, move and have our being. How our ears prick up when you investigate Abraham's relationship with Lot, Jacob with Rachel, Sarah with Hagar, Mary with Elizabeth. Now we are at home in your talk. Now the principals stretch out their hands, and we are captivated. You have won our hearts.

This is not to say women are not intelligent creatures. Even though we like you to spend some time being practical for us, we aren't afraid of a Greek word, a lofty phrase, a nuance of a verse. We'll reach, stretch, risk the query at the end of a sermon if we don't quite know what you were saying, and even read a theology book if you lend us one! Don't insult us by forbearing to challenge us to wrestle with a current theological issue—but please be sensitive to our feelings about it and reactions to it.

Women are spiritual creatures. Some of us do not share some of your theological views about us. It's hard to hear our gifts discussed from the pulpit and well nigh impossible to divorce it from our femininity.

(Continued on page 23)

# The Call

by Louie E. Bustle

*Quito, Ecuador*

**P**reaching the good news of Jesus has been one of the great mysteries of God's kingdom. It is difficult for anyone to explain adequately why and how God calls men and women to proclaim the gospel through the preaching ministry. There seems to be nothing supernatural nor spectacular about preaching, but still there is a divine unity that takes place between the person who is speaking and the One who delivers the message, especially as preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The call to preach follows no set pattern. Paul on the Damascus road received a direct, audible command, calling him to the ministry of preaching. For others, it is a slow awakening and a deepening conviction that God is opening a door and that He has chosen to call that person to the preaching ministry.

God does call whom He chooses! We may not feel worthy of the privilege. We may not feel that we have much ability. He has made great and wonderful preachers out of many people who did not seem to possess any great talent for the preaching of the gospel.

We must be confident that we have been called to preach. With that conviction, God helps each one develop a successful ministry. He has entrusted the gospel to us, and we must fulfill His call as our responsibility.

The deep conviction that Paul felt becomes a reality for anyone who knows he is called. Paul exclaimed, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart

for the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Paul also declared, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). I have felt that conviction in my own ministry. The greatest privilege bestowed upon me was when God chose me to carry the glad tidings. Preaching has become a great love to me! I cannot imagine doing anything else. I made a deep commitment many years ago to a loving Lord who saw something in nothing. Whatever I have been able to do for Him has only been through His power. As a church leader in South America, it is not my position that gives me any authority. God grants authority through anointed preaching.

We are called to communicate. The power of words spoken under the unction of the Holy Spirit is instrumental in moving people. Preaching is powerful. Preaching proclaims the good news of Jesus. Preaching should always be under the unction of the Spirit in a forceful manner and with great enthusiasm.

In the Old Testament, the prophet was known as a man of God. In the New Testament, the man called to preach is referred to as the herald who carried His message to the people. He is also known as the shepherd. The shepherd protects and leads his sheep. Understanding the importance of preaching as well as being a pastor to hurting people is vital. Preaching is God's chosen way to inspire and lead His people.

The shepherd is a servant, a servant of the people as well as a servant of the most high God. Sometimes we have seen the "chosen one" become puffed up with fame

until servanthood is forgotten. Jesus led because He had passed through the tests of life by walking where people walked. They listened to Him because of who He was and how He identified himself as a servant.

There is power in being a servant. A minister is willing to suffer for the gospel's sake. He is a peacemaker, yet he proclaims the call and demands of the gospel.

God is never satisfied with a "maintenance ministry." He plans for us to multiply our ministry in the Kingdom. One of our responsibilities is to multiply by training God-called pastors or preachers. We need to create a positive atmosphere so that people will be sensitive to hear His call. He calls whom He chooses, whether we think they are capable or not. They can know that He calls by that same still, small voice by which He called us. In obedience, people called by Him through our ministry will respond and say, "Here am I, Lord; use me." Then we must help them develop that special ministry.

In South America I feel a great need for more shepherds. We have been using a slogan, "Each One Train One." The response has been so great that pastors are multiplying their ministries at an explosive rate. An explosion of church growth has occurred with the emphases, "Each Church Start a New Church" and "Each Member Win a New Member." When biblical principles are used, God moves just as He did in the New Testament.

God's call is a call to develop the ability to minister to the social and spiritual needs of His people. To multiply His Church, we need a vision to multiply our ministries of the Word. My call to preach is fresh and even greater today. The best part is this: every week I am not just preaching in one assigned place, but in many countries of the world through His "called ones" who have been reached through ministry.

We "called ones" must give adequate leadership to make an impact on our world with the wonderful message of Jesus and His transforming power. I am glad to be one of those called ones, that the world may know Jesus. Let us fulfill that call and destiny now!



# Cultivating the Fine Art of Story Preaching

by C. S. Cowles

Nampa, Idaho

*With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable (Mark 4:33-34).*

**D**eanna, it's time for prayer," I said as I tucked our little daughter into bed one night.

"But I don't want to pray, Daddy."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," she replied.

"Well, then, I'll pray for both of us."

"No, Daddy, don't pray. Tell me a story instead."

"What story would you like me to tell you?"

"David and Goliath. Tell me that story."

And so, once again I did. She grew quiet. Her eyes fixed on an invisible screen just beyond the bedroom wall. She became enthralled in the great drama. After the stone from David's sling found its mark, dropping the giant in his tracks, she was ready to pray.

Perhaps there is a sense in which none of us are really ready to pray until we have heard a story—the story of God in Christ, communicated through a thousand stories. While I have long loved stories, listened to stories, read stories, and told stories as sermon illustrations, it has only been very recently that I have begun to discover that stories are more than illustrative devices; story can be a legitimate and effective means of proclamation itself! Homileticians are calling this "Narrative Preaching."

## I. THE POWER OF STORY PREACHING

"Jay O'Callahan has revived the ancient art of storytelling," announced the subtitle of a *Time* magazine article on June 19, 1978. Mr. O'Callahan is a storyteller in residence for the public schools in Quincy, Framingham, and Brookline, Mass. In this technological age where young people "have seen everything on TV," students will actually skip lunch or gym class to attend O'Callahan's storytelling time. Why? Says O'Callahan, "People are hungry for storytelling because we live in an age preoccupied with technology and science" (Jensen, 116-17).

The best-selling theologian over the last three decades is also a consummate storyteller. I remember exactly where and when I became hooked on C. S. Lewis. I was 16 years old. A missionary's kid in Hong Kong.

Two of my friends and I went back-packing. We camped by a stream. I took what was then a newly published book, *The Screwtape Letters*. I was hooked. I read and reread that book. He wrote another story about a fanciful bus trip to heaven, *The Great Divorce*, which makes heaven and hell come alive. *The Chronicles of Narnia* continue to sell briskly on the secular book market, along with the fantasies of his friend, J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of the enormously best-selling books *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and *The Silmarillion*. Lewis and Tolkien were but continuing a tradition popularized two centuries earlier by a fellow Englishman, John Bunyan, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* has been second only to the Bible in popularity since then.

C. S. Lewis was the prime catalyst

in Sheldon Vanauken's conversion, who authored a recent Christian best-seller, *A Severe Mercy*, which tells the story of his spiritual journey.

The secret is what Frederick Buechner calls "indirection." That is, story preaching does not assault us head-on with the truth, as does proclamation or exhortation. In story form, the *truth sneaks up on us* and grabs us unawares. We are caught up in the drama, drawn into the story line as actors and players, and buy into the inner logic of the truth almost without being conscious of it.

Americans have been more divided and have shed more blood over the race issue than any other in the history of their country. Yet, what did more to bury this hatchet in our own time—more perhaps than all of the marches and civil rights demonstrations—was the appearance of a story told by Alex Haley in his best-seller, *Roots*. When dramatized by television, it set records for a sustained viewing audience that have not been broken since. I too became totally engrossed in the series. I too, along with millions of others, wept unashamedly for joy when the slaves were set free. It was widely reported that at the conclusion of the final episode, children ran out into the streets, shouting, "They're free! They're free!"

Why can't preaching be like that? In my effort to preach biblically, I have been careful to do good exegesis; analyze Greek words, tenses, and roots; extract the meaning of the text in careful exposition; make relevant applications; and then conclude with some sort of exhortation.

My people have left church—all too often—informed but unmoved, enlightened but uninspired. Rather than finding the release, the liberty, the freedom that Jesus offered when He preached the “good news” (Luke 4:16 ff.), I am afraid that I have loaded them down with yet an even heavier sense of obligation and more guilt.

It's been a long time since people ran out of church, crying out, “They're free! They're free!” Or, more important, “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” Why not seek to learn to tell stories in such a way that people's eyes are opened until they cry aloud with the man touched by Jesus, “Once I was blind but now I can see” (John 9:25, Williams). Is it possible that the storyteller's art can help us in preaching *The Greatest Story Ever Told*?

People are  
hungry for  
storytelling

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## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY PREACHING

### 1. The Bible is the world's greatest compendium of illustrations and stories

In the beginning are stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Noah, the tower builders, Abraham, and the patriarchs. Our glimpse into the future is filled with mind-blowing images of the world's end: psychedelic images of the beast, the whore, the living creatures, lofty scenes of worship, the battle of Armageddon, and the triumph of the Lamb who was slain but is alive forevermore. The Bible is one story after another, reaching its highest point in the story of Jesus.

God could have revealed himself by handing down divinely dictated scrolls, heavenly Ph.D. dissertations, replete with definitions, analyses, formulation, and carefully reasoned syllogisms. Rather, He chose to enter into the stream of human history through persons. *Their story became His story.* The God of the Bible is not the god of the philosophers, nor the god of theological abstraction. He is a God with a human face. He is a God who speaks with a human voice, who desires human friendship, who entangles himself in the web of human relationships, who—in Christ—gets crushed in the vortex of historical events, and who sheds human blood upon a

wooden cross. Truth is incarnational before it becomes propositional.

### 2. Jesus' preaching was, in large measure, story preaching

Literary critics affirm that two of the stories Jesus told are among the greatest short stories ever written: the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan. Twenty-seven of these short stories of Jesus are preserved for us in the Synoptic Gospels. They constituted the bulk of His preaching: “With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them . . . He did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Mark 4:33-34).

Jesus could have delivered a carefully defined and well-argued dissertation on God's care. Instead, as Calvin Miller so beautifully expresses it,

When Jesus saw a sparrow fall to the ground, something within his heart snapped.

Was he alone at prayer the day it happened? Did our Lord . . . watch an old sparrow wing-split the Galilean air for the last illustration? Now the feathers were needed by the earth to make humus. Life must give itself, sparrow-fashion, so that the ground into which it fell would celebrate newness. Still, the Son of God knew his Father was a sparrow

lover. Jesus had come to show others what it is like to die. Being Son of God, he watched the sparrow, brittle of bone and beak, crash into the coarse earth. The feathers heaved as though they might rise once more. Finally they shuddered, relaxed, and lay, down-soft in the morning. Jesus perhaps suffered one of the unrecorded tears of Scripture, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father” (Matt. 10:29) (*Spirit, Word, and Story*, 153).

### 3. Apostolic preaching was story preaching

On the Day of Pentecost, how did Peter preach? He told the story of Jesus,

a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. . . . This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear (*Acts* 2:22-24, 32-33, RSV).

Peter's preaching was story preaching.

The best biblical preaching seeks to “flesh out” the truth in the living, dynamic, multidimensional narrative form in which it is given. In short, biblical religion is not so much propositional as *personal*; not so much doctrinal as *incarnational*; not so much cognitive as *affective*.

So, it strikes me that if we desire to be truly biblical preachers, we will preach not only the point of the story but also the story itself. We will concern ourselves not only with the “bottom line” message but also with the narrative journey that carries it along. Marshall McLuhan, the philosopher of media, coined the phrase “The medium is the message.” Never is that more true than in story.



I'll never forget the Sunday afternoon when we heard Arthur Fiedler conduct the San Francisco Philharmonic Orchestra in a great outdoor concert in Stern's Grove in San Francisco. Thousands of us, sitting about on the grass, were brought to our feet again and again in applause. But then, the next day, I made the mistake of buying a *San Francisco Examiner* and reading a music critic's analysis of that very concert. What a disappointment! It was to the full experience of the concert what a stick drawing is to a Michelangelo fresco.

#### 4. People love stories

Not only children but also adults like hearing and telling stories. Calvin Miller writes about a Shiite Muslim woman who lived near his church. Having very little in common to talk about, he worked on pronouncing her name correctly. She told him that it could be anglicized as Scheherazade.

Her name came alive. Scheherazade is the name of a fabled harem princess whose sultan every morning executed his latest one-night stand. Not Scheherazade! At the end of her one-night stand, she told the sultan a fascinating tale. Like an old Baghdad rerun of "As the Muslim World Turns," however, she stopped her tantalizing episode with "To be continued." Even though the sultan wanted to get on with morning-after executions, he couldn't stand to kill her, not knowing how her story ended. His need to know prevailed over his need for sexual conquests. For once . . . story conquered eros, and Scheherazade lived to tell the story, or rather a thousand stories. Naturally the sheik kept her. He was mad about stories. So are we all. Our pulpit stories should be as captivating as Scheherazade's (pp. 141-42).

At a large church in California where I preached recently, a delegation of people intercepted me following Sunday School to ask if I would tell the story about Craig, the big bearded hippie. They heard me tell it a couple of years earlier at a district laymen's retreat and wanted to hear it again!

People love stories because their life is a story—a story of awakening and disillusionment, a story of hopes

and disappointments, a story of triumphs and tragedy. Their story is still being written. Its lines are often blurred and its plot unclear. Often they cannot make sense out of what's going on. Theirs is a story in which the last chapter has not yet been written.

Consequently, people listen to stories, hoping against hope that in someone else's story they will dis-

**Story preaching  
does not assault  
us head-on with  
truth**

cover some clues that will help them unravel their own story. They strain to see a light that will illuminate what's going on with them. They hunger to find some assurance that their story is going to have a triumphant ending.

#### 5. Stories build community

Ask a Hebrew, "What do you be-

**Stories give us  
self-identity and  
bind us to each  
other**

lieve?" He would not answer, "I believe that God is One, that He is holy and just." Rather he would answer,

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. Then we cried to

the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; and He has brought us to this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey (*Deut. 26:5-9, NASB*).

Ask a Christian, "What do you believe?" He will not answer, "I believe in a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable." Rather, he will answer,

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead (Apostles' Creed).

The story of God in Christ is the very glue that binds us together in the Body of Christ. Christians for centuries have found community in repeating together the Apostles' Creed, which gains its power—unlike the Chalcedonian Creed—in that it is spelled out in story form. Doctrines divide, stories unite. The closer we move to the great biblical story of salvation history, which culminates in the story of Jesus, the closer we come to each other.

I have discovered that this principle holds true in the congregations where I have preached. It is hard to imagine a more disparate crowd than the one gathered in church on any given Lord's day. They range from infant to aged, from biblically illiterate to the scriptural Ph.D., from welfare recipient to chief executive officer, from arch-conservative to skeptical liberal, from emotional cripples to health club fanatics, from sinner to saint. And then I see what happens when I tell a story. They who are many become one in their laughter, one in their tears, one in their identification with the subjects in the story. It is incredible how one man's story becomes every man's story.

Stories locate us in the human condition, give us self-identity, and bind us to each other. Stories create, build, and nourish community. And so we tell the old, old story, over and over again, in a multiplicity of different ways. We strive to make "the old story" come alive in fresh ways and by telling it through the medium of many new stories.

#### 6. Stories rivet truth to the mind and heart in a timeless way

I received a long-distance call from a former student, now an associate pastor in Washington State. He remembered a story I told in class six or seven years before and asked if I could find it and send it to him. He described it well enough that I knew exactly where to go. It was in Farley Mowat's book of short stories about the Yukon titled *The Snow Walker*. Mowat is Canada's most prolific writer of the far north, author of the best-selling book and movie *Never Cry Wolf*. Here is his story that my student remembered and requested.

Ano came upon a snow house, nearly buried under a terrible winter's night blizzard. He dug down through the roof only to find it a tomb, filled with Indians who had starved to death. He was about to crawl back out the hole when he noticed some rotting hides move. Incredibly, a little girl emerged. Skin hanging on delicate bones, only her eyes were alive. Though Ano was young, he knew what he must do. He cut a vein in his arm, let the blood run into a bowl, and fed it to her a drop at a time. She was far too weak to chew, much less digest solid food. He kept this up for five days until she was strong enough to travel. She recovered, grew, and blossomed into a beautiful teenager. Ano fell in love with her and took her to be his bride.

Several years later, his people suffered a terrible famine because the Caribou did not migrate by their usual routes. Ano's people began to perish. He left his family on a desperate search for food. He found some coastal tribesmen that loaded his sled with seal meat. But by the time he returned, more had perished including his young wife. Wrapped up with her body on the ledge in their snow house,

however, he found his year-old son alive and surprisingly strong. He checked his wife's arm and saw where the veins had been opened. She, whose own life had been

## Involvement is one of the foremost aims of story preaching

### III. WHAT KIND OF STORIES DO WE TELL?

There are five basic types of sermonic stories we ought to tell.

#### 1. Tell our story

Wait a minute; didn't Paul say, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord"? (2 Cor. 4:5). Isn't it unseemly, even arrogant for the preacher to lift himself up as the subject of an illustration?

Not necessarily. Paul also told his converts, "Follow me as I follow the Lord. Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (see 1 Cor. 11:1). Three times in the Book of Acts the story of Paul's conversion is told, twice coming from his own lips. When his gospel is challenged in Galatia, he asserts that he learned it not from men but received it by revelation from the Lord. His own aggrieved experience underlies his Corinthian correspondence. He apologizes for his boastfulness, but he boasts anyway. On more than one occasion he speaks of the gospel as "my gospel."

The final court of appeals is the first-person witness, whether it be in the realm of history, or of science, or of the courts. Jesus not only spoke the truth but also said, "I am the truth" (see John 14:6). The Revela-

tion of John begins with the first person, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit" (1:10). Again and again the prophets testified, "I saw the Lord." "The Lord came to me and said . . ." "The Lord spoke to me." And, as in Hosea's case, his whole life—especially his heartbreaking relationship to Gomer—became a parable, the very content of his message.

Walter Wangerin puts it bluntly: "Tell stories, ye preachers of God. Humble yourselves to make of yourselves a parable. Because when you do that, you invite, as well, the wholeness of the hearers. Then not only their analytic minds, but their laughter shall be in the pew; and by laughter, their lungs and their consternation; their bodies, their sympathy, their emotions, their distress, their inadequacy, their male and femaleness, their parenthood—their experience! You will be inviting them as people relationship, and so, love. And then—if it is in such a relationship that God takes up his dwelling—he dwells in the wholeness of the people's histories. His temple is their experience" (*Ragman*, 77).

The first-person story is interesting. People are supremely interested in people. And, since you and I are persons, people are curious about us—especially about how God's story is being written in the story of our lives. As we discern the finger of God writing His story in our story, people begin to see God writing His story in their stories.

Stories are more than illustrative devices

The earliest apostles made no claim to personal authority. Yet they did affirm, without apology, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). But that was enough to launch the greatest spiritual revolution in human history. People are interested in what you and I have seen and heard!

Two quick cautions: *first*, Paul said he could have boasted in his strengths, but he didn't. He boasted rather in his sufferings, his persecutions, his disappointments, his failures, his weaknesses, "that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. 12:9, NASB). We must be careful to avoid spiritual strutting. We may speak of others' strengths in illustrating sermons, but it is best to speak of our follies, our failures, our disappointments. People identify far more easily with our weakness than with our strength, more readily with our tears than our joy, more deeply with our failures than our successes.

*Second*, we ought not to overdo the first person singular. A pinch of salt flavors a steak, but a pound will kill! Confessional preaching has great power if done sparingly. If we let it all "hang out" too often and too explicitly, we lose that sense of mystery that keeps people intrigued about us.

## 2. Tell His story

The story of Jesus is of continuing interest to people. The Gospels provide us with a rich lode of gold-laden ore from which to mine any number of illustrations. If the common people heard Jesus gladly because He never spoke to them without lacing His teaching with parables, then our people will hear us gladly when we fill our sermons with His stories, His miraculous birth, His mighty works, His saving acts, His relationships, His example, His death, His resurrection, His appearances to His own, His ascension, and His coming again.

## 3. Tell Bible stories

The Bible is a story book. It proclaims the story of God's saving acts told through the stories of His people. If we learn to tell Bible stories with imagination, humor, and pathos, we will always have somebody listening. Using the Bible as our principal illustrative resource has the added benefit of adding to our people's biblical knowledge. Most

of what people in the pew know about the Bible is not gleaned from their own study but from listening to Bible stories told in Sunday School and through sermons. So, let's put our bucket into that well in every sermon. We can generally find a biblical illustration to illuminate just about any kind of point we need to make, for the Bible is an inexhaustible library of stories.

Some biblical stories are so graphic and pointed that they need little or no elaboration. Joseph and his brothers, David and Goliath, and Elijah on Mount Carmel fall into this category. Others invite personification: that is, they come to life when we become one of the actors or narrate it as if we were there in person. I can still remember, after 30 years, a preacher keeping me spellbound by using the simple device of reading a letter from the apostle Paul as if it were addressed to our church. I can remember another, decades after the telling, that began this way: "I was walking down the road one day when I came upon a big hunk of a man—it was Peter, Simon Peter, and he was weeping." And then the preacher went on to describe an imaginary conversation he had with Peter following his denial and his breakfast meeting with the risen Christ beside the seashore.

Still other biblical stories lend themselves to contemporizing: that is, with only minor modifications we can make them walk and live in the 20th century. Jesus' parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the rich fool, and the rich man and Lazarus (i.e., a wealthy farmer and a migrant worker) can be easily and effectively translated into contemporary characters.

## 4. Tell historical stories

I was preparing a series of Advent sermons leading up to Christmas Sunday when I noticed a passing reference to Caesar Augustus in Luke 2:1. I confess that I knew little about Caesar Augustus. Since he was important enough to be mentioned by Luke, I thought that I had better find out something about him. I spent a fascinating morning in a local college library digging up Caesar Augustus from the tomes of encyclopedias and compendiums of world history.

Much to my surprise, I discovered that not only was he the longest-

reigning, most popular, most creative, and most innovative of Roman Caesars, worshiped in his own time by an adoring populace, but also he was the exact antithesis of Jesus. Out of this study came a sermon, "Caesar or Christ?" It fell naturally into two points: first, "Caesar Represents the Best That This World Has to Offer." Second, "Christ Represents the Best That God Has to Offer." Under the second point I spun out a whole series of comparisons, contrasting Caesar's worldly greatness with Christ's divine lowliness. I concluded in this way:

Two thousand years ago, the story of Jesus was but an obscure, tiny, insignificant footnote in the reign of Caesar Augustus. Today the reign of Caesar Augustus is but an obscure, tiny, insignificant footnote in the story of Jesus. *After whom will you pattern your life: Caesar or Christ?*

Happy is the preacher who sees history as an incredibly rich and nearly inexhaustible reservoir of lessons to be learned, illustrations to be used, and stories to be told. Great preachers, past and present, have been adept at harnessing illustrations from the momentous events and great personages of history—especially the lives of the saints.

The Bible is  
one story  
after another

## 5. Tell contemporary stories

When we say, "This week I read," or "Yesterday I saw," or "This morning before Sunday School . . ." we can be sure that all ears will stand to attention. People are incredibly interested in what's going on, here and now, with people and events. Look at how they devour newspapers, magazines, television, drama, movies. I don't recall my youngest daughter, Deanna, ever fighting me over who was going to read the Bible, but she would plot and plan to get her hands on my *Time* magazine before

me. And what section did she always turn to first? The People's department. From her elementary school days, she has had an incredible hunger to know about people. So when we seize some contemporary person or event and baptize it to illuminate the truth of God, few in the pew will continue in a comatose condition. Like a bee constantly in search of honey, we need to be looking for contemporary illustrative material.

#### 6. Create stories

That is what Nathan the prophet did so effectively, in confronting

King David with his sin, when he spun a tale about a rich farmer who coveted and stole a poor farmer's lone sheep. That is what Jesus did in creating His parables. That is what the great storytellers have done from Homer to Garrison Keillor. "Once upon a time . . ." gathers attention, quickens the imagination, and become a pliable vehicle for communicating truth. "It's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon . . ." is an invitation to experience a myth that becomes, nevertheless, more real to us than yesterday's newspaper.

Stories Jesus told are among the greatest short stories ever written

### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF STORY PREACHING

#### 1. In story preaching, the narrative form is preserved

We resist the urge to take the exegetical ax and begin to chop the story to pieces in our effort to extract the truth and then recast it in the form of a propositional statement that can be proclaimed or taught. Richard Jensen protests:

The biblical writers very often communicate with us through stories. Why should we de-story these stories in our sermons and simply pass on the point of the story to our listeners? Why should

Not the god of philosophers but a God with a human face

Metaphors of participation, however, are different in that the point really cannot be made apart from the story. How was Jesus to answer the scribe's question "Who is my neighbor?" Give him a dissertation on neighbors as opposed to family, as opposed to foreigners, as opposed to strangers, as opposed to enemies?

Have you noticed, in reading the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion in the Gospels, that the evangelists steadfastly resist interpreting the event, drawing conclusions, making the point? There is no theology of the Atonement, either expressed or implied, in the Passion-Cross narratives. The Gospel writers intuitively understood that *the story of Christ's passion and death is the preaching itself!* It needed no extensive elaboration or explanation.

#### 3. The aim of story preaching is to involve the listener in the gospel story

A good story draws the listeners in with the storyteller. We know how involved we can get in stories. We laugh. We cry. We hope. We wonder. And we get caught up in the plot and work with the storyteller toward the resolution of the problem. Perhaps the storyteller may do what Jesus did. He allowed the scribe to discover on his own the point of the parable of the good Samaritan.

Involvement is one of the foremost aims of story preaching. The hearer identifies with either the victim or the hero and supplies his own ending. The application thus made is very personal, his own. And that is the beauty and power of story preaching. It is not the preacher hurling

thunderbolts of gospel imperatives at the passive listener: the listener himself says, "Aha! I may, I can, I ought, I should, I must, I will!"

#### 4. Story preaching makes its point indirectly

Emily Dickinson said, "Tell all the truth, but tell it [at a] slant." Indirection means that, through story, the truth sneaks up and catches the hearer by surprise. The truth is veiled, quiet, reticent, like a shy young bride about to be given away in marriage who, nevertheless, draws all eyes to herself.

Kierkegaard maintains that what is lacking among Christians is not information, but the desire and capacity to assimilate that information. The ingestion and digestion of biblical truth can happen better by indirection than direction. To use the vitamin analogy, we can pop vitamins, but it is so much more satisfying to bite into a Yakima Red Delicious! Too much of our exegesis and exposition has been like synthesizing vitamins from the meat of God's Word. Our people hunger for the taste of meat itself, the full, rich flavor of the Yakima Red Delicious.

#### 5. Good story preaching is open-ended

Story preaching can be done in such a way that we don't have to finish off our stories with, "The meaning is . . ." If we stop short of adding an explanatory footnote, we have left our sermon open-ended. We have allowed the hearer to make his own application and custom-make it for his particular situation and need. Or, better still, *the Holy Spirit is*

we rip the content out of the form as our normal homiletical process? If the story . . . is of no matter why didn't the biblical writer just tell us the point in the first place? (*Telling the Story*, 128).

#### 2. In story preaching, the story is the preaching itself

This is not using stories to illustrate a point already made, but making the point with the story. Stories are extended metaphors. There are *metaphors of illustration* and *metaphors of participation*. Most of the stories we tell in sermons are metaphors of illustration.

given maximum freedom to make His point through the story.

#### 6. In story preaching faith is evoked

Preaching and faith have everything to do with each other. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God . . . which we preach" (Rom. 10:17, 8, KJV). Peter tells the story of the cross, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost, and the hearers cry out, "What must we do [to be

saved]?" (Acts 2:37, JB). Paul tells the marvelous story of his conversion on the Damascus road, and King Agrippa cries out, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (26:28). In a story I see myself: my needs, my hurts, my sin. And in the story of Jesus I see the answer, and I respond—not to propositional truths but to a person! A person whose story I can identify with, whose story I can by faith make my own!

People are  
supremely  
interested in  
people

### V. HOW DO WE CULTIVATE THE STORYTELLING ART?

Don't overdo  
the first  
person  
singular

I have been recently reading such books as Eugene Lowrie's *Homiletical Plot*, Richard Jensen's *Telling the Story*, Patricia Wilson-Kastner's *Imagery for Preaching*, Robert Young's *Religious Imagination*, and Calvin Miller's *Spirit, Word, and Story*. I have gleaned some ideas that are helping me in my quest to cultivate the storytelling art.

#### 1. Stories must have a point

Stories must say something. They must relate to, speak about, and illuminate some aspect of the human drama. Like a good sermon, they must say one thing! Like a good painting, they must create a single picture. Story lines may develop all sorts of subplots and offer all sorts of interesting insights, but even these are relevant only as they contribute to the main plot. Jesus' parables, like a surgeon's scalpel, were told to open up the truth: truth about God, truth about the Kingdom, truth about human nature in all of its highs and lows, truth about ultimate destiny.

Likewise, our stories must have a point—not just any old point, but a point that explicates the truth of the

gospel. So we seek for stories not only within the Bible but also beyond that, like the Psalmist's heavens, "declare the glory of God" (19:1).

#### 2. Stories must have an ending

Again, like a good sermon, they must come to a clear, decisive conclusion—a conclusion that either makes the point or implies the point. "There is something in us that resents the unfinished symphonies of life," says Calvin Miller. "We want stories (and certainly sermons) to end with recognizable conclusions of hope."

The Resurrection shouts out, "Free at last!" There is hope! There is purpose! There is everlasting life. The story of salvation history begun in Genesis is concluded in Revelation. We can live happily ever after because of that story!

#### 3. Stories must have a plot

In narrative or story preaching, what is important is not clearly identifiable points, but a sense of progress. At least six movements can be identified that characterize a good story plot.

First, it is important to *set the scene and identify the major players*. It was not enough for Jesus to

tell us that a couple of Jews passed by the man who lay beaten up beside the road. It was vital to the point He was making that He tell us one was a priest and the other a Levite. Especially important to the story was that He identified the hero as an antihero, a Samaritan.

Second, in developing a story plot, it is necessary to *upset the equilibrium*. In the parable of the good Samaritan, a pilgrim is set upon by robbers and beaten up. That grabs our attention. We are jolted out of our complacency. We are alarmed. We are set on edge. We are drawn into the story because we know that at any time and any place—even when we are leaving church minding our own business—we too might be set upon by robbers, by rip-off artists, by false accusers who will strip us of our jobs, our careers, our reputations, our financial security, and even our health.

Third, we must *analyze the discrepancy*. When we think things are about as bad as they can get, they get worse. Two religious professionals, whom we would expect to turn aside and offer assistance to the man, instead turn away and pass on. At this point in the story we find ourselves chasing after false clues, being thrown off the track. The plot thickens. We are caught up in the drama's web and find ourselves disappointed, even angry with the unfeeling priest and Levite. And we are also becoming more involved with the poor pilgrim bleeding to death. Will he be rescued or will he simply perish because of neglect?

Fourth, when the tension becomes almost unbearable, then the good

The Bible is an  
inexhaustible  
library of stories



storyteller *discloses the clue to resolution*. Enter the Samaritan. Even before Jesus tells us, we anticipate that things are going to be different. Rescue is on the way. The beaten pilgrim may be yet saved. Hope suddenly breaks through. Peter is not condemned to sit forever at the gate, weeping because of his denial. The prodigal is not doomed to the pigpen forever. There is anticipation of healing, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of life.

Fifth is the growing *anticipation of resolution*. Unlike the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan does not pass by. He stops. He takes pity upon the bleeding and broken man. He "bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine" (Luke 10:34). The plot begins to build energy as it moves toward its anticipated climax.

