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MAGAZINE

"... SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE ..." Eph. 4:15



BILLY GRAHAM—
SKYWALKER FOR GOD

MINISTERING IN
CRISIS SITUATIONS

A WOUNDED
PASTOR'S RESCUE

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Billy Graham— Skywalker for God

Evangelist Conducts Most Far-reaching Crusade in History in San Juan, Puerto Rico

Evangelist Billy Graham became a “skywalker for God” during his extraordinary Global Mission, as his crusade at the Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, March 14-18, was extended for three days by satellite in 116 languages to 3,000 centers in 185 countries.

Even as his voice “marched through time and space” with a clear message on the reality of a personal God, a team of 48 interpreters in soundproof booths in the nearby Roberto Clemente Coliseum spoke the words of Billy Graham so that people in their country could hear



by Dan Wooding

*Founder and International Director,
ASSIST Ministries, Garden Grove, California*

the Good News. An additional 68 languages were interpreted at the downlink site.

Mr. Graham’s invitation from the stadium, to receive Christ by “coming forward to the front,” soared into the heavens and miraculously appeared on big screens in some 3,000 centers around the world in all 29 time zones.

The evangelist’s face, which looked like it had been hewn from pure Italian marble, shone as he voiced the words, “No matter what language you speak, no matter what culture you’re from, no matter what situation you find yourself in—all around the world, come and give your heart to Christ.”

“Beam Me Up, Billy!”

Sitting at the press table in the baseball stadium here in San Juan, I could imagine God looking down at this huge patchwork quilt of humans of all races making the greatest decision of their lives—as Mr. Graham’s face and words came down from 30 satellites spinning around the global village. Surely God was saying, “Beam Me up, Billy!”

In what was the world’s first global altar call to the entire human race, people in what was a museum of atheism in Tiranë, Albania, came to the front of the screen there, as did survivors of the killing fields of Rwanda, shuffling through the dust of the refugee camp in Goma, Zaire.

Ten million people around the world attended Global Mission venues each night, and in Puerto Rico, attendance records were broken as crowds of 55,000—more than triple its capacity—jammed into the baseball stadium after battling gridlock traffic jams outside. The five-day



Photo by Russ Busby/© BGEA

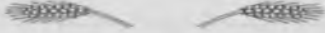
attendance averaged over 35,000, of which an average of more than 1,550 inquirers responded to Mr. Graham's invitation to make a commitment to Christ.

There was an extraordinary terrestrial experience one night, when Mr. Graham pointed up to a full moon in Puerto Rico, and the television camera panned upward to capture it. All over the world in outdoor "cathedrals" people looked up and gasped as they saw that same full moon over their land.

In addition to the attendance at the satellite venues, there's more, as they say in the advertisements. More than 1 billion people will hear Mr. Graham's message on the cross of Christ as it is broadcast the week of Easter in prime time on national television networks in 117 countries.

Good News to a Broken World

Among those attending the final night in San Juan was Dr. Peter Kuzmic, president of the Protestant Evangelical Council of Bosnia and Croatia. He revealed that his own city of Osijek, Croatia, was carrying the Global Mission.



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God looking
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Fighting back the tears, he told me, "Only three years ago, over 150,000 shells almost destroyed Osijek in eight months, and now every night hundreds of individuals are being embraced by the saving love of Jesus through the preaching of the Good

News. It truly is good news for bad times in Croatia, Bosnia, and other parts of our broken world."

Speaking of the Global Mission, Dr. Kuzmic added, "This is a most amazing and effective combination of the simplicity and power of the proclaimed Word and the complexity and efficiency of global communicative technology in fulfillment of Jesus' words in Matt. 24:14, 'This gospel . . . to all nations.'"

In Backi Petrovac, Serbia, a committee member said, "As Dr. Graham gave the invitation and the people in Puerto Rico applauded, it came to my mind that angels in heaven were also applauding and rejoicing at the saved souls who came forward."

Poland also saw a tremendous move of God's Spirit in their land. In Walbrzych, the man responsible for the technical arrangements gave his life to the Lord. In Malbork, a young man who committed his life to Christ on Friday returned the next evening and brought his wife and daughter. They, too, made decisions for Christ.

To Russia with Love

In the former Soviet Union, in many of the former republics, the message of hope preached by Billy Graham was responded to by tens of thousands of people.

In the Russian town of Murmansk, an overflow crowd of 2,200 attended the last meeting, and two extra television monitors were set up in the foyer. Five hundred and eight responded to the invitation to accept Christ; the aisles were blocked, and not everyone who wanted to come forward could, so they were counseled where they stood.

Seven hundred attended the mission in Chita, and 100 people responded to the invitation. Sergey, a 27-year-old Russian army political officer, came forward. For him, this was a very difficult step, though he had heard about God before from his grandmother, who was a believer in the western Ukraine. "He was very distraught with his life, and this brought him to God," reported a leader at the meeting. "In a rather unusual manner he had acquired a New Testament. It occurred while on duty one day as he came upon a group of soldiers playing cards. The stakes were a New Testament. He confiscated it and began to read it."

Albanian Miracle

Albania became infamous in world history when its leader, Enver Hoxha, declared his country to be the "world's first atheistic nation." But now he is dead, and there are some 30 churches open in the country. For three nights, the Global Mission was shown in the Pyramid, a building constructed for the glory of Hoxha and his atheistic philosophies, now an international center of culture. Nearly 800 people attended each service, and many others were turned away due to lack of space. Scores came and stood in front of a giant screen to commit their lives to Christ—in a country where only four years ago they would have been imprisoned for such an action. For them, they now knew that God was not dead!



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Albanian interpreter Lorenc Gjoni, who became a Christian in 1991, one year before the country opened up, now vice general secretary of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance, could not stop smiling when we talked in San Juan. "I feel this crusade in Albania is just a miracle," he said. "It shows that God is faithful to His promises, and He is giving back the inheritance He has for the Albanian nation, for we believe that the apostle Paul once came to our country."

In the city of Zaporozhje, Ukraine, 190 attended the Christian Workers Conference, during which Mr. Graham became a global teacher at the conference that was held in the Roberto Clemente Stadium and then

transmitted as part of the Global Mission to an audience of more than half a million pastors and Christian lay workers in 185 countries.

Mr. Graham spoke at two of the main sessions, and other speakers included Dr. Luis Palau; Dr. Billy Kim; Dr. Leighton Ford; the Rt. Rev. Michael Baughen, bishop of Chester; and Anne Graham Lotz.

Sixteen hundred squeezed into the hall for the evening service and stood in the aisles and foyer wherever they could see or at least hear the translation given from San Juan. Ninety-eight people came forward when the invitation was given. Two children came forward, a brother and sister, but their father hesitated in his seat. Finally, he too came forward and embraced his children as a smile of happiness lit up his face.



"It truly is good news for bad times in Croatia, Bosnia, and other parts of our broken world."

In Galati, Romania, 70 percent of the attendees were unbelievers. Two televisions had been set up in the entrance halls to accommodate the overflow. An eyewitness said, "Every night the number in the audience grew, and the silence in which they listened demonstrated the great impact of the evangelical message. At the end of each service, our choir went on with the Romanian version of the last song. This song was put on the overhead projector, and the audience sang with us in an attitude of prayer. Then almost all of them bent their heads and prayed."

Far away in trouble-torn Sri Lanka, despite technical problems, nearly 3,000 people enjoyed the program in the capital city of Colombo, which included testimonies from a local movie

actress and a prominent former child artiste and a muppet show that appealed to the children in the audience. Many responded to the altar call, including a large number of Buddhists.

Roof of the World

At the roof of the world in Kathmandu, Nepal, the first night of the meetings in this beautiful Himalayan kingdom started against a backdrop of a magnificent sunset. This was the first time that any Christian meeting had taken place at the venue site, the second-largest stadium in the city. All arrangements for the satellite reception and video programs were pronounced to have been "excellent" by the local organizers. Approximately 3,000 turned out, and at least 90 of those came forward at the invitation. The second night, being a Friday, drew a large crowd of 3,500, with 120 responses being recorded.


In the former Marxist state of Ethiopia, a crowd of 40,000, some 5,000 more than its official capacity, attended each night of the crusade in Addis Ababa. Hundreds responded to the invitation. One of the men responding said, "Yesterday I came alone, but today I came with my brother. I was in doubt about Jesus, but today the speaker said that [Jesus said of himself] 'I Am That I Am,' 'I Am the Life,' and 'I Am the Way.'" Before, this young man's life belonged to another way, but when he came to the counselors, he was assured that Jesus was the only way.

In Chad, more than 4,000 people assembled at the Stadium of Peace to hear the message of salvation. Several were deeply touched with the invitation to be given. There was much publicity for the mission, with banners in French and Arabic and media publicity.

Rain threatened the first meeting at an open-air soccer stadium in Pétionville, Haiti. Concerned that such weather might prove disastrous to the success of the meetings, the local coordinators went to prayer. Within minutes the rain ceased. When Billy Graham shared, "I am not offering you a dead Christ," the entire audience burst into applause.

As his sermon progressed, so did the sense of excitement in the stadium. Attendance was estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000, with near-

ly 500 counselors prepared to assist the same number of inquirers, who filled both sides of the stage. On the second evening many people attended.



In the former Soviet Union, the message of hope was responded to by tens of thousands of people.

Before the program began, a pastor said, "People are afraid to come out because of the insecurity and violence that still exists. This is a big and tremendous event for my country. It is the Lord's doing." Radio Lumière, which reaches 94 percent of the population, broadcast live, and those listening were given numbers to call to get further information about coming to know Christ as Savior.

India's 14 Global Mission venues reported the following figures for the second night of meetings: 83,650 heard the gospel, and 3,476 responded to the invitation of Mr. Graham. Calcutta was not allowed to hold Christian meetings, so the venue was moved to the Assembly of God school quadrangle.

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, some 1,500 turned up for the meeting at a Chinese cinema hall converted into a church, which is "now proclaiming the gospel" instead of the usual fare of gory Chinese movies. Many prayed the sinner's prayer in their seats rather than come forward.

In Rwanda, the satellite meetings nearly did not take place when a local official who had given verbal approval for the public meeting place to be used as the Global Mission venue had left the city without notifying any of his colleagues that official permission had been granted. This did not

stop local organizers, who simply moved the venue to a small church. Some 2,000 packed into the sanctuary, and the area outside the church was even more crowded around windows and doors.

In Zaire, some 20,000 Rwandan refugees attended a food distribution compound in Goma to hear Billy Graham preach the gospel message despite a fierce tropical downpour and fears of violence. Many responded to Mr. Graham's invitation. On the second night, a crowd that was double that of the first night came, and nearly 1,000 responded. Locals were encouraged by the report that when everyone had walked home in the dark the previous evening, not one single incident was reported—something that has not been true for many months in this city. One thousand people also attended the Christian Workers' Conference and were greatly blessed by the teaching that was given.

Global Mission Village

Before the outreach began, a "Global Mission Village" was constructed in a short time by a team of volunteers who were able to install an amazing assembly of "firepower" of satellite technology.

"The process has been like building an entire television network headquarters and earth station in a week's time, using it for 10 days, and then

tearing it all down," explained Greg Flessing, who, along with his brother Roger, has been in charge of the TV project.



This was the first time that any Christian meeting had taken place at the venue site, the second-largest stadium in the city.

Billy Graham's Global Mission became a "stairway to heaven" for millions of people around the world, thanks to some of the most sophisticated television and satellite technology ever assembled.

"Even the television industry acknowledges that this is the biggest point-to-point relay around the world


of its kind in history," said David Rennie, a British electronics engineer who has worked with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for many years and who traveled from London to work as a consultant for the event.

"It Can't Be Done"

"There are those who are experts in the field of satellite communications who said that a project as complex as this just could not be done, but we have done it—for the glory of God," Rennie added.

Greg Laurie, in Riverside, California, was on hand to observe the crusade. He told me, "I think that the theme, 'The Time Is Now,' that has been used by Global Mission is incredibly appropriate. Technology where it is at this moment, combined with the stature of Billy Graham, results in an explosive combination.

"I can't think of anyone besides Mr. Graham who could lead an event of this magnitude. One thing that struck me personally was when he was giving the invitation, and he said, 'All around the world—you come now.' At that moment the magnitude of this event hit me."

For those around the world who responded to Christ—their time was now! And for Billy Graham, at the age of 76, he was conducting a "Mission Without Walls" that was the capstone of his inspiring ministry. 

Beyond Belief



CONSIDER HOWARD HUGHES...OR HOW ABOUT ELVIS. HUGHES DIED A MALNURISHED RECLUSE AND ELVIS AN OVERWEIGHT DRUG ABUSER. DID THEY BETTER THE WORLD WITH THEIR GREAT WEALTH? NO. IT JUST ENABLED THEM TO INDULGE THEIR ILLNESSES AND APPETITES!



Don't Criticize One Another

In one church where I served as pastor, I deliberately had to keep new baby Christians away from old, mean-spirited church members to protect them from harmful criticism. No wonder the apostle Paul urged, "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Rom. 14:13). If that translation seems too vague, try this one: "Don't criticize each other any more" (TLB).

Hasty criticisms lead to wrong conclusions. Aaron and Miriam criticized their brother, Moses, blurting out, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" (Num. 12:2, TLB). The Lord's anger responded to their spirit of criticism, and Miriam was stricken with leprosy for seven days.

Even in ministerial circles, you can hear notes of criticism: criticism against a pastor's own people, whom he is called to love; criticism against fellow pastors, usually the ones who appear to be having more success; criticism against denominational leaders, nearly all of whom have been chosen by the people they serve. Pastors criticize and rail against denominational headquarters as if it were a monolithic tyrant from the creative hands of Frankenstein. All these targets of criticism are simply people who have been asked to do something for Jesus—sometimes asked by an eager congregation, sometimes asked by duly selected delegates, sometimes asked by men and women who are held responsible for getting certain specialized tasks accomplished. Each man or woman in service for Jesus has entered the Christian walk as dependent upon Jesus as you and me. And the devil gets the glory when untamed criticisms fly, aimed to pierce the hearts of inno-



by Randal E. Denny
Spokane, Washington

cent, faithful, unsuspecting servants of Jesus.

Paul gave good advice: "Stop passing judgment on one another." Avoid the censorious spirit. Yes, constructive criticism has its place, but most criticism is destructive, fired off to hurt, not help.

A pious fellow criticized a zealous servant of Jesus for the way he handed out gospel tracts to people. The tract distributor asked, "So, how do you do it?"

The embarrassed critic stammered, "Well, I . . . er . . . ah . . . I don't."

The zealous servant replied, "I like the way I do it better than the way you don't."

The Bible does not say it's wrong to help a brother or sister by pointing out weaknesses—but the Bible does tell us to begin with ourselves. Jesus said: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1-2). Keep in mind that the one who indiscriminately criticizes others advertises his own need to be critiqued. He is telling others that he feels insecure and inferior by his inept use of criticism as a tool to raise his own self-esteem. The spirit

of criticism raises the false hopes of superiority. That bubble will burst.

We all have faults and flaws that open us to criticism. James wrote: "Don't grumble about each other, brothers. Are you yourselves above criticism? . . . The great Judge is coming" (5:9, TLB). God has only flawed disciples to work with—unless you are the first of a new kind!

A tenant complained to his landlord about the noisy neighbor upstairs who often stamped on the floor and shouted until after midnight. Then he added: "But it doesn't bother me too much. I usually stay up and practice my tuba until about that time every night." So, that's the way of critics.

If you are sincere about "constructive" criticism, then take it to the person who can do something about it. But, first, filter your criticism through the Lordship of Jesus. Do not try to play God in another person's life, but remember that "we live to the Lord . . . we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8). Paul added, "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? . . . Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (vv. 10, 12). Only Jesus is wise enough to judge.

One fellow said that he only had one talent. His pastor replied: "Don't let that discourage you. What is your talent?"

"Showing others their faults," the church member told him frankly.

The pastor responded wisely, "Then do with your one talent what the one-talented man did in Jesus' parable—bury it."

Don't be quick to criticize one another. Instead, pray for one another, and help one another. Break the awful habit of criticism. After all, we are family!

Where Is God in All of This Suffering?

A mother wrote a letter to a syndicated newspaper columnist. She insisted, "I can tell you firsthand that, of all human suffering, none can equal the pain of a mother who must put her young child into a grave."

Events of the heartland bombing cause us to ask: "Why does God allow such human suffering and misery? Why does God permit war and brutality? If God is good, if He is love, if He is merciful, why would He want people to suffer?"

The person struck by personal misfortune or tragedy often asks, "Why me?" If an acceptable answer can be given, the most bitter of his grief will be relieved. Such bitter pain is caused by no answer to the question, "Why?"

Anyone who, through the years, has lectured or spoken about suffering knows how big a response such a subject elicits. To those particularly sensitive, the subject of suffering raises questions that refuse to be silenced. Often these questions are obstacles to faith. If from the Cross we hear, "My God, my God, why . . . ?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), no wonder we hear that cry torn from our own lips when facing life's insurmountable difficulties.

The enormity of human suffering baffles us. Recent attacks of terrorism, natural disasters, and horrible diseases scream at us from nightly news broadcasts. Where *is* God in all of these?

Primitive man blamed God for floods that came and for disease that swept through his village, killing people. Should we blame God for things like that? An erroneous theory declares that God causes the sorrow and tragedy that befall mankind.

God is a God of love. We can count on Him. He isn't a God of vengeance or wrath. He isn't a God of hate and murder. Hold on to this truth, no mat-



by Morris Chalfant

Evangelist, Church of the Nazarene,
Bourbonnais, Illinois

ter what happens to you. God is a God of love; you can count on Him.

People ask, "Don't you believe that God sends suffering in order to enrich men's characters?" The answer should be, "No." If suffering inevitably brought nobility of character, we have no right to end it. God uses suffering, however, to build character when men cooperate with Him. He brings His good out of our evil. He even works in spite of our sins. He responded to the greatest sin by the greatest redeeming act in history of the world—the Cross of Calvary.

Suffering serves as a part of life's schooling. God does not will evil for any one of us. He does allow it. Parents don't will that their child fall and get hurt in the process of learning to walk, but they allow it. How else will the child ever learn? God can use what He does not choose, evil and suffering, to develop stronger, greater characters.

The apparent tragedies of life are often resolved by God's purposes. William Barclay translated Rom. 8:28, "God intermingles all things for good for those who love him."* J. B. Phillips put it with clarity, "Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good."

Biblical perspective on suffering is not so much explanation as it is reve-

lation. God shows himself to His people through suffering.

In the classic story of Job, the answer to the "why" of suffering was not to look upon suffering as a form of punishment or as a test. In fact, God never did explain the details of Job's *experience*, but He did reveal *himself*. Job experienced new depths of God's character.

At the end of the story, Job confesses, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5). Job never learned why, but he did get to know who. He got to know God in a new, more profound way. He rested in the God who knew why. That was sufficient for Job.

In the midst of terrible suffering in a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie ten Boom felt angry at God. She could not understand why all this agony should take place. In one of the most dramatic scenes of her film, *The Hiding Place*, Betsy says to her sister Corrie, "Corrie, when you know Him [God], you don't need to know why."

The Bible does not teach that there are no answers to our "why" questions. It simply affirms that God's ways remain infinitely higher than our ways, and His thoughts infinitely above ours (Isa. 55:9). God's Word also promises that one day the crooked will be made straight and the dark made plain (cf. 40:4, KJV; 1 Cor. 4:5).

God does not cause the tragedy and terror that stalk the earth. He allows it. He brings something out of it for our good. But He does not cause evil, nor is it His will. Charles Spurgeon said, "God is too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken; *and when you cannot trace His hand, you can always trust His heart.*" †

*William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed., in the Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 111.

Ministering in Crisis Situations

Wednesday, April 19, 1995, will live in the history of Oklahoma and the United States as the day terror swept the country. A bomb exploded in front of the downtown federal building at 9:05 in the morning. The 160 persons killed are multiplied many times over by the family members, the friends of coworkers, and the Oklahoma community at large.

How does one minister in such moments and subsequent hours as this? I recognize the differences between the ministry of a hospital chaplain and the local pastor in such an event. As chaplain at the University Hospitals, I reported for the disaster as quickly as I could. I took a position at the doors of the emergency room entrance at Children's Hospital. That position would be an unlikely place for most pastors.

As the number of patients coming into the trauma center diminished and finally stopped, I directed my attention and ministry to the parents gathering to look for unfound children. In that moment of crisis, not



by **Ronald L. Phelps**
*Chaplain, University Hospitals,
Oklahoma City*

knowing the fate of their child, parents are not calmed by soothing words, Scripture verses, or prayers. "WHERE IS MY CHILD?" screams in their minds and often tumbles from their lips.

The pastor must understand the difference between the death of a spouse or sibling and the death of a child. In the grief support groups at the hospital and the Compassionate Friends, I have experienced the magnitude of that loss for numerous parents. A pastor or minister who does not know and understand that differ-

ence will be at a tremendous disadvantage in ministering to parents who have lost a child. In the past few years, I have had dozens of parents share the pain, hurt, and disappointment that they experienced from words their pastors have thoughtlessly spoken.

What do you say to parents who do not know if their child is dead or alive? I took their hands, clasped them together, and said very little. I put my arm around their shoulders, looked into their eyes, and let my tears speak for me. I hugged them and said: "We're looking. There's still hope." What many persons have discovered in grief situations is that most people will not remember what you said, unless it was hurtful to them. However, they will never forget what you did or that you were with them in those hours of pain and confusion.

Our day at Children's Hospital and University Hospital involved getting families together with the patients. All the area hospitals shared lists of incoming patients so each institution could direct families to the right facility. As the hours slowly slipped by, the families grew tense, fearful, and anxious. "No news" no longer meant "good news." The flow of patients and the high pitch of the sirens had stopped. When the parents were directed to move to a central communication point out of the hospital, one mother fainted to the floor. Our staff kept the crowds back, bathed her head with a cool washcloth, and helped her to a chair. In all of this, very little was actually said.

Ministers from the nearby neighborhood came to help us care for the families. They found themselves overwhelmed by the emotions of the gathering. They wanted to help but were at a loss as to what would be helpful. We directed them to pass out water and food, to sit and listen as



people shared their fears, to simply be present with the people as they hurt and cried.

Other ministers in the community gathered their compassionate ministries, women's groups, and other volunteer services. Within a couple of hours, they brought sandwiches, cookies, water, Cokes, etc., to the hospitals for families and staff. Staff members had no time for lunch, only a quick bite to eat, a hasty swallow of water, and off again. The families were deeply moved and touched by the caring love expressed by the churches in this way. The caring continued day after day for those whose children remained hospitalized in subsequent days.

In my duties as chaplain, I am also called on from Public Relations to deal with the media. On the night of April 19 and the following days, I was interviewed by reporters from numerous papers across the United States, nine radio talk shows, "Current Affair," "The Today Show," and "Nightline." The questions sounded the same in almost every interview: "What were the reactions of the parents? What do you say to parents in moments like this? What were your feelings as you ministered to the people?"

Since Wednesday, April 19, people have called to give help for the bomb victims. As chaplains, we are reminded that our hospital is filled with people suffering, hurting, dying, and grieving. When asked how we deal with the suffering people of the blast, I had responded that we deal with this every day at University Hospitals. We have children dying with cancer, children who have died from abuse received from their caretakers, children who are burned by sadistic people, babies torn apart by sexual abuse, and the list goes on. What could be considered the greater tragedy?

The tragic heartache is greatest when it affects my child! Let us be truthful. We feel sorrow deepest when the hurt is our own. We are offended most when we personally are wronged. What happens to my child touches me and affects me more than what happens to your child. As ministers, we are called on to share the pain of our people, to bind their wounds, to anoint their sores, to walk

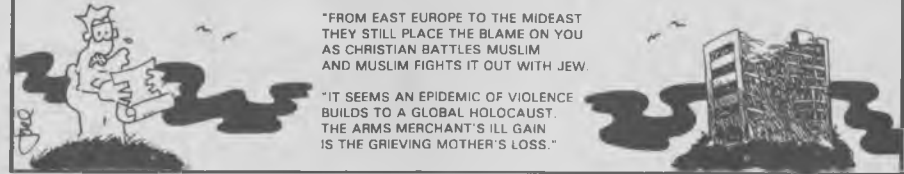
with them through the valley of the shadow of death.

To minister in the crisis situation, we must have the awareness of how people hurt, how they react to hurt, and how they begin the healing

Most people will not remember what you said; however, they will never forget that you were with them in those hours of pain.

process of recovery. That process may be the same in all grief situations. The time required for recovery differs from person to person. It is not uncommon for parents who have lost a child to experience renewed grief in the third year following the death. You don't "just get over it" or "get on with your life" or "go back to work, and it'll be all right." Healing takes time. Healing requires the constant support and faithfulness of the pastor through the long months following death. Pastor, stand firm in your faithfulness to the grieving with your care, your support, and your affirmation. Keep your words few and simple.

Pontius' Puddle

<p>"SAD NEWS." QUOTH THE ANGEL AS SHE ENTERED HEAVEN'S GATE. A BOMB BLEW UP IN OKLAHOMA. THE INCENDIARY DEVICE WAS HATE.</p>	<p>"MORE MASSACRES IN RWANDA. ANOTHER GAS ATTACK IN JAPAN. RUSSIA'S WAGING CIVIL WAR AND SELLING NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO IRAN.</p>	<p>AFTER THE ANGEL HAD DEPARTED AND THE EVENING SHADOWS CREPT CAME THE SOUND OF HOLY ANGUISH AND HEAVY SORROW AS HEAVEN WEPT.</p>
<p>"FROM EAST EUROPE TO THE MIDEAST THEY STILL PLACE THE BLAME ON YOU AS CHRISTIAN BATTLES MUSLIM AND MUSLIM FIGHTS IT OUT WITH JEW.</p> <p>"IT SEEMS AN EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE BUILDS TO A GLOBAL HOLOCAUST. THE ARMS MERCHANT'S ILL GAIN IS THE GRIEVING MOTHER'S LOSS."</p> 		

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Christmas Means Seeing Jesus

Every day is Christmas if one sees Jesus. It is all in seeing Him. No wonder Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5). Without Him, all else is darkness.

With all the elaborate trappings of Christmas, people still miss the heart of it by not seeing Jesus.

One Sunday evening, while seated in church listening to the choir's rendition of a lovely Christmas cantata, I noticed one of the sopranos in the front row. This young lady spent her whole time trying to adjust the wick on an artificial candle that failed to connect with the battery and there-



by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Pastor,

Windham, Maine

fore would not light. She twisted and turned that tiny stub, then stroked it in hopes that a gentler touch would

be more persuasive. I thought that in time she would give up, simply cup her hand over the tip of the candle, and pretend that all was well, but she never did. To the very end of the concert she kept poking at that little white stick.

As I left the building, I could not help but pity the girl. She was there the entire evening, had sung in the choir, but had missed the wonder of Christmas. *She had not seen Jesus.* All she had noticed was a defective flashlight.

Yet, in the second row of the same choir had been a middle-aged woman whose face was aglow. One could just tell that she was into the beauty of both the music and the message. I thought about the contrast between the two and concluded that the second woman was truly singing for Jesus, for her eyes were upon Him while participating in the evening's celebration.

No wonder the shepherds left Bethlehem, praising and glorifying God! They had seen *Jesus*.

How was this so? Partly because they never doubted the message told them by the angels. They believed the unbelievable—that a peasant baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a cow's trough, and overseen by youthful parents, was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, the coming King. So strong was their faith that they dared to leave the barn and broadcast to the world the exciting news of what they had witnessed.

I wonder if we in our world of nuclear fear, terrorism, abuse of many sorts, disintegration of society, and overall sin and ugliness are able to believe with simple faith so that we can see Jesus. It requires faith, but for those who will look into the manger with believing hearts, Jesus will surely be seen.



I think of a friend with multiple sclerosis who is confined to a health care center. Her husband has deserted her and is now an alcoholic. She has no children, and her parents are no longer living. The other night she phoned to say that her "friend"—with whom she shared a bank account—had taken her checkbook and threatened to strip her of all her money. "You don't need the money," this so-called friend told the handicapped woman. And if that was not bad enough, her sister wrote her from the South that she was going to drive northward to take some furniture items, concluding the sick woman "did not need them."

This dear lady is a believer and faithfully serves the Lord in spite of her disability. Although crushed by the betrayal of her "friends," she took the dilemma to God in prayer.

A week later she called my home again. "I have all my money back," she said, "and my sister admitted she did not have the funds to make the trip to steal my things." Her voice then broke into sobs. There was no need to say any more; it was being said in silence. Through the darkness of her despair, she had seen Jesus.

Undoubtedly the shepherds also found praise in bowing before Jesus. They were willing to kneel, something that many people refuse to do.

To truly see inside the manger, we must kneel; we must bend in adoration. That is difficult for a person who is wrapped up in himself, reaching for status, and trying to climb the ladder of worldly success. But it is

easy when we are in love with the Baby, the Christ child.



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During the cantata, there were a number of tableaux to visually illustrate the message that was being sung. I noticed the children gathered around the manger scene by the tree. Their faces were glowing, and their eyes were shining. Their excitement was obvious. Why? Because lying in

that crib was a baby. They had bent and were able to see Him.

No wonder Jesus admonished adults that if they were to be a part of His kingdom, they must become as little children. This is a prerequisite for anyone who would experience Christmas by seeing Jesus.

This season and throughout the coming year, follow God's directive. Just as the shepherds were told by the angels to go and were helped in their quest with signs to keep them on track—the city of David, a baby in swaddling clothes, a manger—so we, too, must go! When we are obedient to God, we will surely find Him.

Some people try to find God in their own way: through drugs, gurus, "trips," the occult, psychic tickles, and soul massages of one sort or another. These are NOT the means by which God directs us in locating Him.

When told by the angels to go to Bethlehem, the shepherds could have refused. What if they had preferred to stay with their flocks, or had decided to go to Galilee instead of Bethlehem? They could have chosen other options. But they did not. Instead, they followed God's leading. The result? They saw Jesus.

We can see Him today, even in our confused, sinful world with all that is going on to point us in the wrong direction. Listen to the angels; *do as they say*.

Yes, in today's mixed-up world it is still possible for people of faith to bend before the manger and see Jesus—not only at Christmas, but every day!

Pontius' Puddle



One Mission, Many Callings

If real ministry is that place where God calls us to serve "for . . . the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, NASB), then the total mission and work of the Church is achieved best by embracing every calling to Christian ministry. There should be no distinction as to the relative importance or standing of one Christian vocation over another. God's call to ministry, wherever it is practiced and by whatever name, is a gift too sacred and important to be marginalized or trivialized.

For more than 27 years I served my church and my country as a chaplain in the United States Air Force. The seeds of my calling must have been



by David Grosse

*Director, Continuing Education for Ministry,
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Kansas City*

planted in World War II soil. As a young boy growing up in 1940s Washington, D.C., I remember that all

life seemed consumed with the war's execution. Blackouts, gasoline rationing, ominous sirens and drills, recycling campaigns, uniforms, omnipresent flags, Sousa marches—all contributed to a wave of patriotic fervor that was not lost on the mind and emotions of this impressionable pre-teen.

During this time, John Atkinson, decorated Nazarene chaplain assigned to Andrews Field, occasionally attended Washington First Church of the Nazarene, where Dad was the pastor. One Sunday following V-J Day, Dad invited Chaplain Atkinson to dinner. I viewed this ribbon-bedecked officer with awe, as if he had single-handedly won the war—a "grosse" exaggeration at best, since as noncombatants, chaplains are forbidden to carry weapons. But chaplains do serve on the front lines of combat, so the stories Chaplain Atkinson told of ministry and survival in the face of great danger only confirmed in my young mind that here was a bona fide hero. I wondered if ever I could be like him, yet dismissed the idea as an impossible dream. Already I was vaguely aware that the road to chaplaincy was a long one: through college, seminary, ordination, ministry experience, church endorsement, military qualification, and acceptance—it seemed like the journey of a thousand miles. I was still struggling through grade school with Miss Ferdinand and wasn't at all certain I would make it past her fourth grade class!

Answering the Call

There were other challenges on the road to chaplaincy ministry even more formidable than Miss Ferdinand. I was reared in a Nazarene parsonage by parents who viewed the office of pastor as a unique and sacred calling, exceeded by no other in the hierar-



chy of divine callings—except, perhaps, that highest of callings reserved only for the most saintly: missionary! Mother and Dad, even Granddad Grosse, frequently reinforced the message in their prayers and conversation.

Not until much later did I become fully aware of other vocations in ministry, and that God had one such calling in mind for me, one not previously revealed to Granddad, my parents, or to me.

For five years after graduation from Nazarene Theological Seminary, Granddad's prayers were right on the mark. My vocation and future in ministry seemed assured in the pastorate. Then, while attending the 1966 Evangelism Conference in Kansas City, I was invited to consider an opportunity to serve as a chaplain in the air force. Having previously discounted chaplaincy as a serious option, Donna and I now felt impressed to take a second look.

Family consultation, vocational assessment, and intense prayer followed. Sensing the unmistakable push and pull and that inner urging that comes with most any call, we confidently made our decision to apply for chaplaincy endorsement. Two months later the endorsement was granted.

Anatomy of a Problem

At last, I felt, my life's calling had been settled. The struggle was over—or was it? When I excitedly shared the good news of our decision with my parents, my mother quite innocently asked, "But David, why are you leaving the ministry?"

