



THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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

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CELEBRATING
OUR HERITAGE:
A CHURCH WITH
A MISSION

HOW NOT TO
CELEBRATE
COMMUNION

IS ALL TRUTH
GOD'S TRUTH?



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Celebrating Our Heritage: A Church with a Mission

Editorial Note: *The editor was privileged to give this address at the centennial celebration of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, the congregation founded by Dr. Phineas F. Bresee. The founding of the Church of the Nazarene is a significant event in the history of the Holiness Movement.*

It was October of 1895. Grover Cleveland was serving his second, separate term of office as president of the United States—all 44 states. The country faced a terrible national depression. Millions of people were out of work. Two years earlier Henry Ford had tested his “horseless buggy” in Detroit. Eight years later Orville and Wilbur Wright would keep their flying machine aloft for 59 seconds at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Dr. Phineas F. Bresee had been a pastor and presiding elder in the Methodist Church. He found himself frozen out of the conference by a bishop who opposed the preaching of holiness. Dr. Bresee served his last



by Randal E. Denny
Editor, Spokane, Washington

Methodist Church in Boyle Heights of Los Angeles, the neighborhood where I was born. Dr. Bresee felt an urgency to bring the gospel to the poor of lower Los Angeles.

Soon he joined with Rev. and Mrs. T. P. Ferguson as a coworker in the Peniel City Mission among the poor and homeless. While preaching at a camp meeting in Bennett, Nebraska, Dr. Bresee received shocking news. He had been abruptly dismissed from the Peniel City Mission.

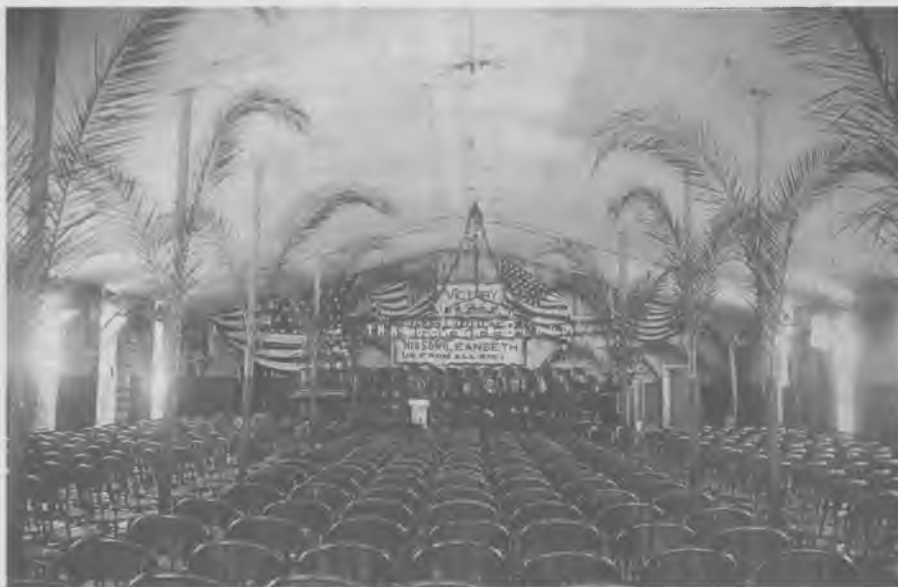
So, Dr. J. P. Widney, a physician and

president of the University of Southern California, and Dr. Bresee gathered with a group of Spirit-filled believers. On October 6, 1895, Dr. Phineas F. Bresee and Dr. J. P. Widney preached at a new mission in a hall at 317 South Main Street. The *Los Angeles Times* told of it under the news heading: “NEW DENOMINATION. DRS. BRESEE AND WIDNEY WILL FOUND A NEW CHURCH.”

By October 20, the new group organized a church. The charter remained open until October 30, 1895. After a night of prayer, Dr. Widney felt led by the Holy Spirit to offer the name “Church of the Nazarene.” In the New Testament when people wanted to identify Jesus with the poor nobodies of the world, they used the derisive tag “Jesus of Nazareth.” Dr. Widney realized the word “Nazarene” had identified Jesus with His compassionate ministry to the poor. Widney said: “The name ‘Nazarene’ links Jesus to the great toiling, struggling, sorrowing heart of the world. It is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, to Whom the world in its misery turns, that it may have hope.”¹ On that organizational Sunday, Dr. Widney preached from Jesus’ words: “Follow me” (Matt. 4:19).²

Today we celebrate the centennial of First Church of the Nazarene—100 years of service for Jesus in the city of Los Angeles. By evangelistic fervor and by mergers with like-minded holiness groups across the land, the shadow of influence from the Church of the Nazarene stretches into 111 nations of the world.

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene and Pastor Ron Benefiel have kept the vision of our founder. Dr. Bresee said: “We seek the simplicity and the pentecostal power of the primitive New Testament Church. The field of labor to which we feel es-



pecially called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever also may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive to personally walk with God and to incite others so to do.⁷³

We praise God for people who have refused to be distracted from the mission of our heritage. Yet, the central figure today must be Jesus the Nazarene. It is His mission Dr. Bresee followed 100 years ago. It is His mission that we must follow on the threshold of this new century. We pause to look back and express our gratitude, but we must look ahead and consecrate ourselves to carry out Jesus' mission in our day.

Jesus returned to His hometown, Nazareth. On the Sabbath day, He made His way to the synagogue, according to His habit. That day, the keeper of the scrolls handed the scroll of Isaiah to Jesus for the Scripture reading. Jesus stood to read the day's lesson:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted and to announce that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him (Luke 4:18-19, TLB).

Jesus sat down in the customary position of Hebrew oratory. Everyone leaned forward in anticipation of what He had to say. Then He added, "These Scriptures came true today!" (v. 21, TLB). That day Jesus of Nazareth revealed God's mission for Him and His people. Will we, the Church of the Nazarene, continue to follow Jesus the Nazarene? Methodist bishop Richard B. Wilke wrote a book analyzing his own denomination, titled *And Are We Yet Alive?* Church of the Nazarene, if we keep Jesus central, we will enjoy His anointing upon our beloved church! However, Jesus warns us, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Surveying the past 100 years and standing on the threshold of the next

century, let's look at our high and holy calling.

I
**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST
PREACH GOOD NEWS TO
PEOPLE WITHOUT HOPE**

Jesus shares with us His mission,
"to preach Good News to the poor."

In the New
Testament
when people
wanted to
identify Jesus
with the poor
nobodies of the
world, they
used the
derisive tag
"Jesus of
Nazareth."

Jesus focused His ministry on and for the poor. The poor include people with nothing, people with very little economic help, and people who have discovered that even with material things, they are still destitute and without hope. Jesus gives them hope: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). The people without hope seem more ready to hear Jesus.

Bishop Wilke observed in his denomination: "We pass resolutions about the poor, but we do not invite them into our churches. We give bread, but we do not break bread with them."⁴

Dr. Bresee said, "It has been my long cherished desire to have a place in the heart of the city, which could be made a center of holy fire, and where the gospel could be preached to the poor."⁵

Los Angeles First Church has not forgotten its mission to serve people

without hope. The church responded to immigrants coming from distant lands and different cultures. Around 45 years ago, Dr. Kimber Moulton led the church to sponsor a Chinese congregation.

Thirty-six years ago Rev. Bruce Webb, associate pastor, joined Rev. Don Hughes of Bresee Avenue Church to take teens to the Navajo Mission in Ramah, New Mexico. They wrote to headquarters in Kansas City for permission, waited as long as youth pastors can wait, went ahead successfully with the mission, and returned before receiving the denial of their request. Now everybody is doing it! It's called Work and Witness!

During Dr. L. Guy Nees's and Rev. Wendell Wellman's tenure, other ministries developed as Ed Switzer and a corp of workers conducted a branch Sunday School in East Los Angeles housing projects.

More than 22 years ago Rev. James Ingalls opened the doors to Rev. Soogoon Hearn, organizing a Korean congregation, and to an Armenian congregation.

During my pastoral tenure, a Spanish-speaking Sunday School class was expanded into a worshiping community led by Rev. Oziel Flores. Rev. Clarence Crites began Bible studies among people from Belize and with new converts from our community.

II
**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST
BRING WHOLENESS TO
WOUNDED PEOPLE**

Jesus shares with us His mission,
"to heal the brokenhearted."

Our fields are littered with broken people, broken homes, broken dreams, broken relationships. Everywhere we find people seeking something to ease the inner hurt. Though they look in so many directions for the answer, we offer wholeness found only in Jesus the Nazarene. He brings hope and wholeness: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

For example, "In America, 40% of all adults are single—unmarried, divorced, or widowed. . . . Singles in the city often lead lives of quiet desperation."⁶

A demographic study showed 35,000 single young adults living within a mile of Los Angeles First

Church. So, 20 years ago I assigned Dr. Ron Benefiel to the singles ministry—that proved to be divine providence! With his “fellowship houses” as a base of operations, Ron began a ministry of wholeness to lonely, hurting people.

**It is His mission
that we must
follow on the
threshold of
this new
century.**

How does a church offer wholeness in Christ? One important aspect is being family to one another. I remember my first Sunday night as pastor of Los Angeles First Church. In my former pastorate, I had to hurry to the sanctuary doors in order to greet people rushing away to their cars. On that Sunday night, I slipped out the side door of Wiley Chapel, rushed around to the exit of the chapel—and stood there alone. No one was coming out. I waited for several minutes. Finally I went into the chapel to see if something had happened. It had—people were loving one another as family friends. Rushing home wasn't a top priority. I believe that has been a major attribute of First Church from the beginning!

III

**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST
OFFER FREEDOM TO
PEOPLE IN BONDAGE**

Jesus shares with us His mission, “to announce that captives shall be released.”

Jesus read the text from Hebrew but spoke His words in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonian Captivity. The words were recorded for us in Greek, the commercial language of the Mediterranean world at that time. The word for “captives” literally meant “captured at the point of a spear.” These prisoners of war alluded to the Babylonian Captivity, but the term applies to all who are captive to sin and Satan. We live in a society

teased by sin, but soon in bondage by moral and spiritual failure. People without Jesus become enslaved to passions, to pleasures, to habits of dissipation and impurity. Yet we have the Good News—Jesus sets people free from the spearpoints of Satan and his crowd.

This church has had some great men of God as pastors, men who have boldly announced “Victory in Jesus.” Don't let the fires of evangelism go out! We must keep on sounding the message of holiness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christian men and women can live beyond the spearpoints of sin. They can have hearts made pure and kept clean by the Holy Spirit. Holiness is the beauty of Jesus' life reflected in us. Holiness is for Christlike behavior.

Thirty-six years ago, Rev. Bruce Webb started a ministry with the Diamond Street Gang. Dr. Michael Mata reignited similar efforts to reach street kids in the 1980s. People need opportunity to see the difference Jesus makes in our lives. For people in bondage, Jesus brings release—even from death's tyranny.

Dr. Roy Mellert died in late November of 1977. Hugh Salsbury and I were in Hong Kong when we got the news. Hugh had already received his own death sentence from the doctor. Upon return, our sanctuary choir sang Dr. Mellert's favorite anthems, honoring his many years as music director of First Church. On Easter Sunday, 1978, we presented Dr. Mellert's favorite Easter cantata. Hugh Salsbury sang the same solo he had sung for many decades—but this time he was sick unto death. This would be Hugh's last solo. It was a dramatic moment I will never forget, as he sang the words of faith: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? . . . Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55, 57).

Let's keep on shouting the message of release to people in bondage!

IV

**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST SHINE
THE LIGHT OF GOD'S TRUTH TO
PEOPLE WHO CANNOT SEE
BEYOND THEMSELVES**

Jesus shares with us His mission, “to announce . . . the blind shall see.”

Jesus refers to physical healing of the blind, as well documented in the four Gospel accounts. Yet the people whom Jesus regarded as most blind were those who could not see beyond themselves.

After Jesus healed a blind man, His critics asked, “Are we blind too?” (John 9:40).

Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (v. 41). They did not recognize God's truth. Jesus came to open their eyes to God's majesty and God's nearness.

One blind man touched by Jesus was asked, “Do you see anything?” (Mark 8:23).

He responded, “I see people; they look like trees walking around” (v. 24). Many persons are like that—people just look like objects, part of the landscape, pieces of flesh along the roadside, something to manipulate for selfish reasons. But when Jesus does His complete work in your heart, your sight will be restored, and you will see “everything clearly” (v. 25). You will see your neighbor and recognize his needs as opportunities for you and God's great grace. Jesus' touch helps us see people, not just problems!

**Everywhere we
find people
seeking
something to
ease the
inner hurt.**

In Los Angeles First Church, more than most Nazarene churches, the singing of anthems and strong hymns was a preferred musical diet. The music of the church had a great mix of sophistication and joyful enthusiasm with Dick Willis at the pipe organ. Yet one Sunday I scheduled Ron Salsbury to sing a solo—with his long, golden hair and beard, a member of the JC Power Outlet. With gifted talent, Ron strummed his guitar and

sang a song he had written; his tempo and text moved beyond the usual bounds. Afterward, Harold Bell commented to me, "Pastor, I don't always care for that kind of music, but I really do love Ron Salsbury!"

That attitude and spirit take us beyond ourselves to see others as valuable in God's eyes. That is love that accepts diversity. God, help us to see beyond ourselves!

V

**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST
REACH OUT TO LIFT UP
DOWNTRODDEN PEOPLE**

Jesus shares with us His mission, "the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors."

Jesus' word for "oppressed" meant "break in pieces." It describes broken pottery that has been smashed or stepped on. Multitudes feel stepped on by heavy-handed justice or smashed by unfeeling competitors scrambling their way to the top. Downtrodden people need our hands to lift them up in Jesus' name. If we pick them up, Jesus can mend them and set them free.

**How does a
church offer
wholeness in
Christ?**

The recent racial riots came right up to the doorstep of Los Angeles First Church. Neighboring stores were looted. But the church chose not to react with fear and flight, but to seek how to help. This church looked beyond the anger and saw people in great need. The church became a channel of help and restoration to this part of the city. Pastor Benefiel's approval and signature opened the purse strings of humanitarian organizations, bringing relief in the midst of pain.