Finally comes *the gospel message*. The Samaritan picks up the poor victim, takes him to an inn, cleans him up, tends to his wounds, and makes full provision for his recovery. Good news! The question that prompted the parable in the first place: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), has become rhetorical. The point is obvious.

In telling stories when the point is as obvious as in this one, let us resist the urge to amplify. Elaboration diminishes the dramatic impact of the story. Let us learn from Jesus: He concludes the story by a pungent restating of the original question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:36). What can the scribe say?

Happy is the preacher who sees history as a rich reservoir of stories

Some stories will make their impact simply because they end with *catastrophe*, leaving an ache in our heart and a tear in our eye. Yet even

these stories hint at another story yet to be told that will have a happy ending. Catastrophe stories leave the hearer with the feeling that this is "To Be Continued" and resolved at another time.

So, when we preach on the Cross, and thus end the story with catastrophe, we must conclude in such a way as to anticipate its resolution on Easter Sunday when we shout, "Eureka! Christ is risen!"

### Conclusion

In my fourth year as pastor after seminary, the hard realities of ministry had begun to set in. Most of my idealistic expectations were being thoroughly crushed. Especially disenchanted had I become regarding preaching. Did anyone hear anything I had said? Did they remember past the parking lot? Was my preaching making a difference with anyone? For the first time in my life I was beginning to have serious doubts as to whether I had the gifts or was even called to preach.

"Once upon a time . . ."  
gathers attention,  
quickens the  
imagination

While in this forlorn frame of mind I found myself, somewhat unwillingly, attending a pastors' conclave at Pasadena College (now Point Loma Nazarene College). Dr. Clovis Chappell, famed Methodist pastor and author, was the featured speaker. I wasn't too thrilled about that since I guessed—rightly—that he had to be in his mid or late 80s. Sure enough, when he tottered onto the platform, face wrinkled, thin hair a wispy gray, owl-like eyes staring at us like those of old folk in rest homes, I knew that it was going to be a long hour. When he began to speak, his gravelly voice and slurred, mumbled speech sent me into my portfolio for the new book I had purchased and brought with me just in case.

I had scarcely read a page, however, until he captured me with a story. Soon I was chuckling. Then laughing. And then weeping. And then pondering, reflecting. And then soaring up into heavenly places in Christ Jesus! Inside of that old body lived a clear, sharp mind, a keen wit, and the accumulated wisdom and experience of an illustrious lifetime of preaching. In addition to his other gifts he was a master storyteller. I never did get past that first page as that dynamic old preacher began to play upon my spirit like a concertmaster plays his violin.

Especially do I remember the vivid way he described Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. When the Lord asked Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" (37:3), I found myself likewise crying out in desperation, "O God, can these sterile bones of my preaching live?" As Chappell began to describe the miracle that took place in Ezekiel's vision, I too began to see a miracle taking place in my ministry. I sensed the mighty Spirit of God breathing new life into my call and new promise into my ministry.

As he tottered back to his chair, there was not a sound in that auditorium. No one moved. Then someone finally broke the spell with a barely audible but deeply heartfelt, "Amen!" The next thing I knew, we were on our feet applauding. And so it went for all five sessions.

As I was driving up the California coast to my church, with the backdrop of a setting sun lighting the waters of the Pacific Ocean on fire, a fire was burning in my breast. As I lived and relived the preached Word from the last three days, I could scarcely see the road for the tears filling my eyes. On Highway 101, in the spring of 1964, I made a new covenant with God. I promised Him that if He would enable me, He would have a preacher on His hands until the day I died. I can testify with Paul, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19, RSV).

Whatever God has been pleased to do in and through my ministry since, I owe much to an old preacher who caught my attention, riveted my mind, thrilled my soul, impacted my will—a storyteller par excellence!

# The Christian Use of Humor

by Montford Lee Neal  
Bristow, Okla.



**R**ecently while flying from Oklahoma City to Lexington, Ky., an article from *Sky* titled "Just Joking," by psychologist Perry Buffington, captured my thoughts concerning how Christians can use humor successfully; for "teasing, or kidding around, can be an effective way of reducing anxiety and building relationships." How can Christians creatively use humor for the kingdom of God?

Traditionally many Christians have poured scorn on any trivial talk or "foolish . . . jesting" (Eph. 5:4, KJV)—and for good reason! However, "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22). Humor has a rightful place in the work of God and the building of His kingdom. Creative humor can lift the audience to new expectations, excite the class for better discussion, relieve the tense board or business meeting, and make things go much better.

To experience a good reason to laugh is healthy, gives the individual a sense of worth, makes the work easier, allows for individual freedom of expression, and serves as a source of renewal for more and creative work. Humor can be the necessary ingredient to introduce a new idea, gather support for the agenda, or get the attention of the audience for the message or lecture.

Rightly placed humor that is uplifting and positive can be helpful in getting the point of a lesson or message across. Humor can help an individual say things that are not always

easy to relate—difficult truths or truthful but painful facts about a situation or thing. Caution should be used in every case to keep humor "Christian" and not use it as a put-down of persons or personalities, to create uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings about certain issues. Relating the message that is conducive to Christian fellowship and ethics is essential to all Christian communication.

The abuse of humor in religious circles has inhibited those who would normally use humor creatively. Elton Trueblood's book *The Humor of Christ* points clearly to the words of Christ embodied in the Gospels and His usage of humor.

Christ employed humor for the sake of truth and many of His teachings, when seen in this light, become brilliantly clear for the first time. Irony, satire, paradox, even laughter itself help clarify Christ's famous parables, His brief sayings, and important events in His life.

An example of Jesus' humor struck me during seminary days when Dr. Thomas Boomershine, United Theo-

logical Seminary Professor of New Testament, in teaching about Mark's oral tradition and the feeding of the 5,000, emphasized one word.

"This is a remote place," [the disciples] said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But [Jesus] answered, "You give them something to eat" (*Mark 6:35-36*).

I chuckled aloud as I thought how shocked Andrew, Philip, Peter, and the others must have felt when the weight of the responsibility hit them of feeding a huge crowd with two fish and five loaves.

John W. Drakeford, professor of psychology and counseling at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has authored a book for ministers, *Humor in Preaching*. He stresses that humor is not inherently unspiritual and can serve the minister well as he makes positive "Christian" use of humor. People need to have pleasant memories. May the ministers of today's pulpits capitalize on one of the amazing gifts of God—create an atmosphere where Christian truth can be presented with a taste of wholesome humor now and then!



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# The Power of Preaching

by L. Milton Hankins

Mineral, Va.



A few weeks ago, after 26 years in ministry, I received an astonishing letter in my morning mail. Astonishing because it proved something I had believed was true but never had opportunity to confirm in all my years of preaching.

All preachers who sincerely believe themselves called to preach the Word, who diligently look to God for guidance in preparation and delivery of sermons, and who faithfully consider their personal inadequacies will periodically question whether God, in choosing preachers, has chosen the appropriate medium for His message.

From time to time I have even attempted to measure the effectiveness of my preaching. I have occasionally asked the Sunday evening congregation to name the title, text, or even the general theme of my morning message, only to face blank stares. A dear old deacon once looked up at me quizzically, missing the point, and responded, "Well, Pastor, if you can't remember, how in the world should I?"

Perhaps I had missed the point! Obviously there is something of much greater importance about a sermon. Remembering its title or text feeds the preacher's ego, but it does not feed the hearer's soul. What is of utmost importance about a sermon is, simply, whether or not it touched someone's heart, inspired him, or instructed him. More important still—whether it effectually altered the life of a single hearer!

We preachers rely on the biblical assurance:

So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it (*Isa. 55:11, NASB*).

The assurance of these words is sufficient, of course. But what a blessing for a preacher to open his mail and read:

Dear Pastor,

Your sermon on forgiveness last Sunday morning was an answer to the prayer I had been praying a long time. I know the Lord led you to preach it *on that day* because earlier or later would probably not have helped my husband.

With beautiful, painstaking prose, my correspondent went on to relate a series of circumstances that had bitterly alienated her husband and her son-in-law for more than two years. Her husband, who regularly attends worship with her, had "turned into a creature consumed with hate," she wrote. As a result, he refused to have anything at all to do with the son-in-law. He had even denied her the privilege of attending her grandson's graduation, which was to take place the following weekend.

Then she wrote:

After hearing your sermon, he agreed to go to the graduation. He knew he was wrong to hold that hate.

We went to the graduation and . . . it went off very well. . . . Praise the Lord for using you to straighten [husband's name] out.

Your sister in Christ.

No worthwhile purpose is served by sharing my ecstasy, except to say that it was considerable. In its afterglow, I realized that sharing the affirmation of the power of preaching could be especially rewarding. Sharing it expands greatly its potential for encouragement. Whether or not anyone else ever remembers the title or the text of the sermon I delivered on that particular Sunday morning, two lives—and hopefully more—were irrevocably changed for the better. Probably no one else in my congregation will ever know. It should be that way; it was not my doing. It was God's doing.

He is constantly changing lives through our preaching—even if nobody ever takes the time to tell us about it.



# ▶ Blackwood's Prime ▶ Pointers for Preachers

by Leslie Conrad, Jr.

*The late Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr., former professor of practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and Temple University and contributing editor of "Christianity Today," was my favorite professor-friend. It was my privilege to take no fewer than 15 of his graduate-school courses—which may be some sort of a student record. Our conversations and correspondence through the years dealt with everything from pussy willows to politics—but mostly preaching. During class periods I kept voluminous notes that included many of Dr. Blackwood's off-the-cuff remarks, most of which are not found in his writings. The following article is a compilation of Blackwood quotes, gathered from correspondence and class notes and presented as if he himself had written the manuscript for publication.*



“**P**reaching. Preaching is God's favorite way of transmitting power. Preaching is communication on fire. And it is a lot better to make a rhetorical slip now and then than to hand out ice cubes Sunday after Sunday.

Proclaim the positive Word of God! Christ is the living Word of God. The Bible is the written Word of God. Preaching is the spoken Word of God.

There is too much negation in present-day preaching. There may be someone in your audience, listening to you, who will never hear you again; don't let him leave having heard nothing but negations from your pulpit. There is not a single pessimistic note anywhere in the New Testament *after* the Resurrection. Why should there be any pulpit pessimism today, anywhere, by any preacher of Christ's good news? The pulpit is no place for apologies. Don't ever say, “Perhaps,” or “I think,” when you are preaching. The preacher ought to make his pulpit pronouncements authoritative.

I have probably read more sermons of undergraduates and graduates than any other seminary professor in the United States. I have discovered that 9 out of 10 preach in the past tense. They learned this unfortunate feature from the older preachers in today's pulpits. Always preach in the present tense.

A minister's pulpit work could well be divided three ways: 30 percent from the Old Testament, 40 percent from the Gospels, and 30 percent from the rest of the New Testament.

My advice to the preacher may be

summarized this way: (1) Preach what you understand. (2) Preach only what you believe. (3) Dare to be simple, but not childish—give solid substance in the simple form. (4) Plan each paragraph carefully. (5) Rely on repetition. (6) Stress persons—one at a time—rather than abstractions. (7) Give preference to persons in action. (8) Bring out tension—the good versus the bad. (9) Use “live” words and “fact” words that appeal to the ear and the eye. (10) Make the most of your imagination.

I strongly recommend that every preacher prepare one or more publishable manuscripts every 21 days, or at least prepare a piece as if he were going to publish it. And I am not against his submitting it to the proper magazine for publication. The more the minister writes well, the better his preaching becomes; the more he writes carelessly, the worse it gets!

♦♦♦ *The Sermon.* A good sermon should be as exciting as a baseball game. Most sermons are dull, dull, dull. To make the most of preaching, get hold of a few big ideas and drive them home. Choose your subjects carefully. I wouldn't dare preach on any subject that I hadn't thought through for more than a week. Start off right by putting religion in your sermon topic: this will be proof that it *is* a sermon topic.

One text for a sermon, and a short one at that, is sufficient. Parishioners are already confused enough. When a preacher uses more than one text in a sermon, he makes for lay confusion, especially for those listeners who are biblical illiterates.

The most important sentence in the sermon is the first one. The most impressive part of the sermon, besides its text, is the conclusion. A good conclusion does not include a summary; a summary looks back, and you don't look back in a conclusion. If you want to spoil a good sermon, summarize! The last sentence in your sermon might well be either a restatement of the text or a rephrasing of the text in your own words.

♦♦♦ *The Master Preachers.* I am a great admirer of the master preachers. I am convinced that a minister can learn more in five minutes from a sermon of a master preacher than from an entire book of sermons by a minister who has not yet proved himself. Greatness in preaching is measured by the effectiveness that continues long after the preacher has ceased to preach.

Living with the sermons of the great preachers is time well spent. That is what John Henry Jowett did. He lived with one great preacher at a time, and then went so far as to “try the master's method” in his own pulpit.

Frederick W. Robertson was the most influential preacher in the last 100 years. His influence was due to his unique way of preaching from the Bible. He was a master at preaching either doctrine or duty. Robertson was my type of pulpit master, because he was a hearer-minded preacher.

Charles H. Spurgeon was the most useful pastoral evangelist, as well as the most amazing preacher, since Paul! He proclaimed the Bible; he never apologized for it. He was a



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## People are buying Bibles—most don't know what to do with them after the purchase

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happy preacher, and he made his hearers happy with the gospel he preached.

Alexander Maclaren ranks as the best at interpreting the Scriptures. However, Robertson and George Adam Smith interpreted the Scriptures best when meeting human needs specifically.

John Bunyan and Dwight L. Moody were simple preachers, yet master preachers. Some of us are afraid to be simple. When I was young, I didn't like either Bunyan or Moody; I could understand every word they wrote. I learned later that I was wrong and they were right.

Horace Bushnell was the most brilliant preacher we ever had in America. He was the intellectual giant of the American pulpit. Phillips Brooks was the best preacher ever produced in America because he was our best pastoral evangelist. His Lyman Beecher Lectures, *Lectures on Preaching*, are the finest of the entire lecture series.

T. de Witt Talmage was probably the most popular preacher in American history. But when Talmage left a church, the people did also. His sermonizing was too preacher-centered.

What about the preachers of this century? Well, the sermons of Arthur John Gossip and James S. Stewart will probably live longer than those of any other 20th-century preachers. Gossip and Stewart are master preachers with master sermons. By the way, Stewart is my favorite living book writer.

The two most famous sermons in the English language are Horace Bushnell's "Every Man's Life a Plan

of God" and Phillips Brooks's "The Fire and the Calf." Book IV of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* contains the finest material ever written on homiletics. [Although Dr. Blackwood never specified what he considered to be the second-best work on homiletics, he was full of the highest praise for Chrysostom's "Treatise on the Priesthood."]

♦♦♦ *The Bible.* People are buying the Bible, but most of them don't know what to do with it after they make the purchase. Their preachers could be at fault. The one thing many preachers don't know is their Bible. I wish some of them knew as

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## Someone in your audience will never hear you again

♦

much about the Bible as they do about Plato. My favorite Bible verse is 2 Cor. 10:7: "Look at what is before your eyes. If any one is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we" (RSV).

♦♦♦ *Evangelism.* Evangelism is another name for "missions at home." In my estimation, the professional evangelist is good; the pastoral evangelist is better; the lay evangelist is best. I support C. H. Dodd's view that whenever the New Testament refers to preaching, it really means

evangelism. There is no closed season to evangelism, no reason why a congregation shouldn't have converts in July.

♦♦♦ *Seminary.* It is very difficult to teach seminarians who have been called to the ministry by their mothers and not by God! Seminaries, generally, have failed to teach *what* to preach and *how* to preach it. If I had the chance at age 35 to be a bishop or a beginning professor in a seminary, I would choose the latter. [Dr. Blackwood made this comment in his late 60s.] If I were the president of a seminary, I would say to each professor who was called to teach: Your business in teaching theology or Old Testament or New Testament or dogmatics or whatever is to prepare men to believe it and interpret it, to preach it and to teach it in facts of experience.

♦♦♦ *Parishioners.* Many a minister pities himself and his situation when he has everything he needs: parishioners! There are four types of parishioners: the dreamer, the drone, the drudge, and the doer. If the parishioners love their pastor, they will think seriously about what he preaches.

♦♦♦ *Pastoral Practice.* For the good of the parish, the pastor and his wife should contribute at least 10 percent of their income to the congregation's program, engage in grace before meals, and have a daily family altar. The news of such practices will eventually saturate the parish—and there is nothing wrong with such news as this getting around. ❧

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# The Three Most Common Mistakes Even Good Preachers Make

by Kenneth J. Collins

Fayetteville, N.C.

**T**he second hymn has been sung, and the congregation sits down as the minister ascends the pulpit. There is silence—and expectation. Drawing on the confidence that comes from sound preparation, the minister develops his text and offers a striking illustration about a crippled boy who “ran” a 10-kilometer race. The emotional appeal is strong and is reflected in many faces.

Toward the end of the sermon, however, many of the once-attentive listeners are now fidgeting. One assumes that they are no longer thinking about Luke 19:11-27 (the parable of the talents), the text of this sermon, but about the Dow-Jones average, what they will eat for lunch, or who will make it into the playoffs. What went wrong here? How can a sermon that began so well end so badly?

Perhaps the most serious mistake that even good preachers make is that they so easily slip into the wrong *form* of language. Their speech reverberates, not with the cadences of an adept orator, but with the intellectual rigor of a scholarly text or of a seminary class-

room. Scholarly texts were meant to be read, not spoken. A few in the congregation may be pleased by this show of erudition, but many simply will not follow this kind of homily. They desire speech more suited to the ear than to the eye, speech marked more by its rhythms, contrasts, and repetitions than by long, complex sentences and theological jargon. A 19th-century American president well understood the principles of effective speech. Therefore, he was heard by the common people gladly—none other than Abraham Lincoln. For example, observe the contrasts and repetitions that carry the concluding remarks of his second inaugural address:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Likewise, both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke using colorful, gripping images. Moreover, they not only paid attention to the meter and sound of their language but also employed pointed contrasts to spark the imagination. No one ever slept through a King sermon or a Kennedy speech—and for good reason. Both knew how to captivate their audiences through

the promise and power of oral address.

A second way good preaching turns bad is when ministers, for whatever reason, refuse to stick to the subject. This common complaint is the damning sin of some of the most promising preachers. Having so many different insights through experience and education, they are often tempted to overload their sermons with material that the listener simply cannot digest or that doesn't relate to the selected theme. Noteless preachers are major offenders. They often assume that their sermons are much more coherent and therefore easy to follow than they actually are. A good tape recorder, however, quickly breaks the spell. A truly great preacher like Dr. King could approach the pulpit without some sort of notes; few others can.

Contrary to popular belief, listening to a sermon is not a passive activity, but very hard work. Preachers should help their congregations by saying only *one* thing per sermon, but they should say it well.

For instance, each item of the traditional three-point sermon—if one uses this approach—should support and amplify only *one* topic. What often happens, though, is that a three-point sermon quickly turns into a three-topic sermon. It is wise to save the “extra” material for another day. There are other congregations to be faced and other sermons to be preached. The mind and ear delight, not in being overwhelmed, but in simplicity, order, and coherence.



A third mistake that even good preachers at times make is that they simply do not know how to end a sermon. Yogi Berra, that witty common-sense "philosopher," quipped on one occasion, "It ain't over till it's over." For the sake of preachers it should be added, "When it's over, it's over!" We have all listened to a sermon in which the minister did not realize where the conclusion was or, worse yet, gave the conclusion 10 minutes ago but continues to speak anyway!

An exemplar of this fault is William Jennings Bryan, former secretary of state and fundamentalist champion. On one occasion, he delivered a lengthy speech before a large audience in Virginia, after which he quickly turned to his mother and asked, "Well, how'd I do, Mom?"

The kind, elderly woman replied, "Son, you missed a couple of fine opportunities to sit down."

Not even the apostles or the saints in heaven will listen to anything that follows the true conclusion of a sermon. Mother Bryan's advice is as relevant now as when it was first given. When it's over, sit down or announce the final hymn.

Techniques are necessary for effective preaching, but they are by no means sufficient; character is required as well. Accordingly, the common thread that brings together

the three counsels outlined above is not some technical advice, but rather a spiritual quality, namely, humility. In the face of much Sunday morning distress what is called for is "incarnational preaching," where preachers descend from the intellectual world for a time, gently push abstractions aside, and speak the language of the congregation. Preachers need to renounce their

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**The kind, elderly woman replied,  
"Son, you missed  
a couple of fine  
opportunities to  
sit down."**

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desire to impress either through the wide scope of their learning or through sermon length. Preachers should realize that though they are truly the instruments of God's grace, it is the Most High who speaks through their humble, all-too-human words. This calls for both exhilaration and for self-abasement.

A good definition of a preacher, although it will never be found in any dictionary, is the following: "an

excited, humble person who knows the craft of public oral communication." Once again, Lincoln comes to mind. On November 19, 1863, the president gave a short speech in Gettysburg, Pa., which followed a two-hour address by Edward Everett, a leading speaker of the time. Everett's remarks received front-page attention in the contemporary newspapers; Lincoln's words were relegated to an inside page. Nevertheless, Everett wrote to the president shortly after the event: "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

All the vaunted techniques of oratory were no match for a genuine desire to communicate. All the ego-driven attempts to impress were no substitute for the power of sincerity. With words well chosen, and with humility and compassion that could be felt, Abraham Lincoln spoke the language of the common man and woman that cold afternoon. He knew the pain of their loss and their hopes for the future. He understood that the grave site of the nation's honored dead was not a place for posturing, but a place in which to touch deeply those who had been scarred and ravaged by the evils of war. Though the papers hardly took notice, all the world remembered.



## Preaching to Women *(Continued from page 8)*

When I hear a preacher say, "Women must not . . ." I tell myself he's saying, "Jill must not."

How can we avoid personalizing it all? So please, be gentle. That's *our* gift you are debating. The future of our ministry in your church is in your hands. Men are making the decisions for us. I think that should be cause for pause!

The same sensitivity would be helpful for those who have had an abortion, as we hear you speak eloquently about the right-to-life movement, or those regrettably single again as we hear about the ills of divorce (we could preach "that" one for you!). But sometimes the shame creeps into the pew and sits hard by our side, and we can't listen as well

as we should if we feel you haven't spent enough time face-to-face with some of us to catch our heartbeat, feel our anguish, and share our tears.

Women are struggling to find identity today; don't laugh at us while we discover ourselves. It's been a long, dark road into the light and laughter of full womanhood. The subject of self-image sells books and fills seminars, counseling offices, and mental homes. If we are made in the same image of God as you are, it would be such an encouragement to hear it from the pulpit.

Lastly, how about some illustrations from our world!

By all means, tell us stories about sports, but remember—not too many of us get the point if we aren't

sports buffs like our menfolk. Take time to explain why half the congregation is laughing their heads off at the joke! We'd like to join in and appreciate it too.

Think of us as you prepare your messages. We love the Lord and we love the church; we love you and we want to work our heads off for the Kingdom, laughing at the devil and making waves for God. But we need equipping for the task. We need to feel you know us, appreciate us, and understand us! (It *can* be done!)

We'll surely pray for you and commit ourselves to doing our part as you preach to us.



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# How to Tell a Good Story

by Jean Gray  
Ozark, Mo.

**S**torytelling is an essential part of preaching. Preachers are often called upon to tell a story to children at the beginning of the worship service, or in a Sunday School class or youth group, but children are not the only audience for a pastor's stories. Adults enjoy stories too, and the best sermons contain one or two story illustrations.

The Bible is a collection of stories. Within its pages are stories of heroes and heroines, of wise people and foolish people, of animals and of children. There are Bible stories that make us smile and Bible stories that make us cry.

Crowds of people, both adults and children, listened in rapt attention as Jesus told stories of a father and son reunited, of a lost sheep that was loved by its shepherd, of a man who discovered a treasure in a field.

In the stories of how other people



have overcome obstacles, coped with adversity, and learned valuable lessons, we find insight for our own lives. Stories help us apply biblical truths to the world we live in.

Whether a familiar biblical narrative or a story of modern-day people, the way in which the story is told will do much to determine its impact on the audience. Good storytellers can make the oldest stories come to life so that you feel you are hearing the story for the first time. Good storytellers can make their characters seem so real that you feel you have known them all your life.

While some people seem to be blessed with the natural ability to tell a story well, the art of storytelling can be learned by anyone.

**The first requirement for good storytelling is for the speaker to be interested in the story.** If you just stick an anecdote into the sermon because you feel obligated to illustrate your point, but you don't really care about the story, your congregation is not likely to care about it either. As a speaker, the worst thing you can do is bore your audience; the second worst is to leave them thinking. So what? An illustration that is uninteresting is likely to do both.

When you find a story that relates to your point in an interesting way, go over the illustration until you have the details clearly in mind. While some parts of the story may be modified or condensed, you don't want to omit any pertinent facts. If you are telling a story about the conflict between a man and his new stepson, but you forget to say that the story is set on the frontier in the 1800s, the audience may be confused when Indians attack!

Visualize your story. Stories don't happen on the pages of books. Stories happen to real people who live in real houses and eat real food. Close your eyes and try to imagine the setting and the people of the illustration. How was the Frenchwoman dressed as she climbed the steps to the guillotine, carrying her infant child and knowing they were both about to die? What did she hear from the jeering crowd? What did she see in the eyes of her execution-

er? You don't have to describe all these details to the audience, but if you can see them in your own mind, you will make the story more real for the listeners.

Using the gift of imagination, put yourself into the story. How would you have felt going out to meet the giant Goliath? What would you have said to the king? Remember that you are telling a story, not giving a history lecture. Lectures tell facts; stories share experiences. Every good story is filled with emotion. Get in touch with your own feelings. Remember what it is like to be afraid or happy or sad or angry. Feel with the characters in your story so that your audience can feel with them too.

Modify your story to make it more clear or to adapt to the age of the audience. Everyday, conversational words are always best. Your object is not to impress the listeners with your large vocabulary, but to impress their hearts with truth. In telling a personal experience, you may sometimes want to use third person instead of first, such as, "Bill saw the truck coming," rather than, "I saw the truck coming."

All the principles of public speaking apply to storytelling. Maintain eye contact. Vary the pitch and volume of your voice and rate of speech. Example:

[Quickly] Ammon ran down the dusty road as fast as his legs would go, [slower] but then all at once he stopped . . . because, right there in front of him . . . [slower and softer] was the biggest lion he had ever seen. Ammon was afraid, but he remembered the prayer the missionary had taught him; and bowing his head, he whispered, [very quietly] "Dear God, . . ."

Be sure that your story has both an aim and a climax. Is your aim to entertain? to inform? to challenge? to inspire? If the story is a sermon illustration, what does it illustrate? If you don't have an aim clearly in mind, the congregation may enjoy your story, but they will be left thinking, What's the point? How does that relate to the rest of the sermon? You don't have to say, "The

*(Continued on page 27)*

# Art in Preaching

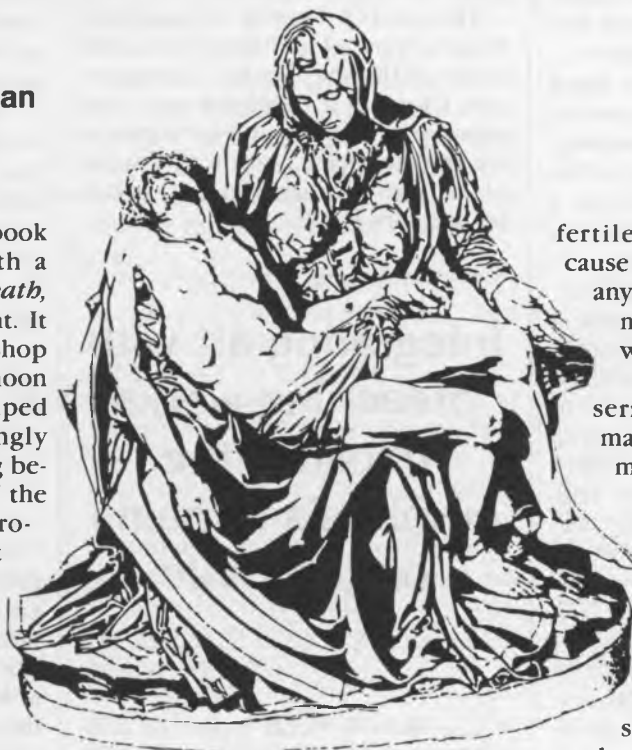
by David L. Vardaman  
Plainwell, Mich.

**J**ohn R. W. Stott begins his book *The Cross of Christ* with a look at *The Shadow of Death*, a painting by Holman Hunt. It is a glimpse of the carpenter's shop of Nazareth bathed in late afternoon sunlight. Stretching work-cramped muscles, Jesus strikes a chillingly crucifixionlike pose. Tools hung behind Him create the illusion of the Cross. Mary, startled by the prophetic scene, kneels by a chest containing the gifts of the wise men. Dr. Stott's point: "From Jesus' youth, indeed even from His birth, the cross cast its shadow ahead of Him. His death was central to His mission."<sup>1</sup>

Charles Swindoll, preaching on "Strengthening Your Grip on Money," describes a painting by French painter Sebastien Bourdon. It portrays the rich farmer of Luke 12 surrounded by his wealth, all is covered with dust, and the death angel—hand on the rich man's shoulder—purses his lips forming the word "fool."<sup>2</sup>

Richard Bewes, pastor of All Soul's Church in London, used a print of Renoir's *Umbrellas* to launch a children's talk about the symbolism of water in the Scriptures.

These uses of classical art to illustrate preaching prompted me to look for additional works that could enhance my understanding of Scripture. I have found a wealth of pictures in galleries and books that do just that. While Bible students normally turn to commentaries for insight, biblical art can be a visual resource for enhancing one's studies. Through the centuries virtually every scene in the Bible has been sketched, engraved, or painted. *Seeing* what one has only read can be thrilling, like the thrill of the near-sighted person fit with his first pair of eyeglasses. Here's how it has worked for me.



## Seeing what one has only read can be thrilling

Preparing to preach an Advent sermon from Luke 1:39-45, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, I recalled Rembrandt's *Visitation*. This painting portrays Mary's arrival at her cousin's home. Elizabeth greets her as Zechariah descends the front steps. Elizabeth is wrinkled, stooped, and walks with a cane. Mary is smooth, vibrant, erect, and expectant. Zechariah's hairline recedes, his beard is hoary.

Though pregnant, Scripture says Mary was a virgin. It also says the older couple was past childbearing, but *The Visitation* helps me see how far past. Were they beyond *wanting* children? Looking at Rembrandt's work, I muse, If God could cause Zechariah and Elizabeth to be

fertile and parental, if He could cause Mary to give birth, He can do anything. What might He do in my life if I remain open to His workings?

This led me to construct a sermon on the subject of God manifesting His power in committed mortals; how He includes us in the miraculous; rarely makes us endure alone but connects us with others similarly blessed; and stays with us through whatever He has called us to experience.

Could I have written the same sermon without Rembrandt? I believe so. And yet, the visual stimulation of the painting helped me see the passage afresh. In this instance the painting need not have been mentioned publicly. Its work was accomplished behind the scenes. But biblical art might also assume a more prominent role, as in the next example.

Asked to speak to ministers and spouses at a Christmas banquet, I wondered what to say. Preachers have the reputation of being the hardest group to whom to preach, and Christmas makes stringent demands on creativity and originality. To make matters worse, I was allotted only 10 minutes in which to give devotional thoughts. Solution: art in preaching. Here's how it went:

Beginning with Luke 2:8-20, I read the account of the shepherds and the angels. Then I related the following:

Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1656) painted at least three works titled *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. In his 1632 version a shaft of light invades the stable, illuminating the Christ child. The Virgin Mary draws back the blankets for the convenience of visitors; and such visitors! Cherub angels descend the light, de-

lighted to witness the advent of One they have known as God himself.

Mary is a woman of sturdy grace who does not flinch in the presence of heavenly beings. Confidently she displays her Child and gazes at the angels as if they were expected.

Joseph is visible to our right, head thrust into the press of human visitors. His hair is gray and thinning, but a full gray beard settles on his chest, framing the tanned face of a laborer—one who works in the sun but has the sense to wear a hat.