In retrospect, I believe she meant, why are you leaving the *pastorate*? Not understanding that, I inferred from her question that chaplaincy was something less than *real* ministry, perhaps a hybrid ministry outside the mainstream of real ministry. The place to be in *real* ministry is the pastorate. I felt demoralized and disappointed—no, I felt devastated! I understood why the pastorate enjoyed great respect as a calling in ministry. I did not understand the apparent lack of affirmation of my calling.

Soon after, I learned that many who faithfully serve God and the church outside the pastorate experience the same disappointment. Institutional chaplains, evangelists, professors,

church administrators, editors and writers, associate pastors, pastoral counselors, and ministers of youth, education, and music—in all of these ministries there are some, if not many, who feel like second-class ministers on the margins of ministry. One can only guess at the feelings of marginalization and loneliness many retired and women clergy must experience.

Coping and Hoping

Some within these groups are simply saddened by their exclusion. They bear their disappointment with quiet restraint, not wanting to be perceived as complaining, divisive, or dissenting. For them, it is enough to find validation for their ministry in Scripture:

Chaplains
serve on the
front lines of
combat.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons . . . for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7, NASB).

Others experience their hurt more acutely as the bite of alienation or the sting of being included "out." While not begrudging pastors their standing, they want to participate fully in the rights and privileges of ordination or licensure enjoyed by pastors and promised by their church.

Of course, feelings can be very subjective and cannot always be taken as fact. But whether real or imagined, if the perception is present, dare we ignore it? It is better to ask, Is there any basis in fact for the perception that many of our ministers who are not pastoring are intentionally or unintentionally marginalized? If there is, how and why should this be so? Is it merely benign neglect? A lack of understanding of other ministries? Is there a fraternity among pastors that tends

to exclude those outside its membership? Is it a turf issue? If the perception is not grounded in fact, what are its sources? How can it be disarmed? These questions I am hardly prepared or equipped to answer. Yet I would like to explore some avenues of inquiry in the interest of advancing the dialogue.

Force Field Analysis

First, and without question, those of us who serve in one of the many "varieties of ministries" must share the blame for any sense of exclusion. Sometimes we have not adequately legitimated our calling in ministry. We have not told our stories consistently and persuasively. While pursuing our calling outside the denominational mainstream, we have not always faithfully supported our sponsoring church when we could have. Service in alternative ministries does not excuse us from an obligation to remain faithful in prayer, tithing, attendance when possible, and rendering our service in the name of our holiness denominations whenever and wherever we can. We have not always done that with conspicuous consistency.

I wonder if the issue has deeper roots, related to how we gauge ministry effectiveness. We tend to value in ministry what we can see, what produces visible and quantifiable results: more members, larger Sunday Schools, increased income, more programs, bigger church buildings—results that spell *real* success in *real* pastoral ministry.

For most of us in ministry outside the pastorate, these criteria simply do not equate. We often work in secular settings, on hospital wards, out on the flight line or with the troops, in the counseling room or classroom, behind prison walls, out with the hungry and homeless, in the industrial or commercial marketplace. We conduct preaching missions and evangelistic campaigns, spiritual renewal events, marriage and family enrichment retreats—all in a context of pluralism, and often without the direct support of our sponsoring church. Even when serving in more familiar pastoral settings, many of our ministries are nondenominational and our methods nontraditional. Ours is often a language and a ministry environment strange and distant to many mainstream holiness churches.

Does this mean that such callings in ministry are less important to the kingdom of God and Christ's Church? Or are we simply unable to validate such ministry because it doesn't fit the popular perception of what really *counts* in ministry, or because its product isn't readily visible and measurable?

I retain a high regard and deep respect for the pastoral calling. Visionary and dedicated pastoral leadership in the local church is the place where the rubber meets the road, where the vital center of church life and activity takes place. I want no part in depreciating the pastoral office or its importance in the pantheon of ministry callings. Statistically, not only do pastors comprise the largest segment of clergy in the church, but also their work in evangelism, church growth, and outreach are absolutely vital to the survival of the church. Without them, we perish! Indeed, three of the first five years of my own full-time ministry were among the happiest, most satisfying, and fruitful of my clergy life—as a pastor!

Many faithfully
serve God
and the
church
outside the
pastorate.

Yet, as the apostle Paul makes abundantly clear in his letter to the Ephesians, while there is one mission, there are many callings in ministry, without differentiation (4:11-12, NASB):

The callings: "He [called] some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers."

The mission: "for . . . the building up of the body of Christ."

If *real* ministry is that place where

God calls us to serve "for . . . the building up of the body of Christ," then the total mission and work of the church is achieved best by embracing every calling to Christian ministry. There should be no distinction as to the relative importance or standing of one Christian vocation over another. God's call to ministry, wherever it is practiced and by whatever name, is a gift too sacred and important to be marginalized or trivialized.

Rx: All-embracing Ministries; Embracing All Ministers

How can we recognize, affirm, and support the many ministry vocations by which the church carries out its mission? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Conduct an investiture or commissioning service for all who serve in specialized ministries.

2. Whenever possible, make district retreats, conferences, and social gatherings for ministers inclusive of all active clergy, not only pastors.

3. Make district and general boards and councils more representative of the many vocations in ministry. One example might be to include religion faculty members on District Boards of Ministerial Studies.

4. Find ways to recognize and honor specific vocations in ministry: a special day, a program, a service feature, an interview, a pulpit guest, a video highlight, a social event.

5. Feature stories in publications that highlight the outstanding work of ministers in specialized ministries.

6. Encourage and model attitudes and actions that reflect interest and concern for the work of those who serve in such ministries. Make a phone call. Write a letter of encouragement. Send an audiotape or videotape or a fax. Use your newsletter/bulletin to inform. Post a letter.

7. Personally and publicly pray for your colleagues in ministry outside the pastorate. How long has it been since you have publicly prayed for the work of hospital and prison chaplains? Or for professors, counselors, campus chaplains? They long to be remembered and supported in their work by the church that has commissioned them.

Of course, some of this is already happening. Some doubtlessly have

found other ways to express care and concern. Changed perceptions at the grass roots will tell us when we have succeeded. In the meantime, an indication of the work that remains is the persistence of a largely unrecognized or misunderstood problem, whispered about but seldom publicly ad-

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in ministry.

dressed. We are at the point now where, as some sage put it, "The only difference between the problem and its solution is that people recognize and understand the solution!"

Leaving . . . Finding

Twenty-eight years ago I was privileged to enter the real ministry of chaplaincy, with the endorsement of my church. My calling took me to the far corners of the world and to every region of my country. I was blessed and privileged to be given the gift of ministry in the service of God and country. In that process, I learned the literal truth that some are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—and, in the context of our time and ministry needs, chaplains and directors of continuing education.

"Why are you leaving the ministry, David?" In retrospect, I hold no grudge or grievance for Mother's question. Were she here, I would like to answer her again. My answer would sound something like this: "To bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are most in need, in the place where God has called me. And that's not 'leaving the ministry,' Mother. That's finding it!"

Of course Mother knew that; she just didn't know that she knew it! ❧

Preaching Is Significant

William Willimon wrote that “people are ripe for a voice that gives them something significant worth living and dying for” (H. B. London, Jr., and Neil B. Wiseman, *The Heart of a Great Pastor* [Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1994], 22). These are encouraging words. In an age when some church growth specialists would tell us that preaching is in demise, these are strengthening words.

Pastor, be encouraged—preaching is still a priority of our task. Paul’s admonition to Timothy, “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2), has not been withdrawn, negotiated, or diminished. It is still a mandate.

Pastor, be encouraged—preaching is still God’s means of confronting people with eternal truths. While it is not the only way, it is a way that has the promise of God’s touch and His guidance. God reminds us concerning His Word, “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

Pastor, be encouraged—the preaching event is a moment, if heart, mind, and spirit are prepared, when the eternal invades the present, and life focuses on principles. Every pastor needs to know that, as Willimon states, “People are ripe for a voice that gives them something significant worth living and dying for.” Pastor, know that what you preach will make a difference in someone’s life—a significant difference in some. We need to know we are only responsible to preach as best we can, with a heart and mind saturated with a truth, prayed full with the Spirit of God, and eager to proclaim on God’s behalf. The Holy Spirit will take such proclamations and plant them in the hearts



by C. Neil Strait

*District Superintendent,
Church of the Nazarene,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

and minds of hearers. It is a spiritual transaction we preachers need to trust more than we do.

This is no time for casual preparation and passionless preaching. Herbert Carson wrote: “A preacher who has doubts about the gospel is a menace to any congregation. The pulpit is no place for hesitant uncertainty. It is a platform from which the herald of God announces with profound conviction the truth of God’s own most holy Word” (Herbert M. Carson, *Hallelujah!* [Hertfordshire, England, 1980], 74). Add to these thoughts the words of Craig Loscalzo, when he writes: “Perhaps the downfall of preaching in the late twentieth century has been the proliferation of passionless preaching” (Craig Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons That Connect* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 77).

The source for preaching and the cure for passionless preaching is, of course, the Word. We are not proclaimers of opinions nor dispensers of motivational talks—though a dynamic sermon will motivate. More, we are preachers of the Word—an eternal Word that gives substance and significance to our preaching. Dennis Kinlaw

reminds us that “nothing in the world is as significant to a preacher as the day Scripture comes alive for him—the day when Scripture seizes him, when he knows that it belongs to him and he belongs to it” (Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit* [Wilmore, Ky.: Francis Asbury Press, 1985], 9).

Pastor, be encouraged—preaching is still God’s method of invading the human predicament with truth and hope. E. Stanley Jones reminded us that “congregations will gather around a pulpit from which living water is flowing.”

There is a story out of the French Revolution that tells of a group of political prisoners shut away in a dark, dingy dungeon. One of them had a Bible, and the other prisoners were eager to have him read it. But the darkness of the dungeon prohibited him from seeing the words. The only bit of light came from a tiny window near the ceiling, but that for only a few minutes each day. The prisoners lifted their friend with the Bible onto their shoulders and into the sunlight. There, for a few minutes, he would read. Then they would lower him into their midst, and with anxious voices they would ask, “Tell us, what did you read while you were in the light?” (Donald McCullough, “Enlarging the Mind to Expand the Ministry,” in Maxie Dunnam, Gordon MacDonald, and Donald W. McCullough, *Mastering Personal Growth* [Carol Stream, Ill.: Christianity Today, 1992], 98). Our task, as preachers, is to stand before people and share what God has revealed to us, “while [we] were in the light.”

Pastor, be encouraged! God’s mandate to us is to preach. His promise to us is that He will attend our preparation and anoint our preaching. ✠

The (Wo)manly Art of Preaching

by Thomas W. Goodhue

Pastor, Island Park United Methodist Church
on Long Island, New York

Most preachers, homiletics professors, and writers about sermon preparation are male. Even the women in pulpits today have studied primarily under men and had male role models. How has male experience shaped our proclamation of the Word?

Growing up male, I discovered that our society expected me to show masculinity by

- thinking analytically and dispassionately,
- knowing the answers—or at least pretending to know them,
- being strong,
- initiating, and
- being one of the guys.

Women, on the other hand, have been expected to show femininity by

- thinking intuitively,
- admitting ignorance (or pretending it!),
- being emotional,
- nurturing others' growth, and
- being sensitive to and empathizing with others.

Taking a broader view

Thinking analytically

Men are expected to be analytical; my seminary emphasized analytic thought in exegesis. Scholarly analysis is valuable—but it is not always much help in preparing sermons. How many of us left the seminary with critical tools but little idea of how to move from textual criticism to interpretation? To understand our experience, we must venture into the realm of feeling—and for many men, this is foreign territory.

Our most powerful proclamation of the Word is almost always an eyewitness account: telling what we ourselves have seen and done and experi-

enced. My best sermon on evangelism, I am told, was my most personal one: the tale of how my home church showed courage in the face of political harassment—and I chose Christ over the surrounding culture.

One female pastor told Lynn Rhodes that she initially received complaints about her sermons being too emotional and too personal, but she said that she “continued to preach that way until the people in my congregation began to see that what I was doing was affirming their right to reflect seriously on their own faith experiences.” Soon 20 of her parishioners mustered the courage to preach.¹

Knowing the answers

School—and cross-examination in debate—taught me the power that knowing the answers conveys. Whether we are delivering a Communion meditation or teaching a Bible

study class, we clerics often see our role as giving answers to the assembled. In *Changing Male Roles in Today's World*, Richard P. Oilstone wrote that in our society the five hardest things for men to say are “I don't know,” “I made a mistake; I was wrong,” “I need help,” “I am afraid,” and “I am sorry.”²

For at least a year after graduation from seminary I dutifully played the part of Scripture expert every Sunday morning. I told what the Greek text “really meant.” I pointed out the historical background “essential” to understanding each passage. I must have bored my congregation silly.

Then one week I wrestled with a passage that baffled me. After thorough exegesis I could not make heads or tails of it. The morning that I was to preach, my ultimate nightmare confronted me: 9 A.M. and a sermon in shambles. When I entered the pulpit, I—with great trepidation—admitted to my congregation, “I am not sure that I have figured out what this passage means.” That got their attention! I shared what few bits of background seemed helpful, offered tentative stabs at what the story might be about, invited them to share their responses to the text, and sat down. I was greeted not by disappointment but by appreciation—I had given them permission to wrestle with the meaning of Scripture.

Barbara Brown Zikmund has noted that women use language that suggests openness to examination. According to linguistic studies, in conversation they ask questions more often than men do and qualify their statements with tag lines such as “Don't you think?” Homiletics professors coached many of us to avoid this sort of hedging so as not to weaken



our message, but Zikmund contends that "when the preacher shares her journey and vulnerability she may speak more directly to the needs of average believers."³

Couldn't our proclamation of the Word be strengthened by admitting our weakness? The editors of *Leadership* tell potential writers, "Our readers expect to share disappointments and struggles as well as triumphs. Each article must balance 'what went well' and 'what didn't go so well.' We've found this gives the writer credibility and allows our pastor/readers to identify more readily with the situation" (*Ministry Magazine*, January 1991).

Isn't it possible that our flocks appreciate this kind of openness too?

Being strong

In our society men are expected to be strong—which too often means insensitive and rather self-centered. Women are the ones trained to empathize. But all preachers would benefit by learning to reason with empathy for others, to think with feeling. I once saw a preacher get himself into a great deal of trouble by saying, "Genesis shows us that marriage between a man and a woman is the paradigm of Christian life." He was genuinely shocked by the uproar his sermon provoked. Perhaps greater empathy could have helped him realize that he should proceed with respect to the feelings of the widowed, unmarried, abandoned, and otherwise single—who made up 70 percent of his congregation.

Native Americans taught their children to "walk in another's moccasins" before criticizing. Maybe we preachers should apply that advice before we try to tell others anything.

Initiating or responding

We clergy, especially those of us who like to see ourselves as strong leaders, often fall into a typically male trap. We tend to see ourselves as the ones who initiate all reflection, dialogue, and action, rather than as those who share their response to God's Word and who respond to concerns raised by parishioners.

For years I wondered why my entreaties to Christian compassion produced more guilt than grace. Only recently has it dawned on me that I

have been calling for compassion but not embodying it. I am on much firmer ground, I now realize, and more likely to be heard, when I preach not as an expert on justice but as a shepherd who feels distress for the pain of my flock. I don't need to be able to answer every legal issue surrounding obscenity to see that porn hurts the men who buy it. Nor do I need a special call to speak about peace, only compassion for the victims of war.

When I entered the pulpit, I admitted, "I am not sure that I have figured out what this passage means."

Laypeople tend to be suspicious of the prophetic word anyway. Perhaps they recognize how seldom God calls prophets—and how often those who claim that role are mistaken.

Being one of the guys

And then there is the pressure to be one of the guys. Face it, ours is not viewed as the most manly of professions, and this perception takes a toll on male egos. One senior pastor coped with this pressure by appointing himself chaplain of the high school football team and salting every fall sermon with gridiron references. (How his congregation must have rejoiced after the last game of the season!)


More subtly, most of us prepare our sermons by consulting the words of men and seldom present the writing, lives, or wisdom of women. Take a quick survey of your library. Who wrote most of the books you consult as you prepare for preaching—men or women?

Doesn't this neglect of the experience of women make our preaching more repetitious and more irrelevant to most of our parishioners? And does not the need to appear strong and cool make it harder for us to reveal our frailty and brokenness from the pulpit?

Getting it together

Does all this seem too one-sided? There are certainly good things to be said for masculinity. The self-confidence before a crowd that I learned in high school spared me the stage fright that afflicts so many talented women of the cloth. Knowledge, analytic thought, and strength of conviction (and delivery) surely aid the proclamation of the Word. Certainly God uses these qualities—even when found in insecure, bombastic clerics. But the church also needs those virtues our society assigns to women.

To be certain, change threatens many parishioners. But the major risk men face in learning to preach with these supposedly feminine qualities is not rejection by our hearers, but change. To open up, to share, to feel more deeply, to admit ignorance, to confess weakness—all these lead us farther away from tough, hard masculine roles and identities.

We men have been taught to feel ashamed of anything that smacks of weakness. But, as Baptist preacher George Thomas has said, on Good Friday Jesus showed us that there are things worth being humiliated for. To free ourselves from the burdens of misdirected shame, we can reclaim the message of Scripture that Christ atoned for our shame, that there is strength in weakness, that weakness does not make us unworthy in God's eyes. When we can claim with Paul that we are "not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16, NASB), we will truly preach the Good News. 

Thomas Goodhue is the author of *Sharing the Good News with Children*. (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1992).

1. Lynn Rhodes, *Co-Creating* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 47-48.

2. Richard P. Oilstone, *Changing Male Roles in Today's World* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1982), 24.

3. Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women as Preachers: Adding New Dimensions to Worship," *Journal of Women and Religion*, summer 1984, reprinted in the Pacific School of Religion bulletin, fall 1985, 1-2.

Empty Pantries and Overdue Bills

Honey, I'm coming home for lunch. I'll be there in just a few minutes."

Bettye shocked me with her response: "There's no need to come home. We have no food in the house." Then she asked, "Do you have any money?"

I replied, "No, but it's lunchtime, and I'm coming home anyway." It was 1958, and I was the pastor of a home mission church in Gainesville, Florida.

When I arrived home, imagine my chagrin when I discovered that she wasn't kidding. There really wasn't a single morsel of food in the house. We had no money, and this was in pre-credit-card days. So how do you feed three hungry children and two adults with absolutely nothing?

I gathered three cartons of pop bottles from under the house and from the garage and sold them for 45 cents at the grocery store. That was enough to buy a can of tomato soup, a tube of crackers, and a package of Kool-Aid. I was relieved to have something for the children to eat. How do you tell three small children: "It's prayer and fasting day. Think of the joy of having nothing to eat and getting to pray for those who are less fortunate than we!"



by Gene Williams

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It didn't make sense. As adults, Bettye and I could forgo food for the pleasure of prayer and fasting, but we were grateful for the soup and crackers for our children. As we sat down, I thanked God for the meal, and the children began to eat.

While we were eating, the telephone rang. Mrs. Adams, one of the 12 members of that little church, was calling to ask, "Mrs. Williams, what's wrong at the parsonage?"

Bettye replied: "Nothing. There is nothing wrong."

Mrs. Adams responded: "Yes, there is something wrong. For when I was having my devotions this morning, God laid your little family on my heart."

Bettye said, "If you had called earlier,

I would have told you that we had nothing to eat." She then told Mrs. Adams what I had done. We did, indeed, have food for lunch. Bettye also told her that this was payday, and I would get my weekly check in the amount of \$50.00 at prayer meeting that evening. We would be fine. She should not worry about us.

I don't know how many phone calls Mrs. Adams made that afternoon, but before suppertime that evening, she and her son-in-law backed a station wagon loaded with food to the front door of that little parsonage. We had a full storehouse of food. They even cooked the chicken! That's the closest we ever came to missing a meal. I do have to say that God never forsook us. We never had to beg for bread. We always felt a sense of security for our material needs.

One of the most common pressure points with which all pastors wrestle is how they will survive financially or materially in this world. We have all heard the war stories of those who could not make ends meet. There is too much of that.

This is very clearly a major pressure point in the ministry. The lack of adequate support has, according to a survey conducted by *Leadership* magazine, created financial problems that require 69% of the spouses of pastors to work outside of the home. Money struggles are listed by H. B. London, Jr., and Neil Wiseman in *Pastors at Risk* as a major reason that the pastoral ministry is so difficult today.

The financial support scale for pastors is way less than it ought to be. However, David wrote that he had "not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25, KJV). Somehow, someday, God provides for all of His people.

Jesus said:

For this reason I say to you, do



not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious, then, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or

One of the most common pressure points with which all pastors wrestle is how they will survive financially.

"With what shall we clothe ourselves?" (*Matt. 6:25-31, NASB*).

Are those words for laymen only? I think not! Do they not also apply to the man or woman behind the pulpit? I think so! If I understand what Jesus is saying, He is committing the Father to take care of those who trust Him. Maybe the key phrase is the last verse, "Do not be anxious" (v. 31). As those who are God-called for the special assignment as pastor to God's people, we are to become people of faith in God's promises. Faith eliminates anxiety. Anxiety is worry without hope, and we are not without

hope. We may not always understand *how* He will take care of us, but we know that He *will* provide for those whom He calls to special assignments.

Someone may say to me: "That's easy for you to say. You are the pastor of a large church and are well cared for." That is true. I am much better cared for than I ever dreamed. However, there have been some tough times along the way. I learned early that God did not abandon those who had absolute faith in Him.

In 1956 Bettye and I left Nashville for seminary in Kansas City in a '41 Chevrolet coupe that had 100,000 miles on it. I had \$50 in my pocket, no job in Kansas City, and a six-week-old baby. In retrospect, it seems as if it was a reckless thing to do. At the moment, it seemed the only thing to do in response to God's call to preach His Word and my need to be prepared. There is something about "naive faith" that is beautiful. God seems to find that irresistible. We were obviously naive in leaving Nashville for Kansas City. God must have called a whole platoon of angels to be on standby to watch over two very naive children of faith.

We moved in with friends until I could find work—which I did before the week was over. With a job in hand, we then got our own apartment—one room and a back porch with a shared bath. Finally, I could begin to carry out what I knew God wanted me to do. I was ready to settle in and prepare for God's calling on my life. That call had become my life's focus.

There were many scary times when there wasn't enough money. Still, we never missed a meal, and we had enough clothes to wear. God seemed to always know exactly what we were going to need.

During my second year in seminary, a second child came to bless our home. This put an even heavier financial burden on us. Help from family members was totally out of the question, but help from God is always a reality. While carrying a full-time load at the seminary and working 40 hours a week in a grocery store, I was given the opportunity to be the pastor of a little country church 65 miles from Kansas City. We drove up early Sunday morning to Mirabile, Missouri,

ministered to the people as best we could, spent the afternoon in someone's home, and drove back to Kansas City late Sunday night. Whatever people gave in the offering was my salary. Sometimes it helped. Many times I barely broke even with gas expenses. Yet it was greatly rewarding and a joy to finally be a pastor!

Anxiety is worry without hope, and we are not without hope.

Serving that little country church wasn't too difficult during the summertime. However, I will have to confess there were times when the 100% wool suit that I wore—my only suit—was wringing wet from sweat as a result of preaching in that small building in the boiling sun with no air conditioning.

When winter came, the journey became a little tougher challenge. I especially recall those Sundays when it snowed and became bitterly cold. On one of those days, God inspired a good layman to give me his topcoat made of heavy mohair. Never mind that it was hand-me-down. It was warm. Before the night was over, it would come in very handy.

On the way home late that night, something went wrong with the motor of our car. We were stranded on the side of a cold winter highway. Due to the foresight of God's provision, I had a coat to break the wind and keep me warm until I could get help with the car.

I wouldn't take anything for the experiences of those early years at seminary. There I learned that the same God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies of the field also feeds His own and clothes them too. I also learned the rich rewards of those experiences at that little country church.

While I was the pastor there, a young father went out to hunt rabbits. When he did not return at dark, his wife called her father, who went looking. He found this young hus-

band and father—the victim of a tragic hunting accident.

On a recent trip back to Mirabile, I visited an old country store where a group of farmers were sitting around a pot-bellied stove on a rainy day. One of those farmers was the son of that young father. He had been 10 days old when he lost his dad. What joy and satisfaction it was to visit with him and talk about his dad!

We also stopped at the home of one of the couples, who are now in their 80s. They were so happy to see me. We rejoiced together as we shared memories of hot summer days and cold winter nights of over 35 years ago.

Memories of that visit reminded me again of the tender loving care of a Father who thinks more of His highest creatures than He does of sparrows and lilies. It was richly rewarding to know that I had been a vital part of their lives.

There have been many other times when but for divine provision I would have been in trouble financially.

Traveling with four young children is quite a challenge. That trial is greatly magnified if one of the children happens to become ill. On one of our vacation journeys from Princeton, Florida, to Nashville, Brent became very critically sick. Initially, we thought he had a fever from a cold or a mild case of the flu. By the time we had traveled the six hours to the Florida/Georgia state line, it became obvious that this was no minor problem. His fever jumped so high that it burned your hand to touch him. Upon inquiring, we found that the closest major hospital was in Valdosta, Georgia. We headed there as fast as we could safely travel.

It didn't take the physician long to determine that our precious two-year-old was seriously ill with bronchial pneumonia. They placed him in an oxygen tent and on an ice mattress. Bettye stayed at the hospital with Brent while I checked into a motel with the other children.

Two extra days in a motel and an unexpected hospital stay did not fit our travel budget. So I called back to Princeton and spoke to a friend about a loan so I could pay the unanticipated bills.

He did more than make the loan.

He called some of our members who were vacationing in southern Georgia and informed them of the problems our family was having. Imagine our surprise when they showed up that morning to visit the parsonage family at the hospital. Since it was Sunday, the three healthy children and I worshiped with them at the Valdosta Church of the Nazarene.

We need to work hard, trust completely, and then we will see what God can do!

Upon returning to the hospital, we knew Brent was better. While Bettye was napping, he had pulled the plug on the ice mattress. She was awakened by the pool of water flooding the floor.

After mopping the floor, the weary nurse checked with the attending physician, who decided that it was safe to allow us to continue our journey. When I went to the business office to make arrangements for payment on Brent's care, imagine the joy I felt in my heart when I was told nothing was due. Our dear friends from home had paid the bill in full.

I could go on and on with story after story about how God provided for us in times of crisis. For the first 25 years of my ministry, there were no savings accounts, no TSAs. It was hand-to-mouth, payday to payday. But we lived—and we made it! The experience in Gainesville was the closest we ever came to hunger. There was rarely a surplus, never a safety account, but neither did we ever go without the absolute necessities of life.

There is no way to convey the peace that comes with naive trust in God's promises. I understand that some don't have much of this world's goods. However, at times I sometimes fear that we expect to have too much of this world's goods. Some young

couples get married and expect to have in the first few years of their marriage what it took their parents many years to acquire. It seems to me that some young pastors expect early in their ministry to reap the benefits that it has taken others of us 25 or more years to acquire.

Are we trying to get too far too fast? Have we lost the naive faith that sparrows have and that has sustained the rest of God's creation? For they take the provisions of God without questioning or complaining. Maybe we need to work hard, trust completely, and then we will see what God can do!

I truly understand being underpaid and having poor financial support from those early years. Maybe, just maybe, we have given Satan a hammer to use in pounding us into the ground when the God who multiplies fish and bread wants to demonstrate His providential care.

We may need to be bivocational. In fact, that was my experience as pastor in that small church in Gainesville, Florida. Following our empty pantry experience, I looked for some way to enhance my \$50 per week salary. I was able to supplement my income by teaching school. By the way, this opened many doors of opportunity in the community. If a bivocational stint becomes necessary, teaching is a natural avenue. In some cases, it may be necessary for the spouse to work outside of the home. I hope it's for necessities and not luxuries.

However, we do not need to permit this pressure to rob us of the joy and peace that rightfully belongs to all of God's people. I believe these fruits belong especially to faithful pastors.

The pantry may be empty and the bills overdue, but we will make it because He never forsakes those who have absolute faith in Him and His provision. After all, Peter *did* walk on water! The water *was* turned into wine! Lazarus *did* come forth! There *was* bread and fish for everyone! The nets *were* full!

I really believe God still has trouble resisting naive faith. So, as Bill Gaither asked in his song "I Believe," "Why should I worry or fret?"

Taken from the book *Living in the Zoo and Loving It*, by Gene Williams, Nazarene Publishing House, 1995.

Disability Insurance: A Necessity, Not an Option

Submitted by Pensions and Benefits USA, Church of the Nazarene

Preparing for disability makes personal sense. The personal costs of disability are high—whether they be financial, physical, emotional, or mental.

You are disabled when a medical condition reduces your ability to perform your occupational duties. Frequently, disabilities are due to accidents, but they also can occur over time, as with heart disease or a disabling pneumatic/bronchial infection.

Disabilities are expensive! Almost without exception, they require expensive treatment at the very time when the ability to earn income either is diminished greatly or eliminated entirely. And disabilities are not rare. Nearly one person in seven will become disabled for five or more years prior to age 65. That number increases to nearly one in five for those between 35 and 65. In addition, disability is 16 times more likely than death to cause a foreclosure on a home mortgage.

Many church employers offer this very important, and inexpensive, type of coverage as an option in their employment benefit package. A disability insurance plan offers coverage options that protect your income, your family, and your quality of life. Coverage is 24 hours a day for disabilities resulting from accident, sickness, or pregnancy.

In denominational plans, one or both of two qualifications may be re-

quired for long-term disability coverage. The first is related to the ministerial credential one holds. The second is related to full-time church employment. Usually, "full-time employment" means being compensated for at least 30 hours per week or earning full livelihood from the church employment. Proof of good health may or may not be required to enroll.

Nearly one
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With some denominational plans, you may be able to choose a benefit either of monthly fixed-amount payments or of payments that are a percentage of your normal monthly salary. These benefit payments usually continue until the end of most disabilities or until age 65, whichever comes first. In some cases, the benefit amount *may* be reduced by social se-

curity or other disability benefit payments. In one plan, participants may choose a monthly benefit ranging from \$250 to \$1,000 per month.

Some plans also include value-added features. A rehabilitation benefit would help you overcome obstacles to returning to work by providing a salary supplement and job search assistance. Depending upon the plan, you may be eligible for help in accommodation, education, family care, medical, and moving expenses. A family care expense credit would allow you to subtract selected family care expenses from earned income upon returning to work so that this portion of earnings does not reduce the amount of disability benefit. A survivor benefit may be included. If you are considering the purchase of long-term disability coverage, you should ask about each of the above provisions. Know the benefits that are included in your particular plan.

If you do not have adequate resources to provide for your family's financial needs in the event of possible disability, contact your denomination's administrative offices for pensions and benefits, and request information regarding long-term disability insurance. They usually specialize in such plans in addition to the retirement benefit work they do. You may be pleasantly surprised at how affordable your denomination's disability insurance can be.

Time Management for Ministers

There are several things about *time* and the *ministry* that every pastor ought to know. Like Murphy's proverbial Law, these things repeatedly prove themselves true at the most inopportune moment.

1. There is never enough time in the day to do everything that needs to be done.

2. People seldom recognize a nine-to-five work schedule for pastors; it's more likely seen as a 24-hour position.

3. Pastors do not have the luxury of weekends off, let alone the flexibility to just take off for the coast when they feel like doing so.

4. There are always a dozen tasks that you ought to have done yesterday.

5. People, like squeaky wheels, demand attention no matter what else you may be doing at the moment.

6. No matter what you are doing, there's always something else that you ought to be doing.

7. The ministry contains sufficient demands to produce guilt in even the most well-adjusted personality.

8. Every person in the congregation has a set of expectations for the minister, and meeting those expectations takes time.

9. The most important things seldom demand immediate attention; the things that do demand immediate attention are seldom all that important.

10. Just when you think you've found a few minutes for the things that matter most, someone will phone or drop by and expect to chat.

11. Almost everything you do will take longer than you first thought it would.

12. The most neglected responsibilities of pastors are frequently their wives and children.



by Bill O'Connor

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13. You can never do as much in a single day as you believed you could; you can always accomplish more in a month than you thought possible.

14. Time is one of the pastor's most valuable possessions, but ministry demands often encourage unwise expenditures of that irrecoverable resource.

15. Unless you learn to manage time wisely, you will never have enough of it to go around.

I have found each of those simple statements to be universally true. Every ministry concern is somehow involved with time. Every ministry problem is, in some way, impacted by the lack of time.

Sermon preparation takes a backseat to counseling. Counseling gets short shrift because of too many meetings on the calendar. Meetings use up hours that could be spent at home with spouse and family. Visits must be cut short because there is always someone else to see. Staff time is truncated because one or another members of the team has another appointment. Each aspect of ministry seems to cut into every other, so that pastoral work is a continual process of robbing Peter to pay Paul. At the end of the week, the conscientious pastor goes home after a long day feeling guilty for shortchanging half a

dozen or more people and programs of the attention and concern they really needed.

I've lived with the long hours, the tight schedules, the full calendars, the limited availability, and the pressures of ministry long enough to have found some tools to manage the demands and to ease the guilt. Here are some well-worn, but very viable, ideas for making better use of your time. Though the implementation of every idea will not give you enough time for everything, some of these thoughts may help you find more time for the things that matter most.

Your first time-saver is an efficient secretary who can manage your daily schedule, maintain your monthly calendar, and keep you fixed on your pastoral focus.