For 100 years this great church has reached out to lift up the suffering, downcast people of the city. Names like Ada Bresee and Esther Bresee bring back memories of aid to mission fields. Each pastor and layman

has a long list of stories of restoration that only eternity will have time to record. But it is all to the glory of God!

VI

**IF WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW
THE NAZARENE, WE MUST INVITE
ALL PEOPLE TO COME NOW AND
ENJOY THE GRACE OF GOD!**

Jesus shares with us His mission, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (TLB, margin). That means, "God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him."

Jesus alludes to announcing the Year of Jubilee. From Old Testament times, every 50th year was Jubilee, a time of release from debts and obligations. Slaves were set free. Family inheritance of land was restored. Jubilee celebrates the season of people's acceptability with God. God accepts whoever turns to Him in repentance and obedience. We live in that season of rejoicing. God listens to all who call on Him. He says: "Call to me and I will answer you" (Jer. 33:3). Jesus invites, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). For people under the terrible debt of sin, Jesus cried out from the central Cross, *tetelestai*, meaning "Paid in full!" (an archaeological variant to the translation of "It is finished" [John 19:30]). That's great news!

For 100 years, missionaries have gone out from across the Church of the Nazarene to announce God's availability through Jesus Christ. Evangelists and preachers have crisscrossed our land with this news burning in their hearts. Laymen from all walks of life have joyfully witnessed for Jesus in their spheres of influence in every village and city. Let's keep on inviting everyone: "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).


In 1985 I took 30 people on a tour of the Holy Land. We stopped by the shore of Galilee at a sacred spot that commemorates Jesus giving the Beatitudes. Buses crowded the parking lot. Groups of pilgrims from all over the world surrounded the eight-sided chapel. I read the Beatitudes to my people and asked them to spend time alone, meditating on Jesus' words. Slipping inside the chapel, I listened as a priest spoke to his people in Italian. Upon dismissal, I walked around

the porch and heard a man reading in French to another group of travelers. On the ground below me, a large gathering of Japanese people listened intently to a Bible reading in their own language. Just beyond them I heard Portuguese and German. Going to the other side of the chapel, I watched black people from London singing from their hearts. The joy of the Lord was carving great, beautiful smiles on their faces. All around me people gathered to hear once again the wonderful words of Jesus in their own languages.

**We must keep
on sounding
the message of
holiness.**

I wept openly for joy, wondering if Jesus had known that His words would go from that hillside, wrap around the earth, and come back again in the babel of languages from the nations of the world.

In this sanctuary we held a Faith Promise Convention for Missions but did not invite a missionary speaker. Our own members of First Church who had been won to Jesus around the world gave their testimonies. Can you imagine the impact as we listened to world missions go out, wrap the message of Jesus around the earth, and come home to this great old church?

The song says, "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene" (Charles H. Gabriel). I used to wonder if outsiders thought we believed Jesus belonged to our group. Now I sing it with delight that we belong to *His* group! Today we celebrate our heritage, standing on the threshold of the future. Jesus the Nazarene has given us our mission and says to us, "Follow me." 

1. Paul T. Culbertson, "What's in a Name?" *Herald of Holiness*, March 1, 1984, 7.
2. Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960), 135.
3. Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 133.
4. Richard B. Wilke, *And Are We Yet Alive?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 40.
5. Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 153.
6. Wilke, *And Are We Yet Alive?* 72.

No Laughing Matter

So-called holy laughter is no laughing matter.

These are confusing times, especially for religion, the Christian religion in particular. The last thing Christendom needs is one more confusion, especially related to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus warned that there would be "great signs and wonders" (Matt. 24:24, KJV). However, the power behind these confusions is demonic, not divine.

Demons can stir up the people—even within churches. Demons can live within church circles. They delight in religion. After all, their king of the pit has always wanted to sit on God's throne.

Satan, therefore, can mimic extremely closely the genuine movings of the Holy Spirit. Shallow people fall for it. Jesus cautioned that "the very elect" would be swept away by the charades of the last times: "Behold, I have told you before" (Matt. 24:24-25, KJV). How kind of Jesus to tell us ahead of time in order for us to be on guard!

What about the conversions and healings of marriages attached to the holy laughter movement? Satan is



by J. Grant Swank Jr.
Pastor, Windham, Maine

willing to permit some good in the splash-over in order to dupe many more who experience nothing of the Holy Spirit—yet think that they do.

What about the biblical supports given to the holy laughter craze? Check them out for yourself. Are they stretched to prove a point? Is the interpretation biased in favor of this phenomenon?

Yet how can all of this take place around the world if the Holy Spirit is not in charge? Do not the demons have sway around the world? Is not the prince (Satan) very much in power in a contest with King Jesus? Therefore, will not the demonic masquerading smother the planet at times?

Are we in for another mock-up of the real? How long will this circus go on? How many unsuspecting will be caught up in it?

A pastor who is into holy laughter asked me the other day what I thought the Holy Spirit was doing presently if He was not the origin of holy laughter.

I answered, "The Holy Spirit is grieving over the world and the Church. People who should know better are flopping on church carpets. So-called spiritual leaders are at the head of the line.

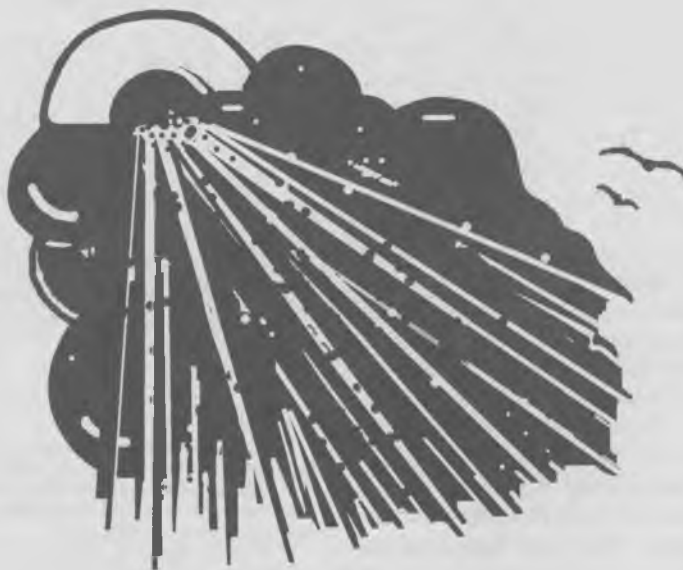
The last thing
Christendom
needs is
one more
confusion.

"The Holy Spirit must be asking: 'Why do not these people get into My Word to learn more of Me? Why do they not surrender totally to My holiness? Why do they not submit more precisely to My sanctification? Instead, they are wasting time and energy in the flesh.'"

Jesus said that the chief mission of the Spirit would be to teach believers more about Christ. He would convict the world of sin. He would purge the carnal nature in the mortal body. He would provide the dynamic for a pure life in a wicked world. He would instruct the church in the ways of holiness.

The signs? What is God's purpose of signs, wonders, and miracles? It is not only to help those caught up in such a love of power but also to make clear eternal truths. *The extraordinary is to support the expounding of the Word.*

Jesus said, "Go . . . into all the



world, and *preach the gospel*" (Mark 16:15, KJV, italics added). The divine message is always paramount. "These signs shall follow" (v. 17, KJV). Astonishing acts from heaven become *supports to the Word* given forth.

Demons can live within church circles.

This divine order is absolutely significant. First, there is the preaching. Second, there is the proof of the preaching's heavenly origin by "signs."

What happens when signs are divorced from the gospel preached? They focus on human egos they can blur into relativism and mire down in display for display's sake alone.

First, consider the preaching. I challenge the "holy laughter" enthusiasts to give equal time to *preaching holiness*, the depths of sanctification, and the *reality of absolute surrender to God*.

I challenge the "holy laughter" proponents to take those same people who are roaring and expound to them the *crucifixion of the self-centered life*.

Preaching comes first. Anointed expounding of the Bible must come first if whatever is to follow belongs truly of the Holy Spirit. "And they went forth, and *preached* every

where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20, KJV, italics added).

It was the same with Moses. He confronted Pharaoh with the preaching that the God of the Hebrew slaves is truly Deity. With one pronouncement after another, Moses sought to strike the truth against Egypt's stubborn heart. To buttress his proclamations, Moses worked wonders by way of plagues.

Pharaoh's magicians were able to mimic these wonders to a point; then they halted. The reason is that God tops Satan's power; even the pagan magicians admitted this to Pharaoh.

So we read: "God . . . brought us up . . . out of the land of Egypt, . . . [doing] great signs in our sight" (Josh. 24:17, KJV).

When Jesus started His public ministry, His first words were "Repent." That was the call to salvation. Then the marvelous acts followed to convince the populace of His messianic mission.


No wonder Peter, looking back, said of Jesus' witness and work that He was "a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22, KJV).

It made divine sense for Peter's own early preaching to be accompanied with the unexplainable: "Fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (v. 43, KJV). However, *first* the hearers "*gladly received his word*" (v. 41, KJV, italics added) before they were privy to miracles as supports.

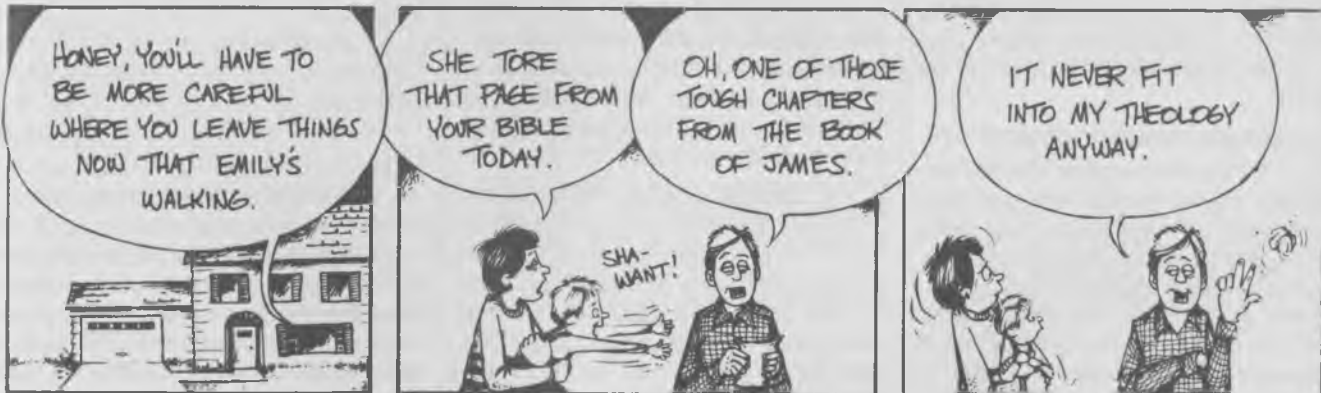
The same pattern exemplified Philip's ministry: "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things *which Philip spake, bearing* and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:5-6, KJV, italics added).

Christians must make certain that they align signs, wonders, and miracles to the entire Word of God.

Paul appreciated this same order of preaching, followed by miracles: "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by *word and deed*, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:18-19, KJV, italics added).

Today more than ever, Christians must make certain that they align signs, wonders, and miracles to the entire Word of God. It will make all the difference in eternity in separating the light from the darkness. 

BEYOND BELIEF



Nourishment for Life

2 Tim. 3:16-17

As the aged Sir Walter Scott lay dying, he asked that he might be wheeled into his library and placed before the window that commanded a beautiful view of the river Tweed. And here, his biographer writes, the famous author expressed the desire that his attendant read to him.

But "from what book?" he asked, seeing that there were thousands of volumes in his library.

"Need you ask?" he responded. "There is but one." Whereupon his servant took the Bible and began to read.

Without a doubt, the Bible is the Book of books. Yearly it is the best-seller of all published works. For many, this book is cherished beyond compare. It is perhaps the most oft quoted and, I might add, most misquoted book of all time.

The Bible is not only a great book but also the Foundation upon which our faith rests. We cannot mature and become like God without it. God wants every believer to grow. One needs the nourishment of food in order to develop physically. The Bible is spiritual food for the believer. It becomes the Source of spiritual nourishment and sustained strength for the follower of Jesus. How can we receive the full nourishment of its words?

ACCEPT ITS AUTHORITY

We all have authorities. Our authorities are those preconceptions that determine how we spend our time, invest our money, make our decisions, and shape our beliefs.

Some people base their preconceptions on unreliable authorities, such as: People—"Well, so and so said . . ." Culture—"Everybody is doing it." Tradition—"We've always done it that way." Reason—"Well, I've always



by William Richard Ezell

*Freelance writer,
Naperville, Illinois*

thought . . ." Or Feelings—"It just feels so right."

But only one reliable authority is trustworthy—God's Word. Recently I bought a new car for my wife. Before I drove off the lot with that new purchase, the salesman gave me the handbook that went with the car. He said, "Read it!" Inside the front cover of that manual, I read the first words: "Read this book from cover to cover." The authority was the manual. If I wanted the car to run well, if I wanted to drive it right, and if I wanted to enjoy it for a lifetime, I had to acknowledge and use the authority of its manual.

When we receive Christ, we come under a new authority—the Bible. The Bible claims for itself the authority of God. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). When we yield to the authority of Scripture, we yield to God's authority.

INCORPORATE ITS INSIGHTS

I don't know if you have noticed, but there is a battle going on for our minds. Our minds and how we think are the controlling factors in shaping our behavior and in what we do. You have heard it said: "It's not what you think you are that you are, but what you think, you are." We become the things that fill our minds.

If our lives would resemble God's Son, whom we follow, then we need to fill our minds with God's Word. In the Bible we learn what God thinks, we discover how God sees things, and we find God's will.

After Paul instructs Timothy that all Scripture is inspired by God, he then adds, ". . . and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Once we incorporate God's Word into our lives, it begins to affect how we think.

How do we incorporate these insights into our lives?

By listening to God's Word. We must learn to listen with an open attitude.

By reading God's Word. Some say, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover," but the real question is, "Do they read the Bible from cover to cover?"

By studying God's Word. The difference between reading and studying the Bible is that, in studying, one writes down thoughts and observations.

By memorizing God's Word. Nothing will sustain and impact your Christian life like memorization of Scripture.

By meditating on God's Word. Meditation is serious thinking about Scripture. If we can worry, we can meditate. Worry is negative meditation.