Four shepherds crowd around, viewing the Christ child. The first, a man in his 20s, stands beside Joseph, sharing his perspective of the Baby. The second, a teenager, stands in awe beside Joseph, appreciating the depth of character in the humble carpenter. The third shepherd, rugged, short beard and white hair, kneels to the right of the manger—hands clasped in the devotion of prayer. The fourth kneels to our left, one hand clutching cap to chest while the other grasps the collar of his sheepdog, who looks at us suspiciously while guarding the Newborn.

It is a moving scene. Mary and Jesus aware of heavenly beings; the shepherds and Joseph transported to states of wonderment by the miracle of birth, knowing this Child was announced by angels—the Savior of the World! The painting is Honthorst's interpretation of Luke 2:15-20.

It was the first Christmas Day, and the *shepherds were working as usual*. Well, of course, being the *first* Christmas, there was no tradition of it being a holy day. They went to work just like any other day—until the angels split the sky with heavenly light and sang the Gloria in Excelsis. Then some of the shepherds made the trip into Bethlehem to view the Baby for themselves.

I wonder, who stayed behind to tend the sheep? Did they see the Christ? Did they worship at His manger? Did they worship at all? They had been bathed in heavenly light, had heard the angel chorus, and were excited with the good news; but—*did they worship?*

Today, *we* are shepherds. Will we worship with our families and congregations, or will we work right through this blessed occasion?

While we are busy feeding our flocks on the food of Advent, we *may* take little for ourselves. What of our families? Will we bring any of God's love home to them?

This is too sacred a season to waste. When I consider the adoration of the shepherds, I remember that I too am a shepherd and must adore Him. Ladies and gentlemen, *we* are shepherds, and in the words of the 18th-century hymn, "O come, let us adore Him!"

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## Integrating art with preaching works because the emphasis remains on the Bible

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The most difficult aspect of consulting art works is locating them. If one had a complete art library on hand, this wouldn't be a problem, but most of us don't. However, I have accumulated a few illustrations by purchasing catalogs from art museums (\$10.00 to \$20.00 each), buying postcard prints or slides in museum stores, and by photographing art. Before you take pictures in a museum, check the museum's photograph policy. Then, use flash for brighter pictures with truer color saturation. Stand at a 30-degree angle to the painting to reduce flash glare. Bruce Bernard's *Bible and its Painters* (Macmillan, \$25.00) is an excellent volume arranged in biblical order (Genesis to Revelation). Check local libraries for art resources such as *The World Encyclopedia of Art*, *Art Index*, or *A Biographical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*. Don't overlook nearby university libraries for additional art sources.

If consulting works of art enhances one's understanding of Scripture, could describing biblical action as if viewing a picture have a beneficial effect? I have tried it, and the answer is yes. Preaching from the Gospel of Mark, I described five

pictures to my congregation. Each "picture" was drawn with words as if it were a work of art and we were on a museum tour. (For all five, see *The Wesleyan Advocate*, issues dated April 18, 1988, through May 2, 1988.) The fourth word picture follows:

This fourth picture is titled *The Punctual Christ*; Mark 5:21-43. It is the home of Jairus, the synagogue ruler from Capernaum. Stone walled, flat-roofed, the exterior is the same camel color as the surrounding rocky hills where the blocks were quarried. As synagogue ruler, Jairus was known, respected, and responsible. He was in charge of the synagogue building and property, the ordering of worship, appointing persons to read the Scriptures and pray, and inviting strangers to address the congregation.<sup>3</sup>

But, in this portrait, something else is on his mind. His daughter had fallen sick, and none of the physician's arts could lift her to health. Now she was about to die. Her imminent death crowded every other thought from his mind, consumed every waking moment, and intruded into his dreams.

Since her birth, 12 years had tipped past. Where did they go? Was this all the time allotted her? Where was the child he had once measured with the length of a single forearm, head in his palm, body reclining in his strength? Was this the face that once seemed all eyes and a smile?

Though not yet a woman, even in that day of adolescent marriages, she was observant, sensitive, and compassionate. He had noted her developing sense of humor, her proficiency, her diligence. She was beginning to talk about boys in a teasing, friendly fashion. But it was her sudden stretch to over 5 feet that forced him to acknowledge his little girl was growing up. Before her birth, he had lived quite contentedly, but after a dozen years it was difficult to imagine life without her.

Abruptly, sickness took the light from her eyes and laid her feverish in bed. Nearer death than life, the physicians whispered the dreaded news—she couldn't last the day. Then Jesus rowed ashore! Jairus himself ran to the beach, edged through the crowd, and knelt, begging Jesus



to visit his daughter with healing power. And Jesus agreed.

However, his daughter wasn't the only sick person in Capernaum. As Jesus moved toward the home, He was interrupted by another in need. It was a woman who sought treatment of an incurable illness for as long as the girl had been alive. While Jesus stopped to minister to her, the daughter of Jairus died. But as the dreaded news reached the synagogue ruler, so did Jesus, saying, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus called Peter, James, and John to follow Him and set out for the mourning household.

She would be buried within hours. Already funeral rites had begun with the arrival of professional mourners. There they are, black robed, crowding the front of the house. Heads thrown back, their faces contorted, but not with sorrow. They are mocking. Mark writes, "When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead

but asleep.' But they laughed at him" (Mark 5:38-40).

The artist gives us a view into the home. Accompanied only by the parents and the three disciples, Jesus entered the child's resting place. Ever the gentle Shepherd, He awakened her quietly. Taking her hand, He said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (v. 41). Mark gives us the very words of Christ, "*Talitha koum!*" Were these words with which her mother had wakened her each morning?

Mark says, "Immediately the girl stood up and walked around . . . and [Jesus] told them to give her something to eat" (vv. 42-43).

The scene shows Jesus smiling at the girl who flits about. She is whole again. The color on her cheeks is not the flush of fever, but the blush of health. Her mother's arms reach to enfold her. Jairus is on his knees, face awash in tears. The light in his eye has been rekindled. His arms reach toward Jesus in absolute worship. What a day!

The Punctual Christ! Time is nothing to Him. A thousand years are as one day, and a day as a thousand

years. He may ignore many opportunities to be early, but He never comes too late. Instantly healing the sick is a miracle, but to raise the dead baffles even believers. Jesus is the final hope. He is the punctual Christ. He may not give us what we need *when* we think we need it. But if we are truly in need, He will come. Surely He is the final hope of mankind.

Integrating art with preaching works because the emphasis remains on the Bible. Even when describing scripture as if it were a picture, I make sure that biblical truth, not the wonder of art, is the final focal point. The Bible is the primary source of spiritual truth. Biblical paintings will never replace commentaries. Nevertheless, ministers, teachers, and laymen could benefit from biblical art, even as John Stott, Charles Swindoll, and Richard Bewes testify through their writing and preaching.

1. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 17.
2. Word, Life Lifter Tapes.
3. *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 818.

## How to Tell a Good Story *(Continued from page 24)*

moral is . . ." As a matter of fact, please *don't* use that phrase, because it tells children, "The story is over, you can stop listening now," and it insults the intelligence of adults. If you have had your aim in mind while telling the story, they will *know* what the moral is.

The climax of the story comes when the basic problem is resolved in some way. The resolution may be a happy one, as when the prodigal son's father welcomed him home; or it may be a sad one, as when the rich young ruler turned away from following Jesus. The resolution may be a totally mental process, such as a choice made or a lesson learned. A climax doesn't have to be dramatic, but it does have to be certain. Don't leave the audience hanging. Whether the climax comes after two sentences or at the conclusion of a six-week series, be sure that the resolution is clear.

Where can you find good stories to tell? Besides the obvious sources

of books and magazines, don't overlook the not-so-obvious—newspapers, for instance. Tucked away in the pages of your morning paper are lots of human interest stories. When you hear someone else tell a good story, write down an outline of it so that you can use it sometime.

Listen to your friends and relatives. If you listen with sensitivity, praying for insight, you will find stories everywhere. Preachers are notorious for using their own spouses and children in sermon illustrations. This can be good, helping the congregation to relate to you and your family as "normal human beings," subject to the same foibles as they. There are some dangers to be aware of, however, in using your own family for illustrations. If you do it too often, or if your stories are "cute" but don't add any insight to the sermon, the congregation may perceive you as arrogant and boastful. The other danger is that you will embarrass the people you love. Your chil-

dren may feel especially vulnerable, worried that everything they do or say is likely to be repeated publicly. Remember that words have the power to destroy—or build.

Search your memory for your own stories. You don't have to imagine what it felt like, looked like, sounded like, tasted like, in your personal experience story. You *know* what it was like because you lived it. To make the story also live for your audience, remember to keep your aim and climax in mind. If an incident had an impact on your life, hearing your story can have an impact on others.

You can tell stories that will make people laugh when they want to cry in self-pity; you can tell stories that will make people cry when they are insensitive to the pain of others; you can tell stories that will make people take action when they are content with complacency.

With prayer and practice, *you can tell stories!*

# The Many Faces of Mission Education

by David F. Nixon  
Fort Wayne, Ind.



**M**ission education in a growing church has many faces. Its effectiveness depends on one's perception of how the cause of missions is communicated to our beloved holiness people. With so many new people coming into our growing church family, we need to let them know the great things God is doing in missions through the international church.

For some churches, mission education is simply a designated person responsible to teach a lesson. Sometimes the ill-prepared lesson gets thrown together at the last minute. He hands out parts to adults as they arrive for the missionary meeting. No wonder the readers lack skill or enthusiasm! Facts and figures dispensed without imagination are quickly forgotten. A mission education lesson has effective impact only as the Mission Council spends time in prayer and preparation, constantly looking for unique ways to involve people in the cause of missions.

My church has found it very effective to devote a segment of one Sunday night service each month to missions. We reach more people this way than through a monthly missionary meeting on another night. Themes and information of up-to-date happenings found in mission education curriculum are distilled into interesting and informative vignettes as part of our Sunday services. But this presents only one face of mission education.

In a growing number of our churches, mission education occurs through smaller groups known as chapters or mission cell groups. This approach may prove especially helpful in churches where small groups function well, particularly larger churches. Monthly meetings promote the cause of missions.

These meetings, often less formal than corporate worship services, give opportunity for unique approaches. Perhaps the group enjoys a fellowship meal together. The leader can promote missions as part of a meeting that encourages fellowship and systematically keeps missions before the people.

Some churches find the midweek evening monthly missions service to be successful. Find a design that **systematically educates** people in missions and that **involves** them in fulfilling mission objectives.

*World Mission* magazine, a publication of the Church of the Nazarene, demonstrates a face of mission education that is consistently fresh. It provides up-to-date information for the congregation, exciting sermon illustrations, and items the whole family can discuss.

Another face of mission education, the deputation service, informs and inspires as well as teaches us to pray and give and support. We hear firsthand reports of our many fields of endeavor from our highly esteemed missionaries. The promotional brochure proudly announces, "A Missionary Is Coming." A sense of anticipation builds in our people.

Seeing our missionaries "up-close and personal" benefits the educational process. Our people receive firsthand reports about accomplishments for Christ in places they may never personally visit. In many ways, our missionaries keep the vision alive. Their reports tell us the good things resulting from our prayers and giving. Our hearts thrill to the on-scene reports of what God is doing. Prayers for God's work in a particular area ascend from our churches all over the world where returned missionaries help keep the vision alive.

Deputation services accomplish



something else. Our people's awareness increases regarding the way the church supports its missionaries. When we see the homes they live in and their needs being cared for, we are glad to give generously as partners in a global cause.

Audiovisuals play a vital role in mission education, especially in our media-oriented society. An effective slide set or video conveys the message and challenges our people in ways that other means cannot. Seeing the sights and hearing the sounds of another culture can sometimes only be duplicated by means of a photograph or a tape. It transports us to the world mission areas of the church and sets us in the middle of a church service in Mozambique, a hospital ward in India, or a Bible college classroom in Haiti.

Another face of mission education is the Faith Promise Convention. Thousands of conventions occur around the world every year. These intensive times of mission education not only keep the vision alive but also raise millions of dollars each year to support missions. These annual conferences greatly assist the local church in educating the congregation in missions and in raising the mission budget—the missions lifeline of support—and millions more in missions specials.

Many laypersons get involved in missions personally through Work and Witness projects. This method rates as one of the best ways to kindle a passion for souls in the hearts of people. When they experience missions firsthand, a vision is born in their hearts that nothing else can produce.

In the spring of 1990, what be-

came known as "The Nixon Family" Work and Witness team traveled to Bayamon, Puerto Rico. Our assignment focused on finishing a church building. Because of donated funds, the building was dedicated in memory of my mother, Ella Margaret Nixon. Eighteen people from Lake Avenue Church of the Nazarene in Fort Wayne, Ind., joined members of my family to finish and dedicate the building. Windows were installed; drywall hung and plastered; and a platform was prepared. But the most thrilling part for me was the privilege of building the altar and pulpit. My dad built and hung a beautiful cross in the sanctuary. My brother, Wendel, and I built the altar where precious souls will come to Christ. Imagine my thrill as I preached the first message in the new pulpit as



Dr. James Hudson, regional director for the Caribbean, translated.


Something happens when Work and Witness team members return. They educate others. And they pray. Bayamon is a permanent entry on my prayer list, along with all the other places I have visited and worked and preached the gospel.

One last face of mission education deserves mention: education that occurs through the dissemination of missionary reading books and tapes. Churches must find workable plans for circulating the books. In our church, the ongoing task of distribution takes place through our Sunday School classes. Adults have books and tapes as do our children and teens. Systematic mission education takes place once a month on Wednesday nights with our teens and in

children's church with our children. In Vacation Bible School, a short time segment focused on reading missionary books to the children. Incentives encourage individual participation. One requirement for participation in our teen Work and Witness project demands that two missionary books be read.

Mission education has many faces. If you are fortunate to have a missionary as a member of your church, the work of missions includes a very personal touch. Lane and Janelle Fosnaugh went out from Lake Avenue and have served the church in Papua New Guinea at the hospital in Kudirip. The exchange of correspondence with them, along with seasonal gifts and remembrances, helps keep missions alive in our midst. We intercede for them publicly and in our private devotions. The same can be done with your assigned missionaries.

When has mission education achieved its purpose? When the vision of fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission is kindled at home and abroad. When the church mobilizes to pray and give and work to see it fulfilled. If God does not send us to another culture, we must faithfully send and support those persons whom God selects to go.

Mission education causes me not only to look at what others are doing but also to look in the mirror and see my own face. **As a pastor, what am I doing? Or what should I do in my church to help my people know more about missions?** Mission education has achieved its purpose when it finally causes me to **take my place in the harvest fields.** 



## I Quit!

by Greg Mason

Georgetown, Ky.

**I**t's Monday afternoon and I've decided to quit. The sun is shining, the weather is warm, the birds are singing, but I'm quitting anyway.

Things have not gone well lately. The past few years have been great! A growing church, good salary, lovely community, increasing statistics, supportive congregation, fine staff.

However, the wheels have come off—and I'm quitting. Several weeks ago we completed a successful Stewardship Campaign. Now we are embarking on a hectic, strenuous, and taxing building program. I'm going to quit first.

Since completing the stewardship program, I have suffered what some call the Elijah syndrome: tired, depressed, feeling sorry for myself. I have plenty of reason to feel bad—and to quit.

Attendance at church services the past three or four weeks is down. Vacations, illness, visits to "Grandma," trips to the amusement park, reunions, and bad weather have all affected the attendance. I find myself constantly wondering if people really care about their church. I find myself exasperated and envious over other people's vacations and illnesses.

When people come to church, they don't seem to worship. They seem to want to be entertained. They respond as if they're at a concert or play instead of in church. They're up and down, in and out. I think I'm noticing more crying babies, fingernail clipping, and casual conversing than normal during the services.



Our budgets aren't up-to-date. The prospect of standing before my denominational meeting is almost nauseating. No matter how positive the year has been, there always seems to be something we haven't done. It's embarrassing to stand before pastors, laymen, and denominational leaders and feel like a failure. They say the pastor is the "key"—but somebody keeps changing the locks. I quit!

My congregation is either tired or lazy. I never thought a church our size would have such difficulty finding committed teachers, choir members, visitation teams, and people to pray. The key word is "committed." Teachers arrive late, the choir won't practice, and calls for visitation or prayer bring out the same two or three each month.

Whether my congregation is tired or not, I know I am. Seventy-five-hour weeks, maybe five days off in the last five months. When you are off-duty, you are not off-duty. I sometimes think that working in a factory would be great. Put in your eight hours, five days a week, go home and forget it. Maybe I'll quit.

Normally I'm not a quitter. I've been a fighter all my life. I never give up. I'm usually very motivated and highly energized. Never was heard a discouraging word. But today, after weeks of reflection and prayer, I'm quitting. That's right—I quit!

I'm going to quit majoring on minors and get back to basics. When I am tired or frustrated, my personal devotional life seems to suffer the most. I'm going to quit wasting time fiddling with financial figures and attendance averages, and spend more time meditating and praying. I'm going to quit concentrating on changing everyone else and ask God to change me. I'm going to pray for a revival instead of a packed house.

I'm going to quit letting statistical numbers tell me how valuable I am

to the work of the Kingdom. When I stand before the Lord waiting to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant," He will probably not be holding my attendance report in His hands. Numbers may be valuable indicators of effectiveness over the long haul, but not over three or four weeks. Jesus lost about 380 followers somewhere between His ascension and Pentecost. And numbers certainly aren't reflective of faithfulness, compassion, or concern. The Psalmist didn't say, "Search my annual report, and know my statistics."

I'm going to quit doing it all myself. I'm going to involve more of my people. I'm going to quit thinking that I'm the only person in my church with gifts or concern. If things fail, it may not be because I have done a poor job of serving; I may have done a poor job of delegating. As pastor the Lord has given me caring and qualified people.

I'm going to quit feeling guilty about being with my family. Every evening that I'm home with them I must fight the temptation to believe that that somehow makes me a poorer pastor. The road to hell is lined with pastors' children whose fathers made 2,000 calls every year. I must win them if I am to win anyone. In 30 years they and my grandchildren will be the ones that visit my retirement quarters. Former members will seldom come. When I am with my family, I am energized and refreshed.

Also, I'm going to quit feeling sorry for myself. God loves me, my family loves me, and 95 percent of my congregation loves me. I serve a wonderful Lord. He affirms me when statistics or people don't. I live in a wonderful community in a wonderful home. My congregation isn't as large as I wish, but they are good to me and my family. They are thoughtful and warm, forgiving and understanding. Many other pastors would love to come here. I have a great wife and great children. They're still glad I'm a pastor, and if they're happy, so shall I be.

So I quit! I have decided to quit thinking that this is "my" church. It is the Lord's. He is the Potter; I am the clay.

Finally, I'm going to quit quitting—at least until next Monday afternoon or next statistical year.



# The Hang-up of Realism

by Raymond C. Kratzer

Yakima, Wash.

**T**he word *realism* defines the tendency to face the facts and be practical rather than imaginary or visionary. It is in contrast to *idealism*.

Unfortunately, this philosophy of realism has taken hold of our era so firmly that it has in ways destroyed such things as faith, vision, and adventure. In the secular world it is smart to "tell it like it is." However, too often this is simply a license to be sarcastic or brutally frank, disregarding the feelings of others, and quenching the embers of idealism.

In the Lord's work the Bible emphasizes the importance of vision and faith: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). Vision has been a standard of conduct for the growing edge of the church. This statement from Proverbs helps us neutralize today's trends, which offer so little in the area of the supernatural.

Take church growth, for example. There are prophets of doom today who would quote chapter and verse depicting the impossibility of growth in some areas. They point out that certain communities are immune to the claims of the gospel. They further opine that some churches, by the nature of their constituency, will never be any stronger than they are at the present. They illustrate by describing the power structure in those churches who pose an unalterable barrier to any real progress.

The problem is that these persons sometimes serve as pastors. They are immobilized on the hang-up of realism. Facts are facts to them. They refuse to see beyond the darkened glass. They have lost the "wonder of it all." Life becomes a drudge with

little hope. Their assessment of the impossible has so filtered into every area of their imagination that their machinery for progress has become sadly gummed up with the sludge of cynicism.

The kingdom of God requires facts and practicality. But if we only look at the bare, austere facts, we leave God out of the picture. For example, who would have envisioned the invaluable ingredients in men like Matthew, or Peter, or John, or other disciples of our Lord. When Jesus looked at them, He saw gold within this human ore. Upon the first realistic look, Simon appeared like a piece of putty, vacillating, and unstable. But Jesus saw beyond to what he could become and called him a "Stone" (Peter). John was a hot-tempered fisherman, self-seeking, and full of worldly ambition. But Jesus saw him as the "Disciple of Love" who could influence the world through his life and writings.

A pastor was constantly stymied in his leadership in a certain church because of a vocal member of the church board. He saw her as carnal, unprogressive, a block to all of his suggestions. To him that was the real picture. But was it? The next pastor discovered through a fresh insight that here was a person with strength and leadership ability. With wisdom he harnessed her talents until she became an invaluable aid to the work of the whole church.

A pastor spoke to me concerning two strong members of his church. He saw them as arrogant troublemakers, unwilling to follow his leadership. He suggested that it would be in the best interests of that church for me, as district superintendent, to put them out. His method would have been to almost literally "throw them out." Upon closer analysis, I could see that he was fastened on the hang-up of real-

ism. His prejudices, along with differences of opinion, had closed his mind to finer qualities in these brethren. A bit of adjustment on his part would have released him from a frustrating deterrent to progress and would have opened up a whole new world of possibilities.

The next pastor found these men to be among his most staunch supporters. They were generous, cooperative, and eager to work with their pastor. His love for them caused them to be more aware of their spiritual needs. Out of this wholesome relationship, power was generated, and progress began to happen.

Some situations are much more difficult than others. Some churches have gone on for years with little growth. At times it would seem that certain members are deterrents to progress. And this may be true to a degree. But on the whole, most of our church members want their churches to become stronger. Some may have preconceived ideas as to what growth involves. They may unconsciously fear becoming too large lest they lose their place of leadership. This is a possible human element in group dynamics.

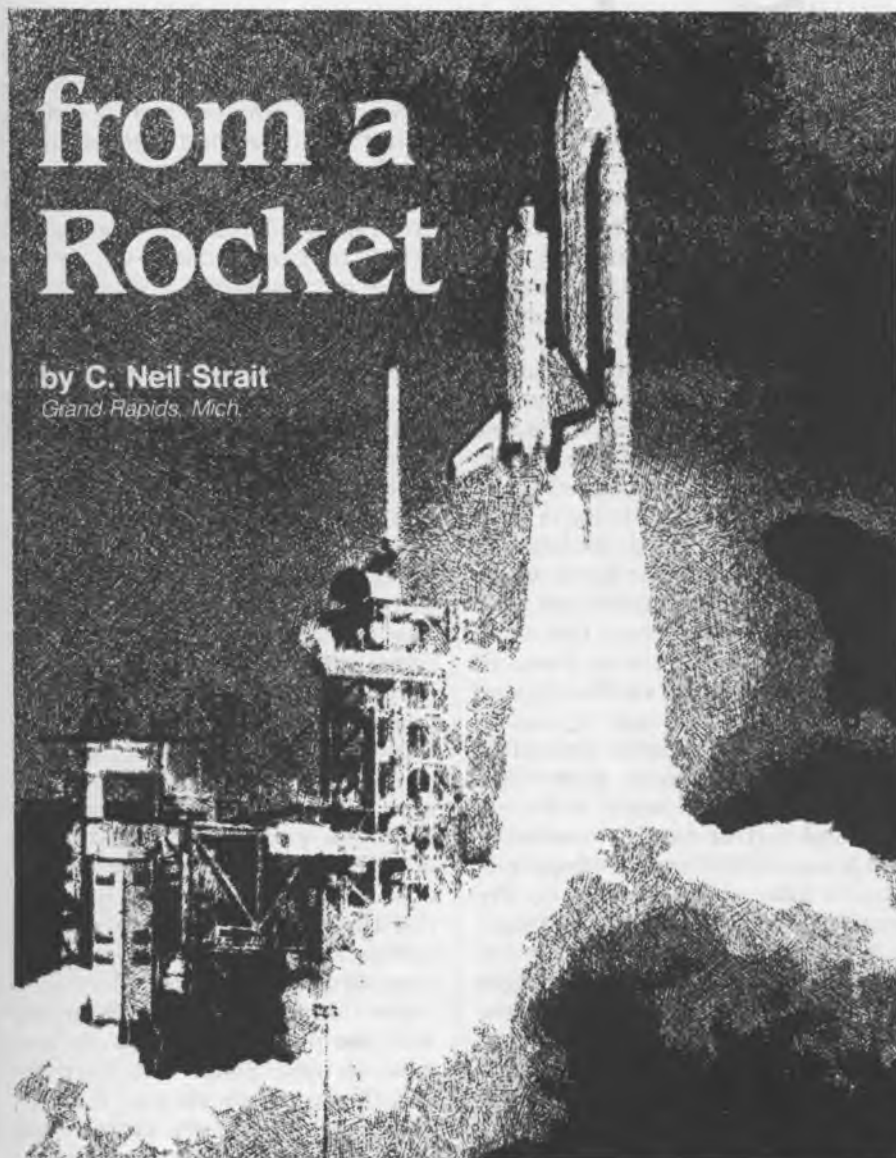
How do you gain a fresh insight into the possibilities that lie dormant in these places? Dr. Chapman used to say that with God the only difference between the possible and the impossible is that the impossible may take a little longer. The Scriptures are replete with scintillating promises for "impossible" situations: "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7, KJV). "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing

(Continued on page 34)





## Lessons



### from a Rocket

by C. Neil Strait  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

#### Editor's Note:

*Continuing thoughts on a previous article titled "So Much of Life Is Adjusting." Writer C. Neil Strait has further insights for us.*

**L**ou Mobley and Nate McKeown, in their book *Beyond IBM*, wrote this interesting piece: "A rocket . . . is on course only 2 percent of the time—the rest of the time is correcting" ([New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1989], 30). I needed that bit of statistic!

I was startled, at first, to realize that a rocket is on course only 2 percent of the time! How does it reach its destination? The answer is clear—the rest of the time it is correcting.

All of us feel, at times, less-than-perfect performance, the missed opportunity, a good-intentioned deed misinterpreted, or a blotched relationship. I am encouraged that rockets are not always on course, and, if I read Mobley and McKeown correctly, success is in correcting!

The correcting posture is what the pastor does best. He is trained to respond, to adopt, to stretch, to pursue, to grow, to learn. The pastor prays and therefore seeks guidance. So, there is no one more conscious that life is mostly correcting. Of all people, the pastor is most conscious that he is less than perfect. In fact, there are times one might think that being on course 2 percent of the time is a high estimate!

Where does all of this lead us? To three important conclusions. First, Pastor, be encouraged—one does not have to be perfect! If a pastor knows how to do the correcting procedures, he will make it. It is not perfection our people seek. It is a pastor who is willing to serve, if not always perfectly, and to minister to needs, if not always in a perfect way.

Second, Pastor, be encouraged—one can struggle, at times, and make the journey. You can bleed a little and still survive. You can mess it up, badly even, but still stay in the journey. Why? Because life is more correcting than being perfect. Life is more attitude—the words "I'm sorry" and "I apologize" are great corrective lubricants that build relationships and put one back on the road to ministry and service. Life is going the extra mile, offering forgiveness—and receiving forgiveness. It is reaching out to understand, rather than being understood. It is taking another's hurt into your heart and offering healing. None of these come easy, but out of the struggle, the pain, the humble journey of reconciliation come strength and trust for the journey.

Third, Pastor, be encouraged—out of the corrective times in ministry come some of the treasured memories of pastoral ministry. From an "I'm sorry" comes a new and better relationship. From an apology comes a deeper trust and reconciliation. From a confession comes healing and hope. From the struggle to forgive comes peace and friendship.

So, let us learn from the rocket, which takes correcting as a part of the price to reach its destination. Pastor, be encouraged—correcting is part of the journey. It is often the price for effective, fulfilling ministry! May you have grace for the journey.

# The Real Me

by Beverly Caruso

Orange, Calif.

If one more person arrives at my door with a suitcase, I'm going to pack my own, I told myself. Within a few hours of my resolution the phone rang. My brother, Dave, had met the girl he wanted to marry, and he wanted us to get to know Lydia better. Could he bring her for a weekend visit?

I liked Lydia. Already I suspected she was going to be my sister-in-law, so how could I turn him down? "Sure, she's always welcome. She can stay in Debbie's room."

During that summer and fall we'd had an unusual number of houseguests. My younger brother, Dave, was visiting the United States for six months from his missionary work in Samoa. He had spent many nights with us. In addition, Dave's visits had been interspersed with other short-term visits, from one night to several weeks by friends and relatives. Now I was feeling sorry for myself, longing for the privacy and normalcy of simply being "just our family."

Now I've done it, I thought. I'd rather that they not come. How can I be hospitable with these feelings?

I was still struggling with my emotions when I arrived at our women's Bible study the next morning. I've prayed many times for needs of these women, I thought. I ought to ask them to pray for me—but I can't.

We had been taught when we were young ministers never to reveal our own personal struggles and problems to our flock. "If you use yourself as an example, always use the third person. The people you are ministering to should never be brought into your personal lives." I didn't remember who said it, but the con-

cept was deeply etched in my soul.

I looked around at the women, so involved in their conversations. I knew the deepest hurts and struggles of many of them. But they didn't know any of mine. Could I tell them of this struggle? I had asked for prayer for physical needs before, but not for emotional needs. Did I dare share with them?

As we worshiped in song, I decided I would. Then I changed my mind. I rubbed the moisture from my palms as our prayer time started. My insides were painfully tight, but I knew the weekend would be even more stressful if I didn't have a change in my emotions. I'll do it!

I plunged in. "I need your prayers. I need healing in my emotions. I have company coming this weekend, and I don't want company now." That's not how I wanted to say it. I started over and told them about all the company and the phone call. It seemed like forever before anyone moved or said anything. Finally someone stood and placed her chair in the center of the room and waited for me to sit in it. Many times I had joined the others as we laid hands on the one there, praying for her needs. Never had I been in the chair.

"Give Bev peace this weekend, Lord," one prayed. "Take away these negative feelings."

Another asked, "Give them a good

weekend filled with Your love." I wept and they wept with me. I felt accepted and loved by these women as they prayed.

A peace and restfulness filled me. God was answering their prayers. Before the meeting was over, I began to look forward to the weekend and getting to know Lydia better.

The peace continued throughout the weekend, and I truly enjoyed the visit. But what about the women's respect for me? I worried.

During the next several weeks I had opportunity to counsel some of the women present that day. One said, "I never came to you before because I didn't think you ever experience problems such as I have. After you asked us to pray for you, I felt you would understand."

Another told me she wanted to be more real herself after she saw the true "me" that day.

Another admitted, "I thought you always had your act together and wouldn't understand the problems I have. I was shocked to see you weep before us, surprised that you have hard times emotionally too—surprised that there are things you can't handle alone."

I wept again that night before the Lord. "O God, how could I have been so blind? Forgive me. Help me to be who I really am."

It took a conscious effort to change years of habit and ways of thinking. Gradually I was able to reveal the real me. As I became transparent, I noticed others were enabled to be themselves as well.

I also had to learn how and when to be transparent. I chose to consciously reveal myself to our group. For a while I went to the extreme of telling everyone everything. I realized I became offensive, even obnoxious, being transparent with everyone at all times.

I've learned that transparency is an attitude—a willingness to be open and real to anyone who needs me or with whom I am sharing my life on an ongoing basis. Transparency is a means of building bridges across the river of isolation and independence. As I became real, I found that my relationships with women in the church changed. Instead of relating as pastor's wife to church member, we related as friend to friend.



## The Hang-up of Realism

(Continued from page 31)

precious seed, shall *doubtless* come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6, KJV, italics added). "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7, KJV).