No one is more valuable than the person who can track your appointments and remind you of your commitments. A good secretary can interrupt the interrupters, bring an end to overlong conferences, and protect you from unnecessary time and energy demands. Hire the best secretary you can find, train her in the time preservation and management skills you need most, pay her well, and use her to full advantage. She will be your first line of self-defense.

Learning to manage your time according to your ministry priorities can save you several hours each week.

You needn't be in the ministry long to understand that your personal study and devotional time, sermon preparation, and planning time are top priority matters. You discover just as quickly that these are often the areas that take a backseat to other things that cry louder and longer for attention.

The only way to solve that problem is to set some ministry priorities for

yourself and stick to them no matter what else may make demands on your time and interest. Set a weekly calendar for yourself that hoards hours for study and sermon preparation. Have your secretary protect those hours by standing guard at your door if need be. Be firm in your refusals to interrupt or misuse the hours you've set aside for your priorities. Defer appointments until later in the day or week. Return phone calls after your priorities have been met.

If there are too many things that you absolutely feel you must do, begin ranking those demands in order of importance, and take care of first things first. Anything left over at the end of a reasonable day will wait until tomorrow.

A simple "To Do" list can be a tremendous tool for keeping yourself on target through the week.

Many years ago I developed a simple form that has proven invaluable in keeping track of all the things I've needed to do. The list is printed in three columns on both sides of a standard piece of paper. It consists of several headings followed by an adequate number of blank spaces for listing items needing to be done. In front of each space is a shorter space used to check off an item once it's done. There are sections for planning; sermon and lesson preparation; telephone calls, hospital calls, and home visits needing to be made; counseling, business, and staff appointments; office work; the scheduling of church and community meetings; correspondence; visitor follow-up; errands and trips to be made; community involvement; housekeeping duties, record keeping, and other paperwork; and a large section for miscellaneous items that won't fit anywhere else on the list.

As something comes up that you need to do, add it to your list. When it's done, check it off. If the list of time demands is long, you might want to prioritize items by numbering them 1-2-3, or labeling them A-B-C. Concentrate on first things first. Anything remaining to be done at the end of the day can be moved to the top of tomorrow's priorities. Anything remaining at the end of the week can be picked up next Monday morning.

People seldom recognize a nine-to-five work schedule for pastors.

It is also very helpful to learn to deal with things in as few steps as possible.

Make all your phone calls at one point in the day. Schedule meetings in close succession. This has the advantage of allowing you to move from one meeting to the next gracefully because other people are waiting. Handle papers only once. When a letter comes in, make notes directly on it concerning your response, and give it to your secretary; don't set it aside and pick it up several times before getting around to dealing with it. If a problem can be dealt with now, don't put it off. Take action when action is required. When something has to be confronted, confront it. The more things you can move off your list expeditiously, the more time you will have for other concerns that cannot be handled so simply.

Learn to be a good quarterback, and hand off the ball to someone else who can run with it.

Obtain and use some good time management tools, or make some that fit your particular needs.

I've found it helpful to have a daily planner that breaks the day up into 15-minute segments. This can be managed by a secretary, who can remind you at the beginning of the day what you have scheduled, and who can see where to fit other concerns into your schedule as they arise. The same sheet can give you a visual picture of how you really use time if you will just record everything you do in those 15-minute time segments through a period of one or two weeks. What you discover may surprise you.

A weekly or monthly calendar is an essential tool. Without it, you may find yourself with gaps of time on the one hand and overlapping responsibilities on the other.

Other forms that can be highly useful are forms that allow you to keep track of family contacts, recording when you visited and for what purpose, and forms that let you track work delegated to staff or volunteers so that assignments don't slip through the cracks.

Speaking of delegation, that can be one of your biggest time and energy savers.

The truth is that you don't have to do everything yourself. Some things require your attention most of the time—things like preaching, or perhaps crisis counseling—but other matters can be handled as easily by someone else. The first question you should ask yourself when faced with a demand on your time is "Who else could do this?" Learn to be a good quarterback, and hand off the ball to someone else who can run with it. You don't need to be the star of the show. If other people expect you to, you need to train them differently. Delegate what you can; do what you must.


Short-term and long-term planning are equally important as time management tools.

Goals determine your focus. Your focus determines your involvement and your investment. If you plan for the future and work your plan, you will have little difficulty determining what your present priorities ought to be. You will give the greater part of your time and attention to those efforts that will advance your goal. Secondary concerns will be easily recognized and can be given to someone else to manage.

Perhaps your greatest tool for effectively using your time is your understanding of people.

It's a fact of life that 20 percent of the people will usually do 80 percent of the work. You make best use of your time by concentrating on those people who will accomplish the most for Christ and the church. Cultivate that marvelous "Top 20" in your congregation, build strong relationships and deep levels of trust, and employ those faithful few effectively in priority ministry. They will lift much of the load from your shoulders, prove themselves worthy of your trust, and magnify your ministry manyfold. There is no substitute for a group of faithful people linked together in ministry as the pastor sets the example and leads the way.

Your focus
determines
your
involvement
and your
investment.

All of the time maxims I listed at the beginning will prove themselves true again and again. If you've fortified yourself with a few simple tools, you will overcome their influence. You have a choice: you can take charge of time, or time will take charge of you. 

De-emphasize the Eloquence of Empty Chairs

It happens to all of us at one time or another. It's bound to happen again eventually. It's awkward. It's a little embarrassing. It can be so discouraging. There's little we can do to completely avoid it. What is it? It's that dreaded monster called "low turnout"—when the time to begin your small group is upon you, and most of the chairs are empty. It's when you plan for 20, but 2 show up. It's when you realize that those people who said they'd be there aren't—and won't be. What then? What should you do, and what should you not do, to fight discouragement in yourself and to keep it from infecting those who did show up? Here are some suggestions:

1. **DO keep a smile on your face, and be thankful for whoever did come.** Let the people who came know how glad you are for their presence. The important ones are those who came, not those who didn't.
2. **DO focus on the few who came, reminding yourself how Jesus loves each one individually.** This keeps you from fretting about the no-shows and allows you to better meet the needs of those who came.
3. **DO take advantage of the intimate setting.** Continue with your study, discussion, or lesson, but feel free to be creative. Create a cozier atmosphere. Tailor the meeting to the needs of those who came. Allow for more personal discussion.
4. **DO proceed with confidence and assurance.** Your attitude will become infectious.
5. **DO expect God to show up no matter who else doesn't.** His grace and Spirit are not proportional



by Marlo M. Schalesky

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to the number of people at your gathering.


6. **DON'T make excuses for those who didn't come.** Don't even mention the absences.

7. **DON'T explain that there are usually more people at your meeting.** This will only serve to discourage yourself and others by pointing out the small turnout. More people do not necessarily make a better meeting.

8. **DON'T denigrate the no-shows for their absence.** This only creates negative feelings. Keep a positive atmosphere.

9. **DON'T postpone your starting time, hoping for more people to show up.** Start on time.

10. **DON'T ever, ever apologize for low turnout.** God can work as powerfully with a few as with many.

Most of all, when the seeds of discouragement begin to plant themselves in your mind, remind yourself again that Jesus would have died for just one. As long as you yourself have shown up, there's one who Christ loves and gave His life to save. If you are there, so is He—and that's a majority! 

Today's Books for Today's Preachers



JOHN WESLEY AND THE MORAVIANS

by Herbert McGonigle
(Ilkeston, Derbyshire, England:
Moorley's Print and Publishing for
the Wesley Fellowship)

Dr. Herbert McGonigle, principal of Nazarene Theological College in England and author of a small book on *The Arminianism of John Wesley*, has cut new ground in Arminian-Wesleyan studies. By showing more conclusively than anyone else had that John Wesley actually read James Arminius's writings, McGonigle has now published another paper, given at the meeting of the Wesley Fellowship in Britain. He was cofounder of the fellowship in 1985 with the late A. Skevington Wood, and he serves as chairperson.

This paper is now published in a booklet. *John Wesley and the Moravians* chronicles Wesley's relationship with that Germany-originated group and their savory influence upon him and his brother Charles. It shows why Wesley did not merge his Methodists with them and why he finally parted company from them.

—by J. Kenneth Grider

THE POWER OF STORY: REDISCOVERING THE OLDEST, MOST NATURAL WAY TO REACH PEOPLE FOR CHRIST

by Leighton Ford with James Denney
(Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994
Pa089-109-8518, \$10.00)

From the Christian main menu, move to the subdirectory named "Evangelism." You'll discover a new file has been added. Somewhere between "Lifestyle Evangelism" and "Street Witnessing," Dr. Leighton Ford has inserted a new file named "Narrative Evangelism"—the act of living and telling [God's] story to other people.

The world and society are in such a state of flux that there are incredible opportunities for a genuine spiritual revolution. Yet we find many of the evangelistic methods, programs, and techniques outdated and unworkable. Christians feel frustrated. Dr. Ford offers the encouragement: "If you have become a part of the Story of God, then you have a story to share with the people around you. They are eager to hear it. They are *dying* to hear it."

Dr. Ford suggests that 2 Cor. 13:14

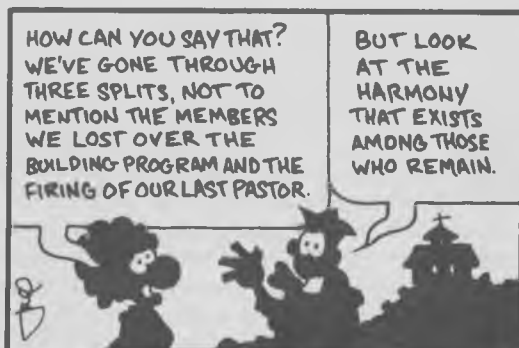
is God's story in crystalline form: the *love* of the Father, the *grace* of the Son, and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit. When God's story collides with my story, mine is called into question. As I reconsider my story, I may get caught up in God's; that is conversation. As I experience God's story—His love, grace, and fellowship—in my own life, I am enabled to *tell* and *model* my story to others; that is narrative evangelism.

The Power of Story is less a how-to book than a you-can-do-it encouragement. The case studies of three individuals—fictional composites—provide the framework upon which Dr. Ford develops his theme. "Ben" represents those "who have been robbed of the love and security of being parented." Through the story of the Father's love—modeled and told—he is saved. "Judith" is into the New Age beliefs and is strongly biased against traditional religion and religious people. As her boss models the grace of the Son, she is drawn toward the Lord. "Darrell" grew up in a Christian home but found his boyhood faith crumble through traumatic challenges. A community of nonjudgmental believers model the fel-

lowship of the Holy Spirit and win him back to Jesus. Real-life situations with plausible Christian responses genuinely encourage us to tell our story.

—by Keith
Jackson
Missionary to
Zambia, Africa

Pontius' Puddle



A Lesson from Russia

by Timothy Tilmant

*Freelance writer,
Arlington, Virginia*

The last couple of summers I have had the privilege of traveling to the former Soviet Union with a religious organization. We distributed Bibles—and other literature. In my travels there, I was able to do many things, such as stand in a prayer circle on a street in old Riga, Latvia, with Russian soldiers sitting, watching us from just a few feet away. This experience alone seemed miraculous, considering the fact that only a few years ago, such an event would have been broken up with people being clubbed over the head and/or being jailed as a best-case scenario.

I spent almost a week in Samara, Russia, on the Volga River, which for years had been a closed city because of its secret military-aircraft factories. One night our main translator, Tanya, in the hotel restaurant, told me how hers and all the people's eyes of Samara had been opened to truth once their city opened up. She said, "It was as though we had been blind all those years, and then all of a sudden we could see."

In Moscow, while handing out literature in the subway, I was pushed by a man who then tried to escort me away, along with my other colleagues. Later I learned that this man was a communist hard-line member of the parliament and had been instrumental in the legislature's passage of a bill prohibiting missionary activity in Russia.

These experiences and many more deeply affected me and made me think a lot about how I should be doing more to present Christ to these and other people around the world. But I think the most indelible memory I took with me from the former USSR is the hunger I saw there for spiritual food.

Many days I would stand on a Russian street corner and give my litera-

ture away in a few minutes. Often grasping hands would be coming at me from all directions, and I would be squeezed by the crowd. It wasn't always like this, but there was always some interest in what we were handing out. It is probably safe to say that we would be ignored on a street corner in an American city.

I know that some pastors in my denomination here in America are at their wits' end to get people to come to Sunday School and church. It would seem that you practically have to beg people to attend. Many pastors are discouraged. Maybe Americans have everything they think they need, so they see no need for God.

It may have something to do with the word "persecution." Americans can get religious materials any time they wish. They are free to go to any church and speak aloud publicly of their religious beliefs. Thousands of bookstores in the United States sell Christian literature. Even American libraries, despite the recent wave of political correctness, have volumes of Christian literature. This literature and so much more is available to Americans without the threat of being incarcerated or beaten over the head for participating in religious activity.

Until recently, this has not been the case for Russians and people of the other republics.

An irony of human nature causes mankind to earnestly desire something when they're told they can't have it. More than that, though, it is a deep hunger for spiritual reality. Believers have suffered terrible persecution in communist countries and have endured torture, not because they were defiant, but because they loved truth and wanted it more than anything else. They were willing to face the threat of brutal beatings and even

death in order to hold on to the treasured truth.

Consider the example of Sergei Kourdakov, a leader of a terror squad in Russia in the 1970s. His job was to beat, terrorize, and arrest believers and confiscate their literature. During many of the raids on believers, Kourdakov recalls that often people would hold tightly to their literature even as they were being beaten mercilessly and sometimes dying from their wounds.

Houses would be ransacked; young men and women and old people alike would be smashed in their faces and other vital parts of their bodies and often left lying in pools of blood. In his book, Kourdakov describes one raid during which he grabbed a man about 65 years old and ripped his Bible from his hand. Kourdakov tore the pages out of the Bible and, at the same time, knocked some of the man's teeth out and smashed his nose. What did the believer do after this? Did he run to escape? Did he retaliate? No! He struggled back to his feet to grab the Bible from Kourdakov's hand. Kourdakov wondered, "What kind of fool is this guy? He values this book more than he values his face."¹

In another situation, one young lady named Natasha Zhdanova was caught in raids on believers' meetings three straight times. Despite severe beatings, she continued to attend secret church meetings. Despite bone crushings and blood-splattering persecution, she considered her faith more valuable than anything else in this life. She was only a young girl. She could have lived in peace with the state if she would have just dropped this religion thing.²

What am I suggesting here? Should we institute a police state so that our Christian faith and literature will be-

come more precious to us, and we will become more resolutely devoted to our Lord? No! Of course not!

Praise God for our freedoms. Praise Him for all the wonderful resources that are at our disposal.

The early Christians had to face lions, tigers, and bears, not to mention wooden crosses. The martyrs of the Reformation period had to endure being burned at the stake. Those who dared to defy Nazis by refusing to accept their doctrine ended up before firing squads or dangling at the end of a rope. And, of course, not the last and certainly not the least in anti-Christian atrocities is the aforementioned former Soviet Union.

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The most
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.....

Don Feder, in his book *A Jewish Conservative Looks at Pagan America*, suggests that the 73-year horror of Communism in the Soviet Union was no more than a divine object lesson. It illustrated graphically what kind of fate mankind would encounter in a godless world.³

I pray that America will not be the next great, but frightful, object lesson that the world has to learn. I pray that we will be like the persecuted Russians and value the Book and our faith more than we value our very own faces. ❧

1. Sergei Kourdakov, *The Persecutor* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 176.

2. *Ibid.*, 199.

3. Don Feder, *A Jewish Conservative Looks at Pagan America* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House Publishers, 1993), 54-55.

Bewildered at Gate 21



by Russell Hosey

Pastor,
Sherman, Texas

I am sitting in the Phoenix airport as I write this article. I am trying to get home after a week of doctoral studies. When I got to the airport, I learned that my flight was going to be delayed by about an hour. Considering the fact that the flight originally would get me home after midnight, I wasn't that thrilled with the news.

While waiting at the gate, I got an idea of trying to hop an earlier flight to a connecting city and possibly making it home sooner. So, I walked up to a gate that was boarding a flight to Albuquerque, New Mexico. The young man behind the counter was messing with some papers as I walked up and stood in front of him. So, I stood there and just waited patiently.

I stood there . . . and stood there . . . and stood there. The fellow never did ask me if he could help. For that matter, he never even acknowledged my presence. Consequently, being the patient person that I am, I grabbed the flight schedule off the counter and proceeded to find out for myself whether I could make a connecting flight. I walked away from that counter without that gate agent ever saying two words to me.

Here is the reason I tell you my tale of woe. I realize that I have met that gate agent before. Not that particular gate agent, but other people just like him—and I've met them in church.

They are the people I run into whenever I visit other churches on vacations and trips. They are the people who treat me with benign neglect because I am a stranger. I am not one of their family.

Now, listen to me carefully: If we at church treat new visitors, especially unchurched visitors, like that young gate agent treated me, how do you think they feel? Will they think that they matter to us? Or that we want to help them or make them feel at home?

The young man didn't growl at me. He didn't say anything rude to me. He didn't tell me to go away. He neglected me. The result was the same. I left and didn't come back. That is exactly what visitors will do in our churches if we neglect them.

Think seriously about them this Sunday as you gather for worship. Those strangers that you meet in the hallways, those people in the next pew that you don't know—they have stepped up to your counter for help. What message are you going to give them?

By the way, after I finished writing this article and finally boarded my plane, ironically I read the following in one of the airline magazines they stick in the back of the seats: *Rule No. 1—“If we don't take care of our customers, somebody else will.”* ❧

God Doesn't Care About Our Socks

by Pam Grossman

Chaplain, Miami, Florida

I have a delightful daughter who, in her short life, has taught me more about God's heart of love for us than all the spiritual books and theology courses in the world.

A few months ago, this seven-year-old played a part in a children's choral cantata where she was one fuzzy member of a flock of sheep. The costumes were simple: all-white clothes and four long black socks, one for each limb. The children all worked very hard, learning their songs, learning their acting lines, learning choreography, and then stringing them all together into the right sequence. Months of rehearsal went into this, along with hours of home practice with audiotapes.

When the big night came, my little girl was excited beyond words. She wanted to do well for the chorus, for the members of our church, and for her parents to be proud of her. As I got her to the performance and all dressed in her sheep's clothing, she was one of a number of bubbling children, bouncing around the sanctuary in anticipation of the event. Just as I

sent her off to the staging area before the cantata, I noticed that her leg socks had fallen down around her ankles wrongly. I told her to pull them up. I then went on up to the balcony to tend the videotape camera, which was my job for this production.

As she marched down one of the aisles singing the entrance music and stomped up to the platform to take her place, I found myself riveted with horror. She had not pulled up her socks! She stood up there, among all the other sheep, with her "legs of lamb" eight inches shorter than everyone else's. I was horrified. I was totally embarrassed. I could not understand why the musical director didn't stop the production right there and scream out, "Hey! You! Grossman kid, pull your socks up to your knees like everyone else!" The error just glared at me.

For some reason, that was all I could see of my daughter's performance, let alone the rest of the children. I actually remember working to keep the camera angles such that her legs would not show in the tape.

Totally lost on me was the wonder-

ful evangelistic message of the cantata, the fine performances of the soloists, the glorious freshness of the children's singing. Basically, I missed the whole show!

About 30 minutes into the production, this terrible flaw exposed itself even to my daughter's oblivious view. She quickly stooped down in the middle of the production and pulled up her socks.

I was furious. "Finally!" I thought. "This is just about finished, and she finally gets the costume straight! Boy, I'll have a thing or two to say about this when I get to her!" And so on it went to the end of the program.

But do you know what? God is very good. When the program was over, the audience clapped and hooted and encouraged the hardworking cast, cheering them on in their appreciation. I did so myself. As I came down from the rafters and passed through the crowds to get to the front of the church, people came up to compliment my daughter's solo and performance. Folks just crowded around the children to praise their efforts. So much work! So much practice. And it all went so well!

I stopped a moment to pause, and to think, and to pray. Right there, halfway down the aisle of my church, I had to sit down a moment to deal with the conviction that came over my heart. What was I doing? What was I thinking?

Here I was, about to greet my child after all this—all this work and effort, all those songs learned rightly, a solo performed rightly, dances mastered rightly, and most important, a wonderful gospel message delivered in music ministry beautifully—and all I could think about were socks? What in the world was I thinking? Oh, boy!



I had missed something critical here. God had just enough time to set me straight before I'd deeply wounded my child.

By the time I got to her and she rushed into my arms to ask, "How did I do? Did you like it?" I was able truly and sincerely to hug and kiss and praise her efforts. Socks were the furthest thing from my mind. We went out to eat later. That evening is a cherished memory now.

Later on, God came back to this with me in prayer. I learned a lesson of great hope and encouragement. It is simply this.

My child had done 99 things right and 1 thing wrong. My mind's eye focused on the single flaw in the performance "perfection" of my daughter. This is what's called being a "critical parent" in some forms of counseling. And I fell into the trap—hook, line, and sinker.

I didn't mean to do this. We seldom do. It's just something we pick up, generally from the way we are parented ourselves. Like some genetic curse, we pass it along through the generations. Mine were critical parents. Hard to please. Perfection was required, and often not even that was adequate for unconditional praise. Praise was often, "Well, that was really pretty good, but . . ." Did you have parents like that too? It's sad that we so often make such things into family traditions.

What is worse is that so often as Christians we transfer this parental attribute to God as our Father. We think He sees us this way. We think we must be perfect to be pleasing to Him. Even then, we know He sees flaws that must spoil His pleasure. So, often we don't even wait on the Holy Spirit to convict us of our flaws, but we take His place, criticizing and downstating our efforts to do good things, until we feel we must constantly try harder just to stay ahead of the score of self-criticism we have mounted up against ourselves.

Heaven forbid we actually do find a legitimate flaw or shortcoming in some effort. In that case, we can totally devalue everything we did, every effort we made, every bit of the attempt simply to be pleasing to our Father in light of our failure.

This was a very special prayer time for me. For the Father carefully took the hand of this small Kingdom child and taught very clearly and distinctly: "God doesn't care about our socks."

I don't know if that will really make sense to you, but it spoke volumes to me.


God is not nearly

so concerned about our getting it all right as that we would simply relax and learn to enjoy His love.

Only when I backed up from my own pettiness and entered into the heart of my child did I see the joyful big picture of her work and ministry accomplishment. She had tried her utmost to be pleasing to God, to her choir mates, to her church, and to her parents. She invested herself fully in the attempt and was a part of a wonderful ministry event. It just doesn't get any better than that! This was not the Vienna Boys Choir, but a small-church children's choir. The point was not the performance, but the love and the relationships built and grown in the service and honor of God.

That was what my daughter most recently taught me of God's heart. God does not measure His value of our efforts by the merit of the performance. Rather, His Father's heart is moved to joy when we invest ourselves to serve Him and one another, building love and relationships in the process.

Socks just don't enter into it at all.

So, the next time you are tempted to put yourself down because you've found a flaw in your performance, or perhaps you find yourself distracted by the loving efforts of someone else because you see a place where they may be less than perfect, just think of my daughter's socks. Remember that God may not even be noticing them. 

It's sad that we
so often make
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traditions.

You Can't Please People All the Time


by Rick Davis

*Pastor,
Midlothian, Texas*

I had just preached my first sermon in the pulpit of my first full-time church. Most people in the reception line afterward spoke encouraging words. However, one elderly lady stopped my self-congratulation.

"One thing, young man," she said, squinting through her granny glasses. "In our pulpit, we do not tell jokes. We do not have funny preachers."

That night my second sermon in this sober pulpit contained nothing remotely humorous. I waited in the reception line for my critic and asked, "What did you think of this sermon?"

"Just like all the other preachers," she sniffed, "no sense of humor." 

A Wounded Pastor's Rescue

I was putting away my sermon notes one night after the evening service when I noticed a light under the door of an elder's office. I wasn't surprised. As a volunteer staff member, this elder often put in long hours at the church. I decided to pop my head in to say good-night. When I opened the door, I was left speechless. There sat the entire elder church board, meeting in an unscheduled, secret mission.

"Uh, hi," I said, groping for words.

Equally unnerved by my chance discovery of the meeting, the elders' faces blanched, conveying both embarrassment and guilt. After a few moments of awkward small talk, I excused myself and hurried out of the church. I knew my days in that church, and maybe in ministry, were coming to an end.

Beware of Sheep Dismissed from the Fold

I had accepted the call to this church with zeal and optimism. Recovering from the devastation of a pastor's moral lapse, this church, by the time I arrived, had shrunk from 800 to 175 members.

I threw myself into the work. My wife and I soon fell in love with the people. Emotionally I was on a high. The church began to reverse its course. Within four years, attendance reached 400, and the past wounds appeared to be healing.

About this time, two families began visiting from another church. They were candid about the fact that the board of their previous church had asked them to leave. I didn't ask any questions. Looking back now, however, I wish I had.

At first the new families were supportive and enthusiastic. They seemed overjoyed to have found a church home—a congregation that would love and accept them. They quickly volunteered to serve. Within



by Jim Amandus with Bob Moeller

*Freelance Writer,
Libertyville, Illinois*

one year both men were elected to the elder board.

I had felt a vague discomfort with each family. They seemed to have trouble accepting other people's shortcomings. They displayed little patience or tolerance with those not meeting their standards.

One of the men in particular seemed to have trouble staying in the same job. A pattern of conflict seemed to appear with each of his employers. He would have an initial confrontation with a supervisor over what he claimed were ethical short-cuts or compromises. Refusing to yield to his boss's authority or company policy, he would eventually resign and move on. It was always their fault he left the company, never his. Later I discovered he had a similar pattern with pastors in the churches he had attended.

As these men gained influence, the church atmosphere seemed to be marked by suspicion and tension. My wife was the first to see the implications of the rigidity creeping into the congregation.

"Jim, we're not going to last very long in this climate," she observed.

I shrugged off her comment, believing I could work out any problem that might arise. After all, we were all reasonable people, committed to doing God's work in God's way.

During this time, a couple from our

church had separated, and, despite our efforts to bring reconciliation, filed for divorce. The wife left the church; the husband stayed on. Hurtling and in need of fellowship, he turned to our singles group.

Immediately, one of the new elders objected.

"Our singles ministry is for people who have never married or are widowed," he argued, "not for people going through a divorce.

"Furthermore, I don't think he should be allowed to sing in the choir. If we expect God to bless our church, we've got to maintain our standards."

"Frank," I replied, "this person neither committed adultery nor deserted his spouse. I don't believe in divorce any more than you do. But he's a member of the body, and we need to reach out to him at this critical point in his life."

The elder was unyielding. The man had to leave the singles group and the choir—now. He received support for his hard line from the other new elder.

"I'm concerned about the purity of our church, aren't you, Pastor?" the second elder asked.

From that day forward, a hairline fracture emerged between those two elders and myself. It would eventually grow into a San Andreas Fault of distrust and acrimony.

These two men managed to convince the rest of the elders. I was instructed to relay the news to the divorced man that he could no longer attend the singles group or sing in the choir.

I felt caught in the middle. I was spending significant time with the man, trying to encourage him. But I was also accountable to the elder board.

I balked at the thought of hitting him with such hard news with no warning. When I did meet with him, I

softened the news by telling him that, due to his divorce, there were concerns about his church involvement. But I stopped short of saying he was forbidden from taking part in the two groups.

When I reported on my conversation, the two elders were upset. They insisted I meet with him again and tell him exactly what had been decided. I apologized for failing to communicate the elders' decision clearly.

"Forgiveness granted," one of them said.

At a nearby restaurant, I met the divorced man for coffee. I told him the elders' decision.

"They're saying I'm unclean," he said, his head bowed. "That hurts, Jim. I'm crushed."

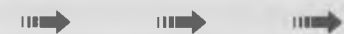
I wished I had some words to say. After a long silence, he said, "Maybe it would be better if I attended another church."

"I hope you stay with us," I said, "but I can understand why you'd feel otherwise."

He did stop coming to our church, but my wife and I continued to invite him over to our house.

All appeared to be fine with the elders until three months later. During a meeting, one of the two men looked straight at me and said, "Jim, I'm concerned that you have a character problem."

"What is it?" I asked.



The bottom line: a minister is a terrible thing to waste.

"I think you're a habitual liar," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "Not only that, I think your eight-year-old son may be picking it up from you."

I was flabbergasted. Though I didn't react outwardly, several minutes elapsed before I recovered my inner composure. I had never considered myself perfect, but this was the first time anyone had questioned my basic integrity.

I thought the situation three months earlier was resolved. But I

could see it wasn't. While forgiveness had been granted, trust had not. I could understand the basis of the criticism of me, but the charge against my son was unfounded.

The seriousness of the situation began to sink in. These men were true to "the letter of the law" but knew nothing of grace, forgiveness, and love. I began to fear the future.

A Prisoner in My Own Parish

Only a few weeks after this traumatic confrontation, I stumbled onto the elders in secret session.

When we met for a scheduled meeting a week later, I expressed to them my deep hurt and disappointment over their actions.

"Gentlemen," I began, "I've always believed that we could work out problems openly and honestly. What you did—meeting without me—lacked integrity."

The elders apologized. But our relationship became increasingly strained. I found myself analyzing my every word, whether in private conversation or from the pulpit. I documented everything—from memos to announcements to telephone calls. Rightly or wrongly, I felt like a prisoner in my own church. Joy and freedom vanished from ministry.

Sadly, the congregation knew little or nothing of this. And, as tensions mounted, my passion for preaching diminished. I was too emotionally distracted to give my best to the congregation.

I found it demeaning to sit in my office like a lonely soldier entrenched in hostile territory, keeping logs and checking records. Struggling to survive sapped my energy. Trying to protect myself from the next surprise attack on my character consumed my working and waking hours.

The siege mentality was taking its toll. I was losing my self-confidence and my desire to be a pastor.

My wife's response was blunt. "Jim, put your résumé together." Furious at the treatment I was receiving, and livid at the accusations made against our children, she was ready to pack our bags and leave.

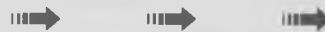
I stumbled on, though, hoping to find my way out of the stalemate.

Now You See Him, Now You Don't

Though everyone agreed we should work through the problem, we were

unable to find a solution. The trust level reached depression-era lows when the elders requested I take a sabbatical—immediately.

The next Sunday one of the elders stood before the congregation and simply announced I would be taking a leave of absence. No further explanations were offered. No questions from the membership were allowed. One Sunday I was in the pulpit; the next Sunday I wasn't.



This was the first time anyone had questioned my basic integrity.

I remember thinking, *I'm being treated exactly like my divorced friend*. It hurts to feel like an impurity.

The next Saturday, sitting in the living room, the terrible reality struck. Turning to my wife, I said, "Lori, tomorrow's Sunday. Where are we going to church?"

Our forced exile had driven us from our spiritual home. We were no longer welcome among the people to whom we had given our lives for almost six years. We held each other and cried.

When individuals from the church would call and ask, "What's going on?" all I could say was, "A situation has arisen between the elders and me we're trying to resolve. If you want more specifics, call them."

I didn't want to open myself to the charge I was talking behind the elders' backs.

Those who did call the elders were given little information. As a matter of policy, the elders had decided not to comment on the situation.

If not for the Psalms, the stress of the situation would have crushed me. Those emotionally poetic words were my lifeline to God during those dark days. I grew in my empathy and understanding of David as I memorized many of his songs.

My pain was sometimes so intense

I would repeat a particular psalm at five-minute intervals throughout the entire day. That discipline kept me from giving in to the overpowering desire to retaliate, to vindicate myself. Instead, I found the peace of mind to trust God for justice to prevail.


In one last attempt to save the situation, we approached the leaders of a large and influential church that had ties to our congregation. We asked if they would be willing to act as mediators. They readily agreed and sent two men from their staff to meet with the elders and myself.

The two elders promptly listed their grievances. I didn't challenge their accusations but opted instead to take an open and conciliatory stance.

I admitted I had mishandled the divorce controversy. I confessed that I had failed to follow the elders' instructions on my first visit. I asked for their forgiveness.

By approaching the situation with humility and openness, I had hoped a similar response from my antagonists would follow. I was wrong.

After listening to both sides, the mediators promised to return with their recommendations in a few days. But when they handed down their verdict, I was stunned. They recommended I enter a probationary period for a year or so. They thought this would allow the elders to continue to observe me to rebuild trust. After the cooling-off period, the elders and I could work together to decide my future at the church.

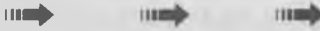


I stumbled onto the elders in secret session.

Their decision was a crushing hammerblow. It felt as if they were swatting flies with two-by-fours.

I weighed my options. None appeared good. Either I could accept the probationary period and try staying on at the church, which meant submitting to the control of the two elders, or I could resign. Even if I did submit, there was no guarantee I could stay on. They had already warned me that my reinstatement

would require a *long* period of observation before making a decision about my future at the church.



Joy and freedom vanished from ministry.

I responded by saying, "Gentlemen, I don't think there's anything I could do in a reasonable period of time to rebuild your trust in me. I've acknowledged my shortcomings, I've confessed my sins, and I've asked for forgiveness. I will honor your recommendation. But if we were going to turn a corner, I believe we would have done so by now. Even with a leave of absence, I don't sense there's any willingness from you to move on and rebuild the relationships."

I knew then that my ministry there was finished. At that point, I didn't really care. My wife, my children, and I were all out of gas. The gauge measuring our desire to remain in ministry was on empty.