PRACTICE ITS PRINCIPLES

We submit our minds to the Word of God, not only because we want to **think** right, but also that we might **do** right. We move from accepting its authority to incorporating its principles. Paul reminds Timothy, "So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). As believers, we do not

want to settle for understanding alone; we want to apply the biblical principles to our daily living.

Dwight L. Moody, great evangelist and Christian educator of a past generation, used to say, "The Bible was given, not to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives." In other words, the Word of God was given, not to inform us, but to transform our lives. All of our efforts in Bible study and reading have no value if, in the final analysis, we do not change and become more like Jesus.

Two men living on the island of Okinawa came across a Bible that had been left in their community by a missionary. The men read the Book and, through its instrumentation, accepted the Lord Jesus as their Savior. One of them eventually became the leader of the town. The other started a school where the Bible was studied.



The Bible is perhaps the most oft quoted and most misquoted book of all time.



Eventually, through their witness, the whole town was converted to Christ. When the American army entered their village during World War II without any resistance, the military was astonished to find that in comparison with other Okinawan communities, this one was clean, orderly, and happy.

One hard-boiled sergeant, walking through the community, told this story to an editor of the *Reader's Digest*. He said, "I can't figure it—this kind of people coming out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus!"

This is the obvious transformation of people who take God's Word to heart and apply it to their lives and subsequently are changed. 🙏

The Dedication of New Hymnals

by Edward L. Estep

Pastor, Maysville Church of the Nazarene,
Maysville, Kentucky

"Sing to the Lord"

PASTOR: Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;

PEOPLE: Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

PASTOR: Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

PEOPLE: Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

PASTOR: Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

PEOPLE: For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise.

PASTOR: Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth.

PEOPLE: Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

—Pss. 95:1-2; 96:2-4; 100:1-2, KJV (incl. margin)

The Act of Dedication

PASTOR: Our joy and gratitude for the love of God, revealed to us through His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior, finds voice in songs of praise. Our hymns tell the story of our salvation, remind us of our lost condition without Christ, and encourage us with the promise of salvation, sanctification, and heaven.

Our hymnal teaches theology in

memorable ways and enables us to express our faith corporately.

May these hymnals, lovingly provided in memory of those who have gone on before us and in honor of those with us, be an inspiration to all who worship, reminding us of our call to be faithful. These hymnals, which shall provide for us hymns of worship, spiritual songs of the Christian life, and choruses of praise, we now dedicate to the ministry of music in the name of Jesus.

SONG LEADER: *To the glory of God the Father, Source of all harmony in heaven and on earth;*

PEOPLE: We dedicate these hymnals.

SONG LEADER: *To the worship and praise of Jesus Christ, who places a song of joy in our hearts, and gives us a reason to sing;*

PEOPLE: We dedicate these hymnals.

SONG LEADER: *To the honor of the Holy Spirit, who has inspired men and women of faith to express the faith in beautiful words and music;*

PEOPLE: We dedicate these hymnals.

ALL: Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. AMEN. 🙏

Authentic Preaching vs. Homiletical Narcissism

by Wayne E. Oates

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We get the word "narcissism" from Greek mythology. Narcissus was an extremely handsome young man. Echo fell desperately in love with him. He ignored her and broke her heart, yet she continued to love him.

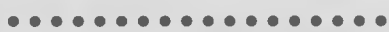
Their relationship was made nearly impossible because the gods had willed it that he could hear only the last two words of her conversation. Regularly he would misunderstand her. They had real problems "communicating with each other"—a quaintly modern thing seen in pastoral counseling. The end result was that Echo pined away to death. However, her "last two words" remain to this day as "echoes."

This is not the end of the story, however. Nemesis, the goddess of retribution—who pays you back for your wrongdoing—punished Narcissus for his neglect of Echo by causing him to fall in love with his own image that he saw mirrored in a pool of water. He could not attend to any of his needs other than the need to admire and love himself in the mirrored pool. As a result he dies, and Nemesis turned him into a flower that we today call the narcissus! What a story! What a metaphor for you and me as preachers!

If we think of our congregations metaphorically as pools of living water, do we adore our own image—to our own and to their detriment—as we look into their faces when we preach? Does this narcissism cripple and confuse our authentic communication with them in and out of the pulpit? Are they so enraptured by our

self-assurance and self-adoration that they waste away for a lack of authentic spiritual nutriment?

Worse than this, are neither we nor they aware of what is happening in this process? The apostle Paul speaks of this kind of preacher-listener relationship when he says in 2 Cor. 10:12: "What fools they are to measure themselves by themselves, to find in themselves their own standard of comparison!" (NEB).



Does this narcissism cripple and confuse our authentic communication with them in and out of the pulpit?

Conversely, in your interaction with and care of your congregation, do you have to deal with people who demand things of you in your preaching that reflect their own narcissistic need to have the preaching and worship revolve entirely around their self-assured demands? Do you feel that to capitulate to such demands would

make an unauthentic crowd pleaser of you? It would not be *you* preaching, but you mimicking someone that those making such demands upon you want you to be like—a former pastor, a special personal preacher friend of theirs, or one of the flamboyant television preachers. What grinds you away in such demands is the demanders' sense of being entitled to shape you into the image of their own imaginations. So narcissism works both ways and seems to be the continuing persistence of original sin, the desire to play God. As Nietzsche said, "There is no God. How could there be if I were not he?"

Some Characteristics of the Narcissistic Personality

Contemporary psychotherapists have with precision identified the following characteristics of persons with a narcissistic personality:

—They have a grandiose sense of self-importance. They exaggerate achievements and talents and expect to be noticed as "special."

—They take advantage of others to achieve their own ends. They are interpersonally exploitative.

—They have a sense of entitlement, i.e., they assume unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment and attention on all occasions: "After me, everyone else might be first!"

—They react to criticism with feelings of rage, shame, or humiliation.

—They routinely lack empathy for others. They have no ability to experience how others feel.

—They are preoccupied with feelings of envy.

As you can readily see, profound ethical implications pervade almost every one of these characteristics. Yet the religious arena is a prime context for these to express themselves. Not only do these people do these things, but they often feel that in doing so, they are doing God a service. There is an adhesion between their self-concept and their concept of God. Their presumption is flabbergasting. They cause people's mouths to fall open in disbelief!

Homiletical Narcissism

You and I as preachers can express all or some of these characteristics in the way we preach. As Søren Kierkegaard says, "Do not let yourself be deceived—or do not yourself be deceived. For as God and God's Word are concerned we human beings are very cunning—even the most stupid of us are very cunning—yes, flesh and blood and self-love are most cunning!" (*For Self Examination* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1940], 39).

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Homiletical narcissism means authoritarian rather than authentic.

Yet we consecrate this cunning to God in Christ and put it to work identifying the self-love in our motives, thinking, and especially our preaching. As I attempt to focus our thinking on homiletical narcissism, bear in mind that I think of this as a guide for my own self-examination first, and then for your self-examination.

Let's translate some of the above characteristics into our own lives as preachers. Homiletical narcissism, in the first place, means that the preacher is authoritarian rather than authentic. It is one thing to share your own struggles of the soul in empathy for your congregation in theirs; it is quite

another to tear into them for their frailties as if you have none of your own.

The authoritarian preacher demands total conformity to his positions, interpretations, and beliefs. To him they are infallible, and he becomes irate or manipulative when someone holds to a diverse spiritual experience from his own. To do so is to be added to his "enemies list." The authoritarian personality divides and conquers, with "insiders" who kowtow to his way of thinking and doing and "outsiders" as those who differ from him.

In the second place, the narcissistic preacher focuses the content of the sermon on himself. It is one thing to draw a metaphor or invent a parable from your or my observations of life and events around us. For example, I was entering the dry cleaning place one Saturday afternoon when three burly teenagers approached and said, "Hey, mister!" I thought I was about to be mugged! I answered them, "Yes?" Then they said: "Our car won't start. Could you help us by letting us jump-start it from your battery?" I was glad to do so, and it worked.

On a Sunday a week or two later, as I was preaching on the subject of "The Ministry of Encouragement," I told this story to illustrate that in the Christian community, with our energy and hope, we "jump-start" each other; we share spiritual energy, that is, encouragement, with each other.

This is qualitatively different from a more recent occasion in which I made my point by telling the story of how I had won an argument with a layperson about a particular biblical interpretation! I demonstrated for my audience what a clever debater I am. This was pure narcissism and one for which I cough with embarrassment as I think of how authoritarian I was. Self-adulation is a constant temptation for the preacher.

A third aspect of homiletical narcissism is the lack of empathy or sympathetic imagination. In the preaching situation this appears in the common habit of using illustrations of people that put them in the worst possible light, that is, making a "worst case scenario" of people and holding them up to ridicule before our audience.

I very early had a remarkable professor of homiletics, J. B. Weatherspoon,

who spoke of this as a real breach of ethics and admonished us to project ourselves into other people's story with empathy and sympathetic imagination. We are to search for the elements of heroism and grandeur even in the misery of human nature.

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Authentic preaching is permeated by the simplicity and directness of Jesus and Paul.

As Gelolo McHugh, professor of psychology at Duke University, once said: "To love means that we interpret another person's behavior in the best possible light." To do otherwise in preaching simply encourages us as preacher and our audience in simply thanking God that we are not as the publicans and sinners, when in reality we are competing with each other to become the chief of sinners.

A fourth dimension of homiletical narcissism is to use the sermon as a tool for venting our own anger, disgust, and contempt. We do this when things are not going our way, which, of course, to us at the heat of our rage is the *only* way. The ethical issue here is that we have a captive audience that cannot answer back. For a member of the congregation to do as people in the New Testament did to Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and others by speaking out and making a dialogue of the homiletical monologue would be presumptuous of them indeed.

In fact, if they responded to our anger in kind, they might even be considered somewhat mentally ill! Having preached often to audiences of mental patients in state hospitals, I can vouch that such interruptions are the rule rather than the exception. To be challenged by their questions and comments—which were often sane and edifying—is a real exercise in humility and an antidote to narcissism for any preacher.

One more characteristic of homiletical narcissism is the flashy flamboyance of a preacher's manner of dress and body language. The chief purpose of preaching is to focus the listener's attention on the person of Jesus Christ and not on ourselves. Gaudy clothing that calls attention to itself at the same time focuses attention on the preacher. I was taught and still believe that if my manner of dress—whatever it is—is the main focus of people's attention, I am inappropriately dressed.

The trend of the '60s was to dress so casually—blue jeans, open collar, bare chest, and all—that a person became a breed apart from the "square" population. In the late '70s and '80s, television preachers went the other direction in costuming, makeup, and garishness. Michael Davis, in the May-June 1989 issue of *Preaching*, presented a sermon: "Did Jesus Wear a Rolex?" His final answer was: "No. Nothing gaudy and spectacular. He just took a towel and washed the feet of His disciples like an ordinary servant. He just took a cross and carried it to the place of death—for the sins of the whole world" (p. 41).

Authentic Preaching

In stark contrast, authentic preaching is permeated by the simplicity and directness of Jesus and Paul. Paul spoke of the cunningness that is a hallmark of narcissistic preaching when he said, "We refuse to practice cunning" (2 Cor. 4:2, RSV). Jesus spoke of our being as "wise as serpents," but in the same breath He spoke of our being "innocent as doves" as far as evil is concerned (Matt. 10:16, RSV).



Authentic preachers are self-emptying rather than self-centered.

Authentic preaching is certainly not naive. Instead, the preacher focuses cunning on the phoniness and unrealness of self-centered preaching. In doing so, that preacher develops

several dimensions of authentic, credible, and trustworthy preaching. A few of them are as follows:

Authentic preachers do not take themselves too seriously. They have a sense of humor about their own foibles and eccentricities. As Jack Benny's humor used to illustrate, they themselves "pay the price" for their humor. If they catch themselves at it, they repent of it and, if need be, ask forgiveness of the person they may have offended. Their humor communicates wisdom and gentleness as they make the characters in their humor heroes and not villains.

Authentic preachers are self-emptying rather than self-centered. They pour themselves out in prayer before God and service before their people. They point away from themselves and glorify God and our Lord Jesus Christ. One form of self-emptying is the capacity for empathy and sympathetic imagination in putting themselves in their people's places, even the most disagreeable among them.

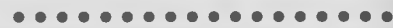
A patient in a state hospital taught me this one Mother's Day when I was preaching to an audience of about 200. I was speaking of parenthood as the gradual letting go of our children until they can leave us and follow the Lord Jesus Christ and be maturely related to a mate in marriage.

A mother in the audience stood up and addressed me: "Preacher, all that you say is well and good, but what if it just ain't in you to do it?" I thought it was a very good question as to the capacity of a person to reach ideals held out by me as a preacher. I was not a parent at the time. I did not know what a difficult thing I was prescribing. She did.

I simply changed the course of the sermon, thanked her for the question, and did my best to enter her world and ask where the strength to do this comes from. Only God can put it in us to do this. We cannot do this in our own strength. Having been a parent for 41 years, I now know better what she meant. Her question has since then become a criterion for preaching for me: "Is it in these people's capacity to do what I am urging them to do?" This enhances my empathy and sympathetic imagination.

Authentic preaching consists of the capacity for expressing grati-

tude to and for the congregation as well as giving them godly admonition about the edification of their thoughts, actions, and ideals. The subtle inability of the self-centered preacher is the inability to express genuine gratitude.



The subtle inability of the self-centered preacher is the inability to express genuine gratitude.

Isaac Stern, the noted violinist, in a television interview said: "We spend the first half of our life learning how to be grateful." As we learn the ability to be grateful, we become more authentic persons; and if we are preachers, we become more authentic preachers.

The grateful preacher listens carefully to his own voice and manner, regardless of the particular content, for tones of carping, griping, complaining, and wailing in voice and manner. These are rooted out, and tones of understanding and appreciation are planned to replace them.

Authentic preachers, finally, honestly admit that they "know in part, . . . prophesy in part," and "see through" any really serious and ambiguous issue "darkly" (1 Cor. 13:9, 12, KJV). This is the purest statement of the apostle Paul's authentic humility. To the self-centered preacher even the most ambiguous mysteries are not just clear, they are *perfectly* clear!

The authentic preacher attempts something that will not happen in this finite, self-interested, and confusing context: searching out the Scriptures for the *whole* counsel of God in the *whole* Bible and declaring it with courage. We know in part, but speak we must because God is pleased when we do.