The first item of business for one impaled on the hang-up of realism is to get "unhooked." Ask God to release you from this hindrance and to open your eyes to the possibilities. Ask Him to show you where you might adjust in order to more adequately lead your people. It may be that your administration is too authoritarian. Your preaching may be less than it should be. When analyzed, you may discover you are only giving chaff to your people rather than whole grain. And they are starving. Perhaps this is why they are complaining.

You may not have learned how to be a good listener. Some preachers seem to love to hear what they have to say, giving little attention to what others are saying. Verbosity is not a virtue, but it may be a bad habit. It is an art to learn how to be concise without being abrupt. A bit of verse may enhance the point:

*A wise old owl sat on an oak,  
The more he saw the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke the more he heard;  
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?*

—EDWARD HERSEY RICHARDS

Many pastors suddenly find a new freedom in their ministry when they begin to see beyond what is apparent. Every great project that has come to fruition has first been someone's vision or imagination. Great churches are the result of a spiritual architect, touched by the Holy Spirit, a pastor-shepherd who has been freed from prejudices, and who keeps in touch with the God of miracles.

May each of us ask the Lord to renew our vision, to forgive us for our fears, and to give us the wisdom to put together a formula for our church that will turn it from mediocrity to a dynamic force for good. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18, KJV). 🦉



# Twelve Basketfuls

by Margie L. Stewart

Raleigh, N.C.

**I**t's exciting to go overseas with Work and Witness teams, I have been told. I've seen the slides, heard the remarkable stories, and noticed changes in the team members' lives. It's not always possible for some of us to go on such extensive trips. Working on home mission projects can also be exciting and rewarding. It can certainly give you a big boost and bring other surprises, as we discovered on a recent trip to Dorris, Calif.

Many of us had never heard of Dorris. It's a tiny town located near the Oregon border. It has no large shopping centers or big office buildings. But we found other treasures: a lovely church building partially finished and a small group of big-hearted, loving people. The scenery is awesome. One instantly notices the gorgeous, breathtaking, snow-covered view of Mount Shasta. The church property offers a perfect view of this mighty spectacle.

The pastor who had retired earlier is back in the church working many hours each day on the church, painting, hammering, doing whatever he can, mostly by himself.

Two Work and Witness teams from our church in Auburn, Calif., went to Dorris. There were 11 men and 2 women. We were the first ladies to come, the pastor's wife told us. She was thrilled to see us. The men hung Sheetrock. Although we didn't paint or climb up on the scaffold, we kept busy preparing meals, taking cold cups of water to the men, helping the pastor's wife, and snapping pictures.

Being there, supporting our husbands and friends, made such a difference. We enjoyed the fellowship with each other, getting to know our group better as well as getting acquainted with our new friends at Dorris.

The big thing we planned together

was a barbecue for Friday night. We would bring the chicken, and the church would furnish the rest of the food. "Plan for 25 people," the pastor's wife told us. So, I brought 12 chickens.

We prepared the chickens, cutting them into fourths. Soon, a mouth-watering aroma floated through the air greeting the chill of the night, teasing our appetites.

The people came. And more people came. I began to wonder if we'd have enough chicken to feed them. We counted about 35. We're not going to have enough, I thought as we continued to prepare the chicken for the grill. We said nothing to the other church except in teasing: "We've got the whole town's attention."

The food was blessed, and blessed it was. The chicken was scrumptious. The church dishes were filled with crunchy vegetables, cool and crisp salads, and delicious desserts. Soon it was time for cleanup and gathering up the food. To our amazement, there were "twelve basketfuls" of chicken left over, enough to feed another 19 hungry people for lunch the next day, and still some left (cf. Matt. 14:20). We were astonished—and to think I was worried about it!

We quickly learned to love this little group of people. They were so grateful for what we had done. It meant so much to them. I felt I had given little, but I felt I had received much more than I had given through their gratitude and love.

Time to go. Warily, we climbed into our vehicles. My soul was refreshed and lifted. As I gazed once again upon Mount Shasta, I was reminded of God's great power and majesty. I thanked Him for our new friends, for His strength and protection. I especially thanked Him for our "twelve basketfuls" of blessings. 🦉



# The Blessings of Obedience

by Debbi L. White

Exmore, Va.

*Many of you responded to the desperate cry of a pastor's wife published in our Dec./Jan./Feb. 1990-91 issue.*

*You may be interested in the following article, written by the same woman, as she shares the wonderful results of your sharing and prayers.*

August 4, 1991

Dear Mr. Denny:

*Thank you so much for printing my letter last December 1990, and for writing a follow-up article this summer 1991. Your concern and the response of your readers has been a great blessing to me. I have come to love and appreciate Cindy Osso (assistant editor). As a new pen pal and friend, she has become a wonderful encouragement. May God continue to bless and use you.*

*In Him,*

*Mrs. Debbi L. White*

After growing up in an East Coast city, I found living in the Midwest quite an adjustment. My husband and I lived there for four years as we finished college and then served as an assistant pastor in a large and growing church. When the invitation came to pastor a small church only 70 miles from my hometown, I was exuberant.

The months following our move were a whirlwind of excitement as I decorated our little home, became acquainted with our new congregation, and welcomed our second daughter into the world. However, when things settled down, loneliness settled in.

Our church consists mainly of older folks. My attempts to befriend other young moms in our area were unfruitful. Many of them work, and others are attached to extended families who live nearby. They have no need for outside relationships.

The second year we were here, a fall caused my younger daughter a brief hospital stay. Following this, we saw our desperate need for medical insurance. Expenses were growing, but our income wasn't. My husband picked up two part-time jobs to help us make ends meet. With him gone six and seven days a week, my loneliness increased.

I served as director of the "missionary society" at church for a while but gave up after several outreach programs failed. I was also discouraged from inviting missionary speakers, as the older folks thought that we were expecting too much from their limited incomes.

About this time, God showed us that we were to teach our older daughter at home. We knew of no others in the area that were home schooling, and it was a new concept to our church people. This served to alienate me further.

During the third year, our little old house began showing its age. The roof leaked, shutters broke off, and holes here and there allowed various creatures in. Our daughters dubbed this "The Bug House." I became increasingly discontent.

I met some other home schooling families in my old hometown. I longed to be able to fellowship with them more often. I started noticing the advantages to living in that city

compared to our rural area: museums, libraries, factories for field trips, a zoo. Our church wasn't growing, and I felt I was dying spiritually. After being here for four years, I was convinced that we should move. I urged my husband to look for a "normal" job, in my hometown, of course.

During the pastoral recall vote, I voted "no." It was the only negative vote that my husband got. Our unsuspecting congregation couldn't understand who would vote against him. I couldn't understand why God might ask me to stay another year.

Then one man in our church invited an ordained couple to hold a weekend revival for us. I thought it would be a waste of their time, as our people had had the same testimony for the past four and a half years that we'd been here. I was certain that no visitors would attend.

That Sunday morning last October (1990), the Mrs. Reverend spoke on obedience. God spoke through her directly to me: "Will you serve Me wherever I ask you to? Will you stay here, even if it means being lonely and living in that old house? Will you support your husband in the ministry and be content?" Tears fell as I counted the cost of obedience, but I couldn't say no to Jesus.

I believe I was the only one at the altar that morning. As I knelt there, God showed me things in my heart that were displeasing to Him: envy, anger, bitterness, discontent. I had thought my desires had been normal, but in my selfishness I had overlooked God's will. After I found His forgiveness, I stood and con-



fessed to our people. I promised to be content in His will, and to stay as long as He asked. All I wanted in return was to be used by Him.

In the days that followed, I felt emotionally drained. I was emptied of self and very humbled. I was unprepared for the blessings that God had in store.

Later that month, I had a Tupperware party. A fellow home schooling mom drove several miles to attend. She brought another young mom from nearby whom she wanted me to meet. Pat and I hit it off right away and became fast friends. She became a prayer partner and an inspiration. How thankful I am for her!

Our state has a "religious exemption" clause for home schoolers. However, our local school board was unfamiliar with it (we were the only home schooling family in this county), and they asked that certain requirements be met. Those requirements violated our convictions and our constitutional rights. After much prayer, and with the help of our Christian attorney, the school board acknowledged the law and our convictions. We became exempt

from any accountability! Another wonderful blessing.

About that same time, our group of home schooling families met to get organized and set up a board. I was elected director and became responsible for putting together a monthly newsletter. This became a great outlet and an area of ministry for me. We started with about 20 subscribers last November and currently have over 60! Also, this fall, at least three other families in our county will begin teaching their children at home, including Pat and her family. This has been another blessing to me.

Over a year and a half ago, before I allowed God to work in my life, and when I was desperately lonely and discouraged, I wrote to *The Preacher's Magazine* for advice. Last December I was notified that my letter had been printed and that many letters and a check had been received in response to it. The check was forwarded, and I was told that a follow-up article would be written. Again, I was greatly blessed.

When I read the follow-up article this summer, I was amazed by the love expressed. I was touched that

people who didn't even know me had prayed for me daily. I thanked God that He had begun to answer prayer even before the prayers were made. Several ministers gave practical advice about how I could get involved with our congregation. Through these letters, I felt enveloped in God's arms of love.

Our roof still leaks, the shutters are still broken, we still have bugs, my husband still works two side jobs, and finances are still tight. But I am rich in God's blessings, and I have the peace that comes only from being in the center of His will. Two weeks ago, my daughters and I made muffins and biscuits and took them to some of our older folks. Most of them gave my girls a little something in return. We have two new ladies in our church who were recently saved. And when our younger daughter celebrated her fifth birthday, three folks from our church met us at a fast-food restaurant with gifts and bought everyone ice cream.

God reminds me of all that I would have missed if we had moved last year. I cannot thank Him enough for all the blessings that He has given in return for my obedience. 🙏

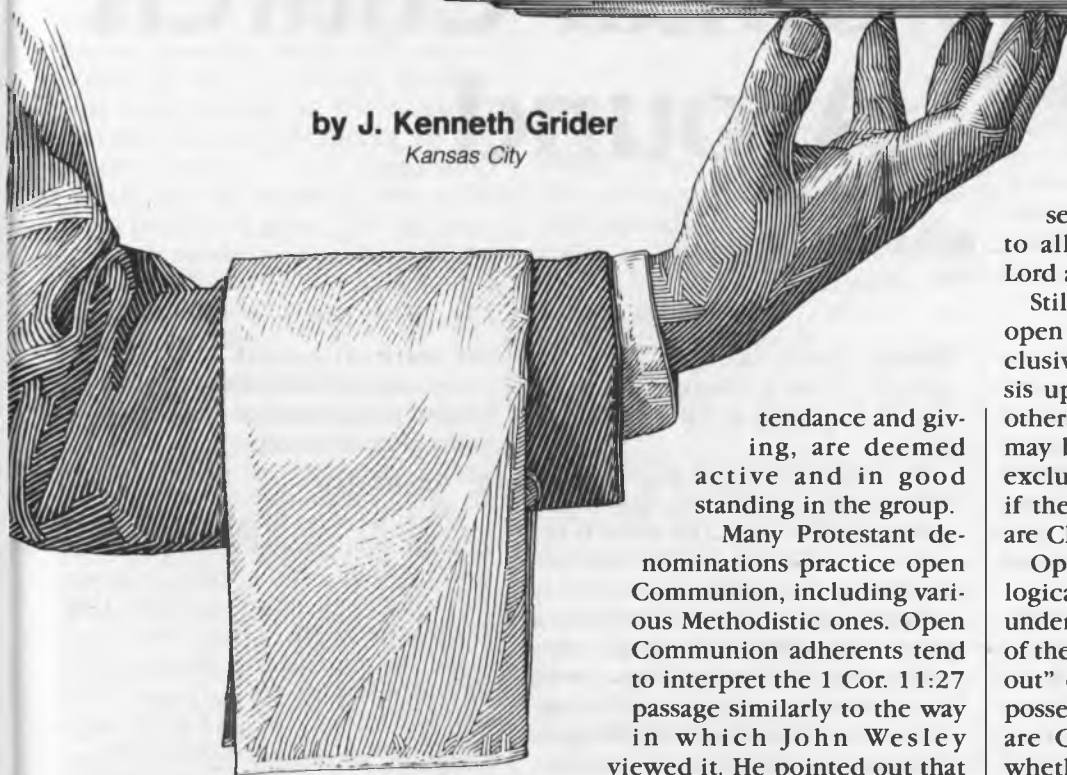
PASTOR HUGO UTT RETURNS  
HOME AFTER A LONG DAY





# COMMUNION: CLOSED OR HILARIOUSLY OPEN

by J. Kenneth Grider  
Kansas City



**I**n our Methodistic tradition, we holiness people practice open Communion: any Christian is invited to the Lord's table.

In many denominations, however, "closed" Communion is practiced: only members in good standing are to participate. Many Baptist and Lutheran denominations close their Communion to nonmembers, as do Reformed Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, and others.

Scripture used to support closed Communion includes especially Paul's saying, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). It is felt that the best way to assure that the communicants are receiving the bread and wine "in a worthy manner" is to serve it only to members, and even to the members who, by such measurements as at-

tendance and giving, are deemed active and in good standing in the group.

Many Protestant denominations practice open Communion, including various Methodistic ones. Open Communion adherents tend to interpret the 1 Cor. 11:27 passage similarly to the way in which John Wesley viewed it. He pointed out that

"eating and drinking unworthily" should be interpreted in light of the immediate context, according to which some people at Corinth were partaking of Communion while they were drunk; and some, while they were refusing to share their food with persons present who had not had food to bring to the common meal that accompanied Communion (see vv. 17-22).

A number of Scripture passages seem to support our Methodistic practice of open Communion. One, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen" (John 10:16). This suggests that outside of a given fold or group God has other people who are also His "sheep." Another, "Whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:50). Here, the person of a different group is not pitted against Christ but is a worker on Christ's behalf.

Another scriptural support for open Communion is in the fact that

"written-down" church memberships did not obtain in New Testament times. The membership of the church seems to have extended simply to all who had received Christ as Lord and Savior.

Still another scriptural support of open Communion is the Bible's inclusiveness assumed from its emphasis upon love for others. If we love others, as we are exhorted to do, it may be assumed that we are not to exclude them from the Lord's table if they imply or state that they too are Christians.

Open Communion also has theological support. One of these is the understanding that we are members of the Body of Christ, the "called . . . out" ones, "a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9, NASB), if we are Christian believers. And this, whether or not we are church members in good standing according to a given group's expectations. As Christians, we may sit with fellow believers at the Lord's table.

Another theological support for open Communion is in the fact that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper prior to the founding of the Church at Pentecost. So, to be a member of a given group, in the ecclesiastical sense of church membership, is not necessary in order to partake of Communion.

Besides biblical and theological supports for open Communion, there is historical support. Certain Christian traditions have practiced open Communion, and this becomes a kind of support for it. The Methodistic tradition, stemming out of John Wesley and early Methodism, has customarily practiced open Communion. When longtime and many-membered traditions support

*(Continued on page 46)*



# Turning the Small Church Around

by Kim L. Richardson  
Framingham, Mass.

**Y**ou have been called to a small church. You can't wait to make a difference for God. The church's leaders told you that they want their church to grow. You want the church to grow. You know that *God* wants the church to grow. But where do you start?

Whether your first, second, or seventh pastorate, you find yourself in a "small church." It is now well documented that 50 percent of America's Protestant churches have less than 75 people in average morning worship attendance. Twenty-five percent of all Protestant churches have less than 35 in morning worship.<sup>1</sup> Many of these small churches are *not* growing.

The following generalizations of a small church need to be analyzed in each local situation. Most churches under 75—and many over 75—will exhibit the majority of these characteristics.

### 1. CHANGE/STABILITY

"Small churches are not against change. They simply feel that conserving the past has a priority."<sup>2</sup>



Walrath argues that even when the context dictates change, the small church will tend to follow old patterns.<sup>3</sup>

Small churches tend to emphasize values and qualities that have worked in the past. The church becomes a carrier of culture and history that gives meaning and stability to young and old. Members have a great sense of security when they gather together with those who share common values and life experiences. "The church building is often seen as an anchor of community feelings, a symbol of stability in the midst of change."<sup>4</sup>

Even though small churches tend to be slow to change, they do have the ability to change rapidly when necessary. A small ship can turn quickly. There is no need for planning committees and elaborate presentations. An informal meeting at the parsonage or at a layman's home have the potential to bring swift action. This type of quick decision would normally be tied to preserving their culture, maintaining their building, or something else viewed as extremely consistent with who they have been and who they are.

Most people tend to resist change initially. John Maxwell argues that the less success being experienced, the more likely that group will hold to what it is already doing.<sup>5</sup> Since small churches tend to measure success by how well members are doing, they may be open to new ideas

for spiritual growth within their membership; but changing to grow—just to get new members—will probably be resisted.

### 2. WORSHIP

Worship is central in the small church. Being together is more important than who speaks or sings. Participation is more important than professionalism. Little Susie can make lots of mistakes on her piano offertory, but no one will care. Susie will get lots of love and affirmation simply because, "She's our Susie."

There is no such thing as slipping into the worship service, sitting toward the back, enjoying the service, and then leaving. Nor is it possible to miss without being missed. While "large church" members tend to count empty pews, "small church" members count faces, and they expect yours to be present. Sixty percent or more of the pews can be empty without any concern unless a familiar face is missing. This builds in a high level of accountability toward existing members but shows a lack of evangelistic fervor.

### 3. EVANGELISM

Hunter argues that "small church members are not socially aggressive people. . . . This may be part of the reason only a maximum of six or seven families can be adopted into the typical small church in any given year."<sup>6</sup> By adoption, we mean far more than accepting the Lord or even officially joining the church. It

is learning and identifying with the history, traditions, and "family secrets" of the congregation. It is accepting the culture of the church as well as the Lord of the church.

This high level of identification with the total church culture limits the number of "doors" into the church. Dudley notes, "Larger churches attract and assimilate members through several small units that are 'hungry' for members to share a common task. . . . Dividing is one activity that the single-cell church refuses to do. . . . Growth by division is subversive to the essential satisfactions of belonging to the whole church."<sup>7</sup> The committed "small church" member does want the church to grow, but he also wants to maintain the culture of the church. When the two lock horns, church culture usually wins, and evangelism loses.

#### 4. LAY LEADERSHIP

People who would not rise as leaders in larger churches often find themselves in key positions in the small church. "Bloodlines can be very influential in selecting leaders."<sup>8</sup> Normally, one extended family or "church boss" will control the process of leadership selection. This family or individual may be deeply committed or terribly carnal. Sometimes the true leader will not surface until challenged by change. These persons who once appeared to be apathetic may have "remarkable energy for maintaining the status quo."<sup>9</sup>

Everyday decisions tend to be made by consensus, not by formal committees. Everyone's opinion is heard, and a strong sense of belonging develops. Crisis decisions are different. Everyone may or may not be asked. In either situation, members are looking toward the church boss for their cue.

Determining who this church boss is and guiding this person into a growth-oriented mind-set is vital for any growth-oriented pastor.

#### 5. LAY MINISTRY

Laymen are deeply involved in the life of the church. Maintaining the church building and the existing program normally take precedence over outreach. Work on the facility is rarely given to a contractor. The laymen typically do it themselves and are proud that they don't need

to pay anyone. If no skilled persons are available within the congregation, the work often waits.

However, many "small church" members will draw the line be-

## Small churches can change rapidly when necessary

tween lay ministry and lay pastoring. In my present church, I taught about Jethro's advice to Moses (Exodus 18) and showed how we already divide ministry responsibility by age-group (children/youth/adult) and task area (Sunday School/missions/church facilities/etc.). When I applied this principle to developing lay pastors with only crisis situations coming to me, many people were upset. They wanted *the* pastor when there was a need for pastoral care. Some interpreted this to mean that I, the pastor, did not care.

#### 6. PASTORAL CARE

The small church is a one-person church. Everyone wants the attention of the one person, the pastor. Small church members want a shepherd. They want a pastor who will care for the flock first and be concerned about those outside the flock later. This does not encourage evangelism and growth. In times of need, they expect the pastor to give comfort or guidance. Others can bring in meals and help with family

## For the small church the concept of the "family" is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness

matters, but the pastor is expected to be close to listen and pray. Small church attenders normally desire to have a close relationship with the

pastor. They want to know the pastor more as a person than as a professional.

#### 7. SUPPORT

If someone is in crisis or if the church is in crisis, everyone responds. There is no need to have a social action committee or special fund-raising banquet. If the need is perceived as genuine, members and friends of the church will be there to help meet that need. Attempts to organize in advance are often deemed unnecessary, and proof is then cited: "Didn't we help Joe when he had that need?" The answer is, "Yes." However, in every organization, including the local church, there are core members and peripheral members. My experience indicates that core people are more than amply cared for in times of need. But this is not always the case for peripheral people. Support only extends so far, and only those in the inner circle can be assured of it. As pastor, you might wonder if *you* are in the inner circle. The answer is probably, "Yes" and "No." Schaller says, "The small membership church does not provide a strong support for the minister. . . . The people feel free and sometimes obligated to check up on the minister, but not necessarily in a supportive manner."<sup>10</sup> I have experienced some of what Schaller suggests, but primarily I have found people wanting to bring me into the inner circle.

#### 8. MORALE

The Bible says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). Most small churches have been small for a long time. Morale is low, money is tight, and vision is something for dreamers.

I planted a church in a "not so nice" Veterans of Foreign Wars hall with 20 to 40 people present each Sunday; but, we had hope. Then I went to serve a church with 50 years of tradition that averaged about 75 in worship. The predominant two characteristics of that church were debt and depression.

Why did the smaller group have hope while the larger group was depressed? The newly planted church expected to grow and develop. The established church was trying to survive and could not see an escape from its predicament.

You may find people who love

each other and enjoy the church but who have no hope for growth. They gave up long ago.

### 9. INTIMACY/FAMILY

The most important characteristic of the small church, the concept of the "family," is at the heart of what it means to be a small church. This is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Various authors have called the small church a family church, a single cell, or a primary group.

Dudley writes, "In a primary group, members are united by common interests, beliefs, tasks and territory. They are not self-conscious about their relationship and are bound together more by sentimental ties than by contractual agreements. They have a solidarity, a feeling of belonging, nourished by experiences of intimacy and personal need."<sup>11</sup> He goes on to show the small church as such a primary group. "Not all the members can know all the others on a continuing, face to face basis, but they can all know about one another. They expect to be able to 'place' everyone physically and socially in the fabric of the congregation. The caring cell church may be defined as a primary group in which the members expect to know, or know about, all other members."<sup>12</sup>

Because the small church functions as a primary group, a high priority is placed on relationships. Genuine caring does take place, *but* it is hard to enter this one big, happy family.

We can compare this problem to a teenager at a new high school where the cliques are already established. The new teen walks in with fear and trembling, hoping that he will not receive too much attention, yet wanting to be accepted. The teen does receive polite hellos, even welcomes and introductions, but no one really invites him into their group.

This often happens in a friendly, caring small church. Normally it is unconsciously done. Members are so busy caring for and sharing with one another that they neglect to see how they are excluding the newcomer from their circle. The fear of losing intimacy keeps many churches small. Most of our people do not understand why they are quick to say, "Welcome," but slow to truly welcome. The fear of losing intimacy

with the whole church is a big factor.

Your small church will tell you that it wants to grow. The people will *not* say that they want intimacy

## The small church is a one-person church—everyone wants the attention of the one person

more than growth. Few would realize that it is true, but two illustrations show what we face as pastoral leaders. One is from my family, and the second is from Scripture.

My parents are still living, and I have four brothers. We are all married with children—10 children in all. That means 22 of us can gather for family events and have a great time.

Visitors sometimes join us at our reunions. We tell them to make themselves at home, but we don't really mean it. After we eat, talk, joke, play games, watch television, raid the fridge again, and lounge awhile longer, we expect our guests to go home. We welcomed them, included them, and fed them all day long. But they should know enough not to overstay their welcome.

While this may be appropriate behavior for a nuclear family, it is not appropriate for a church family. Established members of the small church have very similar feelings

## Most small churches have been small for a long time

when new people begin to attend and stay long enough to make inroads into the "family." They wonder why the new person is staying around.

Genesis 16 illustrates this truth even better. Sarai (the small church member) pleads with Abram (the pastor) to seek out new members (Hagar). Abram agrees. Through Hagar, the church begins to grow (she becomes pregnant). Hagar gets all excited (even a little self-righteous, wondering why Sarai was not an effective evangelist), but Sarai does *not* rejoice. Sarai is threatened and uses her longtime relationship in the "family" to come between Abram (pastor) and Hagar (new member). Abram is greatly disappointed, but Hagar drifts away, leaving Abram and Sarai to enjoy their restored intimacy.

The small church member does want growth, but not at the expense of intimacy. Any strategy for growth must be aware of this vital truth.

We all want families in which we are loved and supported. In today's society the church often becomes this caring family. Dudley may be overly sentimental with the words that follow, but all of us who seek to be evangelistically effective by helping small churches turn around can learn from and build upon the characteristics of the small church.

In a big world, the small church has remained intimate. In a fast world, the small church has been steady. In an expensive world, the small church has remained plain. In a complex world, the small church has remained simple. In a rational world, the small church has kept feelings. In a mobile world, the small church has been an anchor. In an anonymous world, the small church calls me by name. . . . As a result, small churches have survived where others have failed.<sup>13</sup>



1. Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 11.

2. Carl S. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 75.

3. Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1988), 18.

4. *Ibid.*, 57.

5. John C. Maxwell, *Enjoy Life Club Tape: "Growth = Change."*

6. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*, 51.

7. *Ibid.*, 52.

8. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* 21.

9. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*, 70-71.

10. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* 54.

11. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*, 32.

12. *Ibid.*, 34.

13. *Ibid.*, 176.



# A PRAYER

by Michael Roderick

Dunbar, W.Va.

## From the heart of . . .

Dear Jesus,

I haven't written to You in a while. How's heaven? Will You return soon? Something must be done about the world. It's full of violence! You predicted these things that try our souls. Still, how it must hurt You to see people suffer. Our wounds are Yours.

How can we thank You for blessing us? It seems that we oftentimes don't appreciate the many ways that You bless and protect us from evil in its many forms. I know that You have blessed us simply because people generally prefer to show mercy to each other. If this were hell, everyone would be filled with hatred. We would all be insanely hateful, but because You have blessed every soul, and especially the members of Your Body, there is the capability of love. Our duty and joy is to prove it.

I'm sorry that there are so many differences of opinion about Your words. At the same time, I'm glad to belong to the Church. Its doctrine satisfies my questions about death, authority, and bread and wine that represent Your body and blood. Thank You for this extended family, and for the members of my immediate family. I've had to forgive and to be forgiven. Please continue forgiving me, for without Your help no one can know, love, or serve You as he ought; and if our desire to know, love, and serve You is weak, You are able to change that by giving us ever-deeper glimpses of yourself. Thank You for this assurance and the promise that, as one family, we will be with You forever!

You are just but prefer mercy to justice. For that reason, have mercy on us, and reveal to us our need. Then we will fly to You, not daring to let go, and will desire to comfort Your heart, which has already been terribly wounded by our sins. This must be so, for if we truly loved You, we would maintain a spirit of unity in the midst of diligent and prayerful searching to know Your mind on any matter. Christianity would not be a scandal to many that otherwise might be won to You. For who could resist being drawn to You if all who say they love You loved You as You deserve to be loved, and each other as Your very own beloved? What a difference: this would have made through history! Could any fault have been found? Could Marxism have succeeded? Would there have been a need for any movement that had as its aim justice for the poor? Christianity would have provided for all, and it would have remained one in love with You. Instead, what grief!

How bitter the view of history must have appeared to You as You sweat blood in Gethsemane, and yet how consoling, as well, to see the saints that would cling to You, and through whom You would amaze the world with Your humility, wisdom, courage, and power to work miracles. What haven't You done to win us over to Your side? What excuses can we make for our lack of charity?

Again, it must grieve You to know that when You return, not all will rejoice. Some will be angry at You for frustrating their plans. But if we, Your friends, valued each other as much as You value us, then we would understand Your sorrow over the loss of even one soul. Help us, then, dear Jesus, to love as You love, and to be willing to assist You in Your work. We help You best by giving to You the freedom to do with us whatever pleases You most. Isn't this what it means to call You "Lord"?



# Leadership Needed

by Neil Hightower

Calgary, Alta.

**L**eadership, the painting of visions and the harnessing of energies, represents one of the great needs in today's society. Laying aside smugness, we acknowledge a leadership crisis in the church.

We have leaders among us, but we have fewer than we need. Leadership, exercised through both clergy and laity, is crucial to our spiritual task.

The church has been influenced by the managerial mode of modern corporate structure. This is not all bad because the ability to marshal and mold people into accomplishing certain goals is valuable and needed. That is one of the classic definitions of the work of a manager. However, the church requires leadership—leadership that concentrates upon people more than structural goals. Leadership deals with personality and relationships. Dennis Johnson wrote in the *Preacher's Magazine*: "Management is something a man does, while leadership is ultimately what a man is."<sup>1</sup>

An effective leader has certain traits. Chief among them is prevailing faith. Paul highlights this quality in Eph. 6:18. Ted Engstrom pointed out in *The Making of a Christian Leader*: a leader needs a life balanced between work, family, and avocational interests. A leader needs a strong sense of direction or

sanctified ambition. He needs intelligent self-discipline, creative initiative, acceptance of authority, the art of controlled delegation, and informed decisiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Considering practices and style, leaders understand the power and the importance of relationships. Leaders know that the particular mix of people in a group is important in creating and nurturing relationships in the work of the Body of Christ. A leader pays attention to the gifting by the Spirit evidenced in gathering people. A leader understands the church as primarily an organism instead of an organization.

A leader deciphers the dynamics of motivation. The leader sees people as ends in themselves. A manager views people as tools for reaching goals. The leader understands the social processes of recognition and the feeling of importance inherent in motivation. He understands that motivation is primarily an emotional process, not a logical one. However, the leader won't exercise his understanding in a manipulative way. He knows that motivated people connect their personal goals with group goals because of treasured relationships, not because of psychological manipulation.

The leader understands that effective group action involves change. He must understand the nature and dynamics of change. The leader knows that the church cannot swim against the tide of a rapidly changing world in organizational matters. The leader also understands the reality of resistance to change within human personality and the resulting conflict that arises from change. Many people in our churches feel traumatized by change. Lyle Schaller says in *The Change Agent*, "They

find their traditions, customs, skills, and perhaps even their sense of self-esteem challenged by the change."<sup>4</sup> The leader drains the terror from change. He does this because he focuses on people, not on organizational ends.

Since discontent affects change, the leader invests discontent into the problem-solving process. Otherwise, discontent creates conflict. The leader transforms discontent into the energy for affecting change but refuses to let it become the engine. The engine is to be empowered by God's will, the scriptural standards of Christian relationships.

We need leaders today—leaders who have vision and courage to keep the church targeted on Christ's Great Commission. Christian leaders willingly risk their reputations by going against the grain of our "connectional" systems. A "connectional system," emphasizing structure, tends to foster the management mold. However, a true leadership model understands that either the leader or the managerial model has dangers to be avoided. The weakness of the management model is to make people merely tools for reaching goals. The danger of the leadership model is mere "good feeling" without the challenge of specific results. Emphasis upon relationships may tend to obscure the universal responsibility of the whole church for ministry. Key figures in relationships may tend to dominate. Leaders must be sensitive to people but dominated by none, including being dominated by their own egos.

Finally, leaders focus on results rather than efforts. Peter Drucker reminds us that "the man who focuses on efforts and who stresses his

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# The Preretirement Years: Health Care Planning

by Gary B. Morsch, M.D., M.P.H.

Physician, Olathe, Kans.

**M**ost retirement planning focuses on financial resources. Important also is the imperative that you have a plan for the preservation of your health as well as a plan for the provision of health care services. This essential planning should begin in the preretirement years.

## The Preservation of Health

One of the greatest trends of this decade has been the "wellness movement." More than ever people choose to become well and stay well.