The Days After

As the "sabbatical" neared its end, I notified the elder board of my intention to resign. Their response surprised me. They asked me not to leave, which I thought strange, considering their lack of confidence in my ministry and character.

The mediators also encouraged me not to leave. But my family and I had had enough. We simply couldn't go on. I went ahead and gave official notice of my resignation.

In leaving, I experienced the same emotions often felt at a funeral—loss, confusion, sorrow. Only in my case, no service was ever allowed for either ourselves or our friends to grieve. The elders refused my last request to share a farewell message with the congregation. They told me they couldn't take a chance on what I might say from the pulpit. So with little or no explanation, I disappeared from the congregation.

I lost more than a job. I had lost my place of worship, my friends, and my

identity as a pastor all at once. It was a low point, perhaps the lowest, of my entire life.

Our first decision after resigning was to put our house on the market. It sold the first day.

Knowing that our time in the area was coming to an end, I decided to lift the news blackout. Meeting with close friends and supporters from the church, we relayed our ordeal. I made an attempt to be as objective as I could about what had gone on. I admitted that I was partially to blame. I shared that I had blind spots and weaknesses in my life. But I couldn't say I was a habitual liar. Deep in my soul, I knew it wasn't so.

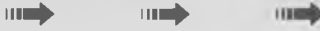
Come Here, Go Away

Now that I had resigned, I felt ripped down the middle. On the one hand, I still loved people, loved the congregation, and loved God. But on the other hand, I couldn't stand the local church.

In all the confusion and hurt that followed, I told myself I never wanted to pastor another church. My ambivalence became obvious in my search for a new job.

Though I would send out my resume, as soon as I would receive a letter of interest, I would trash it. I just couldn't bring myself to fill out a questionnaire or return a telephone call from any search committee.

I wasn't about to give anyone the right to scrutinize my life again. I painted all church leaders with one broad brush: pseudopious, judgmental, uncaring, hypocritical.



The siege mentality was taking its toll.

God continued to work in my life, however. My first crucial step back to ministry was a heart-to-heart conversation with my father. We had moved in temporarily with my parents until we could locate new employment and housing.

"Jim, I know you've been hurt badly by what's happened to you," he said. "But don't leave the ministry just

yet. God has His hand on you. Your gifts, education, and talents are too great to be discarded. Give it some more time before you make a final decision."



The gauge measuring our desire to remain in ministry was on empty.

I had always respected my father. His advice that day touched a responsive chord in my heart, broken as it was. Though apprehensive, I decided to give God a few more weeks to change my mind. If nothing happened, I would say good-bye to ministry.

Taking Up Residence

A few days later, a close friend contacted me with a surprising proposal. His pastor, Chuck Wickman, was initiating a new program in their church, a pastor in residence. It was targeted at restoring pastors who were disillusioned and hurting because of a bad church experience.

I wanted to know more, and, within a few days, Pastor Wickman called, inviting me to lunch.

Chuck's easygoing, soft-spoken manner immediately resonated in my soul. Over lunch I learned that his interest in wounded pastors was more than theoretical. He himself had twice left the ministry after difficult parish experiences. His spirit, though, had been tenderized by those hard encounters. As we talked, I couldn't help but recall my father's prediction that God might still have a place for me in ministry.

Besides wanting to empathize with hurting pastors, however, Chuck had another motive. It grew out of his one overriding conviction: a pastor is a terrible thing to waste.

Crisis experiences, such as the one I endured, that drove so many ministers from the local church permanently, grieved him.

"It's a tragic squandering of the re-

sources of the kingdom of God," he said.

He had done extensive research in exploring the reasons why pastors leave the ministry. "My goal is to find a way to stop the hemorrhaging of talent, experience, and ability from the local church," he said. "I'm determined to reclaim highly trained, competent, and caring individuals for ministry."

His invitation to enter the pastor in residence program was like oil poured on my wounds.

Less than three months after I had left my church humiliated and bitter, I was preparing to reenter the ministry as a pastor in residence. I was by no means agreeing to accept another church if offered one, but I was taking the first step in that direction.

Preparing the Way Before Me

I was nervous about visiting Chuck's church, Christ Community Church in Monrovia, California, for the first time. What would I say if people asked why I was there? Would I have to tell them about my past? Would I still be welcome if they knew the whole story?



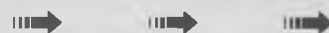
I had lost my place of worship, my friends, and my identity as a pastor all at once.

Chuck had anticipated those questions. He assured me he would make the proper introductions and explanations. If any contact had to be made with my prior church, he promised to be the liaison between the two groups.

I had expected a church initiating a pastor in residence program to be much larger. But on a good Sunday, Christ Community ran no more than 150 people. They didn't own their own building; they rented the local YMCA.

I soon realized my initial fears were unjustified. The whole atmosphere of the church, including the worship service, was casual, easygoing, like Chuck. After he introduced me that morning, the entire congregation broke out in spontaneous applause. The sound of their clapping overwhelmed me. Standing there, fighting back tears, I absorbed the love and acceptance I needed so badly. It was another significant healing moment.

Chuck did one more thing to prepare my way. He told the elder board they had only one responsibility toward me—to be my friend. I chose to share with them the circumstances behind my resignation.



Would I still be welcome if they knew the whole story?

I discovered how therapeutic it was to articulate my pain to a group that accepted me. Most of them had come out of a church where they had witnessed conflict and infighting. They understood my sorrow, and, without having to say so, gave me permission to grieve in their presence.

'Tis a Gift to Be Simple

The structure of the pastor in residence program was simple. I was asked to make a six-month to one-year commitment to the church. In addition, I was instructed to raise my own financial support. Chuck would assist me in sending out a fund-raising letter to my friends and family. Finally, I would serve as a member of the staff and meet with Chuck once a week.

Beyond that, I was not expected to carry any formal ministry responsibilities at the church. My time was my own. If I needed help or counseling in any particular area, the church promised to match me with the appropriate resources. I was free to do as much or as little as I wished.

Because I had previous training in Christian education, I began by help-

ing the Sunday School superintendent arrange classes and curriculum. Besides keeping me busy, it quietly reminded me that I still had something to offer the local church.

I realized I needed to deal with the unresolved anger I carried from my previous church. Throwing résumés in the trash can was no long-term solution.

I sought the help of an individual in the church finishing his master's degree in counseling at a local seminary. He graciously took me on without charge. The fiery outrage still rumbling within slowly died out.

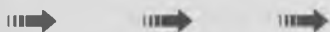
My highest hurdle was forgiving the men who had hurt me. I agonized. Part of me wanted to forgive them; another part wanted revenge.

But over time, I released, bit by bit, the bitterness. As I did, the chains of resentment snapped. Jesus' words about pardoning someone "seventy times seven" took on special meaning (Matt. 18:22, KJV). It was my duty to forgive my tormentors, even those who had labeled me a liar.

A Heavyweight Title

The pastor in residence program returned to me several things I had lost.

First, and perhaps most important, was the integrity that goes with the title of pastor.



Standing there,
fighting back
tears, I
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love and accep-
tance I needed
so badly.

When a pastor is stripped of his office and forced to pursue other work, he can face a credibility problem. If a search committee asks, "What are you currently doing?" it's awkward to respond by saying, "I'm selling insurance," or "I don't have a job."

The title of pastor in residence re-

stored some dignity. I was a pastor applying for another pastorate, not an outcast trying to get a foot in the door.

Second, the pastor in residence program offered me a safe place to sort out my feelings toward the ministry. Chuck said, "Jim, I want to give you time to make a good decision about future local church ministry, not a decision based on financial pressures, isolation, or a sense that no one cares."

By sending out approximately 40 letters with a cover letter from Chuck, our financial needs were met. The support poured in. Each letter, each check, each note of encouragement was more than a financial gift. It was a vote I should stay in the ministry. These votes felt like a landslide victory.

The gifts from members of our former church meant the most to us. They affirmed that our ministry there had not been in vain. Since we had never had an official good-bye, it gave many people an opportunity to express their affection.

The confirmation we experienced was more than financial. Christ Community also helped restore my sense of self-esteem. Little by little, I quit berating myself. People came alongside and said, "Jim, you are a pastor. You have a pastor's heart. You can do it." That helped me see myself as a pastor once again.

After six months at Christ Community, I boarded a plane for a job interview. Because of my unique role at Christ Community Church, I was able to say to the search committee, "I'll be as open as you wish about my past situation. But if you feel you need more information, call Chuck Wickman. He knows the whole story, and he'll be glad to discuss any aspect of it with you." With nothing to hide and a strong reservoir of supporters back at the church, my confidence level rose dramatically.

Though that church proved not to be the right place for us, my wife and I, as we were flying home, looked at each other and said, "We did it. We actually went and interviewed for a church."

I likened the experience to having a cast removed from your arm after a football injury. Your first hit on the line tells you whether or not you're

back in the game. After that first interview, I knew I was ready to play again. It felt good.

The final benefit of the pastor in residence program was the opportunity to improve my conflict-management skills.



I still had
something to
offer the local
church.

One day I said to Chuck, "I'm still an angry person. I believe part of it is that I've never been taught how to resolve conflict. I internalize problems and blame myself way too much."

Chuck directed me to a series of tapes by the Alban Institute on church conflict, with material prepared by Norman Shawchuck. I devoured the tapes. What was meant to take months to study I completed in a week. The tapes showed me alternative ways to handle conflict, each of which has its own unique consequences.

The Wounded Healer

The day came when I was ready to leave the program. I accepted the call to my present church with newfound confidence.

About a year after I was settled in, I realized there might be other ministers who had left the ministry who needed the pastor in residence program. When I met a pastor in the area whose story sounded remarkably similar to mine, I knew it was time to repay the favor that Chuck had done for me.

Not feeling the need to be original, I took Chuck's ideas and implemented them here.

When a skeptical board member asked, "How much is this pastor in residence program going to set us back?" the answer was, "Not a penny."

And like Chuck's program, individuals can do as little or as much as they wish. We make available a number of personality inventories and tests to help them identify the emotional problems with which they may be

struggling. If they feel the need for a counselor, we make certain they are matched with a caring, competent therapist. In addition, we make retreat centers available to a husband and wife where they can be alone with God and sort out the big questions.

The first man to go through our program decided to enter a different vocation. That was fine with me. I rejoiced that he was able to make that decision in a safe, caring environment. He's an evangelist at heart with incredible gifts in that area. His future plans may include bivocational ministry, and learning a trade is a first step in that direction.

While you can't program love, you can communicate love through a program. That's what the pastor in residence does.

One fascinating, unforeseen side effect of the program is that we now have five former pastors in our congregation. The word has gotten out that we are a safe place for hurting ministers to hang out and recover.

I'm delighted that we're seen as a secure haven.



I knew it was
time to repay
the favor that
Chuck had
done for me.

It took time for our board to learn why bad church experiences leave pastors devastated. They were accustomed to the business world, where losing and finding jobs are a way of life.

I've helped them to see that when a pastor loses his church, he loses more than a job. He loses his ministry, his identity, and his support system all at once. Our board members

now have a sensitivity and compassion to pastors who go through that awful experience.

A Christianity Today Gallup poll revealed 30 percent of Protestant clergy think often about leaving the ministry. In his doctoral research, Chuck Wickman found that 48 percent of those who do leave the ministry want to return to it.

My bottom line for continuing the program is this: it costs a church very little to restore a pastor who has so much already invested in him. He is the product of literally thousands of dollars spent on education, years in training, and invaluable years of experience.

Like Chuck, I too believe it is a terrible squandering of divine resources to waste a trained, gifted, and talented pastor.

Sometimes it is the shepherd, not the sheep, who needs to be returned to the fold.

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BEYOND BELIEF



Pastor: Do You Have Your Prayer Partners Yet?

by Mark A. Harmon

Pastor, Central Church of the Nazarene, Tucson, Arizona

Much has been written recently concerning the importance of the pastor's prayer partners. I heard C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, open one of his lectures by saying, "Intercession for Christian leaders is the most underutilized source of spiritual power in churches today." John Maxwell, pastor of the exciting Skyline Wes-

leyan Church of San Diego, in an excellent audiotape-videotape resource, tells us that the secret to his church's success "is not in programs or personnel, but in prayer." E. M. Bounds, the great writer on topics of prayer of another generation, wrote, "Air is not more necessary to the lungs than prayer is to the preacher. It is an absolutely necessity for the preacher to be prayed for. It will take all the pray-

ing he can do, and all the praying he can get done, to meet the fearful responsibilities and gain the largest, truest, success in his great work."¹ So, pastor, have you developed your prayer partner ministry yet?

WHY PRAYER PARTNERS?

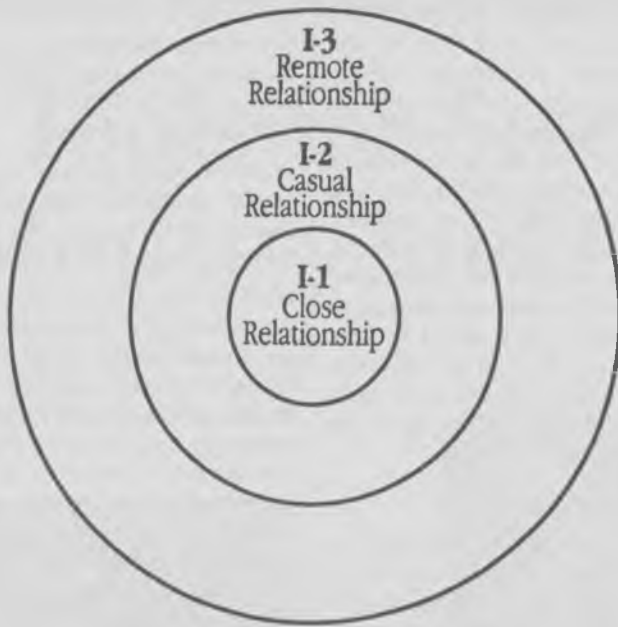
It has taken me a while to be open to personal prayer ministry in my life. Ignorance, individualism, and arrogance nearly deprived me of the power of intercession in my ministry. However, I am learning that I need intercession for *prevention, protection, and power*.

"Air is not more necessary to the lungs than prayer is to the preacher."

Intercessory prayer on our behalf can be a dose of preventive medicine fortifying us from mistakes in judgment, abuses of influence, yielding to temptation, or surrender to discouragement. As little children in the classroom are vulnerable to all kinds of communicable diseases, so a pastor, by mere reason of his position, is vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. Faithful and intelligent intercession can be a preventive dose of medicine against the wiles of the devil.

Intercessory prayer for the pastor stands also as an important source of protection from danger. There is increasing evidence that pastors are targets of spiritual warfare.² Not only are satanists, spiritists, and occult practitioners praying for the breakdown of





marriages of pastors and Christian leaders, but also often we can be targets of accidents, physical danger, or illness that is nothing but spiritual warfare.

Recently my sons and I were quail hunting on some open range outside Tucson. We were traveling some unfamiliar back roads when we came upon some crudely lettered warning signs of the "Keep Out or You'll Be Shot" variety! I felt particularly uneasy and made a hasty retreat. I did not give the incident much thought until one of my prayer partners asked me later, "What were you doing Thursday morning? I felt particularly impressed to pray for protection." What my boys and I were protected *from* I will never know, but I do thank God for sensitive prayer partners and God's safekeeping!

Pastors who are open to receive personal intercession will find it also makes a measurable difference in the empowerment of their ministries. A. M. Hills, in *Pentecostal Light*, related this story:

Dr. Wilbur Chapman often told his experience when he went to Philadelphia to become a pastor of Wanamaker's church. After his first sermon an old gentleman met him in front of the pulpit and said: "You are pretty young to be a pastor of this great church. We have always had older pastors. I am afraid you won't succeed. But you preach the Gospel, and I am going to help you all I can."

"I looked at him," said Dr. Chapman, "and said to myself, 'Here's a crank.'"

But the old gentleman continued: "I am going to pray for you that you may have the Holy Spirit's power upon you, and two others have covenanted to join with me."

Then Dr. Chapman related the outcome. "I did not feel so bad when I learned that he was going to pray for me. The three became ten, the ten became twenty, and the twenty became fifty, and the fifty became two hundred, who met before each service to pray that the Holy Spirit might come upon me. In another room the eighteen elders knelt so close around me to pray for me that I could put out my hands and touch them on all sides. I always went into my pulpit feeling that I would have the anointing in answer to the prayers of the 219 men.

"It was easy to preach, a very joy. Anybody could preach with such conditions. And what was the result? We received 1,000 into our church by conversion in three years, 600 of which were men. It was the fruit of the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayers of those men. I do not see how the average pastor, under average circumstances, preaches at all.

Church members have much more to do than go to church as curious, idle spectators, to be amused and entertained. It is their business

to pray mightily that the Holy Ghost will clothe the preacher with power and make his words like dynamite.³

RECRUITING PRAYER PARTNERS

Beware of making poor choices in prayer partners as you initially begin. Originally I invited 10 men to be responsible to pray for me daily, but especially on the two weekdays out of the month to which I assigned them. On their assigned days I requested that they contact me personally or by phone for prayer. These men were also to meet with me and pray for me prior to the morning worship service. I made two discouraging mistakes.

First, I did not spend enough time seeking God's leadership before recruiting my prayer partners. While each prayer partner began his ministry to me strongly, it did not take long before there appeared some "holes in the wall." One author recommends using the Luke 11:9 formula and *ask, seek, and knock*. *Asking*, according to this formula, is praying for the Lord to prepare the potential prayer partner; *seeking* is to sit down and make a list of all potential candidates; *knocking* is getting in contact with those on the list.⁴

One exceptional resource for developing prayer partners comes from John Maxwell. He has produced *The Pastor's Prayer Partners*, which includes written, videocassette, and audiocassette materials that any pastor can utilize to develop his or her own prayer ministry.

A second mistake I made was in not considering my own personality. I asked each prayer partner to contact me personally or by phone on his assigned days. Because of my reserved, phlegmatic disposition, this became frustrating rather than strengthening. I found that I was becoming resentful of the "intrusions on my time." Some men wanted to visit, while I wanted to pray and get back to work. Some days I found myself manufacturing prayer requests in order to make the prayer partner feel worthwhile.

It was some time before I was able to gain perspective on what was occurring. I finally realized that their calls were not intrusions on my work but *were* my work. A small pamphlet, *Pastors Need Prayer, Too!* published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship, was distributed, which taught the

prayer partner the important areas of need for which to pray. I no longer had to manufacture prayer requests.

I also learned the three types of personal intercessors identified by C. Peter Wagner in his very practical book *Prayer Shield*. Understanding the different levels helped me see more clearly my responsibility to them as prayer partners. Wagner illustrates the three categories of personal intercessors with three concentric circles surrounding the leader (see fig. 1). The inner circle of "I-1 Intercessors" have a very *close* relationship to the pastor. The middle circle, or "I-2 Intercessors," have a *casual* relationship with the pastor. The outer circle, or "I-3 Intercessors," have a *remote* relationship to the pastor.

I-3 intercessors include the many people who pray for you of which you are hardly aware. I-2 intercessors are those with whom you cross paths frequently and need a certain amount of intentional personal contact. Such were my original 10 men.

Often we can be targets of accidents, physical danger, or illness that is nothing but spiritual warfare.

I-1 intercessors, however, are those with whom you have a close relationship. Most I-1 intercessors are spiritually gifted in this area and have developed an intimacy with God through prayer that will bless your ministry. Most pastors seldom have more than one or two I-1 intercessors. I-1 intercessors must be chosen carefully and regarded highly. It may even be, through prayer, that an I-1 intercessor may choose you!

Such was the case with Bill Klassen, John Maxwell's personal intercessor.

Bill had been praying for two years the promise in Jer. 3:15, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (KJV). He finally secured an appointment with Pastor Maxwell, who had just come to Skyline. This was no ordinary feat for someone who was not a member of the church nor even attended! Bill introduced himself and shared his heart for pastors, then asked to pray for Pastor Maxwell. As their tears mingled together, their hearts were knit, and Klassen testifies: "God gave me my pastor that day."

GETTING STARTED

Two centuries ago in England, as William Carey repaired shoes, he became concerned about the spiritually lost. He placed a map above his workbench and prayed for the salvation of people in far-off lands. William Carey went on to become the father of modern missions, forming Britain's first missionary society. Soon afterward, he himself became a missionary and spent 42 years in India.

Carey had an invalid sister. He would write to her about his work in India, relating his opportunities and problems. Then hour after hour, week after week, she would intercede in prayer for those concerns. Would anyone argue that a prayer partner was responsible for the success of William Carey's ministry?

Pastor, do not be hesitant to start or become part of a prayer partnership. Many leaders would like to have personal intercession but yet wonder how to mobilize this ministry. Here are a few simple steps to get started.

1. PRAY

Pray intently for the Lord's will in providing personal intercessors. Use the Luke 11:9 formula: ask, seek, knock.

2. STUDY

Avail yourself of some quality materials on the subject. My suggestions would be to secure and study:

Prayer Shield by C. Peter Wagner, published by Regal Books (PA083-071-5738, \$15.99). *Prayer Shield* is a practical field manual for mobilizing or becoming intercessory prayer partners.

The Pastor's Prayer Partners by John C. Maxwell, videocassettes and audio-

cassettes as well as sermon outlines and supplementary printed material available from Injoy Ministries, 1530 Jamacha Rd., Suite D, El Cajon, CA 92019, 1-800-333-6506.

Pastors Need Prayer, Too! by Will Bruce, available from Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 202 W. Lincoln, Suite E, Orange, CA 92665.

How to Have a Prayer Ministry by C. Peter Wagner, one videocassette and six audiocassettes, available from the Charles E. Fuller Institute, Box 91990, Pasadena, CA 91109-1990, 1-800-999-9587.

An intercessor
may choose
you!


3. PLAN

Plan a prayer partner retreat, and invite your potential partners. Suggestions and materials are given in Maxwell's material. Decide how your partners could best support you with your particular gifts, struggles, and personality. Communicate your need to your prayer partners.

4. TRAIN

There are many individuals who desire to support and pray for you but who do not know where to begin. Teach your prayer partners some prayer basics. Share with them the unique struggles of a pastor. Present them with a book on intercession. You will be surprised how those truly gifted by God to this ministry will begin to blossom as prayer warriors. All the materials listed contain lessons and principles that are transferable by you to your partners.

5. BEGIN

Pastor: do you have your prayer partners yet? 

1. E. M. Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 89-90.

2. Larry McCain, "Why You Should Pray for Your Pastor" *Herald of Holiness*, February 1993, 38-40.

3. Quoted by John Maxwell in *The Pastor's Prayer Partners*.

4. C. Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield: How to Intercede for Pastors, Christian Leaders, and Others on the Spiritual Frontlines*, ed. Virginia Woodard (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1992), 146.

Tools for Strengthening Ministry and the Minister

John Stuart Mill is reported to have awakened one morning with an overwhelming feeling that he had come upon the answer to the "question of the ages." Unfortunately, he forgot what it was. So he placed a paper and quill beside his bed. A few mornings later he awoke with a similar feeling. This time, however, he found on the paper in his own handwriting, "Think in different terms."

Change is the order of the day. "We either choose it or chase it," says Gerard Egan. Communication changes. Technology changes. Political, environmental, economic, social changes. So what does all this have to do with ministry? For one thing, "adapt or



by David Grosse

Director, Excellence in Ministry Project, Kansas City

die" is a tag line that includes almost every institution in a society, including the church.

Consider, for example, the long list of social ills that threaten us today.

Lawlessness, attacks on institutions and legitimate authority, rampant chemical dependency, family disintegration, social diseases, political polarization, terrorism, violence, racism, the war of the sexes, unbridled narcissism—we ignore such burning issues at the peril of irrelevance and marginalization. Why? Because the people we serve must live and work and play in this culture, in this world, with these concerns. Religious faith does not occur in a vacuum, but in a social, political, cultural, and economic context.

For these and other reasons, effective ministers of the gospel will want to challenge old assumptions and practices. Not that everything tried and true should be abandoned; even "back to basics" can be the wave of the future. But the church that isn't actively reexamining its thinking may well be dead from the neck up—and "watch out below!"

John Stuart Mill was right: the "question of the ages" requires thinking—and communicating—in different terms. And this, no less for the preacher than for the philosopher. For the preacher it means placing the most powerful, positive visions and promises of the gospel alongside our most terrifying social and personal nightmares. It means bringing the power of the timeless gospel to bear on the real, not imagined, needs of people today, where they live, in the thought forms and language of their own changing times.

The worship and preaching resources listed here were selected to help us in this ongoing task. Accompanying descriptors identify the primary usefulness of each resource. Once again, no general endorsement is implied or intended.

WORSHIP AND PREACHING

Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes*



The Poet. Fortress, 1989. PA080-062-3940, \$13.00.

Addresses the crisis of interpretation that preachers face in contemporary culture. With its cynicism and ideologies, the culture has reduced the gospel to prose. The answer to the dilemma is poetic (or prophetic) speech, which is the primary form of language found in the Bible. A substantial little book!

David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Fortress, 1987, pb. PA080-062-0968, \$20.00.

The most comprehensive and authoritative text on the subject in more than a decade. A major resource on the theory and craft of sermon construction for the contemporary mind. Martin Marty exults that "even the bibliographies make good reading. It's too good a book to limit only to people who preach."

Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*. Abingdon, 1990. PA068-718-6943, \$11.95.

Argues that the key to developing quality sermons lies in the minister's ability to develop and maintain an "imaginative theology," where imagination is a key function of reason. Practicing such principles, the preacher will be faithful to Scripture and to the needs of the congregation.

Leighton Ford, *The Christian Persuader*. Harper & Row, 1976, pb. PA089-066-093X, \$6.95.

Considers many important issues in evangelistic preaching, including theological and emotional issues. Suggests ways to bring balance and perspective to the art of Christian persuasion. An "oldie but goodie"; look for this one in your library.

Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, pb. PA080-421-5715, \$13.99.

A comprehensive theological vision of preaching as "bearing witness." Practical material for crafting sermons according to this understanding, by the distinguished Princeton professor of preaching and worship.

Thomas G. Long and Neely Dixon McCarter, eds., *Preaching In and Out of*

Season. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, pb. PA066-425-1498, \$12.99.

Preaching helps for addressing the recurring program emphases of the church and civic calendars. Besides the editors' contributions, especially helpful are the chapters by Fred Craddock ("Giving Thanks and Praise"), Ronald Allen ("Preaching About Stewardship"), David Buttrick ("Preaching About the Family"), and Don Wardlaw ("Preaching About Work"). Suggestions for sermons on each theme are included.

David H. C. Read, *Preaching About The Needs of Real People*. Westminster Press, 1988, pb. (Out of print, but worth looking for)

One in a series of five books to help preachers bring the light of the gospel to the abiding concerns of people. Wise, witty, illuminating—and theologically grounded in the Prologue of John's Gospel. Other authors in the series: Achtemeier, Willimon, Sider, and Proctor.

James W. Cox, ed., *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. PA066-421-9284, \$25.00.

Timely topics of the day are related to Scripture (and vice versa) in this exceptional book. Specialists in ethics, theology, spirituality, pastoral care, and biblical studies offer their most current thinking for use in bringing God's message to your congregation. "Options for Preaching" conclude each article. Contributors are among many of the most familiar names across a wide range of Christian traditions. No dust catcher here!

Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-persuasion*. Pilgrim Press, 1993. PA082-980-9511, \$12.95.

Calls the preacher to dialogue, not only with Scripture and listeners, but also creatively with oneself. Willingness to listen critically to one's own sermon—a willingness to be freshly persuaded—will enable the preacher to communicate with greater passion, insight, poetry, and clarity.

Robert Webber, *Liturgical Evangelism*. Morehouse Publishing, 1986, pb. PA081-921-5961, \$7.95.

According to this respected Fuller professor, "liturgical evangelism" is the calling of persons to Christ and into the church through worship. Decrying gimmicks for building another one of "America's fastest-growing churches," he suggests a return to "third-century evangelism, that was used effectively in the context of a secular and pagan society" and which "not only converts people but also brings them into the full life of the church and keeps them there."

Fred B. Craddock et al., *Preaching Through the Christian Year (Year A)*. Trinity Press International, 1992, pb. PA156-338-0544, \$30.00.

Ever-increasing numbers of preachers are using a lectionary as a guide for preaching and worship. They do this because the arrangement of Scripture according to the seasons of the Christian year gathers up the central message of the entire Bible. They are stretched to mine portions of the Word into which they would not have gone had they trusted only personal preference. Authors' comments on Scripture texts for each Sunday are sufficiently germinal to give direction and "move the text toward the pulpit." An excellent place to begin with lectionary preaching.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, pb. PA066-425-0424, \$16.99.

The homiletical text for those who have trouble, or who have neglected, preaching from the Old Testament. Shows how the Word of God in the Old Testament is the Word to the present-day church. Filled with practical insights and usable sermon suggestions.

Manford Holck, Jr., *Dedication Services for Every Occasion*. Judson Press, 1986, pb. PA081-701-0335, \$9.00.

Thirty-five complete services of dedication for almost every conceivable occasion, including building dedications, groundbreaking, choir robes, musical instruments, and many more. Scripture, prayers, responses, and comments are included in this one-of-a-kind desktop resource.

Are We Moving Yet?

You know the story: You haven't been asleep very long when your husband comes in after a late-night work session in his study. As he crawls into bed, he announces: "I'm really feeling like my work here is done. In fact, tomorrow I'm mailing my resumé to several district superintendents."

You take a deep breath. "Well, dear," you answer, "if you really feel like that's what the Lord wants."

While he snores peacefully, you stare wide-eyed at the ceiling. "How will the children handle leaving their friends? How can I leave my job right now? Who will watch the children when I work? What will the schools be like?" On and on the questions chase themselves around your bed until you finally realize you have to put the whole situation in the Lord's hands. After doing this, you drift off to sleep, thinking that you *are* getting awfully tired of this house.

In the next few weeks, you start doing little things like cleaning out the at-



by **Mary E. Egidio**

*Pastor's wife,
Greenville, Pennsylvania*

tic, organizing garage sales, and thinking that it will be great, after all, to get away from that snooty Ann Martin.

Eventually the phone call comes. A church board in Sometown would like you and your husband to come for an interview. When you hear the salary package, you decide that maybe your daughter *will* be able to get braces. You scramble to a map to figure out exactly where Sometown is and realize this town has that certain attraction you'd been hoping for in your

next assignment. Choose one: closer to a city, farther from the city, closer to your/his parents, *farther* from his/your parents, perhaps a college town. Whatever it is, it fits the profile.

You carefully choose your clothes for the interview—conservative, but not too dowdy-looking. You meet the church board, and they take you on the tour of the parsonage. Now, in addition to Sometown having the attraction, this house has the *feature*. You know, when you've said, "I hope my next parsonage has (fill in the blank)," this house has it. Choose one, or if you're really privileged, two: family room, finished basement, deck, space for a garden, nice neighborhood, big yard, multiple bathrooms, room for a sewing room or office. You name it. The trustees even tell you the new pastor will be choosing the paint and carpet color.

The interview goes smoothly; your husband conducts himself beautifully. If he preaches, it's the best you've ever heard him. He doesn't jingle the change in his pocket and ends his sermon within 25 minutes. Everyone seems to be very positive and complimentary. You both leave feeling great about the whole experience. You spot that long-forgotten sparkle in your husband's eyes again.

On the way home in the car, you think maybe you'll stop in the furniture store after work tomorrow. You can't possibly move his mom's dinette set into *that* house. And when you see Ann Martin at church the following Sunday, you smile smugly to yourself.

It's at this point that things get interesting. You see, the story can end one of three ways. In the "best of all possible worlds" scenario, the phone rings a few days later. It's the church board in Sometown saying they definitely want your husband to come and be their pastor. The following Sunday your husband announces his resignation, and Ann Martin cries on your shoulder. You and your family



pack your bags *and* the new dinette set and live happily ever after. At least until it's time to move again (which may be sooner than you think.)

In ending number two, your husband receives a call a few weeks later telling him, "We really appreciated your coming to interview, but we've decided on another candidate." You look at each other in shock and disbelief, wonder if you should have worn the black dress instead of the suit, and think to yourself that the church board secretary at Sometown *did* act enough like Ann Martin to be her sister.

You both try to pray about it and attempt to understand how you could have misread what you thought was God's will. Then you hear that the "other candidate" needed to move to Sometown for reasons more important than just a family room, and you decide that God does indeed know what He is doing.

In the third version, the phone rings again. Yes, the offer is made. Yes, they want your husband in Sometown. He tells them he'll pray about it and give them his answer in the next few days.

You go to sleep that night, planning to drop by the grocery store on your way home from work to pick up some boxes. You haven't been asleep long when your husband comes in. As he crawls into bed, he announces: "I've decided not to take the call to Sometown. I just don't feel like it's time to leave yet."

You take a deep breath, stifling the urge to scream, "You WHAT?" Instead you reply, "Well, dear, if you really feel like that's what the Lord wants."

While he snores peacefully (that is, if you haven't smothered him with your pillow), you stare wide-eyed at the ceiling. You argue with the Lord, and you struggle once again with the puzzle we call God's will, which always seems to have a critical piece missing. As you try to express your frustrations to the Lord, the Holy Spirit comes in close to your bedside and assures you that He is still in control. Reminders of His loving care and provision from times past are paraded through your memory. Once again you commit yourself to His will for your life, whatever that might be.