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Show and Tell: How to Preach an Unforgettable Sermon

Do you often wonder if your listeners still remember your sermon when they get home? Delivering a sermon that is both meaningful and memorable is one of the biggest challenges in today's pulpits. While the Word of God itself provides the meaning, preachers can do a lot to create the memories.

According to leaders in business, education, and technology, good communicators communicate *visibly* and *visually*. Why not apply that knowledge to preaching? Augustine called baptism the visible Word. It is time to make the preached Word become visible as well.

Preachers can deliver visual sermons by using two kinds of visual aids:

1. Physical props and gestures (visible aids)
2. Visually rich language (visual imagery)



by **Ryan MacPherson**

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Both kinds of visual aids—the physical and the mental—help listeners identify and remember the speaker's main points. When applied to sermons, visual aids provide the Holy Spirit with an additional channel through which to use the Word.

Before considering how each kind of visual aid can be used in church, it is necessary to learn why visual aids are so effective outside of church.

Visual Speakers for Visual Thinkers

People in the '90s think visually, and therefore effective communicators speak visually. This may entail using physical objects for visual aids, or creating vivid imagery with a visually stimulating vocabulary, or both.

Physical visual aids, like props or diagrams, not only create interest but also improve retention. Additionally, these visible aids can lessen a speaker's nervousness and stage fright. Most importantly, visible aids clarify the speaker's message. By drawing

emphasis to portions of a speech, visible aids can help listeners recognize and recall the speaker's main points. A recent study at the University of Minnesota showed that visible aids can also increase persuasiveness by over 40 percent. (It is no surprise, therefore, that attorneys often use visible aids—including computer simulations—to sway juries in their favor.) The eye contact that visible aids achieve with the audience makes visual presentations very effective; speeches are no longer heard, but experienced.

Another type of visual aid appears inside the minds of listeners when a speaker uses visually stimulating phrases. Everyone likes a good storyteller. Research shows that speeches rich in visual concepts help listeners improve comprehension and retention by creating a special friendship between the speaker and listeners. "Vivid visual language connects very easily with emotional responses," says Dr. Thomas Kuster, Ph.D. in communications.

Finally, educational researchers have discovered time and again that students benefit most from lectures rich in visual vocabulary and accented with physical visual aids. Undoubtedly, visual aids increase attention spans and provide pastors with an effective environment in which to preach.

Preaching Visibly

Preachers and teachers have much in common. Both present information to people in hopes that they will understand and remember it. Since people learn visually, it only makes sense that preachers should teach visually.



The first method of doing this is to use “physically visible” visual aids.

Some visible aids are readily available: hand gestures, Bibles, hymnals, and pens, to name a few. A pastor can, for example, strengthen his sermon by gesturing toward a Bible when he refers to God’s Word. By holding up a pen while saying, “God inspired Paul to write these words,” a pastor can create a visual scenario of events—making his audience actively and consciously experience the message. The subtlety of such visual aids provides for them a uniquely simple strength.

Unlike the subtle visual aids described above, more dramatic visual aids, such as chalkboards (or marker boards), overhead projectors, maps, charts, and diagrams are rarely used in church. Given that pastors aim to communicate God’s Word to the people, it seems natural that they would use such visual aids. What is wrong with indicating where on the map Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea? It works in Bible class, and it can be equally effective in sermons.

If a pastor wishes to contrast Christ’s question about *agapaō* love with Peter’s reply of *phileō* love in John 21:15-17 (“Simon, . . . lovest thou me?” [KJV]), why not use a marker board or display a chart? Remember, visual aids not only improve immediate comprehension but also extend long-term retention. Is it not the goal of every pastor that his listeners still remember his sermon by the time they get home from church?

Unfortunately many visible aids become counterproductive when used in church. The traditional sermon environment is not conducive to visual aids for several reasons—including customs, expectations, and even church architecture. Sometimes pastors are simply not encouraged to use “modern ways” in their preaching. Church architecture further inhibits the use of visual aids because of visibility problems inherent in large rooms. A chalkboard, for example, might not be visible to the entire assembly. Another danger in using visible aids in church is the overuse of aids. Not only can overuse detract from the message, but also it lessens the impact because the more often aids are used, the less effective they are when used. The pastor must use

visible aids with care: If people remember the visible aid instead of the biblical truth the aid represents, then the pastor has misused the aid. But these problems are not without solution.

Many visible aids already exist in a usable form. I recently visited a church in which the pastor called attention to the stained-glass windows adorning the sanctuary. Throughout his series of Lenten sermons, his listeners moved their eyes from window to window and studied the colorful images of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. While they watched these visible aids, they listened to the pastor describe what the windows signify.



Visible aids clarify the speaker’s message.



Perhaps the visible aid most suitable for church is a sermon notebook. Pastors should encourage congregants to keep sermon notebooks—a place where one can jot down notes during the sermon. Not only will these notes will provide a future reference to aid retention, but also they will improve immediate comprehension. Each time the pastor says something, his listeners will think about it, translate it into their own wording, and write down meaningful notes to help them understand and remember the message. This three-step process—thinking, translating, writing—ensures that congregants consciously listen to the message, rather than merely hear the words in the background of their daydreams. The audiovisual impact of hearing something from the pastor and seeing it written on the page will further instill

the Word into the hearts and minds of the congregants.

Although the *visible* preaching techniques mentioned above can be very effective alone, no discussion of visual aids would be complete without mention of the *visual* imagery found in language.

Preaching Visually

The second kind of visual aid is imagined rather than seen. Such visual aids appear in the minds of listeners as the speaker seasons his language with vivid imagery. Jesus used this storytelling technique in His parables. For example, rather than explicitly telling a pious lawyer to show kindness to all people, Jesus told a story:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. . . . But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion on him (*Luke 10:30, 33, NKJV*).

In this parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ uses concrete language, which communicates very well to physical sensations. Immediately, we have in our minds an image of a man who was beaten, robbed, and abandoned to die. We also learn of a compassionate individual who illustrates Christ’s command to care for others. Finally, we are left with a practical application: “Go and do likewise” (v. 37, NKJV).

By telling stories that His listeners could visualize (and therefore understand and remember), Christ accomplished the goals of His ministry. History has proven that this technique was very effective: Many American hospitals bear the name Good Samaritan, and most states have “Good Samaritan” laws.

Now that we have given merit to the adage that “the best sermons are good stories,” we will explore another aspect of imagery: Good prose is poetic.

It is no mistake that the most memorable verses in Scripture have poetic rhythm and vivid visual imagery, as well as theological significance. God frequently used these methods to speak to His people. An example:

Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,

They shall be as wool (*Isa. 1:18, NKJV*).

A preacher once demonstrated this verse with a chemistry experiment. Using two large Erlenmeyer flasks as visible aids, the preacher mixed two red chemicals (one symbolizing our scarlet-stained sins, the other the blood of Christ) in order to produce a clear solution. The marvel of chemistry paralleled the marvel of the gospel: Red plus red can equal white. In other words, Christ's blood washes away our sins. Here is an excellent example of the impact that visible aids and visual imagery can have upon comprehension and retention of biblical truths.

As shown with the stained-glass windows and the chemistry experiment, pastors can easily add memorability to their sermons by preaching visually.

Seeing Is Believing

Can you imagine learning algebra from a teacher who never uses the chalkboard? Perhaps churchgoers will someday say the same of pastors who do not take advantage of the visual aids God has given us, both in His Word and through technology.

Instilling God's Word into the hearts and minds of His people—that is every pastor's goal when he delivers a sermon. Research shows that audiences understand and remember messages that are strengthened with visible aids and with visual language. Although it is the Holy Spirit who brings the Word to life in a sermon, God does use human talents and techniques to bring His Word to the people. Theologian C. F. W. Walther realized this long before the information age and instructed his seminary students over a century ago that "when preparing to preach, the preacher must draw up a strategic plan in order to win his hearers for the kingdom of God" (*Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau [St. Louis: Concordia, 1929, orig. 1884], 23). Preaching *visibly* and *visually* is one such strategy.

Both kinds of visual aids, when coupled with the Word of God, can transform routine sermons into messages of lasting significance. Through visible aids and visual imagery pastors can make sermons not mere messages heard in the pew, but lasting memories that congregants take home and share with friends. ¶

A Layman's Guide to the Apostles' Creed

by H. Ray Dunning

Kansas City:

Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995, 87 pp.

PA083-411-5522, \$6.95

Professor H. Ray Dunning, who has just retired after a distinguished and lengthy career at Trevecca Nazarene College, has gifted us with another book.

Dr. Dunning is the author of a systematic theology, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, and has authored, coauthored, and edited a number of other books—all in the area of theology and the life of holiness.

This new book is on the Apostles' Creed—the most ancient of all the creeds of Christendom, unless you count as creeds a few passages in the New Testament itself that read as though they are early confessions of faith.

This creed, familiar to Christians in all the regular denominations, is often repeated in our worship services.

Dr. Dunning discusses the creed from the standpoint of its origin and its Trinitarian outline, directing the explanations to laypersons. Yet persons technically educated in

doctrine can also learn from it, as I have.

At the end of the three major chapters he includes material designed to help groups who might be studying the book together discuss the chapters.

Dr. Dunning, aptly described at his retirement as being a person of "unself-conscious Christlikeness," is one of the most significant scholar-teacher-writers of the Wesleyan tradition in our century.

Word is that he has yet another book about to be birthed.

An annual Theology and the Bible lectureship is being started at Trevecca Nazarene College in Professor Dunning's honor.

With \$14,000 received as of May 1995, and with \$16,000 more needed, I was glad to contribute several months ago; and I hope still others might be sending such to TNC at 333 Murfreesboro Rd., Nashville, TN 37210-2877. ¶

—J. Kenneth Grider

The Pastoral Prayer

Pastor, each week your pastoral prayer helps me pray the things I want and need to pray." This report of a grateful parishioner tells what the pastoral prayer should do—it should help parishioners speak the things they would like to pray. Logic may argue that the congregation will participate more at prayer time if the pastor becomes less verbal. However, a carefully crafted pastoral prayer draws the parishioner into conversation with God; it does not generate boredom or leave parishioners uninvolved.

Well-Crafted Prayers

Too many pastoral prayers fail to engage the parishioner because they are poorly crafted. The sermon generally receives more preparatory attention than the pastoral prayer. Indeed, many "freestyle" Protestants actively resist the idea that a prepared prayer can be a Spirit-guided prayer.

Without question, a spirit of freedom should characterize the pastoral prayer. Pastoral prayers lack intimacy if they sound like form letters or do not engage the heart of the person who prays. The congregation's late-breaking needs should be included, and spontaneity is important. However, because it is an awesome thing to lead people into conversation with God, a prayer must wed careful planning to spontaneity. It is as important to lead God's people into His presence with dignity as it is to teach them His ways with clarity.

A well-crafted pastoral prayer will engage the heart and the mind of the pastor and, through him, the hearts and minds of parishioners who rejoice that their pastor, on their behalf, says to God the things they want to say to Him. Scripture discourages empty forms;¹ it also encourages thoughtful prayer.² Spanning yester-



by Carl C. Green

Assistant to the superintendent,
Spokane, Washington

day, today, and forever,³ Christ can guide the preparation of the pastoral prayer.

Conversation with God

As I think about the pastoral prayers I have heard (and prayed), too many have been monologues about God instead of conversations with God. This happens, I think, because the pastor fills a unique role at the pastoral prayer time: he speaks with God *on behalf of the congregation in their bearing*. Speaking with God, not one-on-one but on behalf of others, the pastor must pay special attention to the use of language so the pastoral prayer taps the heartbeat of the parishioners. At some point during the prayer, each should find himself or herself saying, "Yes, Lord, that's what I think, that's what I feel, that's what I want to say!"

This brings us to the pastor's most common temptation—the misuse of the personal pronoun. The focus of the pastoral prayer shifts and loses intimacy every time a third person pronoun replaces a first person pronoun. However, because we find it difficult to configure the language so that we speak with God on behalf of our congregation, we frequently end up talking to our congregations *about* God instead of leading our congregation's

conversation *with* God. The following prayer sample illustrates this:

Father, forgive us for our rebellious ways, for walking in paths of sin, for bringing shame to Your name. Lord, I thank You that, because of the mighty blood of Jesus Christ, we have right relationship with our Heavenly Father today; that we don't have to fear Him or be at a distance from Him, but can be lovingly welcomed into the throne room and cry out, "Abba, Father."

Notice how the second sentence objectifies and depersonalizes the up-close, personal petition of the first sentence. The second sentence is not a pastor speaking with God on behalf of his people; it is a professional lecture about Jesus and His mighty blood, and about a right relationship with the Heavenly Father, who does not need to be distant or feared. Also, notice now this prayer flirts with tritheism instead of affirming Trinitarianism, exhibiting the difficulty we often have when extemporaneously navigating the doctrine of the Trinity.

However, the beautiful intimacy of this prayer's first statement can continue throughout its length by using first person pronouns:

Father, forgive us for our rebellious ways, for walking in paths of sin, for bringing shame to Your name. Lord, I thank You that You, in human form as Jesus, shed Your mighty blood, making it possible for us to be in right relationship with You, our Heavenly Father. We don't have to fear You or be at distance from You. Instead, because You lovingly welcome us into Your throne room, we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Now the pastor, certain to whom he prays, clearly addresses God without Trinitarian confusion. Directed to

God and remaining personal throughout, it draws every hearer into the same intimacy with the Lord that the pastor voices.

Enlarge the Horizon

Some prayers are just too daring to be voiced on the spur of the moment. How, for example, do we declare God's sovereign love when the daily papers are full of the unremitting tragedies in Somalia and Rwanda? Such a prayer, if the praying community is to retain integrity before the watching world (and some of its own), must not affirm God's sovereignty by ignoring all the difficulties imposed by reality. Or how do we pray for our president, affirming him as God's instrument,¹ if we feel he is leading the country down the wrong moral path? Confused by untidy complexity, prayers like these are most often unspoken when left to the spur of the moment, the awful silence silenced (camouflaged) by parochial prayers that require little courage.

During the course of each year's prayers, the pastor should lead his or her people to pray daring prayers. While personalizing the congregation's victories and needs, these prayers should do more than reflect the congregation's existing horizon; they should enlarge the horizon.

We need to declare that God stands at history's beginning and end, announcing our confidence—even when that confidence trembles—that He knows the future and, though unknown to us and full of danger, that it is full of possibilities.