A common attitude I encounter in persons nearing retirement springs from the misconception that "it's too late to do anything about my health."

Fortunately, this idea proves untrue. It is never too late! You can achieve your highest level of wellness possible no matter what your current level of health. Wellness does not mean the attainment of perfect health, but rather the process of maximizing your health potential. Whether enjoying perfect health or living with chronic disease, you can achieve a higher level of wellness that will make retirement years the best of your life. Choosing a healthier life-style prepares you for a retirement that is productive, joyful, and meaningful. Let's look at some of the components of a "wellness life-style."

## Nutrition

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

Poor nutritional habits are linked to a variety of diseases including heart disease and heart attacks, high

blood pressure, strokes, diabetes, diverticulosis, ulcers, and cancers of the colon, breast, prostate, and uterus. All of these illnesses can be reduced, and often completely prevented, by diet alone.

Following a proper diet does not have to be a complex task. A few simple guidelines provide the basic foundation of a healthy diet. Although thousands of diets are available, most of them fall into the following concept: eat less animal products and more plant foods.

Animal products include meats, dairy products, and eggs. Plants include fruits, vegetables, and grains. Since cholesterol is found only in animal products, a diet low in animal products reduces your cholesterol. On the other hand, fiber is found only in plants; thus, a high fiber diet is simply a diet high in plant foods. In addition, a proper diet should limit salt, sugars and sweets, and caffeine. Our motivation for eating properly goes beyond health, however. Scripture teaches that we become faithful stewards of our health, even in the area of nutrition: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

## Exercise

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

Without hesitation I replied, "Exercise!"

Almost daily, new research confirms that there are few things as important to health as exercise.

Of all the life-style behaviors we adopt, exercise remains one of the most important. Exercise exerts a multitude of positive effects on the body and can reduce or prevent many diseases, including high blood

pressure, heart disease, depression, stress, obesity, diabetes, and even certain cancers!

How much exercise is good for you? You do not have to be an Olympic champion to benefit from exercise. As little as 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three times per week can keep you fit! The type of exercise is essential—it should be aerobic: walking, running, jogging, swimming, rowing, calisthenics, and cycling are all excellent types of aerobic exercise. It is very important to develop patterns of activity now that will carry over into the retirement years. If you are still not convinced, consider this: I believe the Bible challenges us to be physically fit! Scripture says, "For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because he owns it" (1 Cor. 6:20, TLB).

## Attitude

Research shows the powerful link between the mind and our health. Not only are you what you eat, but equally true is the statement, "You are what you think." The scripture makes this clear: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

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

*(Continued on page 46)*

# Helping Families Survive Stillbirth

*Providing Pastoral Care When Nothing Feels Real Except the Pain*

by Victor M. Parachin

Elk Grove, Ill.

When Ann, the happy mother of two children, learned she was pregnant again, she was ecstatic. For nine months she carried her child, experiencing the various stages of her baby's growth and development. Everything was normal and proceeding on schedule.

Late in her ninth month she went into labor. A friend came to look after her two children while Ann and her husband quickly drove off to the hospital. The couple was sent directly into the delivery room. Their physician estimated that the baby would arrive in less than an hour.

Shortly after his announcement, the fetal monitor wrapped around her abdomen showed that the baby's heart abruptly stopped. "Suddenly, the entire atmosphere became charged with tension and anxiety," her husband later recalled. "I was ushered out as other nurses and doctors were rushed in."

An emergency Caesarean section was done in order to rescue the baby. Despite the best efforts of the medical professionals the baby was stillborn.

Although in shock, the father called me because I was their minister. I will never forget the moment I walked into their hospital room and saw Ann holding her daughter. A perfectly and completely developed little girl. "She was strangled by her own umbilical cord," Ann said with tears streaming down her face.

In spite of tremendous medical advances throughout this century, infants still die. Statistically, there is one stillbirth (defined as the death of a fetus between the 20th week of pregnancy and birth) for every 80 live births. Often the cause of death is completely unknown.

Whenever a baby is born dead, nothing feels real except for the pain. In spite of their shock, couples inevitably seek out aid from their clergy. Here are suggestions for helping a couple who have experienced stillbirth heal from the hurt.

1. *Encourage a viewing of the baby.* While this is clearly an individual decision that each mother and each couple must decide, those who have held and viewed their child felt it to be therapeutic. Here is one mother's expression:

My husband said we had a girl, and she was truly beautiful. He encouraged me to see her and offered to bring our baby into the room. She was all wrapped up in a blanket like any other baby. He placed her into my arms, and I touched her. She was both beautiful and perfect. I'm glad that I saw her and held her. That moment formed some closure for me.

University of Nebraska professor John DeFrain has spent 10 years studying and researching how families cope with the death of an infant. In his recent book, *Stillborn: The Invisible Death*, he reports high-level satisfaction from parents who viewed their infant, while those who did not expressed regrets:

We asked the parents in our study if they saw their baby, and slightly more than half had. Every one of these parents was very glad to have done so. Most of the parents who had not seen the baby wished they had.

2. *Have a funeral service.* While our society currently does not have agreement on an appropriate ritual for the situation of stillbirth, more and more couples are opting for a funeral service. Often these are smaller, private rites attended only

by family and close friends.

Generally most Protestant and Catholic clergy will accommodate the family wishes on a funeral rite. However, because Judaism does not recognize a baby until after it is one month old, no formal ceremony is currently available.

The value of a funeral service for the family is that it brings their grief out into the open, facilitates support from others, and establishes the baby as an individual who had a life and was part of a family.

Sharon, whose baby died in her eighth month of pregnancy, says the funeral ritual was "extremely" important:

We called our minister and asked for a simple graveside service. He admitted he had never done a funeral for a stillborn but readily agreed. The day itself was beautiful—bright and sunny. We were surrounded by our parents, extended family, close friends, as well as our pastor. Although I cried through much of the ceremony, I felt much, much better for the tears and for the service. When it was over, every single person there reached out and embraced me tightly. I felt a lot of hope. As a result I strongly recommend that anyone who has a stillbirth go ahead and have a simple service of some kind.

3. *Promote talking and expression of feelings.* Communication is of utmost importance for a healthy adjustment to the crisis of stillbirth. Here is a glowing tribute one woman paid to her supportive pastor after she lost a baby:

Talking was the only way I could deal with my anguish. Thank God for my pastor who allowed me to talk and talk. I'm cer-

tain he must have found me extremely repetitious, yet he never stopped me nor judged me for anything I said or felt. Talking and sharing my feelings was profoundly therapeutic. It seemed that every time I told my story, a little bit of pain was peeled away.

Conversely, those who flounder and drift for years after a stillbirth are those who were unable or prevented from expressing their fear, anger, sadness, and many other emotions connected to the death of a child. One woman's pain lasted far too long, over two decades, and did not subside until she found a sympathetic listener:

Twenty-three years have passed since I lost my baby. Until last year I was not free to even discuss my little boy. My salvation came through a new neighbor who had gone through an identical experience. She initiated the conversation without knowing what I had been through. Finally, after all those years I am able to talk and now receive some comfort.

4. *Recommend activity.* For many people activity is an excellent coping device. A consistent theme I hear from the bereaved in my support groups is this sentence: "Keeping busy really helps me." By that, they mean getting involved in a job or a project because it is a gentle way of forcing oneself back into the mainstream of life. This was true for Ellen, the mother of one school-aged child. When she became pregnant with her second child, she quit her job on a doctor's recommendation. Unfortunately, her baby died in the seventh month. Ellen says:

A good friend, a therapist, would let me come over to talk and cry. She was a very patient and considerate listener. My friend urged me to go out and get a job, since my other child was in school all day. I followed her advice and got a sales job in a retail store. That entry-level, minimum-wage job became my lifeline. It forced me to have a schedule, get up, and get dressed every day. That simple job took the edge off my depression and allowed me to begin recovering sooner.

5. *Be sensitive to the father.* Too often the father is the forgotten or

silent partner in grief. Because the woman carries the child, she receives most of the support. Yet, the lost child is as much the father's as the mother's. David and Martha were expecting twins. One was stillborn, and the other died within two hours of the birth.

Over the next few months family and friends would often ask David, "How is Martha doing?"

Confiding in his pastor, David said: "No one seems to be aware of my pain. I am feeling more and more isolated with my feelings because people don't think I feel any loss or grief over this."

6. *Recognize that grieving takes time.* Each person and every couple grieves differently. There are no clear turning points, nor are there deadlines that can be met. Fortunately, we are created to recover and heal. One man said for himself and his wife:

While we still have many bad days, both of us can see and feel the occasional good day. It has been 11 months since we lost Danny. As time passes, we seem to be doing better and are now beginning to look more optimistically toward the future.

7. *Suggest help.* The death of a child, even in the fetal stage, is one of the most difficult experiences a couple has to face. Normally the pain expends itself with the passing of time. If this does not occur, then there are reasons to believe that the natural course of mourning is not taking place. Signals that an individual or couple may need more help include these: high-level denial, constant and repressive depression, ongoing sleep and eating problems, intense feelings of anger, guilt, blame, and feeling worthless.

An easy, inexpensive, and effective way to receive more help is to join a support group. Those who have experienced a stillbirth have found it extremely beneficial to talk with others who have lost a baby. This statement from one mother explains why support groups are so therapeutic:

I never will be able to take my son to a ball game or playground, but I can take him and my memories to my support group. There I can talk and cry and share broken dreams openly. There no one


would ever interrupt me and say: "Don't you think you should be over this by now!" Those who have lost a baby understand in a way that others cannot.

8. *Provide theological reflection.* The death of a child becomes, for the couple, a profoundly painful theological issue. One mother, whose child died during labor, asked me: "My little daughter didn't have a chance at life. No one will ever know her. She was so small, so vulnerable. Does God know or care about my daughter?"

Her comments were a 20th-century version of the ancient Psalmist's refrain: "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (8:3-4, RSV).

Sharing this helped her understand she was not alone in questioning whether or not God sees and cares. From there we were able to talk together about the fact of God's love, loyalty, and concern for the woman, her family, and her little daughter. I was also able to share my theological conviction that life provides us with minimal protection, but God provides us with maximum support in our pain.

Finally, be mindful that the human spirit has a tremendous capacity to heal from hurts, no matter how deep and painful. Writer and author Susie Blackmun's first child died during labor. The baby had anencephaly, a defect in which the brain does not form properly. Initially devastated by the loss, she and her husband recovered and now have another child. Looking back on it, she writes eloquently about that painful experience:

Losing a child has to be the purest form of hell that exists for a parent, yet I would rather have been pregnant with Julia and lost her than never to have carried her at all. She made her own mark in my life and in the lives of my family and friends. During her brief foray into the world, my first daughter contributed more than most people give in a lifetime. I am proud to be her mother. 

\*Susie Blackmun, "A Stillborn's Gift" in *American Baby* magazine (New York: Nov. 1988), 67.

# Communion *(Continued from page 37)*


a given view, it constitutes a type of support, although this is not support of a fundamental kind—as biblical and theological supports are.

And besides biblical, theological, and historical supports for open Communion, there is a practical support for it. In a practical sense, it approaches the ridiculous to exclude fellow Christian believers from the Communion with Christ and with other believers that is enjoyed at the Lord's table. It approaches the ridiculous, from the practical standpoint, because, when the World Council of Churches has had its every-seventh-year meetings, its ecumenicists have had to divide themselves into four separate groups for receiving Communion. Right while the leaders of some 300 denominations have talked together and tried to practice Christian unity, they have been forced to receive Communion in separated groupings. They pray together in these widely representative conferences, read Scripture together, hear sermons and addresses together, but cannot receive Communion together due to such matters

as who is in the apostolic succession, who may administer Communion, and who may receive it.

It is unfortunate, if not ridiculous, in a local church setting when a Christian stranger is prohibited from receiving Communion with the regular worshipers. The writer himself has been so excluded many times, especially when worshiping with Lutheran denominations while on vacation. In such services the visitor is welcomed, treated cordially, enters into the worship forms and the hymns with the others, but is told by the ushers that he may not receive

Communion with the others. Noteworthy is the fact that the gospel preached in the sermon is preached to all present, and, of course, that gospel never excludes anyone. Yet the Christian stranger within the gates of these groups is excluded from the Communion with Christ and with other Christians at that blessed table.

So the next time you administer Communion, Pastor, be thankful for and glory in your open Communion heritage. If strangers are in your midst who witness to being Christians, open the Lord's table to them. Open it to them wide, with humility, but also with a quiet, unspoken, Christian hilarity. 


## Leadership Needed *(Continued from page 42)*

downward authority is a subordinate no matter how exalted his title and rank."<sup>4</sup>

The leader who concentrates on results is one who asks the question, "What can I contribute to this organization that will make a difference in the outcome?" The question of personal contribution turns the leader's concentration to the per-

formance of the entire church, not to his special interest. It will cause the leader to perceive "the unused potential in the job,"<sup>5</sup> and that often is found in the people with whom the leader works. Failure to ask the "contribution" question suggests that our aim is too low and that the wrong objectives command our attention.

Leaders who ask the "contribution" question discover growth occurring in three areas: direct performance results; building of values and their reaffirmation; and developing people for tomorrow. We need leaders to ask the "contribution" question. Otherwise, followers will never ask the question either.

The church is called to build God's kingdom, not its own. The activities of preaching, teaching, and nurturing point to that end. Great leaders find checks to building their personal kingdoms by a willingness to be led themselves. Leaders must humble themselves before Jesus and listen daily for His instructions. Leaders listen to hear Christ speaking through His followers. The democracy of God's people tends to keep in check the dictatorship of leaders. Godly leadership aims at the glory of God. 

## Preretirement Years *(Continued from page 43)*


The attitude you take toward retirement years is vitally important and depends on you! If you look forward to retirement with optimism and purpose and goals, your health will reflect this. You will be much more likely to find those years all that you dreamed they could be!

### Preventive Health Care

In spite of the best efforts to lead a healthy life-style, illnesses, often serious, still occur. Since all disease cannot be prevented, it is important to detect serious illness as early as possible when the best chances for treatment and cure exist. A relationship with a trusted family doctor or internist is important. Not only will your doctor be available when early symptoms arise, but more importantly, your doctor can provide preventive health maintenance examinations on a regular basis. Depending on your health status and risk factors, this examination

may consist of a physical exam, prostate exam, Pap smear, blood tests, X rays, sigmoidoscopy, EKG, and treadmill tests, among other things.

### Conclusion

Good health and well-being are very important, especially as one looks toward retirement years. Our health is a gift from God. We should be careful stewards of that which has been given to us. The preretirement years can be a valuable time of refocusing as we reexamine our priorities, our life-styles, and our health behaviors. With a clear plan for preserving our health, as well as a plan for the provision of health care, we can look forward to our retirement years with a positive attitude. We can, along with the apostle Paul, "confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be" (Rom. 5:2, TLB). 

1. Dennis Johnson, *The Preacher's Magazine* March—May, 1985, 7.

2. Ted W. Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), chap. 11, pp. 111-20.

3. Lyle E. Schaller, *The Change Agent* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 36.

4. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), 53.

5. *Ibid.*, 54.



# Catholic Spirit

by John Wesley  
interpreted by Mark Royster

Kenya, Africa

*John Wesley's 1750 sermon, condensed and paraphrased for contemporary readers. Albert C. Outler called the focus of this sermon "Wesley's most important contribution to the cause of Christian unity."*

*Jehu saluted Jehonadab and said, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, give me thine hand" (2 Kings 10:15, KJV).*

**N**o one can deny that we must love our fellowman. The royal law of Christ states, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 19:19, KJV). Just as surely, we should love particularly those who share our love for God. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35, KJV).

All Christians accept these ideals, but few are able to practice them. Two large obstacles block the way. First, Christians can't all *think* alike; and because of this, second, they can't all *walk* alike.

Differences of opinions and modes of worship often prevent a complete external fellowship. But should they prevent a unity of heart? Though we can't all think alike, may we not all love alike? Surely we may. Even a mixed character like Jehu can serve as our example.

Our text shows the proposal of fellowship between two very different personalities. From a natural perspective Jehu and Jehonadab had very little in common. Even so, they found communion because of a shared affection.

Their conversation was short. First Jehu asked a *question* of Jehonadab, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" Then he made an *offer*, "If it be, give me thine hand."

Does it surprise us that Jehu didn't ask about Jehonadab's *theological*

*opinions*? Perhaps he realized that all men will never see all things alike.

Human weakness and limited understanding make differences inevitable. A wise man may think *each* of his opinions true, yet in his heart he knows there is little chance that *all* his opinions are true. He knows in principle that somewhere he must be mistaken. Yet he cannot know in which particular opinions all his errors lie. If he did, he would surely change them.

In this condition the wise man strives to follow the dictates of his mind and conscience. And he will allow others the same freedom in thinking that he wants them to allow him. He no more insists on others embracing his opinions than he would want them to demand his embracing theirs.

Neither did Jehu quiz Jehonadab about his *style of worship*. Scripture suggests that it differed widely from his own (2 Kings 10:28-29). Yet Jehu seemed to realize that as long as there are differing opinions, there will be a variety of ways to worship God.

In this area, too, everyone must follow his own conscience. No man can choose for another. While I may have sure confidence that my form of worship is true to Scripture, my belief is not the absolute rule. Before I agree to unite in love with a Christian brother, dare I ask for complete agreement in our habits of prayer, Communion, baptism, or congregational government? Like Jehu, my only question should be, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"

But what does Jehu's question mean for Christians today?

First, it implies: is your heart right with God? Do you believe in His be-

ing and power; His justice, mercy, and truth? Do you "walk by faith"? Do you have evidence of His presence in your life?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Does He live in you? Is Christ "formed in your heart"? Through Him, are you "fighting the good fight of faith"?

Is your faith filled with the energy of love? Do you love God "with all your heart and soul and mind and strength" (Mark 12:30, TLB)? Is God the center of your soul?

Does the love of God motivate you to serve Him with deep reverence? Do you hate disappointing Him? In all things, do you strive to keep a clear conscience with God and man?

Is your heart right with your neighbor? Do you love your enemies? Do you "pray for those that treat you spitefully"? Can your love be seen in your actions?

If all this is true of you—if you sincerely *desire* it to be true of you—then "thine heart [is] right, as my heart is with thy heart."

But what does it mean when I say to such a fellow seeker, "Give me thine hand"?

I don't mean, "Share all my opinions." You need not. Nor do I mean that I will share all yours. I cannot. Keep your convictions; I will keep mine.

I don't mean, "Embrace my modes of worship," or, "I will embrace yours." Stick to what you believe most acceptable to God. I will do the same. If you love God and all mankind, I ask no more: "Give me thine hand."

Love me. Not just in the way you love all persons. If "thine heart [be] right, as my heart is with thy heart," then love me as a friend that is closer than a brother; a fellow sol-

dier under the Captain of our salvation. Hope for the best in me, trusting that whatever is amiss will, by God's grace, be corrected.

Pray for me. If you are nearer to the throne of grace, use your place to intercede for the amendment of my errors and inadequacies.

Encourage me to love and do good. Show me how I might better do God's work. Don't hold back anything that you think might make me more fit for the Master's use.

Join with me in the work of God, as far as your conscience will allow it.

Altogether, this describes a "catholic spirit." Yet because today few expressions are more misunderstood and dangerously misapplied, I close with these clarifications.

First, a catholic spirit is not *doctrinal indifference*. Many think they have a catholic spirit when, in fact, they are simply confused. They haven't sorted out what they believe and remain tossed back and forth between conflicting opinions. A person of true catholic spirit knows clearly what he believes. He is committed to his convictions, yet allows others the same privilege.

Second, a catholic spirit is not *practical indifference*. It does not assume all forms for worship are basically the same in the sight of God. A person of true catholic spirit has carefully chosen his church and worship style, judging it closest to the scriptural and rational ideal. Yet he allows that others may have done the same analysis and arrived at different conclusions.

Quite simply, a man of catholic spirit is one who gives his hand to all whose hearts are right with his heart. While holding fast to his own scriptural convictions, he opens his heart to all others who are seeking to love and serve the same Lord. He loves them, is ready "to spend and be spent for them," even "to lay down his life" for their sake.

Friends, think about these things. If you are already in this spirit, go on. If you have missed your path, be grateful that God has called you back. Now run the race set before you in the royal way of love. Keep an even pace. Keep rooted in the faith, and grounded in love, true catholic love, till you are swallowed up in love forever. ✠

# How Pastors Can Cope with Betrayal

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Windham, Maine

**W**hen I was first in ministry, I wondered why older clergy and their spouses frequently looked tired and aloof. At gatherings, they would be somewhat distant. It was as if a screen had been put up between their inner selves and the rest of the world. Even among the more gregarious, there was that subtle, wary look that kept the eyes surveying the scene, a protective radar at work.

I would say to myself, "Aw, come on, let your hair down and be yourself. Open up a bit. Enjoy." Yet the shielding continued, so that for years I never really knew some of the colleagues I would see the most often.

Now that I have been in the pastorate for 20 years, I believe I have figured out why the older men and women had been distant. With some of them, they had died inside due to betrayal. With others, they were struggling to survive. What brought this on? In large part, it had been the surprise of betrayal—not realizing that it was really there. Those clergy started in the ministry with the sincere desire to save the world for Jesus. They wanted to be a friend to mankind on behalf of a kind Creator. But as time wore on, they discovered that their naive, open vulnerability cost them something.

*Betrayal's sword the worst to bare.*

*For friendship promised, treason seized,*

*And thus dared prostitute the name*

*Of honored Friendship, crushed its reed.*

Betrayal is an experience that we do not want to admit to; therefore, we do not talk about it. After all, we are professionals; many of us are perfectionists with extremely sensitive personalities. Most of us have lofty achievement aspirations; to admit defeat in friendship bindings can be traumatic. Consequently, it is one of the most painful of the occupational hazards.

Too often as giving pastors, we have been regarded by our parishioners as being so close to God that we have no feelings. If they turn on us—subtly or obviously—they think we can take it, for we are not all that human. We can withstand anything. But we are human; and aching desperately to embrace the human race for God, we are cut deeply by these surprise attacks from our parishioners.

No one told us that when we visit regularly and try our best to deliver those stirring sermons, and at the same time craft a smoothly operating church program to meet the needs of the young and old, there would still be some who would turn in dissatisfaction "to do us in."

I have had fellow clergy say to me, "The very ones I gave my blood for have turned on me." "I thought that



I was doing what they wanted done; now they tell me I'm not doing anything right." "The ones my wife and I had in for evening meals are the ones who have set up the coalitions to get rid of me." "The ones I had thought to be trusted are the ones who have been the most vicious."

Because we fear being considered inferior to the task, the wounds of the job are whispered only in private with the very select; and even they are held in guarded suspicion. After all, political snares are here and there, who knows where? After a while, we wonder if anyone, especially within the ecclesiastical machine, can be truly trusted with the inner questions of the occupation.

I recall one pastor who—in an off-guarded moment—opened up to his superior. He candidly spilled out his frustrations, only to be grilled by the very one who should have extended an understanding hand. In sharing this with still another pastor, the minister seeking help reasoned that his superior had attacked him because of the latter's own jealousies of the pastor's accomplishments in other endeavors.

Somewhat there has to be a solution, at least a partial one, if we want to conclude that it is too soon to die inside.

**1. For starters, we must admit to reality.** We must confront the truth of betrayal in the ministry, some of it coming from parishioners and some coming from other clergy. It is simply one of the negatives of existence. To gloss over it is to submit to a positive thinking that is not true to fact.

Some of us think we are unspiritual if we admit that betrayal exists in the church. We are always playing a game of erasing the hurting facts. We keep manufacturing mirages, usually furnishing these with traditional, religious clichés. All of this merely complicates the process of analysis and solution seeking. Calling a spade a spade is not admitting to being an unspiritual disciple. It is using the logic of Jesus, who commanded His followers to be as wise as serpents.

**2. We must turn the betrayals over to God,** even though this is particularly difficult emotionally. When we give so much to help cer-

tain persons, only to have those same individuals silently leave or stab us in the back, the shock is hard to take. Nevertheless, the wounds are to be given over to the Lord for His balm. Thankfully, He can heal our pain. After all, He has been betrayed since the Fall. We are the visual victims of the continuing betrayal against God. Imagine the ache that has been forced upon the eternal heart. If anyone can empathize, it is He.

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## We are professionals; many of us are perfectionists

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**3. We must share the frustrations of the vocation with our family.** They will sense our dilemma, for many times we have taken our hurt out on them. We need to ask for their understanding during the severe seasons by telling them about our disappointments. They will surround us with special care. This can often be the lift that God uses to keep our inner self alive.

Sometimes we keep our hurts to ourselves rather than burdening our spouses. In turn our spouses may also harbor their own bruises rather than communicating them to us. Eventually, the pileup of pain produces a network overload. Something, then, has to give. And more times than not, the "giving" is not pleasant.

The wise move is to share the hurt with our spouses. Dialogue develops understanding. Opening up eases the hurt and gives a more precisioned perspective. A practical, team spirit forms, which enables both partners to have greater strength in carrying the load.

Coupled with this, next to God we need to keep our families in high priority. This does not set well with those of us clergy who have been taught to put family way down in the listing, thinking that such sacrifice is expected by the Lord. Nevertheless, nowhere in the Bible does

God ask such from the pastors; instead, it has been a part of the ministerial myth, particularly within evangelical Protestantism.

As the wounded pastors we can find great solace from our families if we have been keeping close to them all along. This obviously means then that we enjoy our spouses and children by spending time with them—partying, picnicking, making time for recreation, sharing the children's homework, reading to the younger ones, buddying up with the older ones. We can then conclude that if any persons can finally be trusted not to be betrayers, it will be those under our own roof. What a boon!

**4. We must develop meaningful friendships outside the congregation.** It is so easy to become so housebound with our parishioners that we put aside to a future date the making of companionships "on the outside." Yet when betrayals surface, where will we go? To whom will we turn?

After all, the ones within the congregation cannot be our closest friends. Parishioners want a respectable, professional distance with their clergy, even in this supposed relaxed age when everyone is trying to be so open with one another. The Bible commissions us to perfect our people in the image of Christ; this can be best done when we do not allow ourselves to be open to compromise for the parishioners' laxities. Instead, by maintaining a proper distance with our own in the church, we give ourselves the leverage to still pronounce with freedom, "Thus saith the Lord."

Friendships outside the congregation are a must. These may be with other clergy. More importantly, they may be with clergy of other denominations. The latter, after all, pose little if any threat when it comes to betrayal. They are not a part of the political machine, for they are of another group; therefore, they have little power to manipulate or undercut.

Making ties with laity outside the local church is also helpful. Such alliances permit friendship sharings that will not revolve around the shoptalk of the local group. These friendships engender freer relationships.

Fellowship on the outside may

find a meaningful level by mail and telephone contact. I have a very good friend who lives 3,000 miles away; yet we communicate openly by letter. Another minister friend is half a continent removed; he phones regularly for an hour's chat!

When the betrayals surface, these friends will be used by God as legitimate buffers. They will be there—tried and trusted. They will listen. They will empathize. They will understand.

**5. Understand that betrayal is a part of life in general.** The hurts of the ministry are especially deep in that frequently the betrayals are double-edged—betraying God and the minister of God. Further, the betrayals often trigger eternal consequences with the chance that souls may be forever lost. Yet on lesser levels betrayals are common to the Fall. Therefore, to sympathize with laity who experience the death inside, we must also walk that path just as Jesus walked it. ("Will you, too, leave Me?" He asked the Twelve as He watched many others He counted on turn against His call for less demanding paths; see John 6:67.)

**6. Look on the betrayals from the long range.** Ten years from now it will be difficult to recall the names of most who betray today. Yet how often do we wake in the morning with the faces of the opposition staring at us from the mirror? Let us wipe away those faces as best we can and move on to other things, putting into working practice the guidelines above.

Moving on to other things can healthily mean that we do something other than church work for a day or two. Get away to another part

of the country. Go to the library or coffee shop for a day. Enjoy some sport. Travel overnight to some relatives.

It is encouraging to note how the change of scenery—even for a short while—can drain our retaliatory feelings relating to betrayal. Simply seeing another environment, chatting with other people, moving the body into other activity does rejuvenate the mind. Then when returning to the job, the air is clearer. The burden is lighter.

## Defeat in friendship —one of the most painful occupational hazards

One day a friend of mine phoned from out of state. He wondered if he could bunk out at our parsonage for several days. He had been undercut; the pressure was too great at home base, so that he simply needed to get away. Fortunately, we had been friends for years, so that his house was always open to me, and my house was always open to him. After he had completed his visit, he thanked me for "the island" our home had provided him—an escape from the vice that had been squeezing him in.

At least he had sense enough to deal positively with his emotions when under fire. He had realized

that a change of place was what he needed in order to get back on the track.

Having experienced betrayal, we are more cautious in choosing close friends. However, we must not be so gun-shy as to give up. There are those out there whom God will reveal to be true. In most lives this takes some time for Him to work. Be patient. Allow Him to move across the network of human relations in order to aid in the selection of real friends.

In addition, going through betrayal makes us more aware of our own allegiances to others; that is, we're more sensitive in not betraying someone else who is counting on us. It is easy in a hurried life to treat others shoddily; however, when we have been betrayed, we realize then that it simply cannot be a part of our integrity to treat others as we have been hurt.

I can tally the betrayals in my own life. Either I can fondle them, or I can turn them over to God. If I do the latter, I can get on with life and so be productive for the eternal Kingdom. At the same time, I can be deeply thankful to the Lord for the real companions He has brought into my life. And when they visit, when they phone, or when I receive a note from them, I then know that I have come upon some of earth's most precious treasures. I cherish these gifts from God and treat them with special care.

I know what it has been to be tossed about by ones I counted on as friends; and I also know—thank God—that He has provided others to fill in the vacuum. And these others are more dear to me than life itself.

## BEYOND BELIEF



# Today's Books for Today's Preachers



## **THE HEART AND SOUL OF EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT**

by James Hind

(PA089-693-6384, \$9.99)

James Hind takes an interesting approach to the life and relationships of Jesus. As he examines them, he finds that Jesus stands out as "the Model Corporate Manager." He states, "I have couched the study of Christ in a business language and perspective." He quotes Lawrence Miller, longtime business consultant to blue-chip companies: "It is my experience and the experience of other observers that managers who inspire devotion have dedication to a higher, sometimes mysterious, perhaps spiritual purpose. Their beliefs provide them with a sense of special significance which is the key to their leadership. They know they are not merely serving themselves, a goal for which they know little is worth sacrificing, but that they are serving their cause, mission, or faith, for which great sacrifices are justified."

The author challenges chief executive officers (CEOs) to accept the challenge of using the Christian principles of management and attaching themselves to rewards far greater than their expectations—ones that are everlasting! He believes that this approach can revolutionize American business and will restore its soul.

Mr. Hind then proceeds to give various practical illustrations of successful businesses and leaders who have implemented "the Ways of the Master-Manager." Among those companies given as examples are Wal-Mart and Service Master. He illustrates what business America needs

by a classic story from Robert H. Waterman, Jr., coauthor of the best-selling management book, *In Search of Excellence*. In his new book, *The Renewal Factor: How the Best Get and Keep the Competitive Edge*, he says:

Three people were at work on a construction site. All were doing the same job, but when each was asked what his job was, the answers varied. Breaking rocks, the first replies. Earning my living, said the second. Helping to build a cathedral, said the third.

Most of us feel that we are building cathedrals in our work, not just muddling through until payday.

Then Mr. Hind proceeds to describe his approach in detail. He calls it the "Commandments of Caring" and outlines them in this following acrostic:

### **JUDGE OTHERS FIRST WITH YOUR HEART, NOT YOUR HEAD.**

Show concern for and commitment to their developmental needs.

**EXCITE WITH ENTHUSIASM.** Make it an opportunity to involve others. It makes ordinary people extraordinary.

**SOCIALIZE, DON'T OSTRACIZE.** It creates a community of interests, a closer bond between people, and a desire to support one another.