And as you drift off to sleep, you plan to invite Ann Martin over for a cup of tea. ❧

Don't Worry; Keep Praying and Puddle Jumping

We sidestepped puddles as we approached the house. Paul pushed the doorbell with his thumb, but we didn't wait long before the oak door swung open.

Our evangelism team had gathered at the church as we did every week. That week it was just Paul and Bob and me. We grabbed the visitor cards, hoping we could share the gospel with at least one family. There was! Then we recited the scriptures. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." First John . . . ? no; Romans—3:23! Bob, the designated spokesman, poked the cards into his shirt pocket. Then Paul, a new believer himself, prayed: "Dear God, go with us tonight. Help us find these people. Let Bob know if You want him to talk about You. Amen."

We found them and were invited inside. "Sunday was your first time with us, wasn't it? How did you enjoy the worship service?" Bob asked.

"Fine; just fine," they both replied.

We posed questions that we hoped would encourage conversation. "Your yard is beautiful; do you enjoy working in it? Have you lived here long? Do you have family in this area?"

"Uh-hum," they nodded. They looked at their shoes. So did we.

"We sure are thrilled that you came Sunday," I said. "We think you will enjoy the people and—"

Suddenly, they began to reminisce. "We were extremely active at our previous church: on boards, committees, choirs. It was a big church. We have some close friends. When our daughter was ill, the pastor called on us over and over while she was in the hospital." The man and woman both talked at once. Everyone was smiling.

Then the woman said: "I don't particularly care for this pastor. He preaches different than our other pastor. I didn't like the way he . . ."

My face felt hot. My heart raced. My tongue glued itself to my teeth. ❧



by Jan McNaught

*Pastor's wife,
Nampa, Idaho*

Either she hadn't heard me say my full name; or, if she had, she hadn't yet realized I was the Mrs. McNaught that went with the Rev. Mr. McNaught. I'm sure Bob and Paul must have said other intelligent things. I didn't.

Bob and Paul glanced sympathetically at me when we got in the car. But I had recovered and exploded with laughter. Cautiously at first, then in great guffaws, Paul and Bob joined me as we drove away. Then seriously, Bob said: "I didn't get a chance to ask the big question tonight. Obviously they were active churchgoers, but are they born-again churchgoers?"

"Do you guys think they'll come back to church again?" asked the designated worrier.

"Oh, yeah, sure," Bob and Paul answered, almost too quickly.

"What will happen when she realizes who I am and what she said? And what if they feel too embarrassed to come back? Won't it be awkward for them?"

They did come back—they and their daughter. They attended regularly and brought friends. I never referred to that night, and neither did they—at least we did not to each other. Bob and Paul and I and the other evangelism team members continued calling every Tuesday night. And Pastor McNaught kept preaching—just as he always had. ❧

Picture Windows for Preaching

Christmas Illustrations

Gift

Ann Landers tells that she had an attorney friend whom she admired very much. She asked him to share with her about a special gift his father gave him one Christmas. The gift was a note that he wrote to his son. It read: "Son, this year I will give you 365 hours. An hour every day after dinner. We'll talk about whatever you want to talk about. We'll go wherever you want to go, play whatever you want to play. It will be your hour." That dad kept his promise and renewed it every year.

Many children would give anything to have that type of gift under the tree this year rather than toys or games.

King, Duncan. *Lively Illustrations for Effective Preaching* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds Publishing, 1987), 87.

Christmas Wrapping

Frank Meade quotes from the First Baptist Church bulletin of Syracuse, New York, the following article.

There was a gift for each of us left under the tree of life 2,000 years ago by Him whose birthday we celebrate today. The gift was withheld from no man. Some have left the packages unclaimed. Some have accepted the gift and carry it around, but have failed to remove the wrappings and look inside to discover the hidden splendor. The packages are all alike: in each is a scroll on which is written, "All that the Father hath is thine. Take and live!"

Frank Meade, *12,000 Religious Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 70.

Forgiveness

In an excellent article in the *Daylight Devotional Bible*, it states:

It was the perfect Christmas Eve—the kind we all dream about. Dad was home early. After supper,



Compiled by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor,
Three Rivers, Michigan

he built a fire in the fireplace, while Mother made up a big tray of goodies. The kids jumped and ran and shouted in their excitement. Finally when their older sister arrived with her husband, the family gathered together in the den around the Christmas tree. They sang Christmas carols, exchanged gifts with one another, snacked on all the goodies—then ended the evening by walking through the snow to the annual candlelight service. A Christmas Eve to remember!

Christmas Eve. We plan for it and look forward to it—a time of pleasant memories and nostalgia.

The author of the devotional then asks a poignant question, "Or is it?" He reminds us that, for some families, Christmas Eve turns out to be a great battlefield with mines and torpedoes mixed.

There is no peace on earth, much less in the home! Our expectations often run high and our disappointments deep. The gift hoped for is the gift never given. The son who said he would be there—isn't. The sister who never has a kind word for anyone started one of her mean tirades.

If that's your experience today, then even though it may be difficult, wrap up one more gift and give it

away—the gift of forgiveness. It may be the most important, and most beautiful, gift you will ever give to another person.

Daylight Devotional Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1988), 1263.

Everyday Illustrations

Stress

Chippie—that's Chippie the parakeet—never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage, sending a song into the air; the next second he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

His problem began when his owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum. She stuck the nozzle in to suck up the seeds and feathers in the bottom of the cage when all at once the nearby telephone rang. Instinctively she turned to pick it up. She barely said hello when—sswwwwppppp! Chippie got sucked in. She gasped, let the phone drop, and snapped off the vacuum. With her heart in her mouth, she unzipped the bag.

There was Chippie—alive, but stunned—covered with heavy black dust. She grabbed him and rushed to the bathtub, turned on the faucet full blast, and held Chippie under a torrent of ice-cold water, power washing him clean. Then it dawned on her that Chippie was soaking wet and shivering. So she did what any compassionate pet owner would do: she snatched up the hair dryer and blasted him with hot air.

Did Chippie survive? Yes, but he doesn't sing much anymore. He just sits and stares a lot. It's not hard to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over! It's enough to steal the song from any stout heart. ¶

Devotional by Gary Carr. Given at Ministers and Mates Retreat, Michigan District Church of the Nazarene, Muskegon, Michigan, April 14, 1993.

Canaanite Genocide and the God of Love

Old Testament Texts

When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you . . . then you shall utterly destroy them. . . . And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them . . . you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you (*Deut. 7:1-2, 16; 20:16-17, NASB*).

Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" . . . But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good . . . but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. . . . And Samuel said, ". . . Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD . . .?" . . . And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal (*1 Sam. 15:1-3, 9, 17, 19, 33, NASB*).

New Testament Texts

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I say to you,



by C. S. Cowles

Professor, Northwest Nazarene College,
Nampa, Idaho

love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. . . . Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (*Matt. 5:43-45, 48, NASB; see also Luke 9:51-56; John 3:16-17; Rom. 5:8-10; 2 Pet. 3:9*).

Introduction

Moses, speaking for God, commanded the Israelites to "utterly destroy" their enemies. Jesus, on the other hand, said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." The clear implication is that we ought to love enemies because God, our Father, loves enemies. In these conflicting commands, we are faced with one of the most difficult and yet important problems of biblical interpretation. What is at stake here is nothing less than the character and nature of God himself. What kind of a God can order the wholesale slaughter of entire groups of people, from the newborn infant to the aged cripple, from the brain damaged to the mentally retarded? How can the Warrior God of the

Old Testament be reconciled with God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth? How do we harmonize Samuel hewing Agag to pieces before the Lord with the revelation of God's love as demonstrated in Christ?

Many have confronted the Warrior God of the Old Testament and have turned away from the Old Testament altogether. Some, like Madalyn Murray O'Hair, have been so offended by God-initiated violence that they have become militant atheists. Canaanite genocide makes it difficult to use the Old Testament as a guide for theological reflection and ethical guidance. Daring to enter where angels fear to tread, I will, first of all, look at some of the ways by which theologians and biblical commentators have defended Canaanite genocide as representing **the authentically received and understood command of God**. Then I will offer a solution to the problem based upon a Christological reading of the Old Testament texts. First, let us critically examine, in the light of the revelation of God in Christ, some explanations offered.

I. IN DEFENSE OF CANAANITE GENOCIDE

A. The Purified Land Theory

Moses' rationale for God's ordering the extermination of the Canaanites was **to preserve the people from being polluted by Canaanite idolatry and wicked practices**. He warned, "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you" (*Deut. 7:4, NASB*). Even though this carries the force of an apparent command of God, I have some problems with it. The Israelites were quite capable of engaging in wholesale idolatrous worship long before they entered the

land of Canaan (Aaron's golden calf). The record of their 40 years of wilderness wanderings clearly indicates that they were just as prone to idolatry, sin, and wickedness as the Canaanites.

Even if the Israelites had become a truly holy people and had been successful in ridding the land of all Canaanite influence, they were still surrounded by idolatrous nations. Exposure, and the consequent risk of corruption, would have been inevitable. This did, in fact, occur during Solomon's reign when he imported many foreign wives along with their idol worship. The "sanitized land theory" suggests an unflattering view of God's preserving power. It seemed a virtual admission that in free and open competition with Canaanite religion, Yahweh worship would inevitably lose out. So the only solution was to exterminate the competition.

In any case, even if the purified land rationale is used to justify the destruction of the Canaanites during the Conquest, it doesn't work at all where God, according to Samuel, commands Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites—not because they represent a corrupting influence, but for a crime of aggression committed by their fathers against the Israelites in the wilderness some 400 years earlier (1 Sam. 15:1 ff.). It was an act of divinely ordered vengeance, pure and simple.

B. God the Judge Theory

There are many who, like Martin Luther, assert that **God used the Israelites as His "Terrible and Swift Sword of Judgment"** upon a hopelessly depraved, diseased, and wicked people. Writing in defense of a just war, he reasoned: "For the hand that wields this sword and kills with it is not man's hand, but God's, and it is not man, but God who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights. All these are God's works and judgments." While it might be argued that the adult Canaanites and Amalekites were richly deserving of being smitten "hip and thigh," how about the babies and children, the aged and infirm? Would God issue a command in such a way that the innocent would be indiscriminately slaughtered along with the guilty? Where is the justice in that?

Some respond by pointing out that the Canaanite culture was so decadent and diseased that the destruction of infants was, in reality, an act of mercy. Yet, would they thereby defend mercy killing today? When we were touring the infamous Tower of London and viewing its ancient instruments of torture and death, I could not help but notice King Henry VIII's two swords. One was the "sword of justice" and the other the "sword of mercy." It occurred to me that it would have been of small comfort to Anne Boleyn to learn that it was the sword of mercy and not the sword of justice that was being used to cut off her head!

What is at stake here is nothing less than the character and nature of God himself.

Furthermore, this justification of the avenging sword is in conflict with Jesus' parable in which He cautions His disciples not to take judgment into their own hands, lest they root up the wheat along with the tares (Matt. 13:24-30). Jesus not only refused to grant the disciples' request that fire come down from heaven and destroy the Samaritans but also rebuked them for even entertaining such a thought (Luke 9:51-55).

C. God the Creator Theory

According to John Calvin, **God has every right to destroy what He has made.** This was also Moses' conviction when he speaks for God who says, "See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal" (Deut. 32:39, NASB). Jeremiah's metaphor, which likens God to a potter and His creation to the clay, implies that God has every right to do what He wants with His creation (18:1 ff.). Especially is He justified in His destructive acts, since every son and daughter of

Adam's race is born in sin, is utterly depraved, and has no inalienable rights before God whatsoever. That God should bring about the destruction of sinners is understandable. What is incomprehensible, according to Calvin, is that God should have mercy upon sinners at all!

I admit that while there is a certain appeal in the unquestioning acceptance of the inscrutable will and purposes of the sovereign God, I have trouble accepting the idea that God would treat in such a cavalier manner the life He has created and professes to love. A woman who conceives and bears a child does not have the right to do with it as she wishes. If she destroys her child, she is a murderer. Many hold that even an unborn fetus has inalienable rights that the mother ought not abrogate. Would a less stringent standard apply to the Creator God?

D. The Divine Command Theory

According to this view, **actions are justified and morally obligatory because they are commanded by God.** This was the reason for Samuel's anger when he castigated Saul for not carrying out God's command to utterly destroy the Amalekites. The justice of settling a divinely held grudge 400 years after the offense was not the issue. The question put to Saul was simply, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD . . . and fight against . . . the sinners, the Amalekites, . . . until they [were] exterminated?" (1 Sam. 15:18-19, NASB). Saul's failure to carry out the divine command cost him the kingdom.

The issue here is not that God commands something because it is right. **It is right because God commands it.** Although I shrink from questioning any divine command, especially when it is in the Bible, I am nevertheless troubled by this theory for several reasons. First, if all actions answer to no other standard than that they are supposedly commanded by God, then morality would be arbitrary, and the notion of good and evil would be meaningless. Furthermore, how could we ever recognize divine commands if the only morally relevant quality was that they were commanded by God? What would validate a command as being truly from God? Surely miracles would not suffice.

Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce several of the miraculous signs performed by Moses. Not even a divine appearance would be convincing, since the New Testament warns that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

The problem with the divine command theory is aggravated when two or more divine commands collide, as in the case before us. The command to violently seize the land of Canaan breaks at least three of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," and "Thou shalt not covet" (Exod. 20:13, 15, 17, KJV). Prior to Samuel's directive to Saul regarding the Amalekites, God through Moses commanded that "fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16, NASB). What Samuel instructed Saul to do, in the name of God, was in direct violation of this commandment as well as the prohibition of vengeance following Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:13-15). Even Moses' equitable laws of vengeance are dismantled by Jesus and replaced by the imperative of love.

The "sanitized land theory" suggests an unflattering view of God's preserving power.

E. The Two Dispensations Theory

The most common way of resolving the question before us is by asserting that there is a vast difference in the manner by which God revealed himself and the way He dealt with man under the old covenant as opposed to the new. As John put it, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Under the old

covenant, God's judgment was communal, physical, and external. Under the new, God's judgment is individual, spiritual, and eternal. God's character and purposes remain the same; only His method of disclosing himself and dealing with man differs. While the dispensational theory has much to commend it, we are still left with the dilemma of a God who acts—and commands His people to act—under the old covenant in ways that are irreconcilable with the revelation of himself in Christ in the new.

F. The Two Natures Theory

According to this view, **God is not only a God of love and mercy but also a God of holiness and wrath.** It is a distortion of the Old Testament understanding of God, according to this position, to suggest that His wrath directed against the Canaanites and Amalekites is representative of His character. To the contrary, the big picture of God throughout the Old Testament is that of love and mercy. Moses encourages the people to show compassion for the aliens in their midst, saying that "He [God] . . . shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18, NASB). He even goes so far as to say, "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him" (Exod. 23:4-5, NASB). The psalmist, though not a stranger to God's wrath, continually praised Him for His great loving-kindness and abundant mercy. Examples could be multiplied.

On the other hand, it is a distortion of the New Testament to assume that God acts only in loving and merciful ways. A quick survey of what Jesus had to say about the scribes and Pharisees, His cleansing of the Temple, and His uncompromising teaching about hell reveal that there is a white-hot side of wrathful indignation to His character as well as that of self-giving love. Furthermore, did not God himself strike down Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit? Is not the wrath of God clearly portrayed by Peter and Paul in their letters? Does not John, in his Apocalypse, graphically portray a divinely mandated, irrevocable, and eternal

genocide on a cosmic scale for all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life?

Would God issue a command in such a way that the innocent would be indiscriminately slaughtered along with the guilty?

I confess that this is difficult to deal with, simply because there are so many scriptures in both Testaments that reveal not only the love of God but also the wrath of God. Let us be quick to point out, however, that Jesus did stop short of ordering the slaughter of the scribes and Pharisees along with their wives and children. Furthermore, Luke does not say that God killed Ananias and Sapphira. Nevertheless, we are still left with the dilemma, on the one hand, of a God who destroys sinners—and commands His people to exterminate them—and yet, on the other, loves sinners enough to give up His Son for their sakes. So, how do we unravel this greatest of all biblical puzzles involving the apparent contradiction between God's holiness and love, between His justice and mercy, between His wrath and grace? I would like to suggest:

II. A CHRISTOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO CANAANITE GENOCIDE

Lest we shrug off too easily **the sheer human horror and moral heinousness of genocide**—ancient or modern, God-commanded or otherwise—I want to present a haunting portrait of what the Warrior God of the Old Testament might well have looked like to the Canaanite or Amalekite about to be devoured by

the Israelite sword. It comes from the pen of Elie Wiesel, Nobel prize-winning Jewish author, who was caught up in the Nazi holocaust at 16 years of age and taken to Auschwitz, where he, alone among all of his family, survived. He describes his soul-searing experience upon being unloaded from railway cattle cars and being marched to, as yet, an uncertain fate in the camp.

The command to violently seize the land of Canaan breaks at least three of the Ten Commandments.

Not far from us, flames were leaping up from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load—little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it—saw it with my own eyes . . . those children in the flames. (Is it surprising that I could not sleep after that? Sleep had fled from my eyes.)

So this was where we were going. A little farther on was another and larger ditch for adults.

I pinched my face. Was I still alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it. How could it be possible for them to burn people, children, and for the world to keep silent?

I heard my father whisper, "May His Name be blessed and magnified. . . ."

For the first time, I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for?

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the lit-

tle faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget those things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.

Then Wiesel describes a religious service attended by 10,000 camp inmates.

"Blessed be the Name of the Eternal."

Thousands of voices repeated the benediction; thousands of men prostrated themselves like trees before a tempest.

"Blessed be the name of the Eternal."

Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had thousands of children burned in His pits? Because He kept six crematories working night and day, on Sundays and feast days? Because in His great might He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death? How could I say to Him: "Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praise be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who has chosen us to be butchered on Thine Altar?" (Elie Wiesel, *Night* [New York: Avon Books, Hearst Corp., 1982], 42 ff., 78).

I ask myself: can I imagine the God I know and worship stoking those flames? Can I envision Jesus at the wheel of that truck, backing it up and pulling the lever that dumps living children and babies into the flames? If this approximates the character, will, and purposes of God—past, present, or future—then I, too, like Elie Wiesel, must turn away in horror from such a Hitler God.

As I have struggled with this problem of the character and nature of God over an adult lifetime, I have come to some conclusions, which, I admit, cannot be supported from all

parts of the Scripture. For that matter, however, very few Christian doctrines enjoy consistent affirmation from all parts of the Scripture. As I try to resolve the inherent tension between the love and holiness of God, I have come to the following convictions.

A. God Is Immutable and Always Consistent with Himself

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6, NASB). When we are confronted with different and apparently contradictory portraits of God's character, action, and purposes, even in the Bible, we must assume that **the problem lies with man's understanding of God, and not with God himself.** God's truth is without error, but man's perception of that truth is not.

B. God Has Disclosed Himself Fully and Finally in Jesus of Nazareth

The unanimous claim of New Testament authors echoes Paul when he describes Jesus as the very "image of the invisible God" in whom "all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 1:15; 2:9, NASB; see 1:18). In Jesus of Nazareth we see "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). God is the kind of Father who could have a Son like Jesus (2 Cor. 1:3). The Christian conviction is that **God is like Christ.**

It is a distortion of the New Testament to assume that God acts only in loving and merciful ways.

Therefore, all concepts of God, within and beyond the Scriptures, must be measured against the full and final standard of God's revelation of himself in Jesus. The author of Hebrews implies that there was a vast

difference between the clarity of God's revelation made known "long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways," and the revelation of His true character through "His Son," who "is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (1:1-3, NASB).

In regard to Canaanite and Amalekite genocide, [I suggest] **there was a difference between what God said and what Moses, Joshua, and Samuel understood Him to say.** There was a difference between God's perfect will and the Israelites' perception of it. This is readily apparent in the way the New Testament sets aside large portions of the Hebrew Scriptures—including many direct commands of God—as any longer having relevance for Christians (for example, animal sacrifices, works salvation, circumcision). In speaking of Moses and the Israelites, Paul says, **"But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ"** (2 Cor. 3:14, NASB). We must hasten to add, however, that God honored His people's obedience in doing what they perceived to be His will, even when it involved child sacrifices, as in Abraham's case. What God requires is not perfect knowledge but a perfect heart of obedience toward Him.

There are so many scriptures in both Testaments that reveal not only the love but also the wrath of God.

C. God's Essential Character Is That of Holy Love

Because God is holy, He hates

sin! Because He is love, He loves sinners! His wrath is directed against sin because sin destroys the object of His love: namely, humankind. It is because God loves passionately that His wrath burns hotly against sin. God loves sinners with eternal, unconditional, and unchangeable love (John

"Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever."

3:16). God's love does not represent a change in His attitude because of Christ, but rather a full revelation of His character through Christ. There is nothing that man can ever do that, in and of itself, will change God's love into hate or mark an end to His patience (Rom. 2:4-11). The problem of estrangement from God has always been on man's part, never on God's. His heart has always been *for* man, reaching out *to* man in redemptive love: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19, NASB).

D. God Does Not Destroy; Sin Does!

The "wrath of God is . . . against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," not against men themselves (Rom. 1:18, NASB). God's love is experienced as wrath when men "exchange . . . the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25, see 23), and thus bind themselves to that which He hates. Then He "gives them over," in freedom, to become what they have chosen to be (see vv. 24, 26, 28). Consequently, they suffer the "wages of sin," which "is death" (6:23). God's wrath must be seen, not as the dark side of His nature, nor as the signal of the end of His patience with man. His wrath is the necessary corollary to His great love. Death was never a part of God's original intention for man nor for His creation; neither will it be a part of the "new heaven and . . . new earth" (Rev. 21:1 ff.). Death came into the world through sin (Rom. 5:12 ff.).

Death is an "enemy," the "last enemy to be destroyed" by Christ (1 Cor. 15:26, see 20-28). God does not do evil that good may come, nor does He use "the enemy" as an expression of His wrath.

God's love is so great that He has given to man **full freedom to choose his own destiny.** This is a wonderful and yet terrible potentiality; for when man turns away from God and binds himself to that which He hates, then His love is experienced as wrath. For example, there is one sun in the heavens. It melts butter but hardens clay. Even so, God is One in holy love. Whether man experiences God in the melting creativity of holy love or in the hardening destruction of wrath depends entirely upon man's response to the eternal, unconditional, and never-changing grace of God. If man binds himself to sin unrepentantly and irrevocably, then he too will be finally subject to the wrath of God and will hear those fateful words on the Day of Judgment: "Depart from Me, you who keep on practicing lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23, see NASB).

Few Christian doctrines enjoy consistent affirmation from all parts of the Scripture.

Here is the **good news** of the gospel: after sin has run its course, resulting in death, **the God who raised up Jesus is the One who continues to raise, in newness of life, those who are "dead in . . . trespasses and sins"** (Eph. 2:1-9, NASB).

E. God's Love Is Demonstrated Most Compellingly on the Cross!

Instead of destroying sinners, God allowed himself in and through His Son to be slain by sinners on the Cross. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NASB). **Jesus did not die to appease the wrath of an angry God, but to demonstrate the love of a gracious God.** Jesus did not die to earn God's forgiveness but to express it. Jesus' death was not a sacrifice offered up by man to God but by God to man! God is saying through the sacrifice of Christ: "I love you **this much!**" **Jesus did not die to change God's mind about men, but to change men's mind about God.** God's mind was, and forevermore shall be, one of unremitting love for man. It is man who, like Adam in the Garden, keeps fleeing in guilt and fear from God.

God's truth is
without error,
but man's
perception of
that truth is not.

God's attitude toward sinners is best seen in how Jesus treated Judas. Even though Jesus knew what was in Judas's heart and what Judas was about to do, He loved him to the end. His love was expressed through gentle warnings, by making him the guest of honor at the Last Supper, by offering him—along with the other disciples—the cup of forgiveness, and by greeting him in the Garden of betrayal as "friend." What is hell? It is to **reject** Christ and yet hear His words calling out for all eternity, "Friend, friend, friend." Conversely, what is heaven? It is to **receive** Jesus as Savior and Lord and hear His greeting through all eternity, "Friend, friend, friend."

Conclusion

Once more we turn to Elie Wiesel, who records a poignant scene that occurred when he and hundreds of other Jews were barracked for three

days at Gleiwitz, Poland. They were pressed into a room so tightly that many smothered by the sheer mass of human bodies cutting off sources of air. Twisted among the bodies was an emaciated young Warsaw Jew named Juliek. Somehow, incredibly, Juliek had clutched his violin during the forced march through snowstorms to Gleiwitz. That night, crammed among the hundreds of dead and nearly suffocating humans, Juliek struggled free and began playing a fragment from Beethoven's concerto. The sounds were pure, eerie, out of place in such a setting. Wiesel recalls:

It was pitch dark. I could hear only the violin, and it was as though Juliek's soul were the bow. He was playing his life. The whole of his life was gliding on the strings—his lost hopes, his charred past, his extinguished future. He played as he would never play again.

What God
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knowledge but
a perfect heart
of obedience
toward Him.

I shall never forget Juliek. How could I forget that concert, given to an audience of dying and dead men! To this day, whenever I hear Beethoven played, my eyes close and out of the dark rises the sad, pale face of my Polish friend as he said farewell on his violin to an audience of dying men.

I do not know for how long he played. I was overcome by sleep. When I awoke, in the daylight, I could see Juliek, opposite me,

slumped over, dead. Near him lay his violin, smashed, trampled, a strange overwhelming little corpse (*Night*, 107-8).

Jesus did not
die to earn
God's
forgiveness but
to express it.

Into the writhing mass of dying and doomed humanity stepped the Creator God in Jesus of Nazareth. He took upon himself skin of our skin and bone of our bones. He drank the cup of our sin, suffering, and death to its bitter extremity.

Jesus, likewise, brought with Him a violin. And upon it He played a song such as human ears had never heard. It was a plaintive song about a God who lives, who loves, who cares, and who has gone to infinite lengths to wrap His arms around us and hug us to himself. It bore a melody beyond the jarring disharmonies of this noisy and vacuous world. It spoke of bright new worlds beyond our doomed planet—a world of God's eternal day. And we listened to its pure, eerie, and heavenly strains.

But then darkness descended. The heavens hid their face. The earth trembled. And when we awoke on a new dawn, we saw Jesus—violin crushed, body broken, blood spilt—for us! And, in that moment, we too were broken, broken by

*Love so amazing, so divine, [that]
Demands my soul, my life, my all!*

—Isaac Watts

Author's note:

I am grateful to Dwight Van Winkle, professor of Old Testament, Seattle Pacific University, whose paper "Canaanite Genocide and Amalekite Genocide and the God of Love" (1988) provided an invaluable resource for Part A of this paper. I have borrowed some of his ideas and utilized his research, with his permission.

Robert's Forgotten Rules for Nominating and Electing

As Christians trying to be Christ-like, we are motivated to be fair in all our dealings. Election time in the church, whether local or at a higher denominational level, should certainly be no exception. The question is, what is the most fair way to do things? Fortunately, we do not have to figure it all out for ourselves. That question has been worked on for years by others with a desire to be fair.

The result of that effort is known as parliamentary procedure or rules of order. *Robert's Rules of Order* is far and away the most commonly used form. And for good reason. A man named Robert didn't simply sit down and create these rules. Rather, the rules and procedures as set forth in *Robert's Rules* have been developed over a long period of time through logic, usage, revision, and more usage. The rules as they now stand have proven themselves to achieve the fairness we seek, but only when applied.

Unfortunately, observing many of our elections will reveal that some of the rules found in *Robert's* are ignored or forgotten. Assuming the Christian's desire to be fair, I think the latter is responsible.

What is the remedy for forgetting? Reminding. Consider, therefore, the following points to be reminders.

One rule that is frequently forgotten has to do with nominations by a nominating committee. It is actually quite common for an organization's bylaws to call for a nominating committee to nominate certain positions. It is a fine rule because it gives the advantage of letting a small group spend a good deal of time on



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it, and it allows those nominated to be contacted in advance of the election to determine their willingness to serve.

The forgotten part of the rule is that even when a nominating committee is prescribed, nominations from the floor are still in order. In fact, it is the duty of the chair to see this is carried out. "After the nominating committee has presented its report and before voting for the different offices takes place, the chair must call for further nominations from the floor" (p. 427). (All citations and page references are from *The Scott, Foresman Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* by Henry M. Robert. 1990 ed., a new and enlarged ed. by Sarah Corbin Robert, with the assistance of Henry M. Robert III and William H. Evans. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1990.)

The chair is mandated to inquire whether there are any further nominations before declaring nominations closed. Even a formal motion to close nominations "is not in order until a reasonable opportunity to make nominations has been given; . . . it is out of order if a member is seeking the

floor to make a further nomination, and it always requires a two-thirds vote" (p. 282).

A second often forgotten rule is the "second rule"—that is, the rule relating to requirement of a second. Seconding a motion to adopt a resolution or to take a certain action is often required. The result is a seconding habit that has rubbed off on nominating procedures. Nominations to an office are governed by a different set of rules than other kinds of action. While it is acceptable and allowable to second a nomination for the purpose of indicating support or agreement, when nominating someone for an office, "no second is required" (pp. 423-24). An unsupported nomination must be allowed to stand.

Another important forgotten rule is that "each member is free to vote for any eligible person, whether he has been nominated or not" (p. 422). This means that write-ins are always in order. Recalling the principle that one should "never say always," note that an exception occurs when the bylaws specifically state otherwise; for example, as when they allow for a yes or no vote on an incumbent.

Having read the three reminders given thus far, perhaps you wonder, why even have a nominating committee? Or even, why bother to have nominations at all? It is purely a matter of practicality. "Unless the members' choice is confined to a small number of persons, voting may have to be repeated many times before a candidate achieves the required majority" (p. 422).

Besides these forgotten rules concerning nominations, there are also

some forgotten rules governing the elections themselves.

First, there is the issue of majority or plurality voting. Majority voting is the default procedure. "A plurality that is not a majority never . . . elects anyone to office except by virtue of a special rule previously adopted" (pp. 399-400). In some instances, even the special rule is not permitted, as in the case of an officer. Only the bylaws can prescribe that an officer be elected by plurality.

We, the church, more than any other organization, should strive to be fair and just in all our dealings.

That rule makes it appear that majority elections are somehow better

than plurality elections. Common sense tells us that a majority election is more likely to reflect the will of the members than a plurality election. *Robert's* goes so far as to state that "a rule that a plurality shall elect is unlikely to be in the best interest of the average organization" (p. 400). So why plurality voting? To prevent the possible necessity of additional balloting and thereby save time. The next time you are asked to choose between a majority or plurality vote, ask yourself which is more important: saving time, on the one hand, or more accurately determining the will of the members, on the other?


Another move to save time often surfaces when additional ballots are required because either no one received a majority or in order to break a tie. Oftentimes, a well-meaning member will move that the next ballot be limited to the top two (or three, or four) candidates or to those involved in the tie. The logic is to reduce the probability of needing yet another ballot.

Such a motion is always out of order and must never be allowed. "If any office remains unfilled after the first ballot, . . . the balloting should be repeated as many times as necessary. . . . The same is true where two candidates tie. . . . When repeated balloting for an office is necessary, the names of all nominees are kept on the ballot. The nominee receiving the lowest number of votes is never removed from the next ballot unless

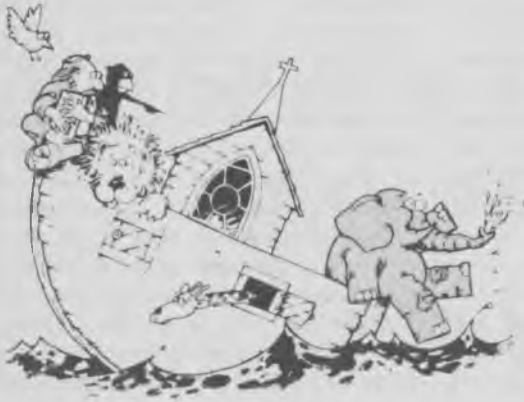
the bylaws so require, or unless he withdraws. . . . The nominee in lowest place may turn out to be a 'dark horse' on whom all factions may prefer to agree" (p. 433).

Another question that sometimes arises is, "What happens if someone is elected to more offices than allowed?" While strictly speaking an election question, this issue often arises in a different form at the time of nominations: "Should we nominate him for secretary, since he's already on the ballot for treasurer?" Since there is a fair way to deal with someone being elected to more than one office, go ahead and allow the nomination to more than one office.

What is the fair way to deal with someone elected to more offices than allowed? The elected member, if present, may simply choose which office(s) he will accept. If the member is absent, the assembly should vote to determine the office to which he will be assigned, then vote again to fill the other office (p. 432).

We, the church, more than any other organization, should strive to be fair and just in all our dealings. As church leaders, it is our job to see to it. But it isn't our job to determine what is and what is not fair. Parliamentary procedures and rules of order have developed over the centuries to do just that. Our job is to remember them and, by all means, use them! When we violate these procedures, we are violating someone's rights. 





The Model Prayer Meeting as Found in Acts Chapter 2

When the Day of Pentecost came, they all sat together in one place. Suddenly, Peter stood up among the brethren with scroll and quill in hand. "And now, do we have any prayer requests?"

John, the spiritual one, responded first. "Yes, please pray for my mother. She came in contact with a leper this week and fears she may have contracted the disease."

"Thank you," Peter replied as he noted this on his scroll. Then Peter asked if there was anyone else.

"Yes," said Andrew. "My daughter is going to see the physician this week about a physical condition and needs your prayers."