We need to face our sins of littleness, meanness, and narrow-mindedness, repenting and praying that our love for each other and for everyone else will increase and overflow.² Prayer should announce our grace-empowered decision to possess the opportunities tucked away in these serious times by choosing great faith instead of preoccupation with the petty.

Because sin resides in human institutions as well as in individual hearts, we need to repent our participation in systemic evil—our use of technology that we enjoy at the expense of workers' health, for example.

We need to pray for the Church of Jesus Christ—not our own church or denomination alone, but the Church universal. We need to pray that the

body of believers will be a spiritual family that, because love prevails, compensates the absence of love so increasingly common in biological families; and to renounce every division of race and color, nation and speech. Prayer can lead us to see how much alike our souls are, how similar are our needs and aspirations.



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We need to pray that God will add a glimpse of sunshine to those harassed by difficulty; that He will grant strength to those caught in dark tunnels of discouragement, despair, or bereavement; that He will reinforce the faith of those bewildered by some strange turn of life, or troubled by doubts, or tempted; that those who have sinned will know His forgiveness.

We need to fold a grand variety of people into our prayers of thanksgiving and intercession—physicians and nurses, teachers and students in our schools, upright people in law and business, homemakers and social workers, laborers and tradesmen, missionaries in far places and among us, our nation and our leaders, all nations

and all leaders, all whose friendship encourages and sustains us, and our enemies too. We need to pray for those who cannot or do not pray for themselves, too—for those happy with the passing days, unaware that tragedy lies at the end of their disinterest in spiritual matters; and for those who are content with a Christian experience that is neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.⁶

We need to declare our intention to turn our prayers and intercessions to action under God's leadership—to go from the place of worship to make goodness attractive; to minister to someone in Christ's name by phone, card, note, or personal visit during the week ahead.

We need to ask for the fullness of God's Spirit, that our lives will sing our faith and give witness to God's transforming power.

Growth happens as we voice prayers that challenge our faith and require enlarged horizons. Therefore, the pastoral prayer should enlarge the horizons of both the pastor and people. Poorly prepared prayers are generally inadequate for this task.

Preserve the Potency of Public Prayers

Finally, well-crafted prayers lose their potency if the worship service is poorly planned. For example, on a recent Sunday I was in a church where three prayers were bunched together—the invocation was followed by a short chorus, a brief prayer chorus, and the pastoral prayer, then immediately by the offertory prayer. I left from worship that morning feeling that those prayers, all clustered together, were somehow redundant—"we could have done without two of them." Those same three prayers, if they had all been seen as parts of the whole, could have cooperated with the music and the sermon. We who worshiped could have enjoyed changes of tempo and mood and the prayers, positioned in the service so that each was unique, would have been three open windows, carrying the fresh breeze of conversation with God.

1. Matt. 6:7.
2. 1 Cor. 14:15.
3. Heb. 13:8.
4. Rom. 13.
5. 1 Thess. 3:12.
6. Rev. 3:16.

Six Steps to Enhance the Effectiveness of Video Training: A Strategy to Promote the Transformation of Leaders from Observers to Participants

More action means more sales! Just ask any advertiser. Magazine readers are told to scratch off a patch to see if they have the winning number. Action photos induce a sense of movement and involvement. Samples give potential customers a chance to try the product. And once they've reached out to try it, many are hooked. They no longer are just passive observers. They are transformed into active participants. What's more, their behavior has been modified. Many will become regular customers of the new product.

Christian leadership training is also concerned with shaping behavior. The goal is that all Christians be trans-



by Norman G. Wilson

Director, Program for Accelerating College Education, Houghton College, West Seneca, New York

formed into active and effective participants in Christian ministry. To achieve this transformation, many churches are using videos in their

training programs. Yet videos by themselves are not sufficient to facilitate the transformation from observer to participant. This is primarily because viewers tend to continue in a passive mode once the program is over. Although leaders in training might be prompted to reflect on the information, ideas, and experiences seen in videos, often little significant change can be noted in their behavior.

Breadth of Transformational Training

The most effective programs of leadership training address three fundamental domains of human growth and development—intellect, character, and skills—in a balanced and integral way (fig. 1). Learning activities that primarily promote intellectual growth are supplemented with others that facilitate the development of Christian character and leadership skills (table 1). In this way, the whole person is impacted and transformed for effective ministry.

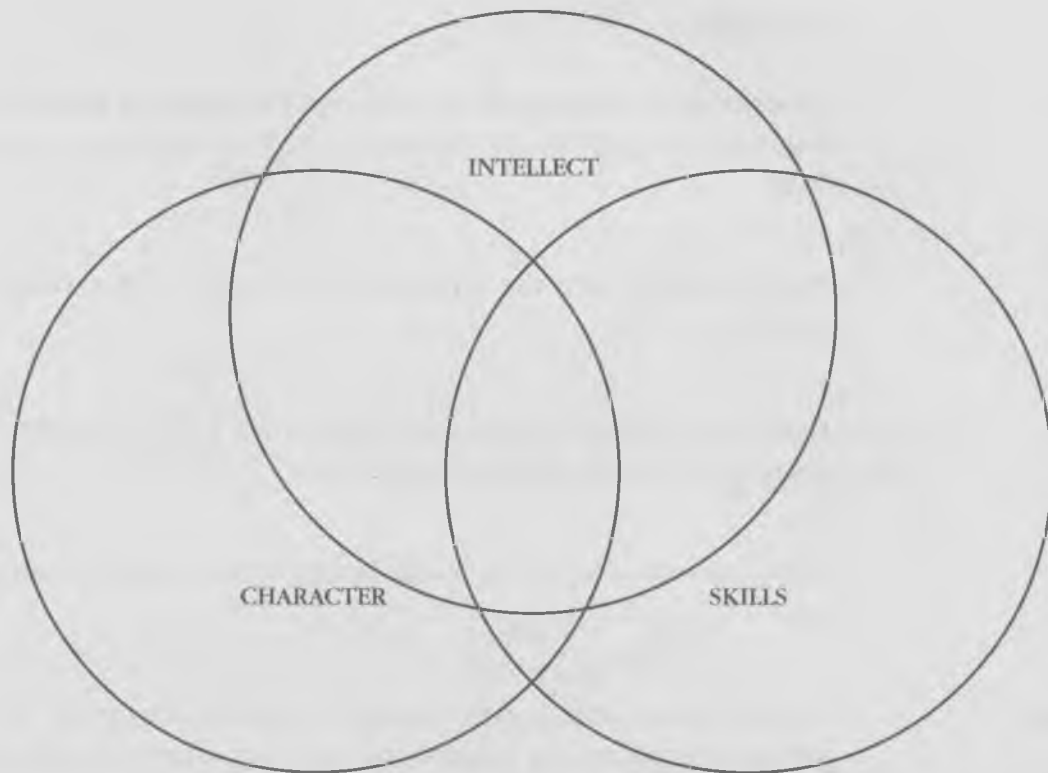
These educational principles can help in evaluating the numerous video resources available today and in planning for their most effective use. Through strategic selection and planning, each video can make a significant contribution to the overall objectives of the training program.

Six Steps to Enhance the Effectiveness of Videos

The following six steps for the effective use of video pro-



Fig. 1. Fundamental domains of growth and development: Represented in reference to their interrelatedness



grams are designed to facilitate the transformation of leaders in training from passive observers to active participants. Even though they are explained in sequential order, in practice one will often want to loop back to previous steps to complete, modify, or refine them (fig. 2).

Step One: Assess the Content

Every video should be assessed regarding the content. Does the presentation relate to the main topic of the class in a helpful manner? Do its contents harmonize with, contradict, supplement, or illustrate the other lesson materials? The answers to these questions will help in the selection and development of supplementary activities.

Step Two: Consider the Impact

The teacher should also anticipate the overall impact of the video on the viewers. Keep in mind that not everyone will react in the same manner to a video presentation. The impact will vary due to each person's distinctive cultural background, worldview, experiences in life, opinions, learning preferences, and other likes and dislikes. Emotional and

physiological responses will differ from one individual to another. The unique combination of all these factors will affect how each one inter-

The goal is that
all Christians be
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prets and endeavors to apply the lessons to daily life. A teacher's ability to anticipate the impact of a video on the viewers will also help in the selection and development of supplementary activities.

Step Three: Evaluate the Usefulness

Based on the results of steps one and two, the teacher at this point should be able to evaluate the potential contributions of this overall viewing experience to the training program. Since class time is at a premium, one ought to exercise disciplined judgment in this decision. Sometimes it is advisable for the teacher to loop back again to steps one and two after a day or two, particularly if one's emotional reactions to the video have been so strong as to hinder an objective evaluation of the overall experience. In the case of video programs that are not considered to be a worthwhile addition to the teaching plan, the process should stop here.

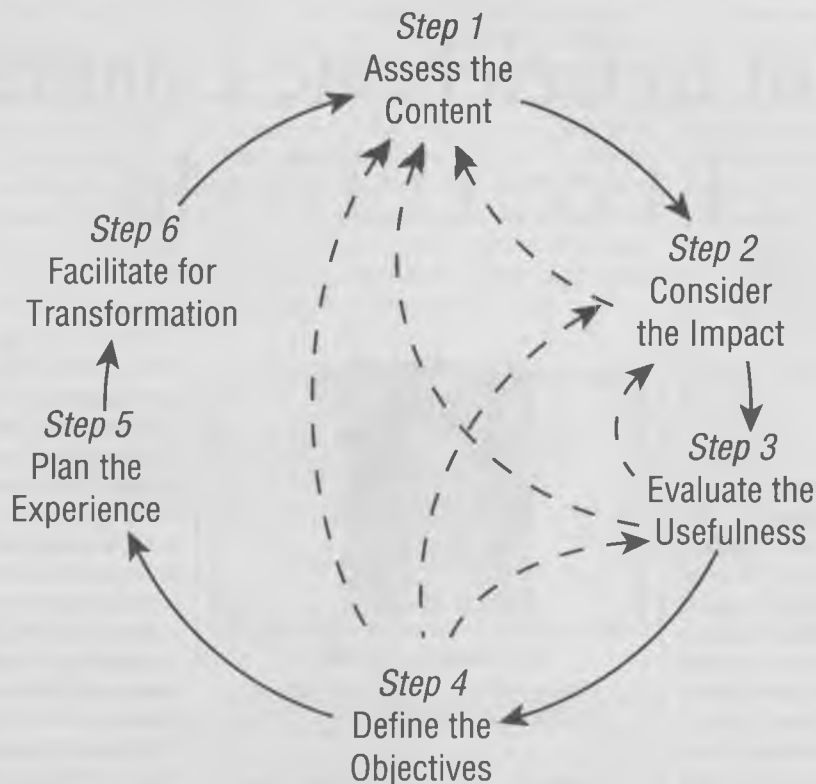
Step Four: Define the Objectives

Next, specific learning objectives should be defined, both for viewing the video and for the supplemental activities. These desired learning outcomes should contribute to the general objectives of the overall program and should address the integral development of leaders in training in reference to the subject matter. Careful

Table 1. Teaching methods that promote active learning: Recommended for supplemental use with videos

<i>Method</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Case studies	Describe a similar situation to the one presented in the video for class discussion regarding the dynamics involved and the various alternatives.
Debating	Hold a debate from the differing perspectives of the video's protagonists.
Field studies	Have each student observe and report on a place or event that can be related to the main lessons of the video.
Field trips	Visit a nearby hospital, nursing home, school, prison, halfway house, etc.
Game playing	See who can recall certain events or information from the video, or who can produce the longest lists of given items, or who can be the most creative according to the judgment of the group.
Interviews	Have each student conduct an interview and report on the experience.
Outreach ministries	Give each student a ministry assignment in coordination with and under the direction of a mentor-supervisor.
Projects	Have individuals or small groups propose and develop an activity that applies in a practical way the lessons taught in the video.
Questionnaires	Require students to develop, administer, and report on the findings of a questionnaire.
Role playing	Extend a situation presented in the video, or explore other possible scenarios.
Simulations	Involve the group in a hypothetical dilemma that calls for resolution.
Workshops	Divide the class into groups to complete various aspects of a larger assignment.

Fig. 2. Six steps to enhance the effectiveness of videos: A dynamic model to promote student transformation



Note: The closed circle represents a process of ongoing review regarding the use of a video in a training program.

consideration should be given to cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes (Bloom 1984, Kolb 1984, Krathwohl and others 1964).

Step Five: Plan the Experience

Now it's time to develop the teaching plan for a transformational experience. One should consider the multiple teaching methods available (see table 1) and select only those that will most effectively accomplish the desired learning outcomes. The learning activities, including both the video and all supplementary experiences, should be arranged in such a manner so that the session flows naturally and moves toward closure. Transformational learning experiences generally ought to include a challenge to apply the truths learned in practical situa-

tions and a follow-up plan for reflecting on and assessing each student's application of those truths.

Step Six: Facilitate for Transformation

If the above steps are adequately addressed, the teacher is now ready to implement the strategy for transformation. The following guidelines for facilitators will help to enhance the impact of the overall experience: (1) keep the learning objectives in mind, both for viewing the video itself as well as for the supplementary activities; (2) be responsive to the learners, touching base with their personal experiences and making space so that everyone has an opportunity to participate; (3) be aware of the dynamics of the group, making strategic adjust-

ments to the teaching plan in order to capitalize on the natural flow of the learning experience; (4) debrief the learning experiences, beginning with feelings and impressions before moving on to other observations, insights, meanings, and possible applications (table 2).

Conclusion


By implementing these six steps for enhancing the effectiveness of video training, one can engage the whole person in life-changing learning experiences and thereby promote the transformation of leaders in training from passive observers to active participants. In this way, all Christians can be enabled to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22, KJV). 

Table 2. Four guidelines for facilitators of transformation

1. Keep the learning objectives in mind
2. Be responsive to the learners, promoting interaction
3. Tune in to the dynamics of the group
4. Debrief the learning experiences

How Not to Celebrate Communion 1 Cor. 11:17-34a

My earliest childhood memory of Communion is a bitter-sweet one. I don't remember exactly how old I was, probably 9 or 10. I was kneeling at the altar of my home church in Sandwich, Illinois. Beside me was my Sunday School teacher, Sister Davies. Observing the obligatory morbid introspection, I repented again of all my youthful peccadillos, and I pondered my worthiness to participate in this strange, rarely observed adult ritual. My penance was briefly interrupted by the rattle of a chrome tray full of tiny glass cups. I nervously took one, placed it on the altar rail, and continued my "navel inspection." When my pastor gave us permission to drink, I reached for the cup, only to knock it over and spill its precious contents on the altar. I was horrified, certain that, with the next act of divine retribution, I would become toast.