### **UNDERSTAND PEOPLE AND IDEAS THAT DIFFER FROM YOU.**

Don't look for "labels." Look at their actions, attitudes, and character.

**SUPPORT YOUR PEOPLE WHEN THEY NEED YOU MOST.** Particularly offer help to those under pressure or in a crisis. Then they will give their most.

### **COMPLIMENT, DON'T CRITICIZE.**

Use purr-words, not slur-words.

**HUMILITY—PRACTICE AND PROMOTE IT.** Don't be blinded by your own importance. This is the mark of great and enduring leadership.

**RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF YOUR PEERS.** Compete against a standard of excellence in your work, not peer pressure.

**INTEREST OTHERS IN WHAT THEY CAN DO.** Find and promote their distinctive talent(s). They will achieve far beyond their abilities.

**SELF-CONTROL: HAVE PATIENCE WITH PEOPLE.** Don't argue with hostile emotions. It pays off.

**TREAT OTHERS WITH TOUGH LOVE AND A TENDER TOUCH.** Hold people accountable.

The author believes that these "Commandments of Caring" are closely patterned upon the ways Jesus Christ believed, lived, and successfully managed and motivated people—to help them be all that God created them to be. He states that this is true *Servant Leadership*. He emphasizes that the greatest success is unselfish love—the giving of yourself to others!

Mr. Hind has succeeded in communicating the "Agape Love" of Christ into practical management skills. For those persons searching for ways to implement their faith in business or spiritual leadership, I consider this to be a very usable and applicable book. I hope that it will be read prayerfully and thoughtfully again and again.

—Joe Farrow





# Striving to Be Average

**T**he whole "successful pastor" business has been way overdone. Even the "excellence versus success" argument misses the point. I am convinced that the local church pastor who wants to build a history of long-term pastoral stays should direct his energies in another direction. He should strive to be average.

A pastor who preaches great sermons every Sunday won't get to stay very long in that church. Somebody from a bigger church will visit, be impressed by his oratory, and try to get him moved the next time there is a vacancy in the pulpit at his church.

On the other hand, a pastor that preaches consistently lousy sermons will be dumped and go into another line of work. Much better, it seems to me, to be an average preacher and simply preach well enough to be comfortable and stay.

A pastor who spends 60 or 70 hours a week on church work will make his congregation feel guilty that they aren't doing more them-

selves. The pastor who never gets out of his house will be considered lazy. Pastoral review time will leave him writing resumes. A pastor who spends too many hours on church work may also appear to be ignoring his family. Questions may arise as to how the pastor and his wife are getting along. The pastor who spends plenty of time with his family will be accused of ignoring the needs of the flock. It would be safer to just be average and stay on.

The pastor who strives to be average should also ignore all seminars, conferences, and district social events. Attendance at these functions gives the impression that the pastor (1) doesn't have enough work to occupy his time; (2) has money to burn; (3) is trying to earn "brownie points."

A good pastor's automobile should be average too. An expensive one suggests that he doesn't need a raise. A rusted-out smoke-belcher embarrasses the people in the congregation. The ideal car for a pastor striving to be average is a five-year-

old station wagon.

At the risk of being considered extreme, it could even be said that a good pastor's wife should be average. A wife who is exceptionally beautiful, classy, or stylish will be a stumbling block to men in the church. And all the women will hate her. Of course, if the pastor has married a goddess *before* he was called into the ministry, he certainly shouldn't divorce her. She should have a baby and make everyone feel comfortable again.

I know that the apostle Paul would hate all this advice. He wrote about "straining for the goal," "pressing toward the mark," "running the good race," and things like that. But look at Paul's track record. He didn't stay more than a year or two in any of his churches. Who wants to emulate a record like that? Why, that's hardly enough time to learn all the television channel numbers or become chaplain of the Rotary Club or even be invited to pray at the high school commencement.



## Pontius' Puddle





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# WORSHIP

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# & PREACHING

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# HELPS

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Carlton D. Hansen

## June/July/August 1992

Prepared by Carlton D. Hansen

### INTRODUCTION

The summer is an interesting time to preach. Congregational continuity is lacking, so lengthy series are not practical.

Although I have focused on Ephesians for six weeks, there is no particular theme, so the sermons may be preached on any Sunday and in no particular order. I have also given three character studies: Lydia, Onesimus, and Gaius.

You will find a variety of preaching experiences. Most of the sermons are heavily illustrated, adding windows of truth for each point. Hopefully you will flesh out each sermon, adding your own style and material.

My prayer is that God will use this material to help you find a starting point for your summer preaching and that He will anoint your effort.

# THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST

by Carlton D. Hansen

Acts 1:7-8; 2:1-4

June 7, 1992

## INTRO:

**ILLUS.** When Lorenzo de' Medici ruled Florence, the Christians had an unusual custom. They acted out the events in the Scriptures on stage. The presentation of Pentecost was memorable, getting more than they bargained for. To symbolize the tongues of fire resting upon the believers, they lit fires upon the heads of the 120 actors who played the parts of those in the Upper Room. Pandemonium broke out when part of the staging caught fire.

Although no one was seriously injured, the scenery was completely destroyed before the fire was extinguished.

We may view their attempt strange to portray the meaning of Pentecost in this manner. However, the miracle of Pentecost can be repeated today, and the fire of God can burn hotly on the altar of every believer's heart.

Our prayer is, "Do it again, Lord!"

**ILLUS.** Two men were visiting Niagara Falls when one said to his friend, "There is the greatest unused power in the world!"

"Not so," said his friend. "The greatest unused power in the world is the Holy Spirit of the living God."

## I. There Is the Promise of Pentecost (1:8)

The prophet Joel declared, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29). This outpouring is not limited to culture, race, or age, but on all flesh.

John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus, proclaimed that Christ would baptize His converts "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

One day Jesus gathered His disciples to himself and comforted them, saying He would not leave them comfortless (John 14:26).

Before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

Looking for an earthly kingdom, His disciples asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (v. 6).

He responded, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (v. 8).

God's timing is always perfect. On the Day of Pentecost, an 800-year-old promise was fulfilled.

We, too, can experience the promise of Pentecost.

**ILLUS.** Dwight L. Moody tells how in New York City he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said, "What a day. I can't describe it! I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred to name! I can only say God revealed himself to me! I had such an experience of love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand! I went to preaching again. The sermons were no different. I did not present any new truth. Yet

hundreds were converted. I would not be back where I was before that blessed experience."

## II. There Is the Purpose of Pentecost (1:8)

What was the purpose of Pentecost and why did the disciples need the Holy Spirit?

### A. The disciples needed cleansing from all known sin

The disciples needed their hearts cleansed of jealousy, pride, envy, strife, selfishness, self-centeredness. We have the same need.

The Holy Spirit purifies the thought processes, the attitude, the heart. He gives moral strength and ethical integrity, and He empowers us to live victoriously in Christ.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's Sir Galahad said, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure."

**ILLUS.** At a Bible conference some years ago, a husband and wife sought the experience of entire sanctification. The next evening the wife testified to her new-found victory.

"I have been a born-again believer for a number of years," she said. "But not until last night did I know what it is to be cleansed throughout my being. Until last night I had felt my Christian experience was like a dingy-looking washing hung out on a clothesline. But at the altar the Savior made me whiter than snow. He fully sanctifies me now."

### B. The disciples needed empowerment for service

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower and qualify His disciples to perform His work on earth. It was not until they were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that they were able to carry out the mandate of the Great Commission.

Prior to Pentecost, they were powerless, weak, and ineffective. After Pentecost, they declared, "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Before Pentecost, Peter could not wholeheartedly say he loved Jesus with his whole heart (John 21:15-19). After Pentecost, he loved Jesus so much that he suffered and finally died for the Lord.

Before Pentecost, John asked that fire be called down from heaven and consume the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56). After Pentecost, he ministered to the Samaritans.

The Holy Spirit empowers the follower of Christ to become a workman approved by God, (2 Tim. 2:15), "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (v. 21).

*This is the secret of the Holy,  
Not our holiness, but HIM;  
Jesus! empty us and fill us  
With Thy fullness to the brim.*

—Unknown

### III. There Is the Power of Pentecost (2:1-4)

Jesus promised, "You will receive power" (1:8). That power was demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 believers in the Upper Room and on nearly a score of nationalities in the streets of Jerusalem when Peter preached and 3,000 received Christ as their personal Savior (2:41).

When we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will exclaim with Isaiah, "Here am I. Send me!" (6:8).

Our vocation will not matter. Our main business is to live out the mandate of Acts 1:8.

Let us remind ourselves, though, that the power of Pentecost is in a Person, the Holy Spirit, who is:

**A. Our Teacher and Comforter:** "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

**B. Our Inner Witness and assurance:** "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16).

**C. Our Defense against the wiles of the devil:** "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

**D. Our Guide into all truth:** "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit will enable us to:

1. Live a holy life in an unholy world.
2. Use our talents for His glory and service.
3. Be filled with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

T. R. Glover said, "The early Christians outthought, outlived, outdied the world."

### CONCLUSION:

**ILLUS.** Andrew Murray is reported to have said that while writing *The Temple of the Holy Spirit*, he stood in awe and said, "I will meditate and be still, until something of the overwhelming glory of the truth falls upon me, and faith begins to realize it: I am His temple, and in the secret place He sits upon the throne."

He went on to say that when he had finished, he prayed, "I do now tremblingly accept the blessed truth: God the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who is God Almighty, dwells in me. O my Father, reveal within me what it means, lest I sin against Thee by saying it and not living it."

The question of Paul to a group of Ephesian believers is still appropriate in the 20th century, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2).

God kept His promise at Pentecost. The purpose of that Pentecost has been revealed. The power of Pentecost can be experienced personally.

How can you experience the miracle of Pentecost?

First, empty yourself of yourself, consecrating your possessions, your will, yourself to Him.

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe.  
Here, Lord, I give myself away;  
'Tis all that I can do.*

—Isaac Watts

Second, seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to have all of you. Your part is consecration; God's part is entire sanctification.

Third, grow in grace by living in daily obedience (Rom. 8:4).

As we stand to sing, move right out to the altar to receive the Holy Spirit. When you take that first step, God will help you take the second.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Joel 2:28-32
Choruses	"Holy, Holy"
	"My Desire"
Hymn	"Bring Your Vessels, Not a Few"
Hymn	"Fill Me Now"
Special Music	"Breathe on Me"
Prayer Chorus	"Come, Holy Spirit"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Sanctuary Choir	"Pentecostal Fire"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Submission"
Sermon	"THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST"
Invitational Hymn	"Holy Spirit, Be My Guide"
Benediction	

### Pastoral Prayer

*May the grace of Christ, our Savior,  
And the Father's boundless love,  
With the Holy Spirit's favor,  
Rest upon us from above.  
Thus may we abide in union  
With each other and the Lord,  
And possess, in sweet communion  
Joys which earth cannot afford.*

—John Newton

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Idea

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

#### Offertory Prayer

Dear Father, may You bless the giver and the gift, and may we be wise stewards of that which You have graciously given to us.

#### Creative Ideas

Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter, marks the beginning of Kingdomtide—the season of celebration and harvest. It is the ushering in of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

Consider a 20-minute musical on the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit by either the choir, an ensemble, or a men's chorus.



# GOD'S INCOMPARABLE GRACE

by Carlton D. Hansen

Titus 2:11-14

June 14, 1992

## INTRO:

Years ago a popular song exclaimed, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." There are many kinds of love. Love is usually defined differently by different people. The love usually sung about can't solve the ills that plague a world tottering precariously on the edge of an abominable abyss.

For man no theme is more grand than love; yet can the love of the popular song meet his needs? If not, what does man need most?

Educators feel man can change through education. The scientist insists that man's needs can be solved with greater technology.

The doctor says, "Let me cure man's ills with medicine. Healthy people are happy people."

Judges, lawyers, and the courts seek to right wrongs through legal means and the administration of the law. Governments strive to cure man's problems through welfare relief from starvation and want.

But the humanistic approach has failed. Although each of these solutions may meet a specific need, they have missed the secret of giving man what he needs most.

The root of man's problem can be traced to his fallen nature. Russell V. DeLong wrote, "Man cannot change his own nature," and "Men who are spiritually sick cannot heal themselves."

More than ever, man needs the love that only Jesus Christ can impart. God's incomparable grace provides the healing balm of divine love for a sin-sick soul.

**ILLUS.** When the learned and wealthy John Selden was dying, he said to Archbishop Ussher, "I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, and my study is filled with books and manuscripts [he had 8,000 volumes in his library] on various subjects. But at present I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my soul, save this from the sacred Scriptures: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works'" (Titus 2:11-14, KJV).

## I. Grace Is Incomparable in Its Reach (v. 11)

William E. Gilroy reminds us that "the glorious gospel of the grace of God is the profound heritage of the Church and ministry for a lost world."

God's grace reaches to the worst of humankind. God is interested in every person, regardless of race, class, social standing, or depth of sin.

*Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to cover all my sin.  
Let the healing streams abound;  
Make and keep me pure within.*

—Charles Wesley

**ILLUS.** When a former mayor of New York befriended a poor, dejected outcast of society, he was reproved by the prosecuting attorney who said, "That tramp's no good. He's getting only what he deserves."

Hearing this, the judge interrupted the harsh counselor by asking with a smile, "Did you ever hear of the mother who visited Napoleon on behalf of her condemned son? The emperor told her the young man had committed the same offense twice, and justice demanded the death penalty. 'But Sire,' she pleaded, 'I don't ask for justice—only for mercy.' 'He doesn't deserve it,' said Napoleon. 'No, he doesn't,' she admitted, 'but it would not be *mercy* if he deserved it.' 'You're right!' said the ruler quickly. 'I'll grant your request and show him mercy!'"

## II. Grace Is Incomparable in Its Demand (v. 12)

This demand describes man's relationship with himself, with his fellowmen, and with God.

Someone said, "He must learn to control his own passions, to deal justly with his neighbors, to worship God and obey Him."

Thomas Benton Brooks noted, "As heat is opposed to cold, and light to darkness, so grace is opposed to sin. Fire and water may as well agree in the same vessel, as grace and sin in the same heart."

The apostle Paul reminds us that although grace is greater than sin, grace is not a license to continue in sin so that grace may abound (Rom. 5:20; 6:1-2).

Rather, grace gives us the strength to resist temptation, to say no to sin. It empowers us to live godly lives in this present world. We do not have to wait on glorification to live free of the yoke of sin around our neck.

## III. Grace Is Incomparable in Its Guarantee (v. 13)

The "blessed hope" is one of the great central distinctives of the Christian faith. Although Paul hoped it would happen in his lifetime, he had confidence that Jesus would come in His own timing.

Furthermore, this "blessed hope" is guaranteed to all who accept Jesus as personal Savior.

What a practical tie exists between the truth of the coming of the Lord and our appearing before Him, and the living of our daily lives.

**ILLUS.** Martha Snell Nicholson, suffering for more than 35 years, remained triumphant. During those many weary years, she wrote some of the finest Christian po-

etry ever published. Several years before she died, she wrote about her hope of the coming of the Lord: "The best part is the blessed hope of His soon coming. How I ever lived before I grasped that wonderful truth, I do not know. How anyone lives without it these trying days I cannot imagine. Each morning I think, with a leap of the heart, 'He may come today.' And each evening, 'When I awake, I may be in glory.'"

We must live each day as though it were our last. We should live on tiptoe with expectancy.

#### IV. Grace Is Incomparable in Its Source (v. 14)

The source of this incomparable grace is Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior. He purposes to redeem man from sin and purify him to live for all eternity with the King of grace.

Note these incomparable truths concerning the source of God's grace:

We are justified by His grace (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:7).

We stand and rejoice in God's glory by His grace (Rom. 5:2).

God's grace comes to us through Christ (Rom. 5:15).

We have forgiveness of sins by His grace (Eph. 1:7).

He calls us to service by His grace (Gal. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Our hope of heaven is through His grace (1 Pet. 5:10).

His grace will strengthen, stablish, settle, and perfect us (1 Pet. 5:10, KJV).

His grace will keep us from falling (Jude 24).

Jonathan Edwards wrote, "As grace is first from God, so it is continually from Him, as much as light is all day long from the sun, as well as at first dawn or at sun-rising."

**ILLUS.** Judge Kaufman presided at the trial of the Russian spies, the Rosenbergs. Charged and convicted of treason against the United States, they were sentenced to death.

In his summation at the end of the long, bitter trial, the lawyer for the Rosenbergs said animatedly, "Your Honor, what my clients ask for is justice."

Judge Kaufman replied calmly, "The court has given what you ask for—justice! What you really want is mercy. But that is something this court has no right to give."

There will come a day when we shall stand before Jesus as our righteous Judge. The day of grace and mercy will be over. That is why it is important to accept His offer of incomparable grace and mercy today.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Ps. 34:3
Choruses	"O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
	"Majesty"
Hymn	"Grace Greater than Our Sin"
Prayer Chorus	"He's All I Need"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"We Shall Behold Him"
Sanctuary Choir	"My Savior's Love"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"The Unveiled Christ"
Sermon	"GOD'S GRACE"
Closing Hymn	"Amazing Grace"
Benediction	

#### Pastoral Prayer

O Lord, we pray for Your mercy and love and grace. May You open our hearts to Your voice today through the songs, Scriptures, and message. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Idea

Some time ago, *Life* magazine made a special offer and announced, "Enjoy *Life* at half price." How many people are trying to enjoy life at half price? It doesn't work.

##### Offertory Prayer

Read Ps. 67:5-6.

##### Worship Idea

Emphasize the need to accept God's grace today. When you pray during the pastoral prayer time, include Harry Emerson Fosdick's prayer: "Somewhere in this congregation is someone who desperately needs what I am going to say; O God, help me get to him."



"YOU'RE HERE FOR THE CONVENTION? COULD YOU NARROW THAT DOWN A LITTLE—WE'VE GOT FOURTEEN THIS AFTERNOON"

# THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 5:22—6:4

June 21, 1992

## INTRO:

In recent decades, the family foundation has been torpedoed by many societal forces—an escalating divorce rate, drugs, alcoholism, child abuse, abortion, absentee parents, and television, just to name a few.

Even the definition of a family is in question.

**ILLUS.** Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock*, made an amazing prediction more than 20 years ago, stating that someday we might see newspaper advertisements like this: "Why let parenthood tie you down? Let us raise your infant into a responsible, successful adult. Class A Pro-family offers: father, age 30; mother, 36; grandmother, 67. Uncle and aunt, age 30, live in, hold part-time local employment. Four-child unit has opening for one, age 6-8."

The ad continues, "Regulated diet exceeds government standards. All adults certified in child development and management. Bio-parents permitted frequent visits. Telephone contact allowed. Child may spend summer vacation with bio-parents. Religion, art, music encouraged by special arrangement. Five-year contract, minimum. Write for further details."

Although the family may not be dead, it is desperately ill. Even Christians struggle to survive in the midst of cultural attitudes that oppose the traditional family unit.

Through inspired writers such as Paul, God laid down important guidelines of mutual subjection and respect for husbands and wives, parents and children—something the 20th-century mind finds offensive, "since unbridled freedom is the god par excellence for man today."

Let us look at these biblical principles for today's family.

## I. What Is the Role of the Father and Husband? (5:24; 6:4)

The father stands symbolically in the same position over his family as God stands over His people, as nourisher, protector, provider, disciplinarian, encourager, and spiritual leader—a position he must never abdicate.

### A. *His relationship to his wife is important* (5:25, 28, 33)

The love expressed in verse 25 is continual, unceasing love, where the husband loves his wife as his own body.

When a man and a woman marry, they are "complementary parts of one personality" (see v. 31). Therefore the husband must provide for his wife's well-being—body and spirit.

### B. *His relationship to his children is important* (6:4)

The father's duty is not to "exasperate" or "embitter" his children but to lovingly discipline and instruct them morally and spiritually.

This begins by dedicating his children to God (1 Sam. 1:28) and by erecting a family altar where prayers are offered for the family, the church, missions, the nation, and the world.

He must be a positive influence in their lives, remembering that apples do not fall far from the tree.

**ILLUS.** A strange dog with three white hairs in his tail came to a family's house one day, and the three sons soon became attached.

The next day a newspaper ad appeared about a lost dog that fit this dog perfectly.

In the presence of his sons, the father carefully removed the three white hairs.

The owner discovered where the dog was staying and came to claim his animal.

The dog showed every sign of recognition, and the owner was ready to take him when the father said, "Didn't you say the dog would be known by three white hairs on his tail?"

Unable to find the white hairs, the owner was forced to leave.

The father said later, "We kept the dog, but I lost my boys to Christ." The sons no longer had confidence in what their father professed.

**ILLUS.** On the other hand, a young attorney said that the greatest gift he ever received was a small box from his father one Christmas.

Inside was a note saying, "Son, this year I will give you 365 hours, an hour every day after dinner. It's yours. We'll talk about what you want to talk about, we'll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be your hour."

He said, "My dad not only kept his promise but renewed it every year, and it's the greatest gift I ever had in my life. I am the result of his time."

## II. What Is the Role of the Mother and Wife? (5:22-24)

### A. *Her relationship to her husband is important*

Every relationship requires some submission.

In the unmarried relationship, male and female are equal. But in the family, the husband assumes certain divinely ordained mandates of authority in discipline and instruction of the children, protector, and provider. The wife must accept the biblical model of submission as "unto the Lord" and in the same way the Church submits to Jesus if the home is to survive and be happy.

This does not mean that wives are inferior in any way to their husbands. Rather, there is a natural hierarchy in creation, and the wife is next after the husband.

One only has to take a cursory look at the marital landscape to see that many modern marriages have landed on the rocks because some wives have not been willing to follow this timeless biblical principle.

**ILLUS.** At her golden wedding celebration, a grandmother told guests the secret of her happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of 10 of my husband's faults that, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook."

As the guests were leaving, a young wife asked what some of the faults were that she had overlooked.

"To tell you the truth," the grandmother said, "I never did get around to making the list. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's 1 of the 10!'"

#### *B. Her relationship to her children is important*

Mother, your influence with your children is as significant as your husband's.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan had four sons who all became ministers. One day a friend asked one of the boys, "Which Morgan is the greatest preacher?"

Without batting an eye, he said, "Mother."

Susanna Wesley, pastor's wife and mother, had 19 children and spent one hour each week with each child that survived infancy. Two sons, John and Charles, brought revival to England.

**ILLUS.** Wesley L. Gustafson told how as a young man he would come home late at night. Regardless of the time when he came home, his mother was always awake in her room, praying for him.

He said he would sneak into his room and climb into bed. His mother would come into his room and speak his name softly, "Wes." But he would pretend to be asleep.

Then he said, "She would turn and look out the bedroom window and pray audibly, 'O God, save my boy.'"

Gustafson said, "I myself am quite sure that the prayers of a good mother never die."

### **III. What Is the Role of Children? (6:1-3)**

The Duke of Wellington said, "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children."

The apostle reminds us that children are to obey and honor their parents in the Lord so that they might have a long life on the earth.

The sage of old said, "My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you" (Prov. 6:20-22).

Obedience may not always be the easiest road to travel, but it is the best one.

**ILLUS.** A famous children's specialist observed that when it comes to serious illness, the obedient child stands "four times the chance of recovery that the spoiled and undisciplined child does."

### **CONCLUSION:**

Someone has written a poignant recipe for child rearing:

1 cup of Prov. 22:6

2 tablespoons of Prov. 19:13

1 dash of Prov. 23:13

1 teaspoon of Prov. 3:5

½ cup of Titus 2:3-7

Mix these ingredients, add a pound of persistence, one cup of love, and whip until right consistency.

Add a pinch of Eph. 6:4.

This recipe was created by God himself.

#### **SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Matt. 18:1-5, 10-14
Hymn	"A Christian Home"
Hymn	"O Perfect Love"
Prayer Chorus	"In This Very Room"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Hymn	"Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary"
Sanctuary Choir	"Arise and Sing"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"More Love to Thee"
Sermon	"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"
Closing Hymn	"The Savior Is Waiting"
Benediction	

#### **Pastoral Prayer**

Father, we come to You today on behalf of our families. They are beaten down by the world, but they have come to this place of worship to find a haven from the world. May this service of worship help them find comfort and rest in You. Amen.

#### **Creative Worship Ideas**

##### *Offertory Idea*

Select a family that practices tithing and have them testify about God's ability to help them, as a family, give to the Lord.

##### *Offertory Prayer*

Lord, we thank You for the opportunity to give to You. May You take what each of us give today and use it to reproduce Your kingdom throughout the world. Amen.

##### *Creative Idea*

At the conclusion of the service, have each family stand together for prayer. Invite families to include the singles in the church or children who do not have families present.

# A GLORIOUS INHERITANCE

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 1:15-23  
June 28, 1992

## INTRO:

"The last boy in my Sunday School class accepted Jesus as Savior today," a teacher declared. "My work is done. I want a new class." This teacher did not realize that a new responsibility had begun.

Sometimes, after a person has accepted Christ as Savior, those who were praying for him stop doing so. Paul did not stop after a person took his step of faith.

Paul has just finished with a mighty crescendo in the previous verses by reminding the Ephesian Christians that they have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, "who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory" (1:14).

This guarantee is an advance installment on their future. The Spirit-filled life gives a foretaste of God's inexpressible joy that every Christian shall inherit one day.

Their faith in Jesus and love for fellow Christians had reached the great intercessor's ears. Turning from praise, Paul makes a specific prayer for these believers, asking God to give them the Spirit of wisdom and enlightenment so that they can comprehend the great riches of their glorious inheritance in Christ—worthy goals for all Christians today (v. 16).

## I. The Disciple May Have the Spirit of Wisdom (v. 17)

**ILLUS.** A young man of 32 years had been appointed president of the bank. He never dreamed he'd be president, much less at such a young age. So he approached the venerable chairman of the board and said, "I've been appointed president. I was wondering if you could give me some advice on how to be successful in this job."

The old man came back with two words: "Right decisions!"

The young president had hoped for more than this, so he said, "That's really helpful. I appreciate it. But can you be more specific? How do I make right decisions?"

The wise old man simply responded, "Experience."

"That's the point of my being here," said the young man. "I don't have the kind of experience I need. How do I get it?"

Came the terse reply, "Wrong decisions!"

All of us have experienced the helpless feeling that comes with a lack of experience. We may have specific biblical knowledge, but how do we obtain spiritual wisdom, that is, the ability to understand the Bible and make right decisions for life?

As Christians, spiritual wisdom is not received by intellectual pursuit alone, nor even by experience. Both of these can be deadly traps by which we feel we "know God" because of our intellect or personal religious experience.

Real wisdom comes by divine revelation. The Holy Spirit is the Source of that revelation. He guides and teaches, leading us into all truth. God makes us more sensitive to His will (John 16:13). The Spirit-filled person possesses deeper insights into the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-16).

Paul greatly desired that the Ephesian Christians would become wise enough to understand the doctrines of Christ. He understood that they had an experiential knowledge of Christ, but he wanted that knowledge deepened and made stronger. No matter how far one may plumb the depths of biblical knowledge, there is always more to explore concerning Christ. A personal knowledge of Christ consists of adoration, communion, and obedience.

Comprehending who God is and what He reveals to man is vital to Christian growth. Peter declared, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

## II. The Disciple May Have an Enlightened Heart (v. 18)

Akin to spiritual wisdom is an enlightened heart.

Sometimes the head is duped by the heart, and our judgment is swayed by our affections and feelings. In Scripture, the heart is the core and center of life, the arena where the battle between sin and salvation is fought. It is where the will yields to the voice of God or rejects Him.

Only as God enlightens the heart do we have a right concept of Him, turning us from the blindness of a darkened heart to make the correct decision to accept and follow Jesus.

Albert Barnes noted, "Nowhere is the effect of true religion more apparent than in shedding light on the intellect of the world, and restoring the weak and perverted mind to a just view of the proportion of things, and to the true knowledge of God."

This simple process begins with prayer—communion with God. The apostle informed the Ephesian Christians that he was praying for their understanding of the glorious hope they would inherit. We, too, must pray for God to open our understanding of Him and His Word. Most of us would rather do something else to obtain this knowledge than to pray.

Samuel Chadwick contended, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

We should seek earnestly for a clear understanding of God so that we might know the inexhaustible blessings of Jesus in this world and in the world to come. That is



why the prayer of every Christian ought to be: "Open the understanding of my heart so that I can know more about Jesus and His will."

### III. The Disciple Has a Glorious Inheritance (v. 18)

**ILLUS.** The man who owned the city's newspaper had three sons. He offered ownership of the paper to the son who could write the most sensational headline with only three words.

The first son's headline announced, "Reagan Turns Communist."

The second son declared: "Khomeini Becomes Christian."

But the third son inherited the newspaper when his headline was submitted with only two words, "Pope Elopes."

Fortunately our spiritual inheritance is not received by sensational works or words. It is a gift from God to all who believe on His name and accept Him as Savior and Lord (Eph. 2:8-9).

The Christian's inheritance is incomparable. Jesus offers a plethora of benefits to those who follow Him.

For example, the Christian receives peace of mind, inexpressible joy, indescribable love, the hope of eternal life, a powerful faith, and unlimited mercy and grace, just to name a few.

The Christian's inheritance goes beyond human comprehension: "As it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Our inheritance is both present and future.

Most important, spending eternity with Jesus will be worth every effort to follow Him.

*When, by the gift of His infinite grace,  
I am accorded in heaven a place,  
Just to be there and to look on His face  
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

—Charles H. Gabriel

### CONCLUSION:

Assurance of eternal life is guaranteed by the present possession of the Holy Spirit. May we experience the life-changing reality that accompanies the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

*May the grace of Christ, our Savior,  
And the Father's boundless love,  
With the Holy Spirit's favor,  
Rest upon us from above.*

*Thus may we abide in union,  
With each other and the Lord,  
And possess, in sweet communion,  
Joys which earth cannot afford.*

—John Newton

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	"He Is Lord"
	"Holy Ground"
Invocation	
Hymn	"Jesus Has Lifted Me"
Hymn	"Jesus Is All the World to Me"
Prayer Chorus	"Thou Art Worthy"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"More than Wonderful"
Sanctuary Choir	"Someone Is Praying for You"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"I've Just Seen Jesus"
Sermon	"A GLORIOUS INHERITANCE"
Closing Hymn	"Have You Any Room for Jesus?"
Benediction	

### Pastoral Prayer

Thank and praise God for the inheritance of redemption, regeneration, justification, and eternal life.

Praise Jesus for His atoning death.

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Idea

Share with the congregation how God uses the tithes and offerings to support world missions, Christian colleges, denominational offices, evangelism, the local church, etc.

#### Offertory Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for the opportunity to give to Your cause, to share with others the good news of Jesus. Remind us daily that Christ "has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9).

#### Creative Ideas

Use a teen or an adult to pray the invocation. If you do not use the open altar, have each one hold the hand of the person next to him as you pray. Encourage them to pray for each other.

# ALIVE IN CHRIST

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 2:1-10  
July 5, 1992

## INTRO:

A little boy, caught in mischief, was asked by his mother: "How do you expect to get into heaven?"

He thought a minute and then said: "Well, I'll just run in and out and in and keep slamming the door until they say, 'For goodness' sake, come in or stay out.' Then I'll go in."

This illustration aptly points out the fallacy many people have about going to heaven. How often have we heard, "All one needs to do is live a good life, be a good person, be a good neighbor, and he will go to heaven."

The apostle poignantly addresses this issue, instructing his audience that without Christ man is dead in "transgressions and sins."

Because of God's love and mercy, man can be made alive in Christ by faith and receive eternal life.

One characteristic that distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions is the teaching of salvation by grace, through faith, apart from human works. A headline in the *Grand Rapids Press* announced: "Conversion to Hindu Faith Is Torturous." The article told of a West German businessman who had completed his conversion to the Hindu faith by piercing himself through the cheeks with a ¼-inch-thick, 4-foot-long steel rod, and pulling a chariot for 2 miles by ropes attached to his back and chest by steel hooks. The article went on to say that others walk through 20-foot-long pits of fire, don shoes with soles made of nails, or hang in the air spread-eagle from hooks embedded in their backs.