"Anyone else?" asked Peter as he hurriedly scribbled Andrew's request on the scroll.

Silence reigned for a while until James mentioned that fish prices had been falling steadily, and, being concerned, he would appreciate their prayers.

Matthew said he had fallen off a camel that week and wasn't feeling well. This led to a three- or four-

minute discussion on the merits of camel riding versus donkeys. Peter, however, tactfully brought the discussion back to prayer requests.

Bartholomew mentioned that, as he was getting older, he was getting forgetful, which frustrated him. He would appreciate their prayers.

Thaddeus's father planned on taking a business trip to Jericho. Thaddeus wanted the group to pray that his father would be given traveling mercies.

Simon had a sister that was going for a job interview with the Roman governor that week and wanted prayer. Philip had a neighbor who had a daughter that lived in Damascus who worked for a merchant that had a son who had a terminal disease that needed prayer.

As the flow of requests came to an end, Peter reminded the disciples that the greatest thing they could pray for was a moving of God's Spirit in the Church. At this, at least four of the saints nodded their heads in agreement. One even said, "Amen!"

Peter took a deep breath, put on his best pastor's smile, and said, "There is

one further concern I'd like us to pray for. Our giving has been down lately, and we're struggling to pay our budgets. Now we all know that God is able in these difficult times, and He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Let's pray that God will lay this matter on people's hearts, and that people will mind God with regard to their finances. You know," Peter continued after clearing his throat, "I wish we could see budgets as ministry and not like the taxes we pay to Rome. Now, let's all go to prayer."

Before the disciples split into small groups for prayer, Peter read again from the list of prayer requests. He secretly prayed that no request would be forgotten, thereby creating a division among the brethren.

When the prayer time was over, Peter announced that the usual after-prayer meeting fellowship time was changed from Jacob's Joint to Abe's Pancakes. Some of the brethren didn't like the service at Jacob's Joint.

The disciples then sang "We Are One in the Bond of Love" and were dismissed. About 3,000 were added to their number that day.

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Curtis Lewis, Jr.

December/January/February 1995-96

Prepared by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most exciting and challenging aspects of preaching is that of proclaiming Hebrew narratives. The Old Testament as a whole, as well as the New Testament, is built on a narrative frame. Gabriel Fackre said: "Narrative, in its encompassing sense, is an account of events and participants moving over time and space, a recital with beginning and ending patterned by the narrator's principle of selection."

I chose the Genesis narrative of Joseph as a basis for this series of sermons. It was a fascinating and delightful journey.

Three things one must be cognizant of in preaching narrative (one must recognize these factors in *all* preaching):

First, be true to the biblical text. Do your exegesis and do it well.

Second, continually remind your congregation that grace is at work in the story.

Third, emphasize continually the sovereignty of God. He is the God who acts in history.

I trust that you will have a wonderful journey with Joseph.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A CRACKED FOUNDATION?

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 37:1-5

INTRO:

ILLUS: A bombing during the Korean conflict left a child named Kim blind and forced her family to wander from place to place to beg for food. Her distraught father sold the eldest of his three daughters to a family to do housework. Then one day, in desperation, he threw his other two girls into a river. The younger drowned, but six-year-old Kim survived. For some reason she was able to float a bit, though she swallowed a lot of water and hit a rock. She was finally rescued by her own father. A few weeks later he left her at the door of a World Vision Home that cared for the deaf and blind.

Four years later Kim came to the United States to be adopted by an American family. Here her lovely voice was discovered. She received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Vienna, Austria, and, later, invitations to sing in churches all over America. Patsy and I had the privilege of having Kim in our home. Today she serves on the Billy Graham team and has been featured at his crusades and over his television programs. Kim was united with her father during a visit to Korea. The *Korean Times* told the story of how this 22-year-old blind vocalist met her real father after so many years.

Suffering can contribute to development, maturity, and fulfillment. Many times through adversity an inner attitude is developed that allows one to triumph over tremendous personal anguish. In the midst of loss, creative response can be released. Joseph is a good example of this. Though the story of Joseph teaches many lessons, the theme that unites them all is the sovereignty of an all-wise God overruling the sordidness of man to work out His beautiful purpose.

Like Kim Wicks, Joseph did not start with an ideal foundation. His foundation was extremely weak in many ways. Yet, despite less than ideal circumstances, Joseph grew to be one of two major Old Testament characters of which not one negative word is stated. Daniel is the other.

Let's look at some of the cracks in his foundation that Joseph had to overcome.

I. JOSEPH'S FATHER WAS LESS THAN PERFECT

In early life, Joseph's father, Jacob, had been undisciplined. For him, the end always justified the means. In order to understand this less than perfect father, let's review some scenes from his life.

A. Scene one: In Genesis 25, Jacob's brother, Esau, had been out hunting. Famished, he came home from a long day in the wilderness. He caught the scent of fresh stew being made by his younger brother. Hungry and tired, Esau asked Jacob for a hot meal. Jacob saw his golden opportunity. He would be glad to give Esau

some stew—for a price. The price was that Esau hand over his birthright.

B. Scene two: Getting older and with his vision diminishing, Isaac, the father of Esau and Jacob, was making plans to give Esau the patriarchal blessing. Rebekah, Isaac's wife, overheard his plans and summoned her favorite son, Jacob. Together they devised a plan.

C. Scene three: Desiring to cover the conspiracy and, at the same time, save her youngest son from Esau's wrath, Rebekah sent Jacob to her brother, Laban. Working for his uncle, he fell in love with his cousin, Rachel.

D. Scene four: Leah gave Jacob four sons. Rachel does not have children, so she gives Jacob her maid, by whom he fathers two sons. Then Leah gives him *her* maid, and Jacob fathers two sons by her as well.

E. Scene five: Several years later, in giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, Rachel dies. In his grief, Jacob showered his affection on Joseph, Rachel's firstborn. Scripture tells us that Jacob "loved Joseph more than any of his other sons" (Gen. 37:3).

II. JOSEPH WAS SHACKLED BY HIS SIBLINGS

A. The story of Jacob and his family is sordid.

1. Then there was Dinah, who was raped by the son of the town mayor. And then there were Simeon and Levi, who, along with their brothers, plotted revenge for Dinah, deceived the young men of the community, and slaughtered them all.

2. Perhaps the saddest statement in the entire narrative is Jacob's reaction to the sin of his sons. Evidently, he took no disciplinary action. Instead, Jacob's reaction centered upon himself. Concern for his own reputation was preeminent. Scripture records, "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to . . . the people living in this land'" (Gen. 34:30).

B. And if you haven't had your fill of sordidness yet, then there was Judah. Thinking he was sneaking out to have sex with a prostitute, Judah found out that he had been sleeping with his daughter-in-law. That was the "happy little family" in which Joseph grew up.

III. JOSEPH OVERCOMES THE ODDS

A. Joseph probably didn't understand what was happening in his life. Yet without the aid of modern psychology, television, SAT and ACT scores, or even a written Bible, Joseph did quite well.

B. Joseph had a positive mental attitude.

C. Joseph had perseverance and determination. Even with a cracked family foundation, he determined to

persevere. Life is a long-distance endurance run. It requires pacing and, most of all, persistence and determination.

ILLUS. Do you remember the 1984 Olympics? Jeff Blatnick competed in Greco-Roman wrestling, an event in which the United States had never won a medal. Added to the drama was the fact that two years before, Jeff had undergone major surgery for cancer. Blatnick was not to be denied. In the gold medal round as I watched, I could sense the determination. When the final buzzer sounded, the arena erupted. As Jeff was interviewed, tears streamed down his face—he cried like a baby. I felt a lump in my throat—he had overcome. That is the attitude Joseph modeled in his life. He persevered.

D. Joseph had a servant's attitude. Today, serving seems negative. Most see it as a weakness rather than a strength. Serving is for wimps and losers. But Joseph realized that one of the greatest strengths in life is to give your life away to others.

ILLUS. Do you remember the story of the little engine that could? A trainload of toys needed to be delivered to the village for the children. The powerful engine that pulled the passenger trains was asked to help. "I'm too busy pulling important people," was his haughty reply.

Next, the working engine that pulled long freight trains was approached. "I'm too busy pulling the machinery that runs the world," he retorted.

When all else failed, the little switch engine in the train yard was asked. He knew he was small and did not have great strength, but he was willing to try. Remember what happened as he approached the big hill? All the way up, he kept saying, "I think I can! I think I can! I think I can!" Finally reaching the top and cresting the hill, the train edged toward the downward slope. Picking up speed, it raced down the hill and pulled into the village train station with the children cheering its arrival.

That story speaks volumes on willingness to serve. Even when we are not sure we can handle the task, we ought to be willing to try. Joseph was an overcomer because he was more concerned with giving his life away to others.

E. Joseph had an attitude of spontaneous obedience.

Though things were not ideal at home, Joseph was spontaneously obedient. In Genesis 37, when his father asked him to go check on his brothers, he didn't even hesitate. This attitude would be reflected throughout Joseph's life, not only to his family, but to his God.

ILLUS. The story is told of a young preacher who was being interviewed by a church as a potential senior pastor. The Pastor Search Committee heard him preach in his own congregation and was spellbound by his oratorical abilities. They unanimously voted to ask him to come and preach a trial sermon at their church. On Sunday, the trial sermon was preached. The young pastor delivered another oratorical gem. The committee was a bit nervous when they realized that he was preaching the same message they had heard him preach in his own church. De-

spite that fact, nothing was said, and the church unanimously voted to call him as the new pastor. Three months later he arrived for his first Sunday in the new field. He began to wax eloquent. Fifteen minutes into the sermon many of the people realized that he was preaching the same sermon he had preached during his trial sermon. They shrugged it off as due to nervousness and newness of the situation.

That night the evening service began. The music was outstanding. The congregation was in high spirits. Then the young pastor began his message. Within five minutes, the entire congregation realized it was the same message again. The quickest deacons' meeting in the history of the church was called following the service.

In addressing the young pastor, the deacons said, "Pastor, we believe that you are tremendously gifted. We also believe that you are God's man for our church at this time, and we want to affirm you and support you in everything you do. However, we do have one question. Don't you have more than one sermon?"

With a slight smile and a twinkle in his eye, the young man replied, "Yes, and when you start living what I'm preaching in the first one, I'll go to the second one."

CONCLUSION:

Joseph took a cracked foundation and filled it with the mortar of godly attributes, and that made all the difference.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship

Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymn

"The Solid Rock"

Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

Praise Chorus

"More than Conquerors"

Hymn

"Standing on the Promises"

God's Word

1 Cor. 13:1-7

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer

It Is Family Altar Time

Ministry in Music

We Worship as We Bring Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Sanctuary Choir

"Paid in Full"

Message

"WHAT DO YOU DO WITH

A CRACKED FOUNDATION?" (Gen. 37:1-5)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

Benediction

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26). Amen.

WHEN LIFE IS THE PITS

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 37:1-28

INTRO:

Have you ever read Erma Bombeck's *If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?* It is an all too truthful book that causes us to stop and laugh at ourselves. I'm not sure that even Erma could have made Joseph laugh, however. "The pits" for him became more than just a figure of speech.

Joseph had a sense of destiny as a 17-year-old teenager. He could say not only, "I had a dream," but, "I had two dreams!" Naturally Joseph felt he had to tell his brothers about them. Why? Who knows! He described to his brothers that the dream included all of them "binding sheaves of grain out in the field." Suddenly his sheaf rose and stood above the rest. The indication seemed to be that his brothers would bend down before him. Their response was rather typical: "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" (Gen. 37:7, 8). They were angry—here stands Joseph in his dignified robe, telling them that one day he is going to be the headman. They couldn't believe it; they hated him all the more.

Joseph twists the knife by telling them of a second dream. In this (37:9), the sun and moon and 11 stars bow down to him. The message is clear—the stars refer to the brothers. The temperature is rising dramatically. The brothers are getting hotter by the moment. Joseph is being stretched—father's favoritism; brothers hoping he would die.

For some time, the brothers fumed over the preposterous dreams that Joseph had shared with them. He wouldn't become their superior! They would stop him. Their time finally came when Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing as they tended sheep. The scripture tells of their reaction upon seeing him coming (read 37:19-20). The die was cast.

But Reuben, the oldest brother, had more maturity and sense. Murder would never work. Instead, he set forth the idea of throwing Joseph in the cistern. To cover up their deed, they would strip off his robe and blot it with animal blood. They would then proclaim to their father that their youngest brother had been killed. What an excellent cover-up—just enough to soothe their conscience and assuage their guilt.

I. THERE IS THE PRECIPITATION OF ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES (37:4-10)

A. It would be helpful to understand the causes that put Joseph "in the pits." They are often the same causes that put us there. These factors are especially evident when others are involved in our being in the pits.

1. Jealousy (v. 4). Jealousy is hostility toward a rival or a person one believes to enjoy an advantage. Joseph's brothers were hostile toward him because of his father's blatant favoritism. Jealousy often wreaks havoc based on this premise. Many a person and home have been tragically destroyed because of this debilitating tendency.

ILLUS. A good example of this is Ester Pauline Friedman and her twin sister, Pauline Ester Friedman. These identical twins dressed alike, took the same classes, shared the same purse, and slept in the same twin bed. The middle-aged Ester Pauline hooked a job replacing the original Ann Landers at the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Two months later, Pauline Ester started her own column with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, calling herself Abigail Van Buren. Ann sniffed to *Time* magazine that her sister's column was "very imitative." The feud was on. For eight years these two sisters could not resolve a petty family squabble. Finally, the two partially made up. Feelings lingered on. Seventeen years after making up, Abby said about Ann, "If she looked old, if she needed a face-lift, believe me, it's because she needed it. Why not? When you cry a lot, it's got to show." Jealousy!

2. Envy. Having seen the favoritism shown by Jacob to Joseph, the brothers envied the special attention. Why did they not have a special robe like him? Why did they have to work so hard? Why weren't they handsome? The questions were innumerable.

3. Bitterness. Because jealousy and envy were allowed to take root in their lives, Joseph's brothers became bitter. When bitterness takes its stronghold, excessive amounts of emotional energy are wasted.

B. Do you know what a hatred ledger is? It's that private mental list we keep of everything we hold against another person.

C. Joseph's brothers had been consistently adding to their hatred ledger concerning him.

II. THERE ARE SOME PRINCIPLES IN DEALING WITH ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES (37:22-24)

A. Can you imagine being in Joseph's place? He was in the middle of nowhere and had no help.

1. Was Joseph's life going to end here at the ripe old age of 17? He couldn't climb up the walls of the cistern. There was no way out. He was surrounded. And what's worse, no one cared.

2. But God did care! Acts 7:9 tells us that all the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. And yet God was with him. You see, it is always too soon to quit.

ILLUS. Winston Churchill was such a man. While young, he attended a preparatory school by the name of Harrow. Following his time there, he completed his education and served in the military in both India and Africa. At the age of 65, this 5'5" tall giant was elected as prime minister of England. Toward the end of his career he was invited to address the student body at his alma mater. The day preceding his arrival, the headmaster announced, "I would encourage you to bring pen and paper tomorrow. The prime minister will speak, and you will wish to note his comments. He is possibly the greatest orator of all time."

The following day, the auditorium was packed and

each pen hoisted. After an effusive introduction, Mr. Churchill stepped to the podium. Graciously he acknowledged all. Then, in powerful voice, he rumbled: "Never give up! Never give up! Never give up! Never! Never!" With that he sat down.

So it is with Joseph and us—even in the pit of life we must never give up. Paul described life in the pit well when he said, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

Joseph, in order to make a meaningful contribution with his life, will have to forget the adverse circumstances of the pit and put them behind him.

III. YOU CAN FIND PURPOSE IN ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES (37:25-28)

- A. Joseph knew he was needed.
- B. God brought Joseph to a place of no return. He will do the same with you and me.
 1. The 10 brothers lifted Joseph out of the pit when they saw the Ishmaelites coming. They lifted him out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver. Then the Ishmaelites brought Joseph to Egypt. There would be no turning back for Joseph. What is more, it was out of his hands.
 2. Joseph was given temporary relief from his immediate need when he was lifted out of the pit. He had thought that this was the end. God gave him relief.
 3. Joseph would always remember how he was lifted out of the pit.
- C. Joseph's new home was Egypt. A lot had happened in the last 24 hours. God can accomplish a lot in a very short period of time. What was accomplished now was the impossibility of turning back. It was painful. He didn't even get to say good-bye to his father. He could only say in his heart, "Good-bye, Father. Good-bye, Canaan. Good-bye, coat of distinction," which showed he was the favorite son.

CONCLUSION:

Like Joseph, all of us have to deal with the pits of life. But the strength to do so comes from knowing the One who can overcome all of the pits. How about you? Do you know the God who is able to rescue from the cisterns of life? Do you see His hand even in the pit in which you may find yourself? Perhaps the pit is merely a brief stopping place on the road to doing great things for God.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED
 The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship
 Welcome to Our Fellowship
 Hymn "Living by Faith"
 Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE
 Praise Chorus "Because He Lives"
 Hymn "It Is Well"
 God's Word Rom. 8:31-39

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER
 The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer
 It Is Family Altar Time
 Sanctuary Choir "When Answers Aren't Enough"
 We Worship as We Bring Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD
 Ministry in Music
 Message "WHEN LIFE IS THE PITS" (Gen. 37:1-28)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence
 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10).

Benediction
 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Amen.



STARTING A NEW LIFE

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Gen. 39:1-6

INTRO:

ILLUS. With only two seconds left in a professional football game some years ago, the New Orleans Saints were losing to the Detroit Lions by two points. The Saints sent out kicker Tom Dempsey to try a field goal, which would win the game. But the ball had been spotted an almost impossible 55 yards from the goalposts, plus 8 yards behind scrimmage, a total of 63 yards. The record for a field goal at that time was 56 yards. Dempsey put his foot squarely into the ball with everything he had. When it cleared the crossbar by only inches, teammates, fans, and newsmen mobbed him.

The field goal was all the more remarkable because Dempsey was born with half a right foot. As Tom grew up, he resolved to do everything other kids did, including 10-mile hikes with the Boy Scouts despite his handicap. In college, he discovered that he could kick a football farther than everyone he knew. With just half a foot, he seldom hit the ball dead center. But he kept practicing. He was honored by the Professional Sports Writers of America as the "Most Courageous Player." Dempsey spoke of his handicap in this way: "Had I not been born with the handicap, I might never have become a field goal kicker and record breaker."

Joseph suffered adversity. He fell from the position of favored son to slave. For the next 13 years, from the moment his brothers pushed him into the pit until the day Pharaoh elevated him to prime minister, he was a captive. The Word of God reveals the anguish in these words: "With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility" (Gen. 49:23). The prophet Amos speaks of "the ruin of Joseph" (6:6).

Like Joseph, we all have our captivities; we are trapped in one way or another. Some have been invalids for years, shut in by four walls. Others have been boxed in by accident, anxiety, illness, hardship, financial reverse, pain, misunderstanding, tragedy, or sorrow. Like Joseph, all of us can say on occasion, "I never thought this would happen to me. I never expected to be a captive in this situation."

Here is Joseph—born with a silver spoon in his mouth, now in a strange new country. Now a slave, Joseph has to start a new life. He is in Egypt, cut off from all the people and surroundings he had ever known. Yet the sovereign God has a plan for Joseph and for the nation Israel. God is in control, not only of Joseph's life, but yours and mine as well.

I. JOSEPH HAD TO BE EMANCIPATED FROM HIS PAST (v. 1)

A. Joseph could not go back to Canaan. This was in his past. He was now a slave in Egypt.

1. Dreamer that he was, it wouldn't do any good to sit around all day dreaming about going home.
2. Joseph enters phase two of his preparation. In

phase one he had been thrown into the pit, rescued in time, and kept alive. When God makes us break from the past, He puts something in its place to make things not only bearable but even pleasant.

B. There were ways in which God made life bearable for Joseph.

1. Joseph had rest from his enemies. He lived free from the kind of terror and jealousy and hatred that he had known. He wasn't overjoyed about being in Egypt, but at least he didn't have that terror.
2. Joseph had the presence of the Lord (v. 2).
3. Joseph prospered. Starting at the bottom in Potiphar's household prepared him to be prime minister in Egypt.

II. FOR JOSEPH EGYPT WAS THE PLACE OF PREPARATION (vv. 2-3)

A. When the Ishmaelite merchants arrived in Egypt, they sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials.

1. The Scripture record identifies Potiphar as "captain of the guard." We have learned from other sources that he was head of the Egyptian secret police or FBI.

ILLUS. Traveling around the world, the late Corrie ten Boom often carried with her a small piece of tapestry. As she would speak, she would display the piece of cloth to the audience. At first glance it appeared as an ugly item, its threads tangled, ragged, and snagged. But when Corrie turned it over, the onlookers knew that they had merely been viewing the back of the piece. Beautifully embroidered on the reverse side of the tapestry were the words "God Is Love."

Anyone looking at Joseph down in Egypt might only see a tangled mass of loose ends, yet God is preparing Joseph—He is weaving the thread into a tapestry of a beautiful life.

B. Potiphar takes note of something. The God of Joseph is blessing him. Potiphar has been watching Joseph, and in the midst of slavery Yahweh is there.

1. During the days, weeks, and months of our preparation time, someone is watching us. What a tremendous testimony to God's power that a pagan onlooker notices that God is blessing him.
2. Joseph's attitude during this time of preparation is quite different from the attitude of our world. Today we live in an age where the clamor for individual rights far exceeds the call of duty.
3. Joseph serves as an example of a Christian's attitude toward work.

ILLUS. Lee Iacocca compares the work ethic of the United States with that of the Japanese: The Japanese worker is highly disciplined—if things are crooked, he'll straighten it out. On the assembly line, he'll stop the line until it's fixed. They have a lot of pride. They see their work as

a mission. Hangovers and absenteeism are virtually unheard of. One Japanese company had to fire their supervisors because too many of them insisted on working on holidays as well as their days off. Can you imagine that in the United States?

Joseph is a good example of doing a job well, even as a slave. Through his unselfish service, he prepares himself for greater things and brings glory and honor to God. Potiphar notices this.

III. JOSEPH'S POSITION IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE (vv. 4-6)

A. Joseph achieves the highest position possible in the household of Potiphar, the attendant of Pharaoh. This position was often found in houses of Egyptian nobility. Here the Hebrew slave now runs the whole household.

1. Joseph reflects the ultimate in trust. His performance and behavior were so outstanding and above reproach that he became Potiphar's executive assistant. This meant supervising all the other servants and employees, handling his public relations, overseeing his finances, administering his agricultural interests, and all of his other business activities.
2. Though Joseph's credibility was based on his personal performance, the Word makes it clear that there was another important and deciding factor: "The LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph" (v. 5). In fact, "the blessing of the LORD" (v. 5) was on everything Potiphar had.
3. Though Joseph was a slave, his spirit was never shackled. His confident faith in God enabled him to face Egypt successfully.

CONCLUSION:

Will Steger described this kind of endurance in his journal of the 1986 Steger International Polar Expedition to the North Pole by dogsled, a feat that had not been attempted since 1909. They traveled over 400 miles across the polar icecap for 56 exhausting days. Steger told of their emotions during a particularly trying part of the journey:

Our moods swung wildly with each change in conditions. For hours we'd fight our way through a hellish chaos of huge rubble, suddenly breaking free onto a

plain that seemed endless. Despair would flash to exhilaration. "Finally the worst is behind us," we'd gasp. An hour or two later we'd strike another maze . . . another slump. Another heavy dose of doubt about our prospects. . . . We found ourselves expending as much precious energy fighting doubt as we did fighting pressure ridges. But now . . . we've learned to stop groping for some elusive highway of smooth travel to the pole and settled in for the long, hard grind northward.

Joseph wrestled his way through the "hellish chaos" that surrounded him. He had the power to see it through—to start over again. He also had the faith to hold on when everything was working against his dreams and the strength to keep going toward an elusive goal.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship

Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymn

"The Lily of the Valley"

Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

Praise Chorus

"Let's Just Praise the Lord"

Hymn

"It's Just like His Great Love"

God's Word

Heb. 11:1-6

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer

It Is Family Altar Time

Sanctuary Choir

"Forever King"

We Worship as We Bring Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Ministry in the Word

Message

"STARTING A NEW LIFE" (Gen. 39:1-6)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you" (Deut. 16:17).

Benediction

And now may the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ be in you, enabling you to know God's will and empowering you to do God's will. Amen.

WATCH OUT FOR THE WRECKERS

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 39:6-10

INTRO:

ILLUS. Several hundred years ago on the island of Cape Hatteras off the shore of North Carolina, there were men whose business it was to get ships to run aground on the shoals just off the island. These men were wreckers who made their living gathering up the parts and cargo of such ships. With a lighted lantern fastened to the head of an old nag (a horse), these men of Nag's Head—for that was the name of their village—walked up and down and back and forth. Out at sea in the darkness of the mid-Atlantic night, ships searching for a passage past the island would mistake the bobbing light for the stern light of a ship they supposed had found safe passage.

The ships would turn inland and run aground in Diamond Shoals. In the morning, the wreckers would come and gather the timbers for new houses, utensils for their kitchens, and money for their purses. It was a thriving business. In fact, even now visitors to Nag's Head will be shown old houses built and furnished with the material taken from the more than 300 ships that perished off the coast by accident or treachery.

Temptation is much like the ancient wreckers of Cape Hatteras. Just as Joseph is on his way up, his tragic beginning looks like it is about to turn into a triumph. Maybe, just maybe, there was a silver lining in his cloud. Then it happened—out of nowhere the wreckers of temptation sprang. Potiphar's wife had been eyeing Joseph because he was what the younger girls of the congregation would call "a hunk." The first day she propositioned him, he was probably startled. He had been striving to do his best and earn the respect of his boss. Now his boss's wife was wanting intimacy with him. What is a 27-year-old red-blooded male to do? Joseph faces the wrecker of temptation.

The choice before Joseph was honor or the boss's wife. Temptation comes in many forms. For Solomon, it was polygamy. By giving in, he allowed his wives to lead him astray. For David it was lust. Bowing to the temptation, he found himself committing murder to cover his deed. The ramifications affected his family for years. All of us are subject to temptation; each one of us has a weak spot. One thing for sure, temptation is inevitable. Even Jesus Christ was not exempt.

Let us examine Joseph's temptation to see what valuable lessons we can learn.

I. JOSEPH IS PROPOSITIONED BY POTIPHAR'S WIFE (v. 7)

A. When we are the most successful, we are often the most vulnerable to temptation. What happened to Joseph vividly illustrates this reality.

1. Before Joseph arrives on the scene, Potiphar probably spends a little too much time at the office. He is a politician on the rise, and that demands long hours. When Joseph comes along, Potiphar is freed from his responsibilities at home, and he wraps

himself up in his administrative duties. Meanwhile, he leaves an unfulfilled wife at home.

2. Potiphar may have become too busy to meet his wife's emotional and physical needs. In view of the moral value system of the ancient Egyptian culture, Potiphar probably had other women in his life.

B. Potiphar was not the only one that took notice of Joseph.

1. Potiphar's wife eventually noticed Joseph also. We read that he "was well-built and handsome" (v. 6).

2. We don't know a lot about Potiphar's wife, so we have to be careful not to speculate. Possibly she was a fashionable woman. As an officer's wife, she moved in circles that made it likely she would normally have little to do with a servant or a foreigner like Joseph. She is not subtle in her advances. She comes to Joseph and very directly tells him what she wants: "Come to bed with me!" (v. 7). Joseph refused her. Not only was her invitation direct, but she kept after him "day after day" (v. 10). We don't even have to speculate to conclude that her invitation was more than verbal. She would have used every visual seductive technique she could think of.

How does Joseph handle this? What is his response?

II. JOSEPH REMARKABLY RESISTED HER PROPOSITION (v. 10)

A. There is no sin in being tempted. Temptation is not sin, but yielding is sin.

1. Joseph avoided temptation. Though Joseph had to enter the Potiphar house daily to perform his job, which subjected him to Mrs. Potiphar's repeated solicitations, he avoided her whenever possible.

ILLUS. A man overcoming a gambling obsession found that he could not walk home by way of a certain street because he would have to pass a certain club where he habitually gambled. A rehabilitated alcoholic admitted he couldn't have lunch in a certain café near his office because of his former practice of taking liquor with every meal he ate there.

B. Joseph's response was remarkable, particularly since he was a young single man. He resisted temptation.

III. JOSEPH HAD REASONS FOR RESISTING MRS. POTIPHAR'S ADVANCES (vv. 8-9)

The Scriptures give two reasons why Joseph continuously resisted.

A. He would not violate Potiphar's trust in him (read v. 9).

B. His love for God kept him from falling into sexual sin.

1. Joseph knew that Potiphar trusted him totally, even with his wife.

2. How strongly people resist acknowledging sin's harm.

ILLUS. Luis Palau, the Latin American evangelist to whom God has given an effective ministry on three continents, bemoans the American tendency to regard sin as "just a little thing" and ignore its effects. He says, "If you think it is just a little thing, come to Latin America, and see what we are going through down there. In some countries 70 percent of the population is illegitimate. There is a terrible nothingness in the structure of society in that part of the world because of sexual immorality."

ILLUS. An ancient legend tells us that when Joseph made reference to the fact that he could not do that "great wickedness, and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9, KJV), Potiphar's wife looked puzzled. Then she smiled understandingly, tore off a part of a richly embroidered drape, and hurrying over to the image of a pedestaled Egyptian god standing in the corner, threw it over the idol's head, covering its eyes. "Now, Joseph," she said, "it's all right; the god cannot see us."

Joseph is said to have answered, "But my God sees us still. His eyes can never be covered, for darkness and light are both alike to Him."

C. Most adulterous situations come because someone thinks the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. And there is one reason for this: it is sin.

D. Love is often the excuse for sin, as if to say, "It's all right." Remember this: any sexual involvement outside marriage is sin. It is not real love that motivates it—it is lust!

CONCLUSION:

Have you ever seen an area where a forest fire has raged? It is a horrible sight. Towering trees have been reduced to blackened, splintered toothpicks, vestiges of their former beauty. The grandness is gone, vanished in the raging forest fire that was sparked by a burst of lightning or the fallen match of a careless camper. The area is devastated. Once a forest fire has ravaged an area, all that is left are ugly evidences of what was once beautiful. Sin does that to people. If allowed to run amok, its searing flames scar the landscape of a person's life. To love this

destructive force, sin, is to love what literally drove Jesus Christ to the Cross.

It is Satan's pleasure to minimize sin. He calls it by other names. In his jargon, homosexuality becomes "an alternate lifestyle"; promiscuity, "sexual liberty"; drunkenness, "a social disease"; murder through abortion, "freedom of choice." Satan points us to the pleasure and never to the pain. Joseph is a model for us as he says, "No! I'm not going to do it." I warn you today: watch out for the wreckers. You could end up a shipwreck. Look at Joseph—you can make it!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship
Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymn "A Shelter in the Time of Storm"

Hymn "All That Thrills My Soul"

Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

Hymn "Our Great Savior"

God's Word Gal. 6:1-8

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer

It Is Family Altar Time

Sanctuary Choir "More than Wonderful"

We Worship as We Bring Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Ministry in Music

Message "WATCH OUT FOR THE WRECKERS"

(Gen. 39:6-10)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14).

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
Amen.

THE DUNGEON TIMES OF LIFE

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 39:20-23; 40:1-23

INTRO:

It is impossible to know the thoughts that raced through Joseph's mind that day. Within a few hours, he was accused, arrested, and thrown into prison, all because he refused to betray his master's trust or break his commitment to God. He did what was right, and it turned out all wrong. Just when he could see the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled, they were once again thrown into a pit. As he was lowered into the prison, he must have wondered concerning the whereabouts of God. We know the depths of his despair, for in Gen. 40:15 we hear the pathos as he speaks to the cupbearer.

There is another account of this event in a later scripture. Retelling the history of Israel, the Psalmist tells us (read Ps. 105:17-22):

He sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true. The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.

Tested—that is the right word for what's going to happen to Joseph for the next few years. God is going to test Joseph and his dreams in that dungeon. Two words are used in our text to describe where Joseph was imprisoned. In Gen. 39:20-23 a word is used that literally means "roundhouse." The other is the name Joseph gave it—dungeon (40:15). It was probably a windowless, stifling, smelly, filthy, half-buried hall with a roof shaped like an inverted bowl. Through an opening at the top Joseph was lowered into the dark interior. It is one thing to be in a prison when you're guilty, but quite another when you're innocent—where your very purity has caused the injustice. That's the hardest kind of testing to endure.

Look through the perspective of Joseph's dungeon years at some of life's dungeon experiences that come to us. My prayer is that we can hear God's relevant message for us. What are some of the dungeon experiences of life, and what are their meanings?

I. THERE IS THE DUNGEON OF DARKNESS (40:15)

A. There is the darkness of sin. The Bible speaks of many types of darkness that are the result of sin. However, it is wrong to conclude that all times of darkness come from sin. Certainly Joseph's darkness didn't, and much of our darkness doesn't either.

B. There is the darkness of dryness. This is the darkness that some of the saints have described as the seeming withdrawal of any feeling of God's presence from the soul. Such a time of deep spiritual aridness is called by various names: "the dark night of the soul," "a spiritual desert," "the wilderness of the soul." It is God's discipline of darkness so that we will stop walking by sight and learn to walk by faith.