Instead, I witnessed a moment of grace that I will never forget. Immediately, Sister Davies took out the white, embroidered handkerchief tucked in her dress sleeve. Without a word or a moment's hesitation, she wiped up the purple pool of Welch's grape juice, poured half the contents of her cup into mine, and went on as if nothing had happened. She never mentioned the incident to my parents and never once reminded me of my clumsiness. Instead, during all my growing-up years in that church, she lavished me with affirmation. After more than one of my fumbling early attempts at preaching, she would greet me at the door with, "George, you're going to be a general superintendent someday. You preach like one already." I knew better even then. But I also knew that this was Sister Davies's way of saying that she sincerely loved me and genuinely thought that the highest conceivable achievement within her social universe could



by George Lyons

A sermon given in chapel at Northwest Nazarene College, October 7, 1993

be mine. To this day, I never smell Welch's concord grape juice without thinking of Sister Davies.

How is it that unleavened bread and unfermented wine celebrated in the context of sacred words are not only memorable but even sacramental? How is it that the observance of the Lord's Supper is a means of grace? How is it that these tiny portions become an occasion for Eucharist—giving thanks? How is it that these brief moments spent together in silence are called Communion?

Symbols are powerful teachers. A head table at a banquet is a subtle reminder, lest we forget, of the nature of the social pecking order. Symbols participate in the reality that they symbolize. The ancient symbol of the swastika is forever tarnished by its association with the Third Reich. For Christians, the cross, the ultimate symbol of Roman brutality, has become a symbol of salvation. Yet, no one should mistake a cross burned in a Black family's front lawn as a message of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Symbols and how we use or abuse them are not matters of indifference.

We would not know the apostle Paul's view of Communion, or that he observed it at all, were it not for the fact that the Corinthians abused it. Our familiarity with the words of insti-

tution of the Lord's Supper in our text may lead us to miss the reason Paul cites them. The Corinthian observance of the sacrament was so far removed from the reality that it symbolized, he claimed that their "meetings do more harm than good" (v. 17) and that their communal meals did not deserve the name *Lord's Supper* (v. 20).

First Cor. 11:17-22 begins and ends by condemning the Corinthian observance of Communion. Their practices perverted the sacrament into a celebration of disunion and "division" (v. 18; cf. 1:10; 12:25). The "divisions" among them were magnified by their observance of the sacred meal. But how? It was not that some had separated themselves from the church or refused to participate in the meal. The problem was not a church split, for only "when [they came] together as a church" did the divisions become visible (v. 18). Nor was the problem the four cliques swearing allegiance to particular Christian leaders mentioned in the first four chapters of the letter.

Paul admits that "there have to be differences among you" (v. 19). Nevertheless, he told the Corinthians that the visibility of such differences "when [they came] together" destroyed the unity that the Lord's Supper celebrates, so that it ceased to be *the Lord's* (v. 20) and was merely their "own supper." The term used here for "supper" was "the word for the main meal in the Hellenistic world, usually eaten toward or in the evening."¹ Various religions used it to refer to their cultic meals held in honor of pagan deities.² It appears that the earliest Christians did not eat merely a sacramental meal, in which only token portions of bread and wine were served, but observed the Lord's Supper either as or in connection with a full regular meal set aside in honor of the Lord.

Paul cited the tradition of the Lord's Supper here so as to make clear why the Corinthian observance was wrong and how their appropriation of the sacrament was far removed from the reality that it symbolized. Paul's objection to the Corinthian observance of the Lord's Supper is **not** that they ate real—full—meals when they gathered. His concern was **not** to separate the purely sacramental meal from those meals designed to satisfy hunger.³ **Nor** was it that they used real wine, rather than the grape juice preferred in churches like ours. His observation in verse 21, "One remains hungry, [while] another gets drunk," does **not** attack the problem of drunkenness directly. The deeper problem was with both extremes—some did not have enough to eat and drink, while others ate and drank in excess.

How much grape juice does it take to get drunk? And how many Communion wafers must one eat to become a glutton? Paul's concern was not with some breach of proper table etiquette—that some clumsy folks were spilling the wine. Nor even that some rich folks ate their own sumptuous meals before the poor and the slaves arrived.⁴ Paul's objection was that the Corinthian practice, which humiliated "those who have nothing," abused "the church of God" (v. 22). The divisions that they tolerated, even celebrated, involved the social distinctions that separated the rich and the poor in the church.⁵

We might fault Paul for his apparent failure to address the structural problem of the inequitable distribution of wealth within the church, much less the world. He did not question the right to private property—the rich might still have their houses, while the poor had nothing (v. 22). He had no delusions that such socioeconomic differences would ever completely disappear.

Although Paul did not address the problem of the inequitable distribution of wealth within the church, neither did he get lost in petty symptomatic issues. He did not prohibit private meals with guest lists determined along sociological lines (vv. 22, 34). He did not lecture the rich on the sin of gluttony. Nor did he harangue the poor on the virtues of frugality and industry.

Nevertheless, Paul would not coun-

tenance the parading of social and economic distinctions when the church gathered.⁶ He fundamentally challenged practices that "a class-conscious society such as Roman Corinth" took for granted. When the classes came together, it was customary for those of the higher classes to eat from a better menu, with larger portions, and in an inner dining room, while the lower classes ate inferior and inadequate fare in an outdoor courtyard.⁷

Symbols are powerful teachers.

Corinthian toleration of such class distinctions within the church indicated to him "that the church [counted] for nothing in their eyes."⁸ It indicated that they had completely misunderstood the unity of the church that the Lord's Supper celebrates. "Paul [did] not suggest that all should eat the privileged portions of the well-to-do; rather, he implic[d] that in community the well-to-do should eat what the others do."⁹ He called for *kenosis*—self-emptying, not self-examination. His attack on this world's class system was indirect, but it went to its very core in a way that most Christians have yet to appropriate fully.

Paul took for granted that the church was a heterogeneous entity. His solution was not one church for the rich, another for the poor; one for Jews, another for Gentiles. Unity in Christ counts for nothing if it merely accommodates existing distinctions as the Corinthians were doing. We can only guess how Paul might respond to our similar practices. Do the age-group divisions we take for granted in our churches celebrate our differences, creating one church for the young, another for adolescents, for college students, for singles, for the newly married, a church for the old, for the divorced? It doesn't take an apostle or a Gallup poll to demonstrate that eleven o'clock Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour in the week in America.

Paul's challenge to the Corinthian

abuse would seem to call seriously into question the appropriateness of the homogeneous-unit principle of the "modern church growth movement" as a Christian mission strategy: Churches grow that are built around socioeconomic similarities. I am not suggesting that this principle does not work; but Paul's challenge was **not** made on pragmatic grounds. The principle may work simply because it is not Christian—because it does not challenge the status quo, because it does not ruffle the feathers of the privileged, because it allows the church to be conformed to the world's patterns. The question is not, Does it grow a "church"? but, Does the "church" it grows deserve the nickname "Christian"? Does a "church" constituted along purely social, economic, racial, ethnic, and age-group lines know anything of Christian unity? Is it the Lord's Supper we celebrate, or our own?

The tradition Paul received from the Lord explains why he was displeased with the Corinthian observance of the Supper (see 11:2, 17, 22). Their abuse was apparently not in the frequency of their celebration. The twice-repeated term "whenever" (vv. 25, 26) assumes that it should be perpetually observed. However, Paul did not prescribe how often. We can only guess what he might have said about the relative infrequency of the Supper's celebration in our churches. Given Paul's concern expressed in 11:17-22, not observing the sacrament at all may be less objectionable than frequent observances that maintain its form but neglect its substance.

Paul's formulation of the tradition of the institution of the Lord's Supper is not exactly like any of the other three versions in the New Testament, although it most closely resembles Luke's (22:17-20).¹⁰ There are two major differences between these accounts. First Cor. 11:26 is without parallel in any of the other accounts: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (NRSV). Only Luke and Paul mention Jesus' command for repetition of the Supper: "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (v. 25, NRSV). These distinctive features may point to Paul's reason for reminding his hearers of a familiar tradition (v. 23).¹¹

The Lord's Supper is a dramatic symbol of the past, present, and future tenses of salvation. It is a reminder of the **past redemption** made possible by the saving death of Jesus Christ. Paul briefly referred to the historical setting for the first Lord's Supper as "on the night . . . [t]he Lord Jesus . . . was betrayed" (v. 23). We should remember that whoever bears ultimate responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus, "one of us" handed Him over to His enemies (Acts 1:16-17, TLB). What a poignant reminder of our continuing need for the gift of new life and forgiveness, which the Supper celebrates.¹²

The Lord's Supper is also a continuing reminder of **present reconciliation**. The common salvation affected by Jesus' bodily death and resurrection makes us one, despite all our obvious differences. We enjoy a new relationship with God and our fellow human beings that Christ died to make possible. This relationship is not at all based on ethnic identity or social class, on our age or gender, on our wealth or poverty. The new covenant is not founded on any human achievement; it is free for all. The Church is the community of salvation. We do not understand or properly observe the Lord's Supper if we fail to appreciate this. We condemn ourselves by eating and drinking in an unworthy manner—failing to recognize the body, the church.

The Corinthian practice abused "the church of God" (v. 22).

The Lord's Supper is an inescapable reminder that only in the **future** will there be the full **realization** of the salvation begun in "the Lord's death." Only with His second coming will salvation have its future culmination and consummation (v. 26). Let us not grow impatient as we await the fulfillment of the great Christian hope.

The proper observance of the Lord's Supper—observance true to its Founder's intentions—is a potent symbol, an object lesson that proclaims more eloquently than any sermon the central message of the gospel: the death of Jesus as the saving event (v. 26). Significantly, Jesus did not say, "Eat this bread," but "Do this"—referring to the blessing, breaking, distributing, and eating, all "in remembrance of me" (v. 24; see similarly v. 25).

Jesus' interpreting words, "This is my body," first spoken while He was still physically present with His disciples, could only be taken in a figurative sense—"This represents my body" (v. 24). The explanation, "which is for you," points to His body, not the bread, as the divinely chosen means of atonement.

Paul's and Luke's versions of Jesus' words over the cup, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 25; Luke 22:20), clearly point to the saving significance of Jesus' death. Again, it is the taking of the cup, the speaking of the interpretive words, and the drinking that are all to be done "in remembrance" of the Lord (v. 25). His death made possible a new relationship between God and His new people and among His people—a "new covenant in [His] blood" (v. 25). The Lord's Supper is a perpetual reminder of the common salvation affected by His bodily death and resurrection.

The Corinthians seem to have forgotten why they observed the Supper. Because it was intended as a reminder of Jesus' self-sacrificing death in their behalf—a death that made them one body in Christ—their self-centered observance unworthily memorialized the Lord's body and blood (see v. 27). Their self-satisfaction (see 4:8-10) exposed their forgetfulness of the Supper's intention to point them beyond the salvation begun in "the Lord's death" to its future culmination in His second coming (v. 26).

Their observance of the Supper failed to honor Christ, in memory of whose self-sacrificing death it was celebrated. Their socially elitist observance abused one another, the sacrament, the church, and the Lord. It neglected the very point of Christ's death—"to create a new people . . . in which the old distinctions based on human fallenness no longer" mat-

ter.¹³ Thus, it was not the Lord's Supper they celebrated (11:20) but merely their "own supper."

"The Lord's Supper is not simply a memorial of the Last Supper, nor of Christ's death per se. It is a constant, repeated reminder—and experience—of the efficacy of that death for *us*," not just for *me*. "Salvation through Christ's death has created a new community of people who bear His name."¹⁴ Community consciousness was Paul's central concern.

Paul would not countenance the parading of social and economic distinctions when the church gathered.

The Corinthians' visible disunity in their observance of the Lord's Supper dishonored Him. By exalting their differences, they sinned against one another and failed to make visible the unity His saving death was intended to bring (v. 27). Such a celebration of the Supper observed it "in an unworthy manner" (ibid.).

The issue of "worthiness" is not concerned with our spiritual status, but with our attitude in observing the sacrament.¹⁵ We remain unworthy of all that Christ has done for us, but we may yet observe the Lord's Supper in a manner that worthily reflects our grasp of its saving and unifying significance—"for us" (see 11:24). Paul's call for self-examination in verse 28 does not urge morbid introspection as the means of making ourselves worthy of the Lord's Supper. It is, instead, a call to be certain that our observance of the sacrament is consistent with its intention.

The crucial question is not, Are we worthy? but, Does our celebration proclaim the gospel as it should? Is our observance of the sacrament truly Christian? Does it keep in proper perspective the three tenses of salvation—past, present, and future? Do we take seriously “the body of the Lord”? Do we celebrate the salvation His death brings? Do we celebrate—in word and deed—our unity in Christ as one body? Failure to exercise proper judgment in these matters will result in divine judgment (vv. 29-34).

Paul did not imply that all sickness or death came as a divine judgment on unworthy observance of the Lord's Supper. Nor did he suggest that those who were sick or died in Corinth were especially guilty of profaning the sacrament. Rather, he called his hearers to consider these particular experiences as divine discipline, whose ultimate intention was to spare them from the coming judgment that will result in the final condemnation of the world.¹⁶

Eleven o'clock
Sunday
morning is still
the most
segregated
hour in the
week in
America.

Sadly, Paul's words of warning generally have been taken seriously by the wrong people. For many overly conscientious believers, this sacrament has been not a means of grace, but of grief. John Wesley's understanding of the Lord's Supper as a “converting ordinance” needs renewed emphasis in our circles. Too often weak souls, most in need of the assurance of salvation, have hesitated to come to the Lord's table because of their profound sense of unworthi-

ness. Let us make the invitation clear: All who will may come and receive for the first time or celebrate anew the full and free forgiveness Christ's saving death provides. It is to the unrepentant, the self-reliant, the selfish, the unforgiving, the proud, the strong that Paul's warning is sounded.