What a contrast to Christianity! Conversion to Jesus Christ is not accomplished by this kind of self-inflicted torture, but by faith in Him.

Our Scripture lesson paints two contrasting pictures: (1) the preconversion life, and (2) the postconversion life.

## I. Paul Speaks of the Preconversion Life (vv. 1-3)

### A. *The sinner has a life of death (v. 1)*

The sinner is dead, separated from God (Eph. 4:18). Someone noted, "The dead have all the machinery of motion, but the machine is at rest."

The Psalmist described the heathen's idols as appropriate to the spiritually dead: "They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats" (115:5-7).

### B. *The sinner has a life pursuing the world (v. 2)*

The Ephesians' thoughts and pursuits conformed to their culture.

People of every clime and age who do not know Jesus live like the world.

### C. *The sinner has a life controlled by Satan*

The spirit of rebellion dominates the unconverted mind because he serves Satan, god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).

Disobedience is the beginning of all sin and active rejection of God's Word.

### D. *The sinner has a life in submission to the flesh (v. 3)*

Perverted passions, impulses of the fallen nature, lust of the flesh, pride of life, worldly appetites are attributes of the ungodly.

### E. *The sinner has a life subject to God's wrath*

Modern man does not accept the idea of a God of wrath. He wants to see God only as a God of love. Without wrath, God would not be truly righteous.

"I could neither love nor fear a God who did not care enough about me to be angry with me when I sin" (G. G. Findlay).

## II. Paul Speaks of the Postconversion Life (vv. 4-10)

The one thing a dead man needs most is life—not a new suit of clothes or a new car or a new house. The one thing a spiritually dead man needs most is Jesus. Paul turns to conversion, that radical transformation that breathes life into the spiritually dead person.

**ILLUS.** A beggar stopped a lawyer on the street in a large Southern city and asked him for a quarter. Taking a long, hard look into the man's unshaven face, the attorney asked, "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"You should," came the reply. "I'm your former classmate. Remember, second floor, old Main Hall?"

"Why, Sam, of course I know you!"

Without further question the lawyer wrote a check for \$100. "Here, take this and get a new start. I don't care what's happened in the past. It's the future that counts." With that, he hurried on.

Tears welled up in the man's eyes as he walked to a bank nearby. Stopping at the door, through the glass he saw well-dressed tellers and the spotlessly clean interior. Then he looked at his filthy rags. "They won't take this from me. They'll swear that I forged it," he muttered as he turned away.

The next day the two men met again. "Sam, what did you do with my check? Gamble it away? Drink it up?"

"No," said the beggar as he pulled it out of his dirty shirt pocket and told why he hadn't cashed it.

"Listen, friend," said the lawyer. "What makes that check good is not your clothes or appearance, but my signature. Go on; cash it!"

The Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). That promise is a negotiable note of infinite value. As sinners, all we need

to do is exchange it by faith for eternal life. Don't let the tattered clothes of your past keep you from cashing God's check of salvation.

**A. The believer experiences a God-breathed life (vv. 5-7)**

When God breathes life into the spiritually dead person, he comes alive, "raised . . . up together" with Christ, and sits "together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

Believers enjoy a life that reaches beyond the present world, so that in the world to come they might witness the "incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

**B. The believer experiences a God-gifted life (vv. 8-10)**

The Christian receives three special gifts from God: grace, faith, and salvation (v. 8).

**1. Grace is God's unmerited favor to sinful man.**

Grace involves forgiveness, regeneration, justification, repentance, love, salvation, mercy, kindness, loving-kindness, and goodness.

**2. Faith is abandoning one's own resources and casting oneself completely upon God.**

**ILLUS.** Vance Havner tells of an elderly lady who was greatly disturbed by her many troubles, real and imaginary. Finally she was told kindly by her family, "Grandma, we've done everything we can do for you. You'll just have to trust God for the rest."

A look of despair crossed her face as she replied, "Oh, dear, has it come to that?"

Havner commented, "It always comes to that, so we might as well begin with that."

F. B. Meyer said, "Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances."

**3. Salvation is God's free gift of eternal life.**

Since the Fall, mankind has been in a vicious circle and in need of deliverance. Human power cannot save us. Only Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross provided our deliverance from sin and eternal punishment.

Because Jesus died a substitutionary death and rose from the grave, every person who calls on the name of Jesus shall receive God's free gift of salvation, liberated from sin's power.

**ILLUS.** London businessman Lindsay Clegg told about the warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged doors, smashed windows, and strewn trash all over the place. As he showed the property to a pro-

spective buyer, he explained that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage.

The buyer said, "Forget about the repairs. When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site."

That's God's message to us! Compared with the renovation that God has in mind, our efforts to improve our own lives are as trivial as sweeping a warehouse slated for the wrecking ball. When we belong to God, the old life is over. The Lord makes all things new. All He wants is the site and the permission to build.

Some are still trying to reform, but God offers redemption. We must give Him the property, and He will do the necessary building.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Announcements

Friendship in Worship

Call to Worship

Hymn

Hymn

Prayer Choruses

"Family of God"

John 14:1-12, 19-21

"The Healing Waters"

"Jesus Saves"

"I Love Him"

"I Exalt Thee"

Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar

Special Music

Sanctuary Choir

Worship with Tithes and Offerings

Special Music

Sermon

Closing Hymn

Benediction

"I Will Glory in the Cross"

"Rise Again"

"No One Ever Cared for Me like Jesus"

"ALIVE IN CHRIST"

"Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"

**Pastoral Prayer**

Dear Jesus, we come to You in need of Your mercy and love. We long for Your presence to invade our lives. Give us receptive hearts to the truth of Your Word. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Creative Worship Ideas**

*Offertory Idea*

Read Heb. 12:28-29.

*Offertory Prayer*

Lord, we are grateful to You for all Your benefits. May we give back to You that which is rightfully Yours and in the measure You have given to us. Amen.

*Suggestion*

Select a recent convert to give a testimony. Emphasize the miracle of the new birth.

# A PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 3:14-21

July 12, 1992

## INTRO:

After recalling how his readers have been made alive in Christ, Paul prays that out of the glorious riches of God's eternal storehouse, these Christians will experience new spiritual power, a knowledge of the scope of His love, and His fullness.

He desires for God to make of this young church what it cannot make of itself. With the punctuation of a shot heard around the world and throughout the heavens, Paul declares, "I kneel before the Father."

Usually the Jews stood with arms outstretched to heaven to pray. In this instance, Paul prostrates himself before God with his impassioned appeal for his converts.

The apostle believed that the Church should militantly demonstrate God's redeeming love and grace to lost mankind. That mission could only be accomplished by believers armed with spiritual weapons from God's holy arsenal.

His prayer focuses on three major emphases: spiritual power, God's love, and God's fullness. Let's see how Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers is applicable to 20th-century Christians.

## I. Paul Prays for Spiritual Power (v. 16)

Sherwood Eddy has written, "We readily admit that Jesus and all the genuine saints throughout history had spiritual power and that they had a deep prayer life. We believe that there must be some connection between their power and their life of prayer."

It should be understood that one cannot continue very long on the Christian journey without an active prayer life. Prayer is the fulcrum upon which our spiritual power balances.

The late J. Edgar Hoover once said, "The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-made or man-controlled powers, because prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the infinite resources of God."

**ILLUS.** Recently my wife and I were in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, the majestic wonder of the Appalachian Highlands. Long, craggy mountains enveloped by a smoky haze stretch in sweeping troughs and mighty billows to the horizon. From the ground they're beautiful, but they look so worthless and unproductive.

One morning we rode a skylift to the top of one of the mountain ranges. From the top, the view was vastly different. We were surrounded with God's creation of coves, waterfalls, rushing streams, exquisite plant and animal life, and a pageantry of gorgeous colors. As far as the eye could see, God's hand was evident. I was reminded of David's words, "In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him" (Ps. 95:4).

As beautiful as God's handiwork is in nature, an even greater beauty exists in His endowment of spiritual power in a person longing for His mighty touch.

While the outward man decays, the inward man needs daily renewal. We must remember that our usefulness depends on our spiritual strength. Hence the supreme need of every Christian is not physical strength, but spiritual strength to combat the wiles of the devil and to have a victorious Christian life.

The Spirit-filled person who has surrendered to God's divine will is effective in living the Christian life in an ungodly world. Justin Wroe Nixon succinctly noted, "Men use physical power, but spiritual power uses men."

**ILLUS.** A young seminary graduate came up to the lecturer, very self-confident and immaculately dressed, to deliver his first sermon to his first church. But the words would not come out! Finally, after several attempts, he burst into tears and ended up leaving the platform obviously humbled.

Two elderly ladies sitting near the front took in the whole exhibition. One remarked to the other, "If he'd come in as he went out, he would have gone out as he came in."

The Spirit strengthens the believer, leading him to the fullness of God and to a more productive spiritual life.

## II. Paul Prays to Know God's Love

The supreme desire each Christian should have is to know God's unfathomable love.

The breadth of His love enfolds every human being. It is long enough to "last for all eternity." It is deep enough to reach the most depraved sinner. It is high enough to elevate each believer into heavenly places.

God's love bought and redeemed us. He provided grace and mercy when we were yet in sin. His cords of love are strong and unbreakable. Tongues and prophecies and mysteries and knowledge have all failed, but His love endures.

If we had all eternity to describe God's love, it would not be long enough to fully express His incomprehensible love for us.

**ILLUS.** A farmer printed on his weather vane the words "God is love." Someone asked him if he meant to imply that the love of God was as fickle as the wind. The farmer answered, "No, I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is love. If it blows cold from the north, or biting from the east, God is still love just as much as when the warm south or gentle west winds refresh our fields and flocks. God is always love."

*A Friend I have, called Jesus,  
Whose love is strong and true  
And never fails, howe'er 'tis tried,  
No matter what I do.*

*I've sinned against this love of His;  
But when I knelt to pray,  
Confessing all my guilt to Him,  
The sin-clouds rolled away.*

—Edna R. Worrell

### III. Paul Prays for God's Fullness

John Fletcher noted, "We must not be content to be cleansed from sin; we must be filled with the Spirit."

We should pray, "Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire. Light our souls with celestial fire. Fill us with spiritual strength, life, breath, purity, love, peace, and joy."

The apostle Peter wrote, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

**ILLUS.** Centuries ago a king called his most trusted herald to his side. He handed him a letter and commanded him to read it throughout the entire kingdom. The king longed to improve the level of living for his people and to promote great happiness in the homes of the land.

In the letter the king offered special benefits to each subject. The one stipulation said that to collect the benefits, each person needed to appear at the nearest village square on the day the king's representative came to that village. All the benefits that the king promised would be received only through a personal appearance before the king's representative.

So also, all the benefits and blessings that God has for us to experience come through His Holy Spirit. All that God has for us is made a reality through the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit enables and equips us to live Christ's own life through us. By His grace and His gifts, we are prepared to fulfill His purpose.

**ILLUS.** Dwight L. Moody once demonstrated God's fullness like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the tumbler I have in my hand?"

One man said, "Suck it out with a pump."

The evangelist replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it."

After many suggestions, Moody picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for God's child does not come by working hard to eliminate sinful habits, but by allowing the Holy Spirit to fill the yielded heart.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Ps. 30:4-5
Hymn	"Since the Holy Ghost Abides"
Hymn	"The Comforter Has Come"
Prayer Chorus	"Lord, Be Glorified"
	"Lord, We Praise You"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"Holy Ground"
Sanctuary Choir	"I Go to the Rock"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Touch Your People Once Again"
Sermon	"A PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS"
Closing Hymn	"Breathe on Me"
Benediction	

#### Pastoral Prayer

Think of the many spiritual needs in your congregation. Mentally review each face during the singing. Ask God to lay the most spiritually needy person on your heart as you lead your people in prayer. Be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Idea

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

##### Offertory Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for the opportunity and privilege to give to You. We are the recipients of so many wonderful benefits from Your gracious hand. We are grateful that You only require us to give in the measure we have received. Bless the giver and the gift. In Your name we pray. Amen.

##### Suggestion

This service is designed to draw attention to God's power in the believer. You may want to select a person to testify who recently has been touched by the Holy Spirit.



# UNITY IN THE SPIRIT

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 4:1-13  
July 19, 1992

## INTRO:

Paul appeals to Ephesian believers to exemplify Christ in their daily walk by living at peace with all men.

This was not a new theme for Paul. To the Corinthians, he wrote, "Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). To the Thessalonians, "Live in peace with each other" (1 Thess. 5:13). The author of Hebrews emphasized peaceful living: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

The Holy Spirit is God's Answer to peace and unity in the Church, as well as in our interpersonal relationships. When He invades the hearts of believers, discord and division are as unnatural to the Christian as darkness is to light.

**ILLUS.** It is estimated that if all of the American colonies would have been more unified at the time of the American Revolution, we could have won the war for independence in one year. Instead, because of division, it took eight bloody years of battle.

Similarly, more people could be won to Jesus more quickly if more attention was given to the things on which Christians agree rather than on the things of disagreement. Unfortunately the devil works overtime to divert attention from spreading the good news of Jesus to petty issues so often divisive. If Christians conform to the image of Christ with a peaceful life-style, the church will become an effective force in a discordant world.

We shall observe Christian unity from two vantage points—unity in the Spirit and diversity in the Spirit.

## I. We Have Unity in the Spirit (vv. 3-6)

Many things are common to all believers. On these areas of unity, we should rivet our energy. Paul spells them out: "One body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (vv. 4-6). Failing at this point throws the church off-key.

**ILLUS.** A high school orchestra was preparing for a concert that featured a pianist in a rendition of Grieg's A Minor Concerto. Before the performance, it was customary for the orchestra to tune up with an A sounded by the oboe player. However, the oboist was a practical joker. He had tuned his instrument a half step higher than the piano. You can imagine the effect. After the pianist played a beautiful introduction, the members of the orchestra joined in. What confusion! Every instrument was out of tune with the piano.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, the apostle mentioned two members who were "out of tune." In an otherwise peaceful, growing assembly of believers, Euodia and Syntyche were spiritually off-key. This

prompted Paul to write, "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord" (4:2). Unity among Christians was important to the ongoing work of the church.

Paul brings our attention to those graceful attributes that create harmony in the Body of Christ: humbleness, gentleness, patience, and forbearance of each other.

These traits are not natural to the carnal nature. We want to move to center stage, but Jesus says, "Start here. You must conquer the battle of self before going further in your Christian walk." These virtues can only be imparted by the Holy Spirit when we are sanctified wholly (Gal. 5:22-23).

Note the meaning of these attributes:

**Humbleness**—the antithesis of pride, arrogance, and conceit

**Gentleness**—not immodest or weak, but tender, considerate, kind, not given to anger

**Patient**—no short fuse here; tolerant, understanding, steadfast, enduring affliction with calmness

**Forbearance**—the outgrowth of patience, which helps us overlook others' faults and weaknesses.

From these inward virtues flow outward behavior, establishing unity in the church.

## II. We Have Diversity in the Spirit (vv. 7-13)

Unfortunately for the church, many people who profess the Christian faith have difficulty getting along.

Churches often split over such things as the color of paint or carpeting, architectural style of the building, which kind of a van to buy, who will head up the youth program or Sunday School, who will sing the solos, or who will be elected to the church board. Infighting leaves a distaste in the mouth of those who watch from the outside. On the inside, good people get hurt because of someone's insensitivity.

**ILLUS.** During one of the wars between England and France, two warships met one night. Each thought the other ship was an enemy ship, so they began firing on each other. At daybreak, it was discovered that each ship flew the Union Jack. Firing ceased. The ships lay side by side; the crews of both ships were alarmed at the terrible mistake they had made. The rigging and the hulls showed unmistakable signs that the English knew how to fire their guns.

The damage done to the ships could be repaired, but the lives lost from the battle could never be returned. Damage done to the cause of Christ by bickering and fighting very often cannot be repaired.

First, Paul tells us that God has chosen to bestow various talents, gifts, and abilities on different people (v. 7). He says that some are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, all pressing toward the same goal, winning people to Jesus and building up the Body of Christ (vv. 11-12).

The sanctified believer willingly serves where God places him. God uses different kinds of people with a variety of talents within the church, eliminating self-seeking, jealousy, and the overwatchful eye on what others are doing. Instead, each believer searches for ways to enhance the interests of the church.

Then Paul says that God gives these gifts to promote maturity: the means of maturity is "unity in the faith"; the reality of maturity is to "become mature"; the measure of maturity is "the fullness of Christ" (v. 13).

**ILLUS.** Shortly after the close of the Civil War, in a fashionable Richmond church, members of the congregation were invited to come to the altar to receive Holy Communion.

After several worshipers came and left after receiving Communion side by side, a black man walked down the aisle toward the altar. A tense silence gripped everyone. No one got up to come down to receive the bread and wine, although many had not yet received Communion. The black man started to kneel alone.

Quietly, a tall, graying man with a military bearing stood up and strode down the aisle to the black man's side. Together, they knelt.

Before the officiating clergyman could continue, people recognized that the person kneeling beside the black man without showing any distinction was Gen. Robert E. Lee. Although Lee said nothing, everyone realized he had shown his faith through his act of joining that lonely black worshiper at the altar.

Lee gave an example for all. We must not be content with any system that divides fellow Christians. We must demonstrate our unity. Only then can we say truly: "We are one in Christ."

## CONCLUSION:

**ILLUS.** A beautiful little girl wandered out one cold day in the countryside of Canada. The family finally realized that she was lost. They started a search. Then they called the people of the community together. Each went his own way. It became dark. The cold of the Canadian winter settled down. After some time, someone suggested that the searchers join hands and cover the grass

fields. But it was too late. They found the girl curled up, frozen in the cold. Then the shout went up, "If only we had joined hands before!"

The spiritual meaning of this story is clear. Although there may be diversity of gifts, Jesus' love demands unity among His believers.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Pss. 127:1; 103:1-2
Hymn	"Faith Is the Victory"
Hymn	"Holiness Forevermore"
Prayer Chorus	"All Your Anxiety"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"Through It All"
Sanctuary Choir	"Because He Lives"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"He Giveth More Grace"
Sermon	"UNITY IN CHRIST"
Closing Hymn	"Have You Any Room for Jesus?"
Benediction	

### Pastoral Prayer

Dear Lord, we come to You with open hearts and minds. Make us more like You by giving us an agreeable spirit. May we seek to live at peace with all men everywhere. Help us keep our eyes on You and not on our circumstances. In Your name we pray. Amen.

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Idea

Read 1 Cor. 15:58.

#### Offertory Prayer

O God, our Father, Maker of heaven and earth, we rejoice that we have the high privilege of laying at Your feet all Your tithes and our offerings. Please use these gifts to advance Your kingdom in the world. Bless each person who has obediently followed Your command to bring the tithes and offerings into the storehouse. Bless those who cannot give. Amen.

# IMITATORS OF CHRIST

by Carlton D. Hansen

Eph. 4:32—5:2

July 26, 1992

## INTRO:

**ILLUS.** When Leonardo da Vinci was painting *The Last Supper*, he had a bitter argument with a fellow artist. So enraged, Leonardo decided to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas. In that way the hated artist's face would be preserved for ages in the face of the betraying disciple. When Leonardo finished Judas, everyone easily recognized the face of the painter with whom Leonardo quarreled.

Leonardo continued to work on the mural. But as much as he tried, he could not paint the face of Jesus. Something hindered his artistic ability. Leonardo decided his hatred toward his fellow artist was the problem. So he worked through his hatred by repainting Judas' face, replacing the image of his fellow painter with another face. Only then could he paint Jesus' face and complete the masterpiece.

Out of love, Paul appeals to the Ephesian believers to be examples of Christ by being kind, compassionate, and forgiving to others. He reminds them that it is Jesus' method; it must be theirs as well.

Willard H. Taylor wrote, "Surely it is not possible for natural man readily and freely to forgive others, nor to maintain equanimity of spirit in the midst of the aggravating experiences of life. He must come to know Christ intimately, to be so fully united with Him that he has a new nature."<sup>1</sup>

Our new nature helps us become imitators of Christ. The only Christ our world may see is Christ in us. Therefore, the Christian has a solemn, yet joyful, responsibility to mirror the beauty of Jesus to a waiting world.

Our text draws three very important truths: kindness, compassion, and forgiveness—characteristics Jesus exhibited throughout His ministry and qualities we must exhibit in our relationships.

## I. We Must Imitate Christ's Kindness

Kindness is the ability to show understanding, sympathy, and tolerance—one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Jesus taught kindness as He dealt with children. The disciples rebuked Him because He was taking so much time with children. But Jesus showed His kindness to children by taking them onto His lap and saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14).

Jesus taught us to be kind, even to our enemies: "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:35).

In *The Lion and the Mouse*, Aesop noted, "No act of

kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

The apostle Paul said, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12). We are to put on kindness as we would a garment.

**ILLUS.** A Yale University president gave wise counsel to a former president of Ohio State, "Always be kind to your A and B students. Someday one of them will return to your campus as a good professor. And also be kind to your C students. Someday one of them will return and build a \$2 million science laboratory."

Although we are not to be kind for the reward, kindness does pay.

## II. We Must Imitate Christ's Compassion

Compassion is that ability to share in the suffering of others.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus "saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36).

Christ's compassion was illustrated at the tomb of Lazarus when He openly wept with Lazarus' family (John 11:35). So genuine was His compassion that even the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (v. 36).

We must exhibit compassion even in the manner in which we speak to people.

**ILLUS.** A church needed a pastor. The first candidate came and preached on hell. The next Sunday another candidate came who also preached on hell. His teaching was the same as that of the first preacher. When the members of the church were called upon to vote, they voted for the second candidate. When asked why, they answered, "The first one spoke as if he were glad that people were going to hell, while the second seemed genuinely sorry for it."

Abraham Lincoln said, "I am sorry for the man who can't feel the whip when it is laid on the other man's back."

## III. We Must Imitate Christ's Forgiveness

Jesus commanded His followers to be forgiving: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:14-15); "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

Jesus demonstrated His own teaching about forgiveness as He hung in agony on the Cross. Looking down at those who had crucified Him and were gambling over His clothing, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

General Oglethorpe once said to John Wesley, "I never forgive and I never forget."

To which Wesley responded, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

When we reflect on how much God has forgiven us, it behooves us to be forgiving to others.

When Joseph's brothers came before him in Egypt asking for food, he faced a very stiff test of forgiveness. Years before, his brothers had threatened to kill him; then they sold him into slavery. But Joseph forgave them. Even after their father, Jacob, died and they feared Joseph might take revenge, he assured them of his complete forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not always easy, but it is one of the best ways to imitate Jesus to a lost world and to free our own spirits of bitterness.

**ILLUS.** The story is told of a seminary student in Chicago who faced a difficult forgiveness test. The only job he could find was driving a bus on the south side of Chicago.

One day a gang of tough teens boarded his bus but refused to pay the fare. After several days of harassment, the seminarian spotted a policeman on the corner, stopped the bus, and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then he got off. When the bus rounded a corner, the gang robbed the seminarian and beat him severely. He pressed charges, and the gang was rounded up, tried, and found guilty. But as soon as the jail sentences were given, the young Christian saw their spiritual need and felt pity for them. So he asked the judge if he could serve their sentences for them.

The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded. "It's because I forgive you," he explained. Although his request was denied, he visited the young men in jail and led several of them to Jesus.

We all stand in need of forgiveness. Jesus' forgiveness brings peace. Our forgiveness to others restores broken relationships. As Corrie ten Boom has said, When God buries our sins in the deepest sea, He posts a sign that reads: "No Fishing!" We should cease fishing when we have forgiven others.

## CONCLUSION:

**ILLUS.** At the base of the Statue of Liberty is the beautiful sonnet, "The New Colossus," by Emma Lazarus. The message of the church is reflected in the last five lines of this sonnet.

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.*

*"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

—Emma Lazarus

May we become imitators of Christ through our kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

L. Willard H. Taylor, "Ephesians," in *Beacon Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), 226.

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Ps. 8:1-2
Hymn	"Follow, I Will Follow Thee"
Hymn	"I Am Resolved"
Prayer Choruses	"Faith in God Can Move a Mountain"
	"Got Any Rivers?"
	"God Is So Good"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"I Am Determined"
Sanctuary Choir	"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Near the Cross"
Sermon	"IMITATORS OF CHRIST"
Closing Hymn	"The Savior Is Waiting"
Benediction	

## Pastoral Prayer

O Lord, we come to You today seeking Your will. We bring to You those needs that are prevalent in our congregation today. There are so many hurting people. We ask for Your healing touch. Lift the fallen, encourage the discouraged, bring comfort to the sorrowing, give peace to those in conflict. Help us become imitators of Christ. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Creative Worship Ideas

### Offertory Idea

Read 2 Cor. 8:7.

### Offertory Prayer

Dear Lord, we bring to You our tithes and offerings. May we follow the admonition of our scripture today and "excel in this grace of giving." Keep our hearts open to the blessing we receive when we give from a cheerful heart. Amen.

### Suggestion

Today we focus on imitating Christ in our daily walk with Him and as a witness in our world. No doubt some people in your congregation excel at this in their personal lives. You might interview one or two, searching for the secrets of their spiritual walk.

# LOVE'S APPEAL

by Carlton D. Hansen

Philemon

August 2, 1992

## INTRO:

Although Philemon contains no explicit doctrinal teachings, it is an excellent example of Christian ethics and how conversion changes one's attitude toward himself and others.

Written by Paul from a Roman prison about A.D. 62, the letter is addressed to Philemon, a rich and influential Colossian and one of Paul's converts; Apphia, probably Philemon's wife; Archippus, an office-bearer in the Colossian church; and to the other believers that met in Philemon's home.

Paul greets Philemon with, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). He reminds him that he prays for him daily.

The capstone of the greeting is verse 7. Anyone receiving such a glowing salute would naturally think twice before he rejected any request for help.

Paul uses more than one-third of his letter to extol Philemon's character before he presents his defense for Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave.

Jesus had produced a remarkable change in Onesimus' life. Now Paul was ready to defend, support, and commend him to his Christian brother. How did Christ make a difference in Onesimus' life and how can He do the same in ours?

## I. Paul Speaks of the Problem (vv. 8-10)

### A. Paul appeals for love's sake (vv. 8-9)

In the Roman Empire of this period an owner might legitimately take the life of a runaway slave. Onesimus needed an advocate. Hence Paul, who could not accompany him to his master, forcefully states that he has the authority to order Philemon to receive Onesimus back. He appeals, however, on the basis of love (vv. 8-9).

### B. Paul appeals for respect (v. 9)

Paul uses the term "old man," not to elicit pity, but to show the need to respect leadership. One may not always agree with his leader. An issue may be debated. But when the leader makes a decision, sometimes for reasons that cannot be seen on the surface, the follower should submit.

### C. Paul appeals from imprisonment (vv. 9-10)

Much of Paul's life after his conversion was spent in prison. He could have rebelled because it prevented him from preaching the gospel. Yet he never allowed circumstances to hinder his ministry.

We may be imprisoned by circumstances that do not allow us to work for Christ in the way we would like. But if we will do what we can, where we are, and with what we have, much can be accomplished for the Master.

## II. Paul Speaks of Transformation (vv. 11-14)

### A. The new believer becomes a new creation (v. 11)

Paul does not mention the real purpose of this letter,

nor Onesimus' name, until verse 10. He says of him, "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."

Paul's successors in church leadership around the Aegean Sea would probably have come from the ranks of assistants like Timothy, who was with him at the writing of this letter, Titus, and Silas.

One of the Epistles of Ignatius, written soon after the beginning of the second century, tells us that the bishop of the church at Ephesus at the time was a man named Onesimus. In all likelihood, he is the same person Paul had come to love dearly.

Before this time, Onesimus was a slave in Colossae. Slaves were common in the Roman Empire. But Phrygian slaves, of whom he was one, were notoriously lazy and insolent.

Through larceny and treachery, Onesimus had put a thousand miles of distance between him and his master.

Socially, Onesimus was without status. No court would have upheld his action. Nor could he have found anyone to give him a proper defense. His future was bleak.

In the eyes of others, he was probably regarded as debris among men, not living up even to the meaning of his name—"useful."

Because God directs the destiny of men, Onesimus the sinner came in contact with Paul the saint in a Roman prison. Here Paul influences the criminal to look squarely at himself, possibly for the first time in his life. Seeing his need, Onesimus prayed, confessed his sin, and received Christ into his heart.

Now, through the transforming power of Jesus, Onesimus is more than a fellow prisoner with Paul. He has become the apostle's "son."

### B. The new believer has discovered intimacy (vv. 12-14)

Although Paul feels a moral duty to send Onesimus back to his master, he also has deep affection for his new convert and wants to keep him. So close had the two become that Paul says, "I am sending . . . my very heart" (v. 12).

Adam Clarke reminds us, "The Christian religion never cancels any civil relations . . . Justice, therefore, required St. Paul to send back Onesimus to his master, and conscience obliged Onesimus to agree in the propriety of the measure; but love to the servant induced the apostle to write this conciliating letter to the master."

What is retained by force is easily lost, but what is bound by love is kept for eternity. That kind of love reached out to Onesimus in the first place.

Because Paul loved Onesimus, he knew he could not force him to return to Philemon. Rather, Onesimus must willingly return because he loved Christ, which in turn would prompt him to love his master. Philemon, as a



Christian, must now also love Onesimus the slave as a brother in Christ.

Paul might have asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and then have kept him in Rome as a fellow worker. But the real benefit to both Paul and Philemon would have been diminished.

Onesimus could have stayed with Paul out of necessity but would not have learned the lesson of Christian responsibility. Philemon would not have experienced the joy of forgiving freely.

**ILLUS.** In 1818 Tamatoe, king of Huahine, one of the South Sea Islands, became a Christian. One day he discovered a plot by some of the islanders to kill him and fellow converts. He organized a group to capture his enemies and then set a feast before them. This unexpected kindness surprised the savages, who burned their idols and turned to Christ.

### III. Paul Speaks of the Proposals (vv. 15-25)

#### A. Paul proposes restoration (v. 15)

Paul asks Philemon to restore Onesimus to a permanent, personal, Christian relationship. He fled as an unfaithful slave; now he returns as a beloved brother. When a sinner comes to Jesus, he is restored to God fully by adoption into the family of God, no matter the sin.

#### B. Paul proposes elevation (vv. 16-17)

Paul asks Philemon to consider Onesimus, not as chattel, but as a partner.

When a person comes to Christ, it is the obligation of the household of faith to treat the new convert as a member of the family, to forgive past sins and mistakes, and to provide an opportunity for service.

#### C. Paul proposes restitution (vv. 18-19)

Because he was not sure of any wrongdoing insofar as stealing is concerned, the apostle was willing himself to pay any bills Onesimus might have owed—the same spirit that Jesus takes toward sinners.

Where injury has been done, restitution is necessary to maintain a right relationship with God. When one is converted, he should make all known wrongs right as quickly as possible. As he grows in grace, God will reveal other things that may need attention. These should be corrected as soon as God reveals them.

This admonition applies also to patching up quarrels and differences, apologizing for acts of unkindness or words harshly spoken, and taking back what was stolen, or if that is not possible, at least offering to pay for it. The Bible is clear that we must put off past works of darkness and take on the new life through the renewing of our mind.

There may be extenuating circumstances when restitution can never be made. These must be left with God, and we should accept the Lord's forgiveness and go on from there.

#### D. Paul proposes confidence (vv. 20-22)

Paul has complete confidence that Philemon will do what is right by Onesimus. He believes he will go beyond what has been asked (v. 21). One of the attributes

of a genuine Christian is his willingness to go the second mile.

### CONCLUSION:

Benjamin Franklin said, "Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him."

**ILLUS.** Tradition says that when the aged apostle John bid farewell to his congregation, he urged them to love one another.

"But we want something new," they said. "Give us a new commandment."