C. There is the darkness of dilemma. I am referring to those dark moments of life when we honestly try but seem unable to discover what God's will for us really is. We are in darkness regarding God's direction for us or regarding some decision we are forced to make.

ILLUS. A recently licensed pilot was flying his private plane on a cloudy day. He was not very experienced in instrument landing. When the control tower was to bring him in for a landing, he started thinking of the hills and towers and buildings in that area and began to get panicky. In a calm but stern voice, the command came: "You just obey instructions; we'll take care of the obstructions." If we set our minds on the direction of obedience to God's will, He will handle the obstructions. He will take care of the darkness and turn it into light.

II. THERE IS THE DUNGEON OF DESPAIR

A. Joseph was in a dungeon of darkness that could easily have turned into a dungeon of despair and depression.

B. Joseph kept the darkness of the dungeon out of his heart (39:20-23; 40:6-7).

1. One of the most remarkable secrets of Joseph's life is that the darkness that surrounded him in that dungeon was not allowed to enter his heart. The light of the dream within him was kept bright and clear.

ILLUS. In his book *Born Again*, Charles Colson tells of his involvement in the Watergate scandal, his subsequent Christian conversion, and then his seven-month imprisonment. He describes his struggle to keep a truly Christian spirit during his confinement. He watched some of the strongest men finally give in and turn into ambulatory vegetables while in prison. Some slept every minute they could, as a way of escape. Some turned in on themselves, brooding. Others degenerated both physically and mentally. Colson says he avoided that only by the strongest determination—by strict physical disciplines like walking fast, exercising regularly, and fighting off sleep except at night, and keeping his mind on God through regular Bible study and prayer. Only by a strict ordering of himself was he able to keep the prison from getting inside of him.

2. Joseph was inside the dungeon, but he never let the dungeon get inside of him.

3. After a while we see the same thing happening here in the prison that happened back in Potiphar's house. Joseph proved to be a person of integrity amid the sordid treachery and cruelty of prison life. Before long he was made the chief assistant to the warden and was actually running the day-to-day business of the prison.

C. One day the king's cupbearer and baker were thrown into the same prison.

1. Since they were important persons, Joseph was

assigned to them. One night both men had dreams that were very disturbing. The words of the story are remarkable (read 40:6-7).

2. With a compassionate spirit, Joseph listened to the men's disturbing dreams. Then, giving full credit to God, he interpreted their dreams for them. Events turned out exactly as he foretold.

III. THERE IS THE DUNGEON OF DISAPPOINTMENT (40:23)

A. So Joseph stays in the dungeon. At first his spirits are high with hope. But as the days lengthen into months, he begins to realize the terrible truth (read 40:23). Now the darkness of the dungeon is blacker than the swamps.

B. We've all experienced it.

1. We've all known the awful feeling in the pit of our stomachs that disappointment brings. Joseph experienced this. A year passes, and Joseph is still in prison. And then another year—he is 30 years old. It is 13 years since the 17-year-old dreamer started out across the fields to visit his brothers. Where are his dreams now? We are asking the same questions, aren't we? God is going to give us an answer pretty soon, but first He wants to teach us about the dungeon of disappointment. The reason is that God has to get us onto His divine timetable. Many times He cannot do this without taking us through the discipline of disappointment. In our disappointment, God wants us to wait upon Him.

2. Interrupted dreams are not necessarily broken dreams meant to be abandoned. They are only delayed dreams meant to be postponed. God-given dreams will keep in the deep freeze of acceptance, provided you keep out any heat from resentment.

3. God continues to keep Joseph faithful. While he waited in the dungeon of disappointment, he was a good and faithful servant in the task he had been given to do.

CONCLUSION:

Leo Buscaglia relates an experience that happened to him. He awoke in an intensive care unit after surgery. He was plugged into intravenous tubes, respirators, and monitoring devices in a room where other critically ill patients were in the beds around him. Before surgery he

had given orders that no one be admitted to his cubicle while he was in ICU. Though Buscaglia was being watched every minute by trained medical personnel, he started regretting his decision. He was lonely and wanted to see a familiar face. At that point, Buscaglia says, he was roused by the creak of an opening door. A friend had slipped past the No Visitors sign and was threading his way around all the medical paraphernalia to his bedside. "It was a moment of sheer magic," Buscaglia wrote. When the friend took his hand and held it for a few seconds, Buscaglia forgot all the tubes, respirators, and monitors. He only knew that someone loved him, was close to him, and was trying to help him. Buscaglia finished relating this incident by saying, "I'll remember this moment forever."

What a picture of grace! We are imprisoned by the dungeons of life. Our dreams are chained in darkness, despair, and disappointment. In our aloneness and lostness He comes—it is a moment of sheer grace. As He releases us and frees us, we say to ourselves, "I'll remember this moment forever." And we will!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship

Welcome to Our Fellowship

Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

Hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

Choruses Interspersed Between Each Verse

"Fill My Cup, Lord"

"The Comforter Has Come"

"How Great Thou Art!"

"Bless His Holy Name"

God's Word

Ps. 130

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer

It Is Family Altar Time

Sanctuary Choir

"Because of Whose I Am"

We Worship by Bringing Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Ministry in Music

Message

"THE DUNGEON TIMES OF LIFE"

(Gen. 39:20-23; 40:1-23)

THE WAITING ROOMS OF LIFE

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Gen. 40:23—41:40

INTRO:

Have you ever noticed that rooms speak for themselves? Walk into a freshly decorated nursery prepared by proud, expectant parents. Immediately the room speaks of joy, excitement, and anticipation. It proclaims the coming of happy days. Enter a dorm room the evening after students are allowed in—curtains, carpet, bedspreads are all neat. Go back a week later, and all the work Mom and Dad have done seems to be in vain.

But other rooms are not so inviting. Some rooms are lonely regardless of the number of people within them. Discouragement reigns. A frightened uncertainty prevails. These are the waiting rooms. I have the opportunity often to be in the waiting rooms of medical institutions. There I am with people and observe them experiencing the full range of human emotions. The waiting rooms of life are difficult and challenging to cope with, and yet, in our life pilgrimage, we encounter many experiences that develop into waiting rooms. These waiting rooms are difficult to deal with. We are unaccustomed to waiting. We live in an Instamatic society. Our telephones are Touch-Tone. Our ovens are microwave. Our information is generated on a computer screen at the touch of a keyboard.

Joseph will teach us insight into the waiting room of life. He had been imprisoned on false charges, and deliverance was not quick in coming. In prison he met Pharaoh's chief baker and cupbearer. Joseph interpreted their dreams. It had been good news and bad news. For the chief cupbearer, the interpretation brought the good news of release and restoration to his former position. The bad news was that the chief baker got no good news at all. For him the dream's interpretation called for execution.

Hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel, Joseph had requested the cupbearer to remember him and his plight to Pharaoh. As so often happens when we are in a period of waiting, things don't work out according to our wishes. And so things had not worked out the way Joseph had hoped. It was as though he had never existed. No one remembered him. He was confined to life's waiting room.

I. JOSEPH LINGERED IN A TIME OF WAITING (40:23—41:1)

A. Have you ever felt confined? The last verse of Gen. 40 and the first verse of Gen. 41 must be read together to experience the full impact of what must have happened in Joseph's heart and mind at this time. We read that "the chief cupbearer . . . did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." The historical record continues, "When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream" (40:23; 41:1).

1. When Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream, reassuring him that he would be reinstated to his former position, he asked this high-ranking official to put in a good word for him to the king. This

must have been Joseph's first ray of hope for release from his confinement.

2. Why did Joseph want to be free? Not only was he innocent, but also he wanted to return to his family in Canaan. This is implied in his conversation with the cupbearer (40:15). He is saying, "I don't really belong here. I was brought here against my will. I want to go home." It has been 11 years since Joseph had seen his father.

B. Have you ever been homesick and lonely?

ILLUS. You feel as if you are going to die. Several years ago I was in Chicago for three weeks of study. Though I was busy, I dreaded the weekends. I was miles away from family and friends. I missed my family terribly. Fortunately, I was still in my native homeland. I could call and write. There were people with me with whom I could fellowship. Even so, I was still lonely.

Think how Joseph must have felt. He was completely shut away from his family for years with no opportunity to communicate and, humanly speaking, no foreseeable opportunity for freedom.

Those days of waiting after Joseph's encounter with the cupbearer must have initially brought him hope. Then it began to fade, leaving him more emotionally distraught than ever. Joseph is in the waiting room. Fortunately Joseph had hope beyond hope. This hope was ultimately in God, not in Potiphar, not in the cupbearer, not in Pharaoh. In these times of waiting, our hope must be in God.

II. JOSEPH WAITED UNTIL TIME TO BE REMEMBERED (41:9-13)

A. "Two full years" after the cupbearer had been reinstated—probably again on Pharaoh's birthday—the king had a dream. He saw seven well-fed cows grazing in the Nile River. Then he saw seven undernourished cows come up out of the Nile. They immediately devoured the seven well-fed cows (41:1-4). Pharaoh had a second dream, and this time seven healthy heads of grain were devoured by seven "thin and scorched" heads of grain (vv. 5-7). No one was able to interpret the dreams.

1. Egypt has been called "the gift of the Nile." Even today it is totally dependent on the river for its existence. Out of the Nile really do come either bad years or good years.

2. The Egyptians worshiped the river. They also revered the cow as the symbol of the reproductive power of nature. If God wanted to show Pharaoh that seven years of plenty and then seven years of famine were coming, He couldn't have said it in plainer language than the dream.

B. The chief cupbearer evidently observed the process. He watched the magicians and wise men of Egypt come and go, leaving Pharaoh more troubled

and frustrated than before. Then he remembered his experience with Joseph. He informed the king of the "young Hebrew" who was in prison with him (41:9-13).

C. Joseph became the interpreter of God, informing Pharaoh that God gives the answer to the dream.

III. JOSEPH EXPERIENCED A TIME TO BE PROMOTED (41:33-40)

A. Joseph was wise enough to see unfolding before him a plan that God had designed all along. He knew that Pharaoh was listening intently and was open to suggestions. At this juncture, he made a very wise proposal. He suggested to Pharaoh that he "look for a discerning and wise man [—a man he could] put . . . in charge of the land of Egypt" (v. 33). Joseph further suggested a plan for storing up food "during the seven years of abundance," which in turn could be used and distributed "during the seven years of famine" (vv. 34, 36). Pharaoh responded to Joseph's plan positively. Not only was he impressed with the proposal, but also Pharaoh knew who the man should be.

B. Think what God had permitted to happen. Had Joseph come before Pharaoh two years before, chances are it would have been only because of the king's curiosity. There would have been no personal need or urgency in his life. He would not have called for all the wise men of Egypt. Consequently, Pharaoh would not be able to compare Joseph's success with their failure. Pharaoh trusts Joseph. He promotes him from prison to palace—not only to live there but to have authority over the whole kingdom of Egypt (v. 40).

CONCLUSION:

There are some reflections on waiting.

1. Learning to wait patiently strengthens our confidence in God without reducing the self-confidence we need to function in life.

2. A period of waiting often allows time for true character to be developed and revealed.

3. A period of waiting often creates opportunities for advancement that may not happen otherwise.

ILLUS. In her book *Tramp for the Lord*, Corrie ten Boom (Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, N.J., 1974, pp. 23-24) describes her feelings the day she was miraculously released from a Nazi concentration camp. In many respects, she and Joseph had a lot in common.

When you are dying—when you stand at the gate of eternity—you see things from a different perspective than when you think you may live for a long time. I had been standing at the gate for many months, living in Barracks 28 in the shadow of the crematorium. Every time I saw the smoke pouring from the hideous smokestacks, I knew it was the last remains of some poor woman who had been with me in Ravensbruck. Often I asked myself, "When will it be my time to be killed or die?"

Corrie reports that in the face of all this she was not afraid because God's presence was very real. She felt His closeness and His guidance.

As she stood in the prison yard awaiting the final order for her miraculous release, a fellow prisoner whispered to her of the death of two of their friends. It struck her that these two women had accepted Jesus as their Lord during her stay in the prison camp. She silently told the Lord if it had all been for the souls of those two women, it had been worthwhile.

Corrie further described, "A guard spoke harshly, telling Mimi to leave the yard. Then he said to me, 'Face the gate. Do not turn around.' The gate swung open and I glimpsed the lake in front of the camp. I could smell freedom.

"Follow me,' a young girl in an officer's uniform said to me. I walked slowly through the gate, never looking back. Behind me I heard the hinges squeak as the gate swung shut. I was free, and flooding through my mind were the words of Jesus to the church at Philadelphia: 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it'" (Rev. 3:8 [KJV]).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship
Chorus "I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord"
Ministry in Music

THE SOUNDS OF PRAISE

Prayer Chorus "He's My Lord"
Prayer Time
Sanctuary Choir "I Just Love Lovin' the Lord"

THE SOUNDS OF SHARING

His Tithes and Our Offerings
Ministry in Music
Message "THE WAITING ROOMS OF LIFE"
(Gen. 40:23—41:40)

THE MEANING OF WHOLENESS

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 41:50-52, 57

INTRO:

There is no way any human being can endure what Joseph went through for 13 years without experiencing negative aftereffects, particularly at the emotional level. Joseph was human, like any one of us. Though he had a unique relationship with God, he was not exempt from the same fears and anxieties we all experience when rejected by those we love, when falsely accused by those to whom we are loyal, when punished for the sins and mistakes of others, and when willfully forgotten by those we have helped the most. Because of these painful experiences, Joseph suffered deeply.

God did not forget or forsake Joseph, either during those dark days or afterward. Though he must have often wondered whether God really cared, Joseph never turned away from Him.

How did God bring mental and emotional healing to Joseph? The answer is tucked away in three power-packed verses in Gen. 41. Though very clear and to the point, it's easy to overlook and miss the great lessons that emerge from these three verses.

After Joseph's promotion and before the years of famine came, we're told that his wife, Asenath, gave birth to two sons (v. 50). The names Joseph gave these two boys, along with his personal explanation as to why he named them Manasseh and Ephraim, are significant clues to understand how God brought healing to Joseph's inner being. God still uses the same method today when we are victims of suffering and hurt.

I. "MANASSEH" MEANS "GOD HAS MADE ME FORGET" (v. 51)

A. Joseph named his first son Manasseh, literally meaning "one who causes to forget." He then explains why he chose this name: "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" (v. 51). The connection is clear. There is a very definite cause-effect relationship between Manasseh's birth and Joseph's ability to forget his painful past.

B. What means did God use to bring about emotional healing?

1. God gave Joseph a wife—another human being to fill the void in his life and to help him forget his loneliness.
2. Initially Joseph's first family caused him so much pain. Thirteen years later God used Joseph's own family to heal the pain.

II. "EPHRAIM" MEANS "GOD HAS MADE ME FRUITFUL" (v. 52)

A. Asenath bore Joseph a second son. And again Joseph chose a name that focuses on what God was doing in his life. Ephraim comes from a word meaning "to be fruitful."

B. God had made him "fruitful" in giving him two sons.

But God had also made him "fruitful" in giving him position, wealth, and success in Egypt. Joseph was in the midst of the "seven years of abundance" when his sons were born. The land "produced plentifully." Joseph had already stored up huge quantities of grain—so much grain that he stopped keeping records of how much he had in storage. There is only one way to describe what was happening in his political life: "God ha[d] made [him] fruitful in the land of [his] suffering" (v. 52).

C. With this statement Joseph also let us know he had not forgotten what he suffered in Egypt. But he also let us know he was now rejoicing in what God had both allowed and done in his life.

ILLUS. Karl and Edith Taylor had been married for 23 years. Edith considered herself "the luckiest woman on the block" to be married to such a loving, thoughtful man. In his job with the government, Karl often had to go out of town, but he always wrote her faithfully and sent her a gift from every place he visited.

When Karl learned he was being assigned to Okinawa for a few months, the Taylors were saddened. It would be a long separation, but to keep their spirits up, they made plans to put a down payment on a cozy little "cottage with a view" just as soon as Karl returned.

So Karl went to Okinawa. Edith was thrilled when his thoughtful cards and letters began to arrive. There were no gifts this time, but Edith knew her husband was putting every spare cent into savings for their dream house. Within a few weeks, however, the letters became fewer and briefer. Then, just as she was beginning to prepare for his return, Edith received word from Karl that he would have to stay three more weeks. Later, he wrote, "just one more month." Then, "a couple months longer."

Finally, after Karl had been gone over a year, Edith received the letter that shattered her heart. It began, "Dear Edith, I wish there were a kinder way to tell you we are no longer married. . . ." Karl had obtained a mail-order divorce from Mexico. He was now married to a 19-year-old Japanese girl named Aiko.

Edith was devastated. The world ceased to make sense to her. There was no sound, no color, no taste anymore—only unrelieved pain. Finally, Edith took all her anguished feelings and honestly spread them out before God in prayer. As she wrestled with the Lord, she realized she had a choice to make: she could become bitter and resentful, hating Karl for his betrayal and mistreatment of her—or she could choose to continue loving her husband. After a deep inner struggle, Edith made the healing choice for her trial of mistreatment: she wrote to Karl, told him she forgave him, and asked that they continue to keep in touch.

So for the next few years Karl and Edith exchanged cards and letters frequently. As time went by, Karl wrote to Edith to tell her of his and Aiko's first child, a girl named Marie, then two years later another little girl named Helen.

A couple of more years went by, and Edith received another letter that broke her heart: Karl was dying of lung cancer. Medical bills were mounting, taking all the money Karl had saved to send his two little girls to school in America. Aiko and the girls would soon be left without anyone to provide for them. "What's going to happen to them now?" was the closing, despairing question of one of his letters.

Edith wrote back that she would like to pay the airfare to bring Marie and Helen to the States to live with her, if Karl and Aiko agreed. So, a short time after Karl's death, 54-year-old Edith Taylor became "the other mother" to a three-year-old and a five-year-old. A few months later, Edith arranged for Aiko to join her and the girls in America.

At the airport, Edith waited until the last person came off the plane—a thin, frail Japanese woman who seemed totally alone and afraid. Edith called Aiko's name, and they rushed into each other's arms. There they promised that together they would raise the girls for Jesus Christ. Edith Taylor later wrote, "Though Karl was taken from me, God has given me three others to love." She offered her trial of mistreatment to God, and He transformed her trial into healing for Aiko, Marie, and Helen—and for Edith herself. That's what God wants to do in our lives when we are victims of mistreatment.

III. WE LEARN ABOUT PERSPECTIVE (v. 57)

A. Joseph's story demonstrates clearly that at times God allows suffering in the lives of His children to accomplish His own special purposes.

B. What we learn from Joseph's experience is the dynamic means God uses to bring emotional healing in our lives. There are some universal applications.

1. In His permissive will, God allows us to endure emotional stress in order to prepare us more adequately for His service.

2. No matter what the cause of our suffering, God can bring about emotional healing by using other people in our lives.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. The early years of Carolyn Koons's life were spent in a series of rough, dirty logging towns. Violence and mistreatment were part of growing up for her. Her mother and father repeatedly abused her and finally abandoned her on the streets.

As a teenager, Carolyn was befriended by some Christian young people who cared enough to patiently, persistently win this hardened young woman to Christ. Carolyn went on to college and seminary, eventually becoming a professor of Christian education at Azusa Pacific University. In 1975 she founded Mexicali Outreach, an evangelistic ministry that takes hundreds of Christian students into

northern Mexico for short-term missionary work. The first year she led a team to Mexicali, they toured a youth prison housing 300 boys, some as young as 5 years old. There she met 9-year-old Tony.

Tony was raised in the streets of Tijuana, surrounded by crime, narcotics, and prostitution. Tony's childhood, like Carolyn's, had been filled with violence and mistreatment. One day when 5-year-old Tony was playing in the street, he heard his baby brother screaming. Tony went to the door of his house, heard a loud thud, and froze. The screaming had stopped. Looking inside, Tony saw his mother and father bending over his brother's body, a bloody club nearby.

Tony fled, and his parents reported him to the police, accusing him of murder. So 5-year-old Tony was thrown into prison—and he stayed there for 4 years before being discovered by Carolyn Koons. There had never been any investigation of the charges against him. After a long and expensive battle against bureaucratic red tape, Carolyn Koons won Tony's freedom and brought him to the United States, whereupon she found herself a single parent to a 12-year-old boy. In the hardness and resentment of this terribly wounded boy, Carolyn confronted the scars of her own childhood. Her own long-buried hurts surfaced again as she sought to help Tony overcome his painful memories—she used those hurts to bring healing into Tony's life. She saw the love of Christ begin to change his heart.

Today, Tony is a Christian college student at Azusa Pacific. Carolyn and Tony are living proof of the power of God not only to heal our hurts but to transform our hurts into healing for others.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Worship
Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymn "And Can It Be?"

Ministry in Music

Hymn "To God Be the Glory"

Chorus "To God Be the Glory"

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

God's Word Phil. 2:5-11

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

The Sanctuary Choir Calls Us to Prayer
It Is Family Altar Time

Ministry in Music

We Worship as We Bring Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Message "THE MEANING OF WHOLENESS"
(Gen. 41:50-52, 57)

THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 42

INTRO:

ILLUS. Early one cold December morning in 1944, parachutes billowed in the sky over Europe. Quietly men descended to the ground, suspended like puppets on strings. But puppets they were not. The Allied offensive, which was six months old, had moved with precision across Europe. It would soon come to a halt, however. These soldiers from the sky were German soldiers. They carried no weapons. Their uniforms were American. Along with them, suspended under numerous parachutes, came American jeeps. They were descending behind Allied lines. A defensive move that was brilliant in its origin was being implemented by the leaders of the Third Reich. The mission of these soldiers was to travel the roads of the advancing Allied armies and change all signs. If the signposts were turned to give wrong directions, Allied forces would be not only confused but oftentimes lost in the surrounding countryside. Needed reinforcements would be unduly delayed. Allied troops, caught in heated battle, would wonder what was keeping the reinforcements.

The shattering reality is that the strategy almost succeeded. Had it not been discovered, the war might have been delayed indefinitely. Who knows? Perhaps the whole outcome would have been different.

Joseph's brothers would soon find themselves in a similar situation as the Allied troops of World War II. The signposts of their lives were going to be changed. They had been going the wrong direction. Soon they would leave Canaan and march down the road to Egypt. God was changing their road signs to awaken their conscience and bring about His will for them and their father, Jacob. Joseph would be the redemptive means by which Israel would become a nation and his brothers and father would fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

How did God awaken the conscience of the brothers of Joseph? Our Scripture lesson suggests three ways.

I. THEY EXPERIENCED THE PINCH OF MATERIAL WANT (vv. 1-5)

A. As the curtain opens on Gen. 42, we find ourselves momentarily transported from Egypt to Hebron, in Canaan, Joseph's old homestead.

1. Here we catch a glimpse once again of Joseph's father, Jacob, and his family. The famine has spread to the Land of Promise, and the going is tough. There are 66 men, women, and children, plus the in-laws, in Jacob's clan.

2. "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" he demands of now middle-aged sons (v. 1). Their lives are in jeopardy, and the brothers haven't made any inroads in solving the problem. "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt," continues Jacob. "Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die" (v. 2).

B. Egypt—the word leaves a sour taste in their mouths and a sinking feeling in their stomachs worse than any hunger pang. Egypt is where the Midianite caravan carted their brother 22 years earlier. Surely Joseph is long gone or perhaps even dead. Still they would rather not risk it.

1. There is no choice. The 10 oldest boys set out on a journey of some 250 miles to a land they would prefer never to see (v. 3).

2. In the midst of their material wealth, Jacob and his family are starving.

3. Jacob and clan find themselves hungry despite their gold and silver reserves.

II. THEY EXPERIENCED THE PAIN OF HARSH TREATMENT (vv. 6-23)

A. The 10 brothers ride into the Egyptian city where surplus grain is sold to foreigners. They are directed to the chief administrator of the food program—Joseph, who is described as "the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people" (v. 6).

1. When Joseph's brothers approach him, they fall on their knees and bow down to him, "their faces to the ground" (v. 6). Shades of yesterday! Joseph's dream is fulfilled. They do not recognize Joseph, but he immediately recognizes them. Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies.

2. I've wondered why Joseph chose to accuse his brothers of being spies. Then I realized that one of the chief reasons they had angrily tossed him into the pit was that he had been a tattletale and reported the behavior of four of his brothers in the fields (37:2). No doubt he was taunted with the words: "Here comes Daddy's little spy!" Now they receive a taste of their own medicine. Notice the brothers' response (42:13). At last Joseph receives the whole history. Benjamin is alive; Jacob is alive. Joseph's whole family is convinced that he himself is dead. They've given him up as gone for good.

3. Joseph introduces part one of the exam he intends to put his brothers through (vv. 14-17). Finally Benjamin is brought into the picture.

B. On the third day of their imprisonment, Joseph pays a visit to his brothers.

1. Joseph informs them that only one brother will remain in custody. The rest may return to their families, taking provisions along to feed their starving households.

ILLUS. In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, Hamlet suspects that his uncle has murdered his father to gain the crown of Denmark. Hamlet suspects the murder and wants to avenge it. How is he to make sure? Claudius seems to be guilty, but is he? Even after the ghost of Hamlet's father appears and tells him the details of his murder, Hamlet hesitates to strike. What if he should be

wrong? What if the king, his uncle, is innocent? At last, Hamlet hits upon the idea of a play. A troupe of players has come to the castle, and Hamlet arranges to have them perform a play reenacting the details of the murder the ghost had told him about. He calls it "The Mousetrap" and identifies it as the device by which he will catch the king's conscience.

When the play is performed, the king is deeply affected. He rises suddenly and rushes from the room. "Give me some light," he says. Later he confesses his fault, though not openly:

*O! my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest verse upon 't,
A brother's murder.*

(Act 3, scene 3)

Joseph's words were carefully calculated ones that proved effective in awakening the conscience of his brothers and bringing them to a confession of their deeds. Sometimes God permits harsh treatment to awaken our conscience and bring us to a confession of our need of Him.

III. THEY EXPERIENCED THE PROOF OF GOD'S PRESENCE (vv. 24-38)

A. While all the verbal banter is taking place among his brothers, Joseph listens closely. He understands what they are saying, even though they are unaware of it, "since he was using an interpreter" (v. 23).

1. Joseph is unable to ignore the emotion of the moment. Their regret pierces him. Their sorrow stabs him to the core. He turns from them and weeps hot, bitter tears. He doesn't enjoy this. His tears are not a sign of weakness, but the mark of a man who has not seen his family in two decades. Joseph turns again to face his brothers. He orders that Simeon be seized and bound before their eyes. For the entire journey home, the brothers will have before them the eyewitness image of Simeon bound.

2. Before they start for home, the narrative tells us that Joseph caused each man's silver to be returned to him in one of his purchased sacks of grain. In addition, food for the journey was also provided. When they stop for the night, one of them discovers his silver in his bag of grain. They turn to each other and ask, "What is this that God has done to us?" (v. 28). This is the first time in the entire narrative, beginning in chapter 29, that any of Joseph's brothers have mentioned God. Joseph speaks of God often—not so the brothers. Now as their consciences come alive, they utter the word, "God."

B. There is something else here—grace!

1. Thus far in the story the interventions of God in

the lives of Joseph's brothers, bringing them to repentance, have all had a rough edge to them. They have issued from grace, since they have been intended for good in the brothers' lives.

2. I see grace at work in the fact they did not hide the problem regarding Simeon and Benjamin (vv. 32-34). There is grace in Reuben's response to Jacob (v. 37).

CONCLUSION:

II.II.II.S. The Victor Hugo classic *Les Misérables* is about a man who succumbed to a momentary temptation and paid a terrible price. The protagonist, Jean Valjean, stole a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. He was caught, tried, and sentenced for the theft. He spent 19 years in a dungeon for his crime.

Upon his release, he could find no employment because of his prison record. Only one man, an elderly bishop, showed compassion to Jean Valjean. The churchman took Valjean into his home, gave him food and a bed, and prayed for him. But Valjean was so desperate that he yielded to temptation again. He stole some silver plates from his host and fled into the night.

But the thief was quickly captured by the police and taken back to the house of the bishop. The police displayed the stolen silver plates to the surprised bishop and asked if they belonged to him. "Yes, they are mine," answered the bishop. "That is, I gave them to him. And Jean," the bishop added, turning his eyes to the arrested man, "you forgot to take the candlesticks." The bishop was a man who understood grace and forgiveness.

Like Joseph's brothers, you may have failed. Perhaps God has awakened your conscience to sin, guilt, humiliation, and broken relationships. Failure is not the end. Like Joseph and like the bishop, God is ready to forgive us and restore us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

PRAISE BE TO YOU, O LORD

Call to Worship

Ministry in Music

We Greet One Another in the Name of Our Lord

Hymn

"Holy, Holy, Holy"

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE

Sanctuary Choir

"We Shall See Jesus"

The Giving of His Tithes and Our Offerings

JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE

Ministry in Music

Message

"THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE"

(Gen. 42)

WHAT IS YOUR BENJAMIN?

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.
Gen. 43

INTRO:

When we left Jacob at the end of Gen. 42, he is faced with a choice. Initially he is fighting God's eternal purpose, which is to reunite Joseph with his family and to get the children of Israel into the land of Egypt. His heels dragging, his jaw set, Jacob refuses to budge in his decision that Benjamin must not leave Canaan. What blessing the patriarch is in danger of missing because of his stubbornness!

God is dealing with Jacob by turning up the volume on stress. Jacob is underneath his circumstance, fighting a losing battle against God's design. They are now out of grain. God is trying to get Jacob to respond. The response He desires is for Jacob to let go of his youngest son.

I. WE SEE THE STUBBORNNESS OF JACOB (vv. 1-10)

A. As Gen. 43 opens, Jacob and family have consumed most of their grain, and the famine remains severe in the land.

1. Jacob orders his sons to go back to Egypt. He knows the requirements Joseph has laid out, that there can be no trade unless Benjamin accompanies his brothers to Egypt. But he chooses to act as if the rules don't exist. At this moment, he does not plan to obey. Jacob refuses to surrender. He is tough and bullheaded. He has no intention of acquiescing to the commands of a foreign official in a faraway land. He simply tells his sons to get more food.

2. One of the most difficult conclusions we will ever come to is to realize that there is no meaningful life in Christ until we are willing to do things God's way.

B. Judah, Jacob's fourth-born son, speaks to his father (vv. 3-5). There is really no alternative to sending Benjamin. To do anything else means the mission will fail.

1. Judah becomes the great intercessor. He tells Jacob, "Dad, there's no choice. If Benjamin goes, we go. If Benjamin stays, we stay and we die. Without him, we'll get no food, and the 500-mile round trip will have been for nothing."

2. Jacob lashes out in anger, frustration, and fear (v. 6). He blames his sons that all of this has happened. A family feud has erupted. Eight other voices join their brother's in protesting their father's comments (v. 7). Judah steps in once more to break up the fray (v. 8). Then he makes a most amazing, unselfish promise (v. 9).

II. WE SEE THE SUBMISSION OF JACOB (vv. 11-14)

A. As Gen. 43 continues, nothing is as Jacob wishes it to be either. God is forcing his hand. The last thing Jacob wants to do is to send Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers, but he has no choice. He turns to his sons and says with resignation:

1. "If it must be . . ." (v. 11). What glorious words of surrender! The human spirit thirsts for independence. It desires to play the game its way—to protect its ego, to grant wishes to others rather than to receive what is graciously given. Surrender is a learned response. And Jacob is learning. When he makes the decision to let go of Benjamin and cooperate with God's program, we reach a pivotal point in our saga. Now the mind-set of the leader of Israel is one of submission, not resistance; obedience, not rebellion. Characteristically, Jacob still hasn't learned to cooperate without sending a gift.

2. Jacob saves the worst till last—take Benjamin, he tells his sons. Jacob will face the trauma of being alone for one of the few times in his life.

B. At last Jacob reaches the point of surrender. He will give up his Benjamin to whatever the Lord has in mind (v. 14).

1. When Jacob speaks of "God Almighty," he uses the Hebrew term *El Shaddai*, referring to God as the Keeper of the covenant, the breasted One, the sustaining One, the all-powerful One. Into God's hands Jacob releases his sons. Notice the words of surrender: "As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." Whatever, God! We are witnessing surrender. It's time to raise the white flag and allow El Shaddai to handle the situation according to His will.

ILLUS. A man at the side of the road tinkered with his Model-T Ford, trying to get it started—without success. A chauffeur-driven car stopped, and an expensively dressed man got out. After watching the futile efforts of the man to start his car, the stranger suggested a minor adjustment that he should make in the engine. The owner was skeptical but was willing to try anything. He made the adjustment, and when he cranked the car, the motor began to run like new. Amazed, the man asked the stranger how he knew what to do. The answer was, "I'm Henry Ford. I made the car, so I know all about how it works."

God made us and He knows us. We only work best as we surrender to Him. Jacob discovered that—and may we discover the same thing.

III. WE SEE A SURPRISE IN EGYPT (vv. 15-34)

A. In verse 15 notice the word "hurried." Why do they rush? It is because time is of the essence. Thanks to Jacob's delays, if their families are going to survive the famine, the brothers must make the round trip to Egypt and back in record time.

1. The brothers want to get to the food distribution center when it opens. They stand before Joseph, and he recognizes Benjamin. He has his steward invite them home for lunch. They are afraid.

ILLUS. Picture yourself in the customs line at a Middle Eastern airport. You move slowly forward, watching the officers inspect the bags of others. Before you reach the

head of the line, another man in an official-looking uniform grasps your carry-on bag and says, "Come with me."