John replied, "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning . . . that we should love one another" (1 John 2:7; 3:11, KJV).

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Opening Choruses	"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
	"It Matters to Him"
Hymn	"And Can It Be?"
Old Testament Lesson	Song of Sol. 8:6-7
New Testament Lesson	1 Corinthians 13
Prayer Chorus	"Open Our Eyes"
Pastoral Prayer	
Lord's Prayer in Unison	Matt. 6:9-13
Duet	"The Love of God"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Sanctuary Choir	"Sweet Peace, the Gift of God's Love"
Message	"LOVE'S APPEAL"
Closing Hymn	"My Savior's Love"
Benediction	

#### Pastoral Prayer

Pray for those who are suffering emotional distress, discouragement, and temptation.

Seek God's help for deliverance for those who are unable to forgive.

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Idea

Read 1 Cor. 1:26-31.

##### Offertory Prayer

Dear Father, as we come to You today with our tithes and offerings, may we give from generous hearts, reminding ourselves of Your sacrificial giving of Your Son so that the world may know Him as Savior and Lord. This we ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

##### Suggestion

Consider asking someone who has received forgiveness to testify concerning God's mercy and love.

##### Benediction

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

# THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA

by Carlton D. Hansen

Acts 16:11-15

August 9, 1992

## INTRO:

Today our message focuses on the first European site of Christian missionary activity—Philippi, the principal city of Macedonia. We will explore the Holy Spirit's guidance in the life of Paul and the events leading to the conversion of Lydia.

A Gentile purple merchant from Thyatira, Lydia was the first European convert, the first to be baptized, and the first to open her house to the Christian missionaries—all evidence of Paul's obedience to the leadership of the Spirit.

**ILLUS.** Someone came upon Michelangelo chipping away with his chisel on a huge, shapeless piece of rock. He asked the sculptor what he was doing. "I am releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble," he answered. Jesus sees and releases the hidden hero in every person who comes to Him.

En route unknowingly to Macedonia, Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, carried copies of the decision of the apostles and elders from the Jerusalem synod concerning the Gentiles, to be delivered to the cities as they traveled northward. The decree forbade imposing the ceremonial law on the Gentiles (Acts 15:23-29).

Luke enthusiastically reports that the churches were growing daily in faith and numbers. What a thrilling report! As 20th-century Christians, we should expect no less.

At this point God intervenes in a special way.

## I. God Intervenes with Divine Direction (vv. 4-8)

### A. Direction of the Spirit (v. 6)

Paul wanted to go into Asia to preach. But as he and his companions passed through the Phrygio-Galatian region, they were "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia." What was beyond that, they did not know. Paul had had enough experience in listening to God that he obeyed.

There are times when it seems to us that God's way may not be the best way. We want to create our own plans. But we see only the present; God sees the future and knows what is best for us.

Sometimes God interrupts our plans to prevent costly mistakes. While we should exercise intelligence and careful judgment, we must always listen to the Holy Spirit's direction before any major decisions. When He leads, there are no mistakes.

### B. Impressions of the Spirit were given (vv. 7-8)

Traveling northward, the missionary party came to Mysia and attempted to go on over into Bithynia, "but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."

Since the Holy Spirit definitely impressed them not to go that direction, they came on down to Troas, a mar-

itime city of Mysia, in the northwest part of Asia Minor. Here Paul would wait on God's direction.

Had Paul not listened to the Holy Spirit, he would never have visited Europe nor written Romans or the Corinthian letters. Also, he would have limited his work. To touch the Greek world would open a door to a vast harvest field and the world at large.

As God closed doors for Paul to allow him to do a bigger work, sometimes He closes doors for us. However the Spirit may speak—through thought suggestion, through our feelings or will, through the Scriptures, through prayer, or through other people—when He directs, it is time to obey. Perhaps the most difficult thing to do in finding God's will is to wait.

## II. God Intervenes with the Macedonian Call (vv. 9-12)

### A. Paul received the vision (v. 9)

While at Troas, waiting on God's direction, Paul preached and founded a church. He did not hole up in some corner to wait. He occupied himself with God's business until he received marching orders from his Commander.

When God finally spoke, it was through a nighttime vision. Paul was familiar with this type of message from God, so he was not surprised.

### B. Paul sought to go (v. 10)

The Macedonian call, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," ignited a blaze of missionary zeal inside Paul that could not be extinguished.

The call was so clear and precise that he could not wait. Joining the party, Luke records, "We got ready at once to leave."

We, too, should respond to God's call immediately. If we do not, there is danger of our hearts hardening to God's voice. When God calls, He makes a way and provides grace to fulfill the task.

### C. Paul was called of God (v. 10)

Living as a Christian is exciting; called of God to perform a special ministry is doubly exciting. All Christians are called of God to do something. Some are specifically called "to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12).

## III. God Intervenes with Europe's First Convert (vv. 13-15)

### A. There is power in prayer (v. 13)

The weather conditions were favorable, so the voyage across the north Aegean to Neapolis on the Macedonian coast took only two days. From there, they traveled inland to the Roman colony of Philippi.

Paul customarily attended the local Jewish synagogue

on the first sabbath after his arrival in a new city in order to make the gospel known to the Jews first.

Because there was no synagogue at Philippi, the official meeting place was outside the city on the bank of the Gangites River.

Here Paul found a number of Jewesses and God-fearing Gentiles assembled together for prayer, no doubt to encourage each other and bring their petitions collectively to God.

One cannot help but wonder what impact these prayer meetings had on Paul's vision at Troas. Prayer is the most neglected, yet most powerful, resource at our disposal.

#### *B. There is the foolishness of preaching (v. 13)*

Preaching must be central to the worship service. Through Christ-centered preaching people are confronted with the power of the living God.

God-anointed preaching cuts through the shame of sin and goes directly to the heart, creating conviction.

God-called preachers are under orders to proclaim the life-changing good news of Jesus. Although times may change and new methods of evangelism may be beneficial, we have never been released from Jesus' command to preach the Good News.

**ILLUS.** An Indian attended a church service one Sunday morning. The preacher's message lacked real spiritual food, so he did a lot of shouting and pulpit pounding to cover up his lack of preparation. After the service, someone asked the Indian what he thought of the minister's message. Thinking for a moment, he summed up his opinion in six words: "High wind. Big thunder. No rain." When the Scriptures are neglected, there is "no rain." Only preaching based on God's Word blesses and refreshes His people.

#### *C. There is conviction (v. 14)*

Conviction comes in many ways—by means of the atmosphere of the church service, friendship among Christians, tragedies in life, visible results of miracles in people's lives, reading Scriptures, or through a gospel message.

The Lord pierced Lydia's heart with the preaching of God's Word. She felt convicted of her need for Jesus and responded to Paul's message. What peace and joy there is when we obey God and divine forgiveness is obtained!

#### *D. There is baptism (v. 15)*

Lydia and her household were baptized as a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Baptism is not necessary for salvation or as assurance of heaven. Rather, it is practiced as a joyous ordinance of our faith and an act of obedience.

#### *E. There is hospitality (v. 15)*

With all of her heart, Lydia wanted to learn more about Jesus. Immediately she exemplified a spirit of hospitality by inviting the missionaries to her home. When a person accepts Jesus as personal Savior, there is an immediate change in desires, attitude, conduct, and associates. The world loses its attraction, and living for Jesus makes life rewarding.

When the gospel seed is sown and takes root in one's life, the results are great! The church at Philippi resulted from the conversion of Lydia and her faithfulness to the Lord.

**ILLUS.** In England a paper factory makes the finest stationery. One day a man touring the factory asked what the stationery was made from. He was shown a huge pile of old rags. The rag content determined the quality of the paper. The man wouldn't believe it. In six weeks he received a package of paper from the company with his initials embossed on it. On the first page were written the words: "Dirty Rags Transformed." The same is true of the Christian life.

### **SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Ps. 30:11-12
Hymn	"Redeemed"
Hymn	"Hallelujah, I Am Free!"
Prayer Chorus	"Spirit of the Living God"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"Amazing Grace"
Sanctuary Choir	"He's the Lord of Glory"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"The Glory of His Presence"
Sermon	"THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA"
Closing Hymn	"Ho! Every One That Is Thirsty"
Benediction	Isa. 60:1

#### **Pastoral Prayer**

Dear Jesus, we come to You as a needy people today. We pray for Your grace, mercy, and love so that we may learn to serve You better in our sin-darkened world. Amen.

#### **Creative Worship Ideas**

##### *Offertory Idea*

There are three kinds of givers—the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint, you must hammer it. Then you get only chips and sparks. To get water out of a sponge, you must squeeze it. The more you use pressure, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness. Which kind of giver are you?

##### *Offertory Prayer*

"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith" (2 Thess. 1:11).

##### *Suggestion*

Focus on conversion and how God transforms people. Have a recent convert testify how Jesus worked a miracle in his life. Remind your listeners that God loves them as if they were the only people in the whole world needing a Savior.

# WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

by Carlton D. Hansen

2 John 1-6  
August 16, 1992

## INTRO:

John begins this little letter by addressing the "chosen lady," or the church and its members, whom he loved dearly. He reminds them that the truth of eternal life would live with them forever.

He continues his greeting with the assurance of God's "grace, mercy and peace" (v. 3), God's unmerited favor and compassion, and the peace that comes when guilt and sin are removed.

Three thoughts stand out from the text.

## I. Believers Are to Walk in the Truth (v. 4)

The writer speaks of his personal joy when he learns of those who are walking in the truth as revealed by Jesus Christ, something he had not found in some other churches.

**ILLUS.** Sometimes fact is funnier than fiction. According to an article in the *New York Times*, over the past 50 years authorities in the Soviet Union have been deliberately sabotaging their own maps of the Soviet countryside. Rivers, bridges, cities, and coastlines have all been shown in wrong locations on maps or deliberately drawn incorrectly. Distance scales have been an absolute joke. Soviet theory, apparently, was that these errors made these maps useless to spies, invading armies, and navigators of enemy bombers. Unfortunately, though, the maps were also useless to tourists and Soviet citizens.

This little piece of news reveals to us the wall of fear the Soviets built around themselves over the last half century and the great lengths to which they would go to distort the truth.

Pontius Pilate asked a very important question in his confrontation with Jesus: "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

People often frame the question differently by asking, "How can I know what to believe in today's world?" And, "How can I know whom to trust?" There is a lack of credibility on the part of those who are the guardians of truth.

Of course the answer, although simplistic to many, is found in the Bible. God's Word, not man's, holds the key to all truth (Col. 1:5). Often we make truth harder to discern than it really is.

**ILLUS.** Eliazar Hull, the captain of a whaling ship, sailed from the ports of New England in the early 1800s. Eliazar was able to sail out farther, stay out longer, and, in that way, come back with a larger catch than anyone else. Owners of the fleet, seeking to insure their ships against damage or loss at sea, asked that all ship captains be schooled in the latest navigational techniques of the day.

When Eliazar arrived for training, the instructors, who had long since heard of his amazing sailing prowess, asked him how he was able to navigate the vast distances

of such lengthy voyages without losing his way. Eliazar said, "I go up on deck at night, and I look at the stars, and I listen to the wind in the riggings, and I check the drift of the seas, and then I set my course." After completing his course in the science of navigation, Eliazar returned home and resumed his maritime vocation.

Sometime later the instructors visited Eliazar and once again asked how he navigated his great ship. "Exactly as you taught me," he responded to everyone's surprise. "I use the sextant to shoot the angle of the sun at midday. After fixing my longitude and latitude on the charts, I get out my compass and other instruments to plot my course. And then," he continued, "I go up on deck at night, and I look at the stars, and I listen to the wind in the riggings, and I check the drift of the seas—and go back down to correct my calculations."

If we want to know how to walk in the truth, we need to diligently search God's Word and listen to the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

## II. Believers Are to Walk in Obedience (v. 6)

John's test of love is obedience to God.

Obedience remains an important biblical concept—one that cannot be shrugged off.

Samuel, in replying to Saul, said, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Jesus gave us the supreme example of obedience. The Hebrews writer recalls the account: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:8-9).

Paul, speaking to the Roman believers, noted, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (5:19).

Andrew Murray has noted that the secret of true obedience is the "clear and close personal relationship to God." Unless we live close to Him, all attempts at obedience will be futile. Murray goes on to say, "I must consciously include the Lord in every thought, activity, and conversation until the habit is established."

Everybody longs for freedom. But for many people its pursuit leads to bondage. The greatly loved Bible teacher Henrietta Mears knew the secret of true freedom and she wanted her students to know it too. With young people in mind, she said, "A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water, and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand, and he perishes. He is out of his realm. So, young people, the Christian is free when he does the will of God and is obedient to God's command. This is as natural a realm

for God's child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird."

We cannot forget that obedience includes discipline.

**ILLUS.** During the days that Knute Rockne served as coach at Notre Dame, a sports columnist in a South Bend newspaper earned the reputation of being the meanest, most cutting writer in the country. The anonymous writer, who knew Notre Dame well, wrote about the team's weaknesses. He pointed out the mistakes of individual players. He told about those who were lazy, about those who broke training and didn't discipline themselves. Of course, this column made the players roaring mad. The truth hurt and players complained to Rockne. He listened with sympathy but said he could not stop the writer. He advised that the only way the players could do so was to go out and play the game so well that they would prove him wrong. Later it became known that the writer of the column was Knute Rockne himself. As coach of the team, he was best acquainted with their weaknesses. The critical column was his ingenuous device to develop a better team.

Sometimes the Scriptures speak so sharply about us, it is uncomfortable. God tells the truth because He loves us and wants to make us winners. He knows that we cannot win unless we discipline ourselves to obey His rules of life.

### III. Believers Are to Walk in Love (v. 6)

Both truth and obedience must be tempered with love. Truth without love is cold and sterile; obedience without love is duty. Paul said we are to speak the truth in love so that "we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

The command to walk in love is not a new commandment from John, but from Jesus himself. This kind of love is different from parental, marital, or friendly love. It is esteem for the other person.

When John was unable to walk to the Christians' meeting place, he was carried there to address the congregation. His only message was, "Little children, love one another."

Some wag penned this little ditty:

*To dwell above with the saints we love—*

*Oh, that will be glory.*

*But to dwell below with the saints we know—*

*Well, that's another story!*

When we walk in His love, though—that love that descends from God into the human heart—we are able to love everyone.

Love makes the truth revealing and exciting; love makes obedience easy.

John wrote earlier, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:2-3).

## CONCLUSION:

**ILLUS.** Florence Nightingale, one night during the Crimean War, was passing down a hospital ward. She paused to bend over the bed of a wounded soldier. As she looked down on him with eyes of compassion, the young man looked up and said, "You're Christ come to me."

When we truly minister with love and compassion, we reflect Jesus and His love.

Paul wrote: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Pray that God will help us "keep in step with the Spirit" by walking in the truth, obedience, and love.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Sanctuary Choir	"Sometimes Alleluia"
Scripture	1 John 4:7-12
Hymn	"He Loves Me"
Hymn	"It's Just like His Great Love"
Prayer Choruses	"Bless the Lord, O My Soul"
	"Gentle Shepherd"

Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee"
Sanctuary Choir	"The Lord Reigneth"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Jesus, Be the Lord of All"
Sermon	"WALKING IN LOVE"
Closing Hymn	"Softly and Tenderly"
Benediction	

### Pastoral Prayer

Dear Jesus, we focus on walking in love by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to feel Your touch as we gather from various walks of life. Unless You are present, all that we do shall be in vain. If You come, if Your presence fills this sanctuary, if You touch each person who has come to worship, we will leave the sanctuary different people. We love You from the very depths of our spirits. We want to learn how to live as You command. Open our minds and hearts to the truth of Your Word. Amen.

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Idea

Read Phil. 4:6.

#### Offertory Prayer

Dear Lord, giving is a joy. Help us give as if this would be our last opportunity to give back to You that which is rightfully Yours. Help us give joyfully, cheerfully, enthusiastically. May You use these gifts to touch the people who need Jesus. In His name. Amen.



# SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

by Carlton D. Hansen

3 John

August 23, 1992

## INTRO:

Our message today focuses on three men: Gaius, to whom the Epistle was addressed; Diotrephes, possibly a leading man in the church who was ambitious and bigoted; and Demetrius, the antithesis of Diotrephes, a model churchman of excellent reputation.

Of these three men, the biography of Gaius reflects the work of God producing both godliness and ideal Christian living. Although little is known about him, what is said is outstanding. The apostle addresses him as a dear friend that he truly loves and commends him for his hospitality to the Christian brethren (vv. 5-6).

Gaius was a respected member of a congregation near Ephesus around the turn of the century.

Written probably between A.D. 80 and 90 as a personal letter, 3 John presents a vivid glimpse of the Church in its infancy. It reveals the problems of the young Christian movement by drawing a comparison between Diotrephes and Demetrius. Moreover, the apostle helps us see the difference entire sanctification makes in both attitude and conduct.

May we learn from this message how to cultivate Gaius' character in our public and private lives.

## I. There Is a Trilogy of Prosperity (v. 2)

### A. *Physical prosperity is desired*

The apostle prays that Gaius, apparently in poor health, may be as healthy in body as in soul.

Physical health is one of God's best gifts to man. Sometimes, though, it is not God's will to grant good health, and even the best Christian may suffer ill health. Nevertheless, confidence in God must remain unshaken (Rom. 8:28).

### B. *Material prosperity is desired*

The accumulation of wealth can be either a bane or a blessing, depending upon one's attitude and where he places his priorities. The Christian views his material wealth as a trust from God.

### C. *Spiritual prosperity is desired*

The most remarkable feature about Gaius was his spiritual prosperity. A man may have health and wealth, but if his soul is sin-sick, he is a pauper. On the other hand, health and wealth may be lost while the soul remains strong.

## II. There Are Christian Ideals (vv. 3-6)

A prosperous soul is maintained by following the biblical principles that John lays down.

### A. *We need the example of walking in the truth (vv. 3-4)*

Jesus is the only Way to heaven (John 14:6). A person who accepts Christ as the Way walks in all of the truth he knows. Gaius' own peers testified to his faithful walk in the truth (v. 3).

Nothing liberates more than the truth (John 8:32). A Christian should personify the truth.

### B. *We need the example of hospitality (v. 5)*

Gaius was hospitable. Although some brethren were strangers, he rendered meaningful Christian service in his usual manner. We should seek to be good Samaritans at every opportunity (Heb. 13:2).

### C. *We need the example of service with love (v. 6)*

John urges Gaius to continue his good work by sending the brethren "on their way in a manner worthy of God" (v. 6).

What we do must be done from a heart of love—for Jesus and the church. Christian love compels us to serve others, even in the face of obstacles.

Not everyone will accept our gift of love. It might even be misunderstood. Nevertheless, he who gives his love will in the end be loved.

## III. There Is a Missionary Emphasis (vv. 7-8)

### A. *We are to go in Christ's name (v. 7)*

"Missionary, go home!" is not a new cry. Harold Lindsell has noted, "Anti-Christians have shouted it for years. What is relatively new is 'Missionary, come home!'—the proposal for a moratorium on missionaries."

The Church has never been released from its commission to "go" in the name of Christ. In His name people find release from sin (Acts 4:12).

In 1800 some 25 percent of the world's population was Protestant; approaching mid-20th century it was 8 percent. "This is a statistical scalpel laying bare the facts of our failure as evangelicals to reach across the world. I do not criticize the few who did what they could—but lament the multitudes of evangelicals who didn't do what they should" (J. B. Chapman).

As teeming masses of unsaved people grope in spiritual darkness, we must respond now—before it is too late—or give an account at the Judgment for failure to obey the Great Commission.

### B. *We are to give support (v. 8)*

By supporting the missionaries, Gaius became a fellow worker with them in promoting the truth. Even though some people cannot preach or teach, they can help support those who do.

Every true minister of the gospel is worthy of support from the church (Luke 10:7). The minister is not a hireling. Full-time wages for full-time service allows him to minister to the needs of those of his parish and community.

A church that fails to release its pastor from the bonds of secular work is falling short of its Christian responsibility.

Support for God's servant is a matter of responsible stewardship and will be closely scrutinized by God (1 Cor. 4:2).

#### IV. There Are Contrasting Attitudes (vv. 9-14)

*A. The church must deal with the problem of preeminence (v. 9)*

Diotrephes represents the carnal heart. He tried to act like a little Caesar. His pride led to the dethronement of Christ from his heart.

The word "preeminence" occurs only twice in the New Testament (KJV). In Col. 1:18, Paul speaks of Jesus having the "preeminence." Here, Diotrephes' downfall was that he substituted self for Christ.

Probably a converted Jew and officer of the church, he behaved haughtily and without respect for authority. Jesus taught that with greatness comes the responsibility of servanthood (Matt. 20:26-28).

**ILLUS.** There were two boys in the Taylor family. The oldest wanted to make a name for the family, so he turned toward Parliament and fame. The younger boy decided to give his life in service to Christ, so he turned to missionary service in China.

Hudson Taylor died, beloved and known on every continent. When you look up the name of the other brother in the encyclopedia to see his accomplishments, it says, "The brother of Hudson Taylor."

*B. The church must deal with the problem of malicious gossip (v. 10)*

Someone has aptly said, "Talk is cheap." Diotrephes was adept at "cheap talk." There is not a mightier or deadlier weapon than the tongue. What has been indelibly impressed upon the heart is bound to come out.

The oft-quoted wisdom that great minds talk about ideas, mediocre minds talk about things, and little minds talk about other people may have sprung from Paul's advice to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:13).

Malicious gossip ruins families and friendships. It destroys interpersonal relationships. More importantly, it infects the soul with a malignant cancer.

Paul advised, "Speak evil of no man" (Titus 3:2, KJV). If we keep this rule, we shall never have to apologize for something wrongly said.

*C. The church must imitate good (v. 11)*

Man is an imitator. He imitates either good or evil. The apostle strongly admonishes Gaius not to imitate what is evil. He uses Diotrephes as the example of the kind of person to be shunned.

*D. The church must have a faithful testimony (v. 12)*

Demetrius represents the fully sanctified heart. He was a believer well commended by the apostle. He had so impressed others in his daily walk that their testimony bore witness to his good works. Even John was willing to vouch for him. He reminds Gaius, "You know that our witness is true" (NASB). No finer recommendation could be given.

The world looks at Christianity through shaded glasses. If the Christian would impress the non-Christian world, he "must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim. 3:7). He will live in a manner that his works will glorify God (Matt. 5:16).

#### CONCLUSION:

What kind of a testimony do we leave behind us? Does your life measure up to our words? We are to be living epistles read by all. May we live no less than by this ideal.

**ILLUS.** Daniel Webster said, "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon bronze, time will efface it; if we build temples, they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal souls, if we imbue them with just principles of action, with fear of wrong and love of right, we engrave on those tables something which time cannot obliterate, and which will brighten eternity."

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Psalms 113
Invocation	Layman
Hymn	"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go"
Hymn	"Open My Eyes, That I May See"
Prayer Chorus	"Open Our Eyes"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"Broken and Spilled Out"
Sanctuary Choir	"A New Name in Glory"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"He Lifted Me"
Sermon	"SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY"
Closing Hymn	"Have Thy Way, Lord"
Benediction	

#### Pastoral Prayer

Open the altar for those who wish to gather to pray for their own needs or as intercessors.

*Scripture:* "Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day" (1 Kings 8:28).

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Idea

Have a layperson give a brief testimony on the benefits of tithing.

Read Matt. 6:33.

##### Offertory Prayer

Father, we come to You with thankful hearts for all Your benefits to us. Help us have a world vision for the lost that will cause us to give so that many may hear the gospel and come to know Christ as their Savior and Lord. Amen.

##### Suggestions

Select a layman to read the Call to Worship and offer the invocation.

Select a second layman to testify to the benefits of tithing.

Use the altar to help people become intercessors for others' needs.

At the conclusion of the service, have each family stand together for prayer. Invite families to include singles in the church or children who do not have families present.

# PERSEVERANCE

by Carlton D. Hansen

Jude 20-25  
August 30, 1992

## INTRO:

Jude instructs his readers to build their faith by perseverance. Then he tells them how to accomplish the building process. This is an oft-repeated concept throughout the New Testament.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and our hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (Heb. 10:36).

In his book *Three Score and Ten*, Vance Havner tells how eloquently George W. Truett caused a congregation to melt with tears while preaching from 1 Sam. 30:24: "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his art be that tarrieth by the stuff" (KJV).

"Sticking by the stuff," perseverance if you will, is vitally important to Christian living.

By defining our goals and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will not zig and zag after trivial and less worthy pursuits. We will develop one-track minds that help us "stick by the stuff" regardless of the circumstances.

**ILLUS.** A widow in a retirement home was playing bridge with three other ladies. A man walked in—a new ident.

One of the ladies waved at him and spoke: "Hello! I'm new here, aren't you?"

He replied, "Yes, I am. As a matter of fact, I just moved. I was taking a little stroll around to look the place over."

Another lady asked, "Where did you move from?"

He replied, "Oh, I just was released after 20 years in San Quentin."

Surprised, one of the ladies asked, "San Quentin? What were you in for?"

He said, "Well, I murdered my wife."

Immediately this little widow lady perked up and said: "Oh, then you're single?"

That's a one-track mind.

We need to develop one-track minds—to keep our minds on those things that are really important to our Christian development. We will "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and . . . with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb. 12:1).

A determined person is not whimsical nor whining in Jude. He exhibits a positive faith that causes him to forget himself and his failures and "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14, KJV).

**ILLUS.** Cyrus W. Field was responsible for the ingenuity and daring faith behind the laying of the Atlantic cable. Here was a man who had tried and failed many

times to realize his dream. It consumed 13 years of his life, absorbing every part of his mind, body, and spirit.

A crushing blow came on August 2, 1865. He had struggled previous to this for three years to get 10 leading British industrialists to underwrite the cost of laying the cable. On this fateful day, the cable snapped, and \$5 million lay on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean.

The average man would have given up in despair. But Field shook his head and said, "This thing must be done."

The next year the cable was successfully laid, and Henry, Cyrus Field's brother, said, "Now the heart of the world beats under the sea."

Cyrus Field persevered because he was determined that nothing could stop him. He was willing to stick by the stuff, regardless of personal cost, ridicule, misery, or pain.

If we are to be "more than conquerors," then we, too, must persevere in our quest for spiritual growth.

Four thoughts on perseverance stand out in this text.

## I. Pray in the Holy Spirit (v. 20)

The primary building block in the spiritual foundation is prayer. If the Christian is to throw off every sin and resist the seducer, Satan himself, he must have close daily communion with Christ.

In every person's life, there are those times filled with testings, trials, and discouragements that could become the straw that breaks the camel's back. They cause one to stand at the brink of despair. Sometimes they are so severe that we do not even know how to pray ourselves. But, if we have lived close to the heart of God, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to aid us in praying for our weaknesses (Rom. 8:26-27; Eph. 6:18).

**ILLUS.** A little girl was kneeling beside her bed. "Dear God," she said, "if You're there and You hear my prayer, could You please just touch me?" Just then she felt a touch.

Excitedly she exclaimed, "Thank You, God, for touching me!"

Looking up, she saw her older sister and got a little suspicious.

"Did you touch me?"

The sister answered, "Yes, I did."

"What did you do that for?" she asked.

"God told me to," was the reply.

Even as we are asking God for His help, He is providing the answers for our needs.

## II. Keep Yourself in God's Love (v. 21)

It is one thing for us to love God; it is an even greater thing for Him to love us. Consider how God shows His love to us.

God demonstrated the extravagance of His love by allowing Jesus to die for us while we were still in our sins.

He demonstrated the power of His love when He raised Jesus from the grave. He demonstrates the mercy of His love as He forgives our sins when we come to Him in repentance. He demonstrates the authority of His love by making us victors over sin's power.

### III. Be Merciful to the Doubter (v. 22)

Jude was looking beyond the present into the future when Jesus shall return, an event early Christians looked for intently and imminently. "The blessed hope—the glorious appearing" (Titus 2:13) for them was a present reality.

Many doubted. They did not believe Jesus would return in their lifetime. Jude says, "Show them mercy."

Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection, but Jesus showed mercy to him. He also gave Thomas wise direction: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

We are to encourage the doubter and help him see that faith in God works and that eternal life is a reality, both now and in heaven.

### IV. Snatch the Fallen (v. 23)

The vivid symbolism here is one rescuing a person from a burning building who is in peril of perishing unless someone saves him. The same thought is conveyed in Amos 4:11 as a "firebrand plucked out of the burning" (KJV; cf. Zech. 3:2). Time is crucial.

This gives new significance to the urgency of the Great Commission, placing an awesome responsibility on Christians to win the lost at any cost.

When we view our world lost without Christ, of family, friends, and neighbors sinking into hell, lost for eternity, it causes us to realize that some things we think are important pale into insignificance.

### CONCLUSION:

**ILLUS.** It was the spring of 1947. A new young baseball player had shown up in Yankee Stadium. He was a catcher. No one ever looked less like an athlete than this guy. People and sportswriters wondered if the Yankee organization had lost its mind. He was strange looking. He was short, squat, rotund, and clumsy. He looked more like something out of a circus than a professional ballplayer. They made fun of the way he walked and the way he looked with a catcher's mask on. He swung at bad pitches, he had problems behind the plate, and his throwing was wild. Though criticized and ridiculed, he would not quit. He was determined to stay with it. Working hard to overcome his shortcomings as a catcher, spending extra hours in the batting cage, studying rival hitters until he knew their weakness, he eventually turned the table of public opinion. He won the respect of his teammates and the admiration of the opposing teams. He became one of America's most lovable personalities.

When he retired, he had played on 14 pennant-winning teams. He had hit 358 home runs, had made the all-star team numerous times, was voted the league's most valuable player three times, and had set 18 World Series records.

Today you know him as Yogi Berra. He was determined. He persevered!

It pays to persevere, for the Lord has promised, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements	
Friendship in Worship	"Family of God"
Call to Worship	Heb. 11:32—12:2, 28
Hymn	"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"
Hymn	"Trust in the Lord"
Prayer Choruses	"Gentle Shepherd"
	"Give Them All to Jesus"
Pastoral Prayer and Open Altar	
Special Music	"In the Midst of It All"
Sanctuary Choir	"More Love to Thee"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?"
Sermon	"PERSEVERANCE"
Closing Hymn	"I'll Live for Him"
Benediction	

### Pastoral Prayer

Lord, we come to You with open hearts and minds to hear the truth of Your Word. Speak to us and help us to be obedient. We bring to You those who are hurting and ask that You touch them with Your presence. Fill this place of worship with Your shekinah glory, we pray. Amen.

You may want to quote Harry Emerson Fosdick's famous prayer for his congregation, "Somewhere in this congregation is someone who desperately needs what I am going to say; O God, help me get to him."

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Idea

Remind the congregation that giving is as much a part of worship as is singing, praying, and preaching. Instruct them to give cheerfully and joyfully.

#### Offertory Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your bountiful gifts. May we give back to You from our abundance. And may You bless us in the measure in which we give. Amen.

#### Suggestion

Today you are going to exhort your people to follow Jude's call to perseverance. Look for creative ways to include stories of those who have lived as Jude instructs.

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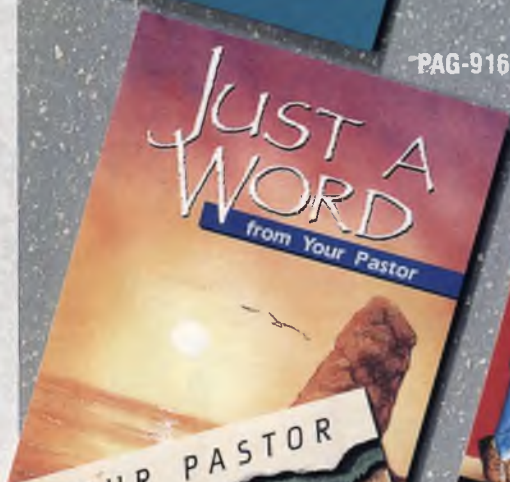
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