What would you do? Panic would hit. You'd be terribly alarmed. You would ask, "What have I done? What's going on here?"

2. That's the reaction of Joseph's brothers. They haven't committed any crimes, but there is the matter of the returned silver to consider. They explain their purpose for coming and inform the steward of the silver in their bags (vv. 19-22). The steward tells them not to be concerned about the replaced silver. He withdraws from the room and returns with Simeon.

B. At noon Joseph comes home.

1. When Joseph walks in the door, it marks the first time in over 22 years that all 12 brothers are together within the confines of a single room. The first chance they get, the brothers present their gifts to him and then bow down before him—there's the dream again! Joseph asks the men how they are and then poses this question: "How is your aged father . . . ?" (v. 27). And then as Joseph's eyes scan the room, they come to rest upon Benjamin, his own mother's son. With supreme self-control, Joseph asks, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" Notice how he addressed Benjamin: "God be gracious to you, my son" (v. 29).

2. Benjamin, his only full brother, now stands before him. Overcome with emotion, Joseph rushes to a private chamber, where he freely sheds tears of joy and heartache. Joseph washes his face, hoping to conceal the redness of his eyes. He reenters the room and orders food to be served.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. To help us understand the profound difference God's special regard can make in human life, we can go back to one of the influential myths that has shaped humanity's view of itself. The story of Achilles, from Greek mythology, still echoes in our world today.

According to legend, Achilles' mother, wanting to bestow immortality on her son, took him to the river Styx and plunged him into its waters. As a result, his entire body became invulnerable to mortal blows—except for one spot, the heel by which she had held him in the water.

Achilles grew up to become a great hero. The ancient poets recounted a series of noble exploits involving the siege of Troy. Achilles defended Iphigenia, a young

princess condemned by a soothsayer to die as a sacrifice. But the princess refused to let him risk his life for her. When King Agamemnon wronged a valiant warrior, Achilles bravely drew his sword against him and was restrained only by the goddess Athena. During the long siege of Troy, his entry into battle saved the day for the retreating Greeks; the rival Trojans trembled before this mighty son of the gods. Achilles was also pictured mourning dramatically and honorably when his friend Patroclus, to whom he gave his armor, was killed.

Later Achilles received armor more glorious than any yet worn by mortal man. He slew innumerable Trojans who leaped into the river Xanthus like locusts driven from fields on fire, and he then drove the survivors up against the gates of Troy. He spotted his nemesis, Hector, and pursued him, wielding a massive spear, his armor glowing like fire. Hector fled, but, at last, Achilles drove his weapon through the warrior's neck.

The most enduring version of this tale describes how Achilles fell in love with a daughter of Priam and came unarmed to the temple of Apollo to be married to the princess. But there the treacherous Paris gave him a mortal wound in that one vulnerable spot, his heel.

Thus the Greeks gave us an enduring image, "Achilles' heel," the tragic flaw. The exposed heel became a symbol for a character blemish—something like pride, for example, that proved to be the downfall of more than one Greek hero.

What is your Benjamin—the Achilles' heel that holds you back spiritually?

Be a Jacob. Surrender your Benjamin to God.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

THE CHURCH GETTING ACQUAINTED

The Men's Choir Calls Us to Worship

Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymn "Grace Greater than Our Sin"

Hymn "Amazing Grace"

THE CHURCH PRAISING IN SONG AND SCRIPTURE

God's Word Isa. 53:4-7

The Men's Choir Sings "The Ninety and Nine"

We Worship by Bringing Him Our Gifts

THE CHURCH PRAYING TOGETHER

It's Family Altar Time

Ministry in Music

THE CHURCH IN THE WORD

Message "WHAT IS YOUR BENJAMIN?" (Gen. 43)

PASSING THE TEST

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Gen. 44

INTRO:

Joseph is putting his brothers to the test. How will they do? Have their attitudes changed over the years? Had they changed? Could it be that the hatred they once had for him they have now transferred to Benjamin? It seemed they had changed. How could he be sure? Before he could reveal his identity and unveil the ultimate plan, he had to be sure. He had to take one more step. It would be the ultimate test of their true hearts and attitudes toward their father and their younger brother. As Gen. 44 opens, the test begins.

I. WE HEAR THE PLAN OF JOSEPH (vv. 1-6)

A. The brothers are getting ready to depart Egypt. Their hurried visit is nearly over. They plan to leave early the next morning. Things will go faster if their bags are packed the night before.

1. For a second time, Joseph instructs his steward to fill the men's sacks and to place each man's silver in his sack. They'll be getting all their money back. The grain they'll cart home is free. Joseph will not be in debt to his own flesh and blood; rather, he will be the giver. This time Joseph gives his steward an unusual additional order (read v. 2). The steward immediately obeys. "As morning dawned," the men set out for home (v. 3).

2. They've spent a comfortable night—well rested, full, happy, and anxious to see their families. Won't the people back home be impressed with their success. What heroes they'll be! They can't wait to get out of Egypt and back home. Since the brothers have not packed their saddlebags themselves, they haven't the slightest idea about the surprising cargo within. None of them have any idea of the cup in Benjamin's bag. The entire group is heading for home without looking back. Soon they'll receive the shock of their lives and will face the toughest of challenges.

B. Before the brothers have gone very far from the city, Joseph turns again to his servant (v. 4). (Read vv. 4-5.) The plot thickens. The brothers are being tested. Joseph orders his steward to pursue the brothers and to falsely accuse them of theft. It isn't fair by human standards, but from God's perspective, it will reveal the brothers' hearts.

ILLUS. Charles Colson tells of sitting on a platform in the crowded Delaware State Prison, where he had come to address the inmates, and thinking over a life that had brought him to high government service, followed by arrest, conviction, and imprisonment in connection with the Watergate scandal. He thought of the scholarships and honors earned, the legal cases argued and won, the decisions made from high government offices. Then he realized, "It was not my success God has used to enable me to help those in this prison, or in hundreds just like it.

... All my achievements meant nothing in God's economy. No, the real legacy of my life was my biggest failure—that I was an ex-convict. My great humiliation—being sent to prison—was the greatest event of my life."

Like Charles Colson, the brothers of Joseph are about to have their self-confidence broken. Soon they will find themselves utterly at the mercy of the prime minister of Egypt. Little do they realize that God in His grace will use their seeming failure to reveal His mercy and bring healing to their lives.

II. WE HEAR THE PROTEST OF THE BROTHERS (vv. 7-17)

A. Catching up with the brothers of Joseph, the steward repeats the accusations of his master.

1. The brothers protest in amazement (vv. 7-8). "We're honest! We're innocent! What have we to gain by such a theft?" So certain are they of their innocence that the brothers make a solemn offer (v. 9). The steward seems to agree with the brothers but changes the conditions (v. 10).

2. The search commences, the brothers quietly lowering their sacks to the ground. Beginning with the oldest, the steward moves on down the line. As he finally reaches Benjamin, the brothers are breathing a sigh of relief. When the steward opens Benjamin's sack, there is the cup.

3. It's a long trip back. Every step is agonizing. They dread the thought of being taken into the presence of the man they've offended so deeply. Yet they go. They could have abandoned Benjamin, but instead, they return to the city—to the uncertain fate and wrath of a ruler awaiting them.

B. When the steward and the brothers arrive at Joseph's house, they find that he has not yet left for work.

1. When they walk into Joseph's presence, the brothers throw themselves on the ground. There is that dream again! Remember, it is God's dream.

2. Have Jacob's sons changed? Indeed they have. Judah steps into the arena of leadership. He refuses to abandon Benjamin. Freedom awaits, yet he and the others choose slavery over Benjamin. Joseph may be surprised at the changes in his brothers. Are they the same men who sold him years ago? The loyalty they're showing is incredible.

III. WE HEAR THE PLEA OF JUDAH (vv. 18-34)

A. Judah now assumes control of the situation. He begs Joseph to let him speak. No doubt emotions swell within Judah as he makes his speech. The atmosphere crackles with tension and electricity. Judah doesn't understand why events have turned sour, but he does understand his responsibilities.

B. (Read vv. 30-31.) Judah informs Joseph that Jacob's

life is bound up in the life of Benjamin. There is no animosity or jealousy. Judah's only thoughts are for the welfare of his father. "Bound up with the boy's life"—what a remarkable statement that is about the relationship between a parent and a child. May I ask you a probing question? Are you, like Jacob was with Benjamin, bound up in the lives of your sons and daughters?

ILLUS. In his best-seller, *Rx for Addiction*, physician W. Robert Gehring related the sad and sordid tale of his personal battle with drug addiction. In it, Gehring reveals that the thing that finally made him desire to end his substance abuse was the birth of a tiny miracle, his daughter. Writes Gehring:

Courtney Robin Gehring was born at 2:54 P.M. on March 7, 1979. I looked at her pretty little face; I saw the dimple in her chin (just like mine); I held her warm little body in my arms. . . . When I held Courtney in my arms for the first time, I felt a warmth, a closeness, a protectiveness that I had never experienced before. It was a euphoria far superior to that generated by any drug.

I persuaded the nursery personnel to push Courtney's warmer to a remote corner of the nursery—away from the other babies. "We need to talk private," I joked. I sat silently on a stool and watched this new person for over an hour. Courtney was flailing her arms and legs—trying them out, as babies do. I studied her little fingers and toes, her protuberant tummy, her healthy pink cheeks. A thousand thoughts bombarded my consciousness. Future thought, past thought, baby thoughts, father thoughts. I started talking to her in a soft whisper. "Happy birthday, little honey. Welcome to our world. We've got problems, to be sure, but it's not a bad world. There's still war and crime and starvation, but that's none of your concern, because your daddy will protect you from all that."

Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I lifted her from the warmer and pressed her tiny body against mine. "Your daddy has a problem right now, little honey. He's gotten into something that he can't get out of. He's in way over his head. There's a beast inside of him that's consuming him. But that's not your concern. Your daddy's strong. Because of you, your daddy will kill that beast, and that beast will never threaten us again. I promise, I'll protect you."

The beast within Gehring was destroyed eventually. It did not prevent him from becoming bound up in the life of his daughter.

C. If Benjamin is forced to remain in Egypt, Judah fears that his father will suffer immensely, will perhaps even die. As he continues speaking, Judah reveals to Joseph the promise he made to Jacob before taking Benjamin from their homeland (v. 32). He then asks that Benjamin be released and that he be imprisoned. Judah offers himself in the place of Benjamin.

D. I am reminded of Another who became a substitute, a descendant of the tribe of Judah—the Lion of Judah. His name is Jesus. In His sacrifice, He was literally being made sin for us, bearing our sins. Jesus offered himself for us. In a lesser, though still meaningful, manner, Judah essentially does the same thing for Benjamin.

CONCLUSION:

What will be Joseph's response to this gesture? This we shall discover as we turn to Gen. 45. For right now, the brothers of Joseph have passed the test with flying colors.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

LET ALL THE PEOPLE PRAISE HIM

The Sanctuary Choir Leads Us in Praise

We Greet One Another in the Name of Our Lord

Hymn

"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Hymn

"It Is Well"

Ministry in Music

HOLY SPIRIT, YOU ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE

God's Word

1 Tim. 6:17-20

We Pray in One Spirit

Ministry in Music

JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE

The Sanctuary Choir Sings of God's Love

Message

"PASSING THE TEST" (Gen. 44)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Cor. 9:6).

Benediction

Embrace the will of God. Obey the call of God. Receive the power of God. Reflect the peace of God. Amen.

THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Gen. 45

INTRO:

In our study of Joseph, we've seen that he conceals his identity. Unlike the Lone Ranger, his motives are less to protect his loved ones than to provide them with a challenge. Neither does he seek revenge—he is not cut out to get even for the way they bushwhacked him 20 years before. The test the brothers undergo is not designed for intimidation or senseless torment. It is designed to awaken the brothers to the truth about themselves, their responsibilities, their God. In Gen. 45, the time arrives for Joseph to strip off the disguise and stand unmasked before his family.

I. JOSEPH HAD THE NEED TO RELATE (vv. 1-3)

A. When Judah pleads that he be allowed to take Benjamin's place as a slave, Joseph could no longer control himself. To this point, Joseph had revealed very little emotion to his brothers. They had only observed him as a stern Egyptian prime minister. You can imagine what his brothers must have thought when they saw their accuser begin to lose control and heard him cry out (read v. 1). The moment had arrived for which Joseph had worked so hard. He needed to reveal himself to his brothers so that they could all live fuller lives. There was much unfinished business that could not be completed until a full disclosure was made.

1. His brothers were suffering under the delusion that their brother was dead. They had been carrying a load of guilt about his demise for more than two decades. They needed to know the truth. This is a family matter—it is private business.

2. Joseph, his vision somewhat blurred by salty tears, looks at his brothers and cries, "I am Joseph!" Then he inquires about his father, "Is my father still living?" (v. 3). Eyes and face glistening with wetness, his breath choked by sobs, he can say no more than these simple words. The brothers cannot answer him because they are "terrified." It's one thing to stand before the prime minister and be accused of stealing. It's quite another thing to find out the official is really the brother whom you sold into slavery long ago and who, considering human nature, should be festering with so much bitterness and resentment that he's ready and able to have them executed.

B. But Joseph isn't like that.

1. Joseph's deepest desire is to relate once again to his brothers. He weeps, then says, "Don't be afraid." Yes, he holds the power of life and death. There is grace here. The ultimate test of the reality of God's grace in our hearts is our willingness to love and relate to the "ungraceful people" in our lives.

2. We can only relate to others properly when we are in proper relationship to God.

II. JOSEPH HAD THE NEED TO RECONCILE (vv. 4-15)

A. In Gen. 45:4-5, we find one of the most amazing scenes in this whole incredible drama. Joseph commands his brothers to come close to him. When they do this, he repeats his earlier message with a few added details. (Notice v. 5.) Joseph tells his brothers not to worry. He's not bitter. He's not resentful. He is fully aware that God had a purpose in everything that happened. Joseph is actually more concerned about how his brothers felt than how he felt.

B. The Joseph story highlights an important distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation.

1. Christians get into a lot of difficulty when they assume forgiveness and reconciliation are the same thing. They are not. We need to carefully sort out the important difference. To forgive those who wrong and hurt us is one thing; to be reconciled with them is another. When we forgive, the walls that we have erected and that have kept us apart are broken down. As far as we are concerned, we are now free to go to them and be reconciled to them. In most instances, we offer Him our willingness to go to the persons and be reconciled. For though they need our forgiveness, we, too, need theirs. This is not an easy thing to do. It requires humility and grace on our part. In the majority of life's simpler situations, we can forgive our wrongdoers, ask their forgiveness for our wrong feelings toward them, and have the broken relationships restored.

2. There is a myth in evangelical circles regarding reconciliation: if we fully forgive people and do all we can to bring about reconciliation with them, they will always reciprocate with forgiveness and reconciliation, and, from then on, everything will be all right between us. In the simpler situations of life, it may work out that way. However, life is not always that simple. Forgiveness is sometimes a one-way street. Reconciliation is always a two-way street.

C. Sometimes in the matter of reconciliation, you can run into a spiritual chain-saw massacre.

1. There are some incredibly complex situations regarding forgiving and being reconciled. We must face the fact that there are some no-win situations in life, situations where our forgiveness may always remain a one-way street.

2. It took over 20 years of waiting for Joseph to be reconciled and restored to his brothers.

ILLUS. David Seamands tells the story of Irene. For years she struggled over deep resentments against an alcoholic father who sexually abused her as a teenager. God graciously and wonderfully healed her of the pain and abuse. Years passed. She received word that her father

was seriously ill and had asked to see her before he died. Led by the Spirit, she made the long trip in fear and trembling. Here are excerpts from a letter she wrote to David Seamands:

I wasn't sure how I would feel about Daddy—whether my emotions had really been healed as I trusted they were, or whether when coming into close physical proximity I would still feel that wave of nausea. . . .

When I saw Daddy, there seemed to be an instant rapport and understanding between us, and with honest and joyful love I threw my arms around his frail, thin body, kissed him, and told him I loved him. He had tears streaming down his face. . . . Everything in the past was forgiven and washed in the blood of the Lamb. . . . The healing and love for which I had trusted the Lord so long ago was mine, not just when I was far . . . away from the problem, but right there in Daddy's arms! (*Living with Your Dreams* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990], 144-45).

She waited 10 years for reconciliation. Today she is one of God's healed helpers because she forgave and then waited for God's timing.

Look again at Joseph (vv. 5-8). In His sovereignty, God took even the evil of man and turned it for good—the saving of many lives.

III. JOSEPH HAD THE NEED TO RESTORE (vv. 16-28)

A. A great start had been made in restoring the family of Jacob to its proper condition, but there was still much to be done. (Read vv. 16-20.) The news of the brothers in Egypt reaches Pharaoh, pleasing the king and the officials. Without hesitation, Pharaoh instructs Joseph (v. 17). The king continues to exercise royal prerogative, issuing an executive order for Joseph to relay to his brothers (read vv. 19-20).

B. When the brothers arrive in Canaan, they evidently decide to give Jacob the direct approach. They don't give him details.

CONCLUSION:

The story of Joseph and his brothers is so moving that it seems almost unreal. But, when applied, it etches two unforgettable principles on our hearts. First, that God truly is in control, and that He will ultimately prevail with or without the cooperation of His erring children. Second, when a man or a woman comes into contact with the immensity of God, the result is a heart that pulsates with His love to such an extent that extraordinary depths of love and forgiveness flow from that grateful heart.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

LET ALL THE PEOPLE PRAISE HIM

The Sanctuary Choir Leads Us in Praise

We Greet One Another in the Name of Our Lord

Hymn "Come, Thou Fount"

Hymn "Grace Greater than Our Sin"

HOLY SPIRIT, YOU ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE

Ministry in Music

God's Word

Eph. 3:14-21

We Pray in One Spirit

The Sanctuary Choir Sings

We Worship Him Through Our Giving

JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE

Ministry in Music

Message "THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS"

(Gen. 45)

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

Benediction

"May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6, RSV).

50/20 EYESIGHT

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Gen. 50:15-21

INTRO:

ILLUS. I find science fiction very fascinating. As a kid I loved to read the adventures of Buck Rogers. One of the most common literary devices of science fiction is the time machine. This gadget conveniently enables one to move backward or forward in time and to become part of the lives of people in the past or the future.

This morning I want us to imagine that we have somehow gotten into a time machine and have been propelled back several thousand years. We are alive just after the teenage Joseph has been sold to the Midianite slave traders. It's the first night of the journey to Egypt, and the Midianite caravan have made camp. The evening meal is over, and all are sleeping in their tents. Everyone except Joseph. He is pretending to sleep.

Watch him—we can hardly believe what we are seeing. His captors have loosened his chains so he could get some sleep. Somehow we are able to free him. (Remember, in science fiction we can see other people, but they can't see us.) He is actually trying to escape from his captors. They haven't traveled very far, and Joseph is an unusually strong young man who knows this area of the country like the back of his hand. He calculates that he could be back to Dothan by the next night. Watch him as he quietly crawls out of the tent and makes his way stealthily into the night. Within a few days he is back home. There is an awful family ruckus, but Jacob is so glad to have his favorite son home again that, in time, the whole incident blows over, and they all live happily ever after.

Such are the wonderful possibilities and fun of science fiction. But when we get "back to the future" and see how it all comes out, we are horrified. Twenty years later, when the great famine strikes, there is no wise Joseph in Egypt, and no grain to eat. Canaan and Egypt are wiped out by starvation. God's plan for His people and the preparation for the Messiah are badly disrupted and delayed. The whole world is different, and there are countless worse evils. All because you and I got overanxious and rescued an innocent teenager from a lot of trouble.

No biblical story better illustrates the overarching providence of God in our lives than that of Joseph. Even in the most unlikely incidents in Joseph's life, God was at work, making them turn out for His purposes. It had taken 13 years, 13 terrible and tragic years, filled largely with evil—hate, suffering, darkness, injustice, human failures, and what looks like bad luck!

Now we look at Joseph's story and see the great underlying truth—that God is able to work out His purpose even through the sin, failures, and blunders of human frailty. Nothing is so accidental or incidental, so foolish or evil, that God is not able to use it for His providential will. Hindsight is 20/20. Our optometrist tells us that's the best vision we can have. But the optometrist doesn't have the last word; Joseph tells us what 50/20 eyesight is, and you can't get any better than that.

Let us examine this passage to see how 50/20 eyesight works.

I. WATCH THE ACTION OF THE BROTHERS (vv. 15-17)

A. Jacob is dead! The period of mourning is over. Joseph and his brothers have returned from burying their father in Canaan.

1. The brothers are afraid, with Jacob no longer there, that Joseph might want revenge at last.

2. Notice what these brothers do. They come to Joseph, in my opinion, with a manufactured message. I do not believe that Jacob left a message such as they attribute to him. They say that Jacob said it, hoping that this might carry some weight with Joseph. So they come to him and say in effect, "We just thought you would like to know that, before Dad died, he wanted us to tell you that you should be merciful to us."

B. The brothers are not rid of their guilt.

1. Joseph has forgiven them (Gen. 45:1-15). They already have his assurance. Because of their unresolved guilt, the brothers do not know if the assurance will hold.

2. The brothers make a candid plea for forgiveness. This plea appeals to Joseph, who is the only one who can do what must be done. They all know it. Without his action, the brothers will continue to live with their fears and anxiety.

ILLUS. These brothers remind me of something I read about a baby elephant born in captivity.

Shortly after the baby elephant is born, the animal trainer chains him to a sturdy tree. The baby elephant will do all he can to get free, pulling and pulling on the chain until he is worn out. Finally, he begins to work in a slow circle around that tree. Over time the elephant will continue testing his chain, but with decreasing persistence. Just a tug on the chain, and he gives up and begins walking around and around the tree. Eventually the elephant becomes so conditioned to his chain that the trainer no longer attaches it to the tree. He simply drops the chain on the ground—and the elephant will circle hour upon hour around that tree. The elephant is free, but he doesn't know it. He's enslaved to the chains of the past.

Joseph's brothers were still chained to the past; hence that is the cause of their actions.

II. WATCH THE RESPONSE OF JOSEPH (vv. 17, 19-21)

A. When Joseph heard the message of his brothers, he wept. Perhaps he wept because he was deeply hurt that they had thought he would hurt them.

B. Joseph did not want his brothers to be afraid of him (read v. 19).

C. Joseph refuses to take advantage of his superior position (v. 19).

D. Joseph comforts his brothers (v. 21).

E. Joseph helps us see that God is at work no matter how frustrating, tragic, evil, or painful the circumstances.

III. WATCH THE REVELATION OF THE DREAM FULFILLED (vv. 20-21)

We learn from Joseph that to live out our dreams requires 50/20 eyesight. For that we need certain qualities of spirit:

A. We need a realistic spirit.

1. 50/20 eyesight is visionary, but not unrealistic.
2. Someone objects, "But surely God does not need our sins, our mistakes, and our blunders, or those that other people have committed against us, in order to work out His plans and purposes." Of course He doesn't. But in this fallen, imperfect world, those are about all the materials He has to work with.

B. We need a forgiving spirit.

The eyes of a resentful and revengeful heart are never able to see God at work in all things. Some of us need to be freed from smoldering resentments over our own personal tragedies and handicaps.

II.IUS. In 1989 Billy Graham preached in the giant sports stadium in Budapest, Hungary, to 110,000 people, the largest crowd in the stadium's history. The person whose witness was most effective to those people who had suffered years of oppression was Joni Eareckson Tada. She sang and shared with great power what the Cross meant to her. They understood when, free from all bitterness and self-pity, she pointed to her wheelchair and said, "This is the prison that set me free." A forgiving spirit reaches toward those who have wronged or hurt us.

ILLUS. In December 1982, Ted Morris, an 18-year-old college student from southwestern Kentucky, was killed by a 24-year-old drunken driver named Tommy Pigage. Ted was the only child of Frank and Elizabeth Morris. Tommy was arrested and charged with murder, since his blood-alcohol content was three times higher than the legal level. From the first time the Morrises saw him, they hated him. Here he was, walking and talking and breathing, while their son was in a fresh grave because of him. They felt he had no right to live. They were happy when he began serving a five-year prison term.

But slowly a spirit of forgiveness began to work in their hearts. They requested permission for Tommy to be released from jail into their custody every Sunday so they could get to know him. Finally, they were able to com-

pletely forgive him. A picture in *Parade*, November 16, 1986, shows the Morrises with their arms around Tommy. "He's our friend now. We can't say he's like a son because no one could ever take Ted's place. But we love Tommy . . . like a nephew."

C. We need a trusting spirit.

It is no surprise that Joseph is mentioned in the great faith hall of fame in Heb. 11. His 50/20 eyesight included the daring faith to see God's plan and purpose in all those seemingly irrational events. Trust dares to believe that God can take the worst materials and turn them into good.

CONCLUSION:

We do not need 20/20 eyesight; we need 50/20 vision—a vision that enables us to say with peace in our hearts, "You meant it for evil, but God is going to use it for His good."

Our lives are just a gleam of time between two eternities—but God wants to work in us to fan that gleam into a shining glory, the glory of His own reflected image. We can live with 20/20 eyesight or can have 50/20 eyesight. The choice is ours!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE PRAISE THE LORD WITH JOYFUL HEARTS

The Sanctuary Choir Directs Us in Worship

We Greet One Another in the Name of Our Lord

Hymn "When Morning Gilds the Skies"

Chorus "Jesus, Lord to Me"

Hymn "How Great Thou Art"

Ministry in Music

WE REST IN HIS POWER

God's Word Ps. 76:1-12

We Pray in One Spirit. Hear Our Prayer, O Lord.

The Sanctuary Choir Ministers to Us

WE RESPOND TO HIS PERSON

We Worship in Our Giving

Ministry in Music

Message "50/20 EYESIGHT" (Gen. 50:15-21)

Hymn "God Will Take Care of You"

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Sentence

"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need" (2 Cor. 8:14).

Benediction

"I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you [your] inheritance" (Acts 20:32, RSV). Amen.

DEATH BY DROWNING

by Curtis Lewis, Jr.

Rom. 6:3-5

INTRO:

Charles Day has written a book titled *Life with Father*. Day points out in the book the fact that his father has very little interest in religion or the church. This is a cause of deep concern to Charles Day's mother. She insists again and again that even though her husband may not be deeply inclined spiritually, he should at least be baptized. Mr. Day is curious as to why she is so interested in his being baptized. Her response is that "she is determined to get him into heaven someday."

His reply is fascinating: "They won't keep me out on a technicality!"

Is that all that baptism is—just a technicality? The church calls it a "sacrament." Thus, baptism is a "sign or token of a solemn covenant or pledge." "Sacraments . . . are certain signs of grace and God's good will toward us." Baptism is more than something we do and more than a sign of a decision we have made. Baptism is a grace event through which we become partakers of Christ's righteousness and heirs of eternal life.

Baptism means the following:

I. BAPTISM IS A CHANNEL OF GOD'S GRACE

Baptism is not something we do; it is something God has done and continues to do. It is unalterably connected with the divine activity in Jesus Christ.

The first condition of our being saved is not something we do; it is what God in Christ has already done in us. God's grace was active in our behalf long centuries ago and is still active today. That is why we may hope for salvation. The ritual of baptism celebrates that grace and is a sign of it.

John Wesley insisted that baptism, along with Holy Communion, was a channel or medium for God's grace, that through it God's gracious work might be done in human hearts. God uses baptism as a means of conveying His divine will to us, of working holy purposes in our lives.

II. BAPTISM IS ENTRANCE INTO THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

Baptism is birth into the Christian family, the Church. Just as physical birth bring us into a particular family, the birth of baptism brings us into another family, the Christian family, the Church of Jesus Christ. Through His family God's grace reaches out to transform.

Regardless of our age when baptized, by baptism we are initiated into the Church; we become a part of the Christian fellowship.

III. BAPTISM IS DEATH THAT LEADS TO LIFE

We live as dead people who have lost all hope in the

world. To be baptized is to be condemned to die. It is a rehearsal for the last day of our life as well as for every day, in which we must die to all that would make us less than God wants for us. As God has raised us from the waters of baptism, He will raise us again from the tomb like a newborn baby from the womb. We live in the strong confidence that comes at our baptism that we do not need to fear death because we should not fear that which we have already done. To be baptized to enter the Church is to volunteer for death—again and again and again.

CONCLUSION:

Argentinean evangelical Juan Carlos Ortiz often uses this baptismal formula when he baptizes: "I kill you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and I make you born into the kingdom of God to serve Him and to please Him." Shocking, isn't it! Baptism is death by drowning, but it is also resurrection to new life. Amen!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

LORD, I BELIEVE THY PRECIOUS BLOOD

The Sanctuary Choir Reminds Us

Hymn

"Nothing but the Blood"

Prayer

Ministry in Music

WITH JOY I SHALL LIFT MY HEAD

Message

"DEATH BY DROWNING" (Rom. 6:3-5)

A Response from the Candidates for Baptism

Hymn

"When I See the Blood"

Sanctuary Choir

WASHED IN THE FOUNTAIN

We Worship in Giving

Ministry in Music

Hymn

"There Is a Fountain"

The Testimony of the Candidates

The Sacrament of Baptism

Creative Worship Ideas

Baptism

Too often baptism is a forgotten sacrament. It has been my practice to give the complete service to this sacrament. Thus I am sharing with you the service. A unique and meaningful aspect of the service is that each candidate writes his personal testimony on a 3" x 5" card. As the candidate enters the waters of baptism, his testimony is read by someone from the congregation.



"I loved your sermon. It was timely, truthful, and poignant. What I especially liked was that it didn't apply to me."

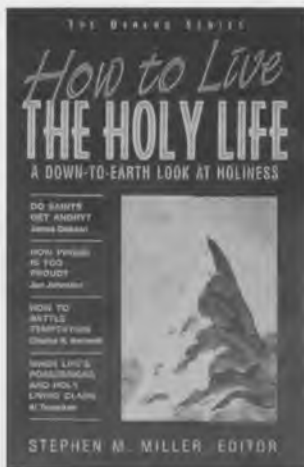
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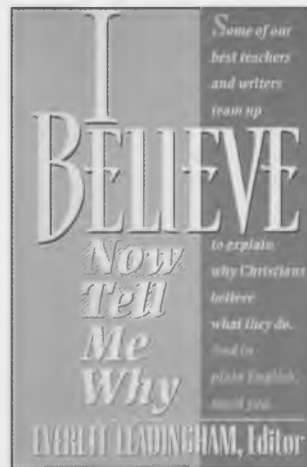
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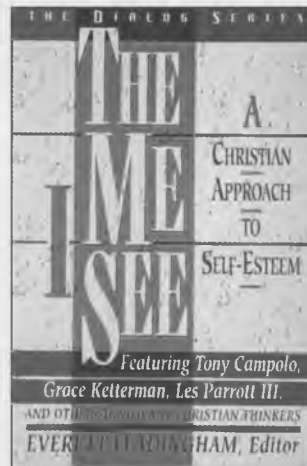
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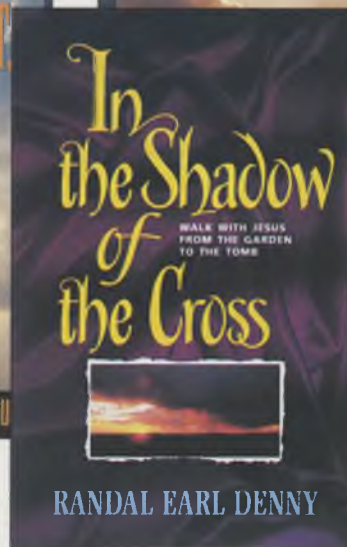
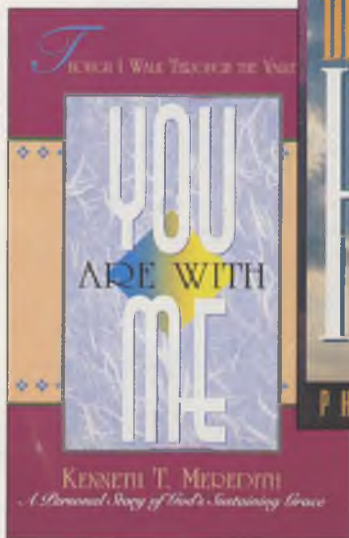
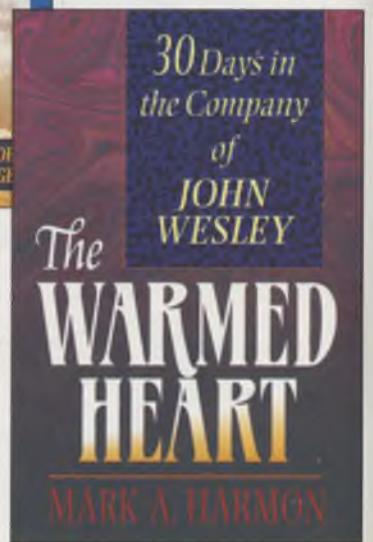
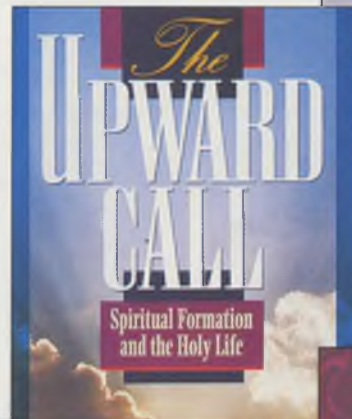
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