First Cor. 11:33-34 brings Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper to a conclusion by summarizing and recapitulating his major points in verses 17-32. He again urged the wealthy minority to treat the poor majority with Christian hospitality. Those with the wherewithal to gorge themselves were to do so at home (v. 34). When the church gathered, the haves were to accommodate themselves to the


We condemn
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manner.

have-nots. They were not to humiliate the needy, but to humble themselves. They were to celebrate their unity by sharing the common bread and drinking the common cup together as one body. Church was not to be the occasion to flaunt social distinctions. Paul warned them again of the certainty of divine judgment if they failed to heed his directions (v. 34).

Church unity cannot be taken for granted. There have been in the past, are now in the present, and will forever be in the future differences among Christians. Nevertheless, church gatherings—especially for Communion—are neither the time nor the place for parading such distinctions. As 1 Cor. 10:16-17 puts it, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (NRSV). May the bro-

ken bread and the common cup remind us of who we were without Christ, of who we are together in Christ, and of what we may become by His grace.

Be certain
that our
observance of
the sacrament
is consistent
with its
intention.

How is it that unleavened bread and unfermented wine celebrated in the context of sacred words are sacramental? How is it that the observance of the Lord's Supper is a means of grace? How is it that these tiny portions become an occasion for Eucharist? How is it that moments spent in silence are called Communion? How can all this be true? The answer is simple: We, the unworthy, have been invited by the One altogether worthy to participate in the extraordinary reality symbolized by these ordinary ingredients. 

1. A literal translation of the Greek in v. 21.

2. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 539 n. 43.

3. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. George W. MacRae, trans. James W. Leitch, bibliog. and refs. James W. Dunkley, in *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 195 n. 21.

4. Contra Conzelmann's (p. 195) interpretation of vv. 22 and 34.

5. Fee's (p. 540) report of the views of several interpreters, a view perhaps implied in the NIV translation of verse 21.

6. Paul does not use these specific terms, but it is certainly what he has in mind. The contrast is between “those who have nothing” (v. 22), and those who “have homes,” who may eat and drink to excess (vv. 21, 22).

7. For Paul the church is only truly the church as it assembles.

8. Fee, 534-45.

9. *Ibid.*, 544.

10. *Ibid.*, 567.

11. See *ibid.*, 547.

12. *Ibid.*, 549.

13. *Ibid.*, 557.

14. *Ibid.*, 558. Italics added for emphasis.

15. Conzelmann, 202 n. 108.

16. See Fee, 565-66.

Addressing the Father in Prayer

Should we address Jesus in public and private prayer? Many people do, including many of the most highly educated persons in Wesleyan-Holiness circles. I hear prayers addressed to Jesus all the time. I have never once heard anyone question the practice. Certainly, it has a long history in the church.

Jesus is, of course, fully divine, and He can, therefore, hear our prayers. However, on several bases, I advocate that we address God the Father in all of our prayers.

Most importantly, most actual prayers in the New Testament are addressed to God.

Naturally, Jesus' prayers were addressed to the Father, and our Lord instructed us to do likewise—and to make our requests in His (Jesus') name. When we address Jesus in our prayers, do we not openly disregard His directives as well as His practice? Also, most of the apostle Paul's prayers are addressed to the Father, or to God as the Father.

Another basis for addressing the Father in prayer is so that the prayer can be made in Jesus' name.

That is, it is in the name and for the sake of the Member of the Godhead who was humanized and who now intercedes before the Father on our behalf. Even though we are redeemed, we are not ourselves merit-invested. We are not worthy of the Holy Father's attention and helps. The Lamb of God slain for us, raised, ascended now at the Father's right hand, touched by a lingering memory of what our human life is like, is worthy. "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain," we read (Rev. 5:12). It is in Christ's worthy name that we pray to the unoriginated and unincarnated Holy Father, who is distinguished from the Lamb, and who "sits on the throne" (v. 13).



by **J. Kenneth Grider**

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A third basis for addressing the Father in prayer is because God the Father executes what we plead for in prayer.

For example, He forgives the sins of a person needing to be justified, and He is able to do so and still himself remain just (Rom. 3:23-26), because of the atonement made by God the Son! And God the Holy Spirit persuades us to ask for forgiveness.

A fourth reason for addressing the Father has been implied already: because we are recognizing and falling in line with the peculiar functions of the three Persons in the Godhead.

But don't worry too much. God the Father understands when we get things mixed up. When we address our prayers to Jesus and then thank Him for suf-

fering for us on the Cross, God understands and He accepts our praise. When someone asks Jesus for forgiveness, the Father is understanding, and He graciously forgives. God the Father is a person, as the Son and the Holy Spirit are, and not a computer—which requires the correct input if we are to obtain a certain output.

Many of my readers will not see this matter as I do. I will continue to hear Jesus addressed in public prayer. This is because Jesus is the One with whom we feel close, who actually became One with us. And when Jesus is addressed in prayer where I worship, I will worship. 



Skjold Photographs

The Essence of Wesleyanism*

The essence of Wesleyanism" is simply and profoundly

Free Grace!

Wesley understood the grace of God in two key ways.¹ First, like the Reformers, he understood grace as the "undeserved favor"² of God, enabling our acceptance with Him. This, Wesley writes, is

favor altogether undeserved, man having no claim to the least of his mercies. It was free grace that "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul," and stamped on that soul the image of God, and "put all things under his feet." The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life and breath, and all things.³

Second, out of his immersion in the Greek Christian heritage⁴ Wesley understood grace as the "power of the Holy Ghost"⁵ enabling us to walk in the ways of God. The former of these two understandings "accents the divine/human relation; the latter, human participation and renewal."⁶ For Wesley the Holy Spirit was "the mediator of all graces—sufficient grace in all, irresistible grace in none."⁷

H. Ray Dunning's title for his "Wesleyan Systematic Theology," *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*,⁸ is appropriate for our theme. For in Wesley, and in truly Wesleyan theology, grace issues first in faith, then in holiness! Foundational for Wesleyanism in Wesley's own language is

*Grace Free in All,
Grace Free for All*

The word for this in Wesleyan theology is "prevenient grace." "Prevenient" or "preventing" grace sets every person *free* to respond to the call of God. In his sermon "Working Out Our Own Salvation," Mr. Wesley writes:

For allowing that all the souls of



by Frank G. Carver

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men are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called "natural conscience." But this is not natural; it is more properly termed "preventing grace." Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Everyone has sooner or later good desires, although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. . . . **So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.**⁹

In the Conference Minutes of 1745, Wesley asks, Q. 23. "Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?" A. "(1.) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2.) In denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, (3.) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God."¹⁰

In his sermon on "Free Grace" from 1739, Wesley defined prevenient grace simply: "The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL."¹¹

As Collins summarizes: "Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace allows him to hold together, without any contradiction, the four motifs of **total depravity, salvation by grace, human responsibility, and the offer of salvation to all.**"¹²

Out of the operation of prevenient grace, grace free in all, and grace free for all, as it brings us to faith, come Wesley's two unique emphases, so needed in his day and in no way irrelevant to ours, the twin spiritual graces of the assurance of salvation, and the transformation of life—morally and spiritually. The first of these is:

The Assurance of Grace

Assurance of salvation is the one sure point of Wesley's Aldersgate testimony.¹³ On Wednesday, May 24, 1738, just three days after his brother Charles had broken through to a new level of assurance,¹⁴ Wesley wrote those often quoted words:

I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.¹⁵

Here is the heart of what he heard read from Martin Luther:

Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and fulfills the law; for out of Christ's merit it

brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free as the law requires that it shall be. Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (1 John 1); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether new and different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith, and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them.¹⁶

In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," one of his sermons on Eph. 2:8 and the written sermon with the most extensive history of oral preaching behind it, Wesley writes of assurance:

The Apostle says: "There is one faith, and one hope of our calling," one Christian, saving faith, as "there is one Lord" in whom we believe, and "one God and Father of us all." And it is certain this faith necessarily implies an *assurance* [. . .] that "Christ loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." For "he that believeth" with the true, living faith, "hath the witness in himself." "The Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God." "Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his son into his heart, crying Abba, Father;" giving him an assurance that he is son, and a childlike confidence in him.¹⁷

This is grace as "the power of the Holy Ghost" enabling us to believe that God loves us, that Christ died for even *my* sins—the very ability to do this is "the assurance of grace." It is the witness of faith itself as affected by the Holy Spirit. As Bultmann comments on 1 John 5:6-7,

The witness of the spirit is thus not a datum which could be used to establish the correctness of the assertion of faith on a neutral basis. Faith as faith in the proclaimed word is certain of itself.¹⁸

God's love to us in the cross of Christ brought home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit *is* itself Christian certainty.¹⁹

The one who believes [is believing] in the Son of God has the witness in himself (1 John 5:10, NASB).

Charles Wesley's poetry says it best:
*Spirit of Faith, come down,
 Reveal the things of God:
 And make to us the Godhead known,
 And witness with the blood:
 'Tis Thine the blood to apply,
 And give us eyes to see,
 Who did for every sinner die
 Hath surely died for me.
 No man can truly say
 That Jesus is the Lord
 Unless Thou take the veil away,
 And breathe the living word;
 Then, only then we feel
 Our interest in His blood,
 And cry with joy unspeakable,
 Thou art my Lord, my God!*

*Inspire the living faith
 (Which whosoe'er receives,
 The witness in himself he hath,
 And consciously believes),
 The faith that conquers all,
 And doth the mountain move,
 And saves whoe'er on Jesus call,
 And perfects them in love.*²⁰

This power of grace free in and for all brings us to

The Grace of Perfect Love

This is grace affecting the moral and spiritual transformation of life! Here above all, it is helpful to let Mr. Wesley speak for himself, again in "The Scripture Way of Salvation":

**Grace issues
 first in faith,
 then in
 holiness!**

8. "From the time of our being 'born again' the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled 'by the Spirit' to 'mortify the deeds of the body,' of our evil nature. And as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to 'abstain from all appearance of evil,' and are 'zealous of good works,' 'as we have opportunity doing good to all men;' while we walk in all his ordinances blameless,

therein worshipping him in spirit and in truth; while we take up our cross and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God.

9. "It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, 'Go on to perfection.' But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. **It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.**²¹ It is love 'rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks.' . . . For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?"²²

It has been aptly said that perfection for Wesley "is the fulfillment of faith's desire to love God above all else and all else in God, so far as conscious will and deliberate action are concerned."²³

Wesley's own words in his "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" provides us with a succinct description impressively full of scriptural language:

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please, (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.²⁴

Albert Outler, in a most appealing way, sums up Wesley's own Christian character in terms of the grace that he proclaimed:

There is impressive testimony to the fact that he came finally to understand that Christian maturity is chiefly faith's freedom to respond to God's grace without fear of rejection or pride of possession. This was the positive and dynamic view of sanctification that explains, in part, at least, Wesley's own unwearyed and unanxious diligence, his stress upon the serene strenuousness of the Christian life.²⁵

For Wesley and for Wesleyans, it is "Grace Free in All, and Grace Free for All!" Epitomized in the "Collect for Purity," repeated by multitudes over the centuries in Christian worship, is the essence of Wesleyanism:

Almighty God, to You all hearts are open, all desires known, and from You no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy Name: Through Christ our Lord. Amen.²⁶

*First presented at "A Wesley Festival: 'Pilgrimage to Wholeness,'" a faculty chapel held February 19, 1993, 9:50 A.M., in Goodwin Chapel, Point Loma Nazarene College. The notes used for that brief presentation are put in full prose form with documentation and some revision. The attempt was to set the stage for John Wesley himself to articulate the essence of Wesleyanism.

1. See Kenneth J. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Francis and Taylor, 1989), 19-20.

2. Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume I: Sermons 1-33* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 117. This is from his sermon "Salvation by Faith," preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, June 11, 1738. The text was Eph. 2:8, "By grace are ye saved through faith" (KJV), a favorite from which he spoke numerous times.

3. *Ibid.*, 117-18.

4. So Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 8-10. See his essay "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church," first published in 1983, now in Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Collected Essays of Albert C. Outler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 97-110. See also Randy Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences," *Asbury Seminary Journal*, 45, No. 2 (fall 1990): 29-53. The *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26, No. 1 (spring 1991), contains the articles from the 1990 society meeting, held at Nazarene Theological Seminary, that explore this relationship between Wesley and the Greek fathers.

5. Outler, *John Wesley*, 260, from the sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption."

6. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation*, 19.

7. Outler, *Works*, 1:98-99. Outler's complete statement is helpful:

The heart of Wesley's Gospel was always its lively sense of God's grace at work at every level of creation and history in persons and communities. He took the "Protestant principle" for granted: that God alone is God, with no rivals in creation save those idols that make human pride the primal font of sin and self-delusion. But he also cherished the Greek Christian heritage as a needful balance and, most especially, in its understanding of the Holy Spirit as the mediator of all graces—sufficient grace in all, irresistible grace in none. His ecclesiology turned on the conviction that all the means of grace are the Spirit's gifts to the priesthood of all believers and, under the Spirit's guidance, to a representative priesthood. The "catholic substance" of Wesley's theology is the theme of *participation*—the idea that all life is of grace and all grace is the mediation of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Wesley did not, of course, invent any of these ideas, but neither did he find them already compounded in the special syndrome that he struggled for and largely achieved.

8. H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988).

Faith is a divine work in us.

9. Boldface is mine. Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume III: Sermons 71-114* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 207.

10. *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (Reprinted from the 1872 edition issued by Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978-79), 8:285.

11. Outler, *Works*, 3:544.

12. Boldface is mine. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation*, 25.

13. How to properly interpret this experience in Wesley's personal "order of salvation" has been under debate in contemporary Wesleyan scholarship. See Outler, *John Wesley*, 13-16; *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 24 (1989): 1873; and Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1990).

14. For an account of this experience and its relation to John's, see Philip S. Watson, *The Message of the Wesleys: A Reader of Instruction and Devotion* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964), 6-7. A reading from Martin Luther's *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* on 2:20 was crucial for Charles's experience.

15. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley, Volume XVIII: Journal and Diaries I (1735-38)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 249-50. See 242-54 for Wesley's explanatory comments leading to and following Aldersgate.

16. *Works of Martin Luther, Translated with Introductions and Notes* (Philadelphia, 1932), 6:449 ff. Quoted from Watson, 8.

17. Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, Volume II: Sermons 34-70* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 161-62. The scriptures quoted are Eph. 4:4-6; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 5:10; Rom. 8:16; and Gal. 4:6. On January 29, 1738, four months before Aldersgate, Wesley had written in his Journal:

The faith I want is (the faith of a son [added in errata, 1774]), "a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God." I want

that faith which St. Paul recommends to all the world, especially in his Epistle to the Romans; that faith which enables everyone that hath it to cry out, "I live not, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it (though many *imagine* they have it who have it not). For whosoever hath it is "freed from sin"; "the body of sin is destroyed" in him. He is freed from fear, "having peace with God through Christ, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." And he is free from doubt, "having the love of God shed abroad in his heart through the Holy Ghost which is given unto him;" which "Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God." Ward and Heitzenrater, *Works*, 18:215-16. The scriptures cited are Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:6; 5:1-2, 5; 8:16.

18. Rudolph Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles, in Hermeneia*, trans. R. Philip O'Hara, Lance C. McGaughey, and Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 80.

19. This statement reflects Rom. 5:5, which can be paraphrased, "And hope never disappoints, because God's love for us in the cross of Christ has been brought all the way home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

20. Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, and James Dale, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume VII: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 182-83. See the collection of the hymns of Charles Wesley on the assurance theme in Arthur S. Yates, *The Doctrine of Assurance with Special Reference to John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 82-102. The omitted verse reads as follows:

O that the world might know
The all-atoning Lamb!
Spirit of faith, descend, and show
The virtue of his name;
The grace which all may find,
The saving power impart,
And testify to all mankind,
And speak in every heart!

21. Boldface is mine.

22. Outler, *Works*, 2:160, 167. The scriptures cited are Rom. 8:13; 1 Thess. 5:22; Titus 2:14; Gal. 6:10; Luke 1:6; John 4:23-24; Heb. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:16-18.

23. Outler, *John Wesley*, 32.

24. "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, as believed and taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from the year 1725, to the year 1777," *The Works of John Wesley* (Reprint: Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978-79), 11:444. See also John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 117-18. A student, born and brought up in the Church of the Nazarene, wrote the following for me in a review of Wesley's *Plain Account*:

I was not familiar with the term "Christian Perfection" before this class. When I think of Christian perfection, I think of saintly living. Some parts of the book were a little dry, but most of the time I was intrigued with what Wesley had to say. I realize that Christian perfection is a lifestyle, but I have never heard it encouraged to live that lifestyle at church. The book was very uplifting and discouraging at the same time (Jody Smith, *Life of Holiness*, fall 1993).

How could this be!

25. Outler, *John Wesley*, 29.

26. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 355. Wesley himself tied this collect closely to his understanding of Christian perfection. See K. Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26, No. 1 (spring 1991): 54.

A Tale of Two Clerics— The Minister in the Manger: A Fable

The dog lay in the manger, growling and snarling at the oxen that came to eat the hay. The dog had no intention of eating the hay himself but preferred to starve rather than allow another beast to eat.

—Aesop's Fable

The pastor had been at the church for a very long time and was tired. He complained to other pastors that he had to do all the work himself. Never mind that he didn't want his parishioners to help with the calling—they might think he was shirking his duties. Never mind that he wouldn't let other people lead the worship—they might usurp his authority. Never mind that only he and the treasurer were allowed to know the true state of the church's finances—people might blame the pastor.

The church board kept talking about growth and evangelism, so the pastor agreed to hire an associate to help with the work. But this created more problems. The associate was too eager to get things done that made the senior pastor look bad. And the senior pastor couldn't take a vacation and leave the associate in charge—what if the congregation liked the associate's preaching better? At the end of the church year, the senior pastor did not recommend the associate for renewal, so the associate had to leave.

The pastor was too tired to keep regular office hours, but he did manage to type the bulletin each week. At one time, the church had provided a secretary, but she put information in the bulletin that undermined the pastor's authority—like the missionary budget or thank-you notes that failed to recognize that the pastor had to do most of the work himself.



by Karen K. Hiner

Freelance writer,
Spokane, Washington

When people did do things, they never did them right. He had to show them what they did wrong and then do them over himself. It was easier just to do everything himself in the first place. Laypeople couldn't be trusted with Kingdom work anyway. Of course, the pastor's time and energy were limited, so many things just didn't get done.

He had given his life for this church. It was his church. And if he couldn't do ministry, no one else could either. And he went on protecting his turf.

* * *

Across town was another minister who had been at one church for a very long time and was tired. He preached most Sundays and was usually available when his people needed him, but he couldn't keep up the same pace as when he was younger. His congregation would have been quite large by now except that he kept equipping people to minister and then sent them off to start new churches or help struggling congregations.

He told other pastors how blessed he was with a congregation eager to carry out the church's mission. He

encouraged all his people to discover their spiritual gifts and then saw to it that they used them. His parishioners called on each other and on the many new people who were always finding their way to the church. Trained laypeople regularly took part in leading worship, while the pastor sat back and beamed like a proud grandfather. He kept the congregation informed of the church's finances, and they responded by giving generously.

He took frequent vacations for spiritual and physical renewal because he had a capable associate who could take over in his absence. The church hired a full-time secretary so the pastor could preserve his limited energy to counsel the many people who came to him for spiritual guidance. He regularly thanked his people for their generosity in giving both time and money.

This pastor often reflected on the privilege it had been to give his life for this church. But it wasn't his church—it was God's. He was simply an overseer and caretaker. When he was gone, the work would go on because God has many workers in His kingdom, and every Christian is a minister.

* * *

One day the two pastors met for lunch, and the conversation turned to the many years each had served his respective church. The second pastor was sympathetic with the first about the difficulties he had faced, but he couldn't help talking about how beautifully everyone in his church worked together. As the two ministers parted, the first commented, "There sure is a difference in congregations."

Picture Windows for Preaching

Giving

Richard Lee, in his book *Windows of Hope*, describes the life of George Müller of Bristol, England, as a genuine giver. During the 1800s, Müller had a great concern for the children of his community. Many of these young people ran the streets with nowhere to go. There were few schools for them to learn the basic fundamentals of life. They were growing up as illiterate leeches on society. Müller felt God's leading to establish a day school and orphanage to meet their needs—and God supplied those needs abundantly!

As a result of prayer, people donated over £40 million over his ministry of 63 years. That total comes to the equivalent of more than \$1 billion in today's currency. The truly amazing facts of the story reveal Müller's art of self-sacrifice in personal stewardship. Not only did he care for over 2,000 orphans in his five homes, but also he provided day schooling for 121,000 students, distributed 300,000 Bibles, 1.5 million New Testaments, 111 million tracts, and supported several hundred missionaries around the world. His own personal giving throughout his lifetime amounted to over £2 million. At his death, his personal estate was valued at only the equivalent of \$850. Half of that amount was in household and personal items.

It would have been easy for him to develop into a "taker" in life, but Müller overcame the temptation. He stood as one of the true givers of money, hope, life, and love.

Richard Lee, *Windows of Hope* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1992), 42-43.



compiled by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor, Church of the Nazarene,
Three Rivers, Michigan

Homemaker

Patrick M. Morley quotes a Richard Kerr, who wrote:

The most creative job in the world involves fashion, decorating, recreation, education, transportation, psychology, romance, cuisine, literature, art, economics, government, pediatrics, geriatrics, entertainment, maintenance, purchasing, law, religion, energy, and management. Anyone who can handle all those has to be somebody special. She is. She's a *homemaker*.

Patrick M. Morley, *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 250.

God

One-time baseball great Joe Garagiola stepped up to the plate when his turn to bat came. Before assuming his stance, however, fervent Roman Catholic Joe took his bat and made the sign of the cross in the dirt in front of home plate.

Catcher Yogi Berra, also a devout Catholic, walked out and erased Garagiola's cross. Turning to the astonished Garagiola, Berra smiled and said, "Let's let God watch this inning."


King Duncan, *Mule Eggs and Topknots* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds Press, 1991), 148.

Commitment

In his excellent book *The Good Life*, Max Anders tells that very few people in our world have never tasted a Coca-Cola. The one man responsible for that achievement is Robert Woodruff.

While Woodruff was president of the Coca-Cola company from 1923 to 1955, he had a vision that he wanted everybody in the world to taste the "real thing" in his generation. During World War II, he promised, "We will see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents wherever he is and whatever it costs." Woodruff and his colleagues girdled the globe for Coke.

Anders comments, "Woodruff was more committed to giving each person in the world a drink of Coke than most of us are to giving each person in the world a drink of the water of life.

"As the church, our collective mandate is to take the gospel to the world. As individual members of the body, our mandate is to do what we can to contribute to that overall goal." 

Max Anders, *The Good Life* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 68.

Funeral Ministry Outside the Church

Hello, Pastor, this is Mr. Morgan at _____ Funeral Home. We just received the body of a woman who lived in your community. Her family tells me she has no present church, but they think she 'used to be' a Baptist. They requested that a Baptist minister handle the service. Can you come right over?"

In my tenure at my present church I have received dozens of such calls. Funeral ministry in general is difficult, but working with people you do not know compounds the problems. My purpose in writing this article is to identify some of those problems and issues and to offer some insights I have gained.



by Don M. Aycock

*Editor, Brotherhood Commission,
Memphis, Tennessee*

Will I Work with Families I Do Not Know?

Each minister has to answer this question on his or her own. Those who are extremely busy within their own congregation may not wish to get involved. Others may know themselves well enough to refuse to handle funeral ministry if they "freeze" in unfamiliar circumstances.

However you have answered this question in the past, I hope you will periodically review your decision. For me personally this was no real question until after I had done several such funerals. I simply assumed that *any* minister would be glad to

help. Only later did I realize that some have policies against it.

The First Meeting with the Family

Once the decision is made to handle the service, the minister's first meeting with the family and/or friends of the deceased is the most important one. It will set the tone and pace of subsequent meetings and interviews. I usually try to plan to meet the family at the funeral home soon after they arrive but before neighbors and others get there. The director usually introduces me, and I try to get everyone's name and their relationship to the deceased. I have found it imperative then simply to sit quietly and allow the family to talk to me. Some will talk about their feelings. Others will review the past accomplishments (or failures) of the one who has died. Sometimes no one talks, and the minister may need to use leading questions. I like to use these: "What would you like me to know about your Aunt Suzy?" or "What kind of relationship did you have with her?" There are others, but anything that can help the family open up is useful.

Sometimes well-meaning family members will want to "canonize" their relative, so the minister should be on the lookout for this setup. Others have harbored anger against the relative and might react with a mixture of grief, guilt, and hostility.

Who Is in Charge Here?

Usually during this first meeting with the family, one clear leader will emerge. This is often a woman who is seen as "the strong one." The minister can get much useful information from this person, especially when it comes to planning the service.

It must be remembered that, ultimately, the minister, not the "leader" of the family, is in charge. By this I



mean I will not surrender the final outcome to anyone else. Some families have made requests of me that were totally inappropriate, and I gently but firmly had to decline. One wanted me to give a lengthy eulogy, but since I had never even met the deceased, I said no.

Since these people often have no ties with any church, they are often at a loss to suggest any order of the service or specific elements of it. If "Aunt Suzy" had a favorite Scripture verse or hymn, I will try to incorporate it into the service. Do not be surprised, however, if the family can make no suggestions.

Working closely with the funeral director is important here. He or she can be very helpful in making suggestions to the family about matters of the service, appropriate dress, behavior, and so on. I have found that many of the people in my neighborhood, for example, have never even *been* to a funeral before and are at a loss as to how to dress or what to do.

The Minister's Own Emotions

I have never yet ministered at a funeral for the unchurched without feeling ill at ease. The problem is compounded by the often tragic or unusual circumstances surrounding the death. My emotions are touched, and I have to work at staying together in order to conduct the service. Consider some of the following examples from my ministry to see how they affect you.

Mr. P., 72, went for a walk along the Ohio River in Louisville, Kentucky. He died while out there, and the body was discovered two days later. It was frozen solid. The exact cause of death was difficult to determine, and the family was frantic.

A 6-year-old boy, Chuck, stepped from between two parked cars in front of his house and was struck by a car. He lived four days before dying. His father was so angry he tried to kill the driver of the car. (This was at Christmastime.)

Mrs. A., 55, died in a nursing home 60 miles from home. Her husband had gotten tired of her because she was bedridden with arthritis. (This man was an alcoholic, practiced bestiality with the family collie, and would often beat Mrs. A.) So much tension and hatred surfaced over the cause of death that threats and counterthreats were made by various

members of the family. I demanded that a policeman be present during the service to keep anyone, including me, from getting killed. (This is another example of what I mean when I say that I am in charge.)

Mrs. L. died at age 108. She was the widow of a Civil War veteran.

Mrs. D., 57, died. Two of her seven children were in prison. The legal technicalities of release threatened to prevent them from attending their mother's funeral. Only after legal bickering and a story by an investigative reporter from a local paper did the boys get out for the hour of the funeral. They were led into the chapel in handcuffs and chains. Armed guards stood watch during the service.

Many people
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An infant of two days died. The family could not afford a funeral, so a local mortuary donated a casket, and the family had the infant's grandfather's grave reopened and the tiny casket placed in it.

All these, and many others, underscore the pain, anger, and bewilderment often felt by people who lose loved ones. The minister is not immune to these feelings, and therefore he needs to take care not to cave in under the pressure. After the service the minister may need to debrief with some trusted friend or counselor. These loads are often too heavy to carry alone.

To Preach or Not to Preach?

Eulogies are out by virtue of the fact the minister does not know the deceased. Some read from prayer books and follow a set liturgy. I opt for as much personalizing as possible. An overarching view of the family of the deceased can be worked into the

meditation if it is done with care. I often hear phrases like, "Uncle Bill was always so generous with everyone," or "Mother just loved little children," and so on.


I am well aware that some ministers question the use of a funeral meditation at all, especially one based on Scripture and a Christian understanding of reality. For me personally, I cannot extricate myself from my calling as a Christian pastor. That is, I cannot simply "say a few good words" over the deceased with no reference to God or eternity. I am not a mortician—but a pastor. People realize this fact when they ask me to help in a funeral service.

Follow Up

The funeral service is over, the family and friends have gone home, and the minister goes to his or her next appointment. But what about tomorrow? A strong temptation is simply to forget the matter and go on about business as usual. Fight this temptation. These people are "sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). A follow-up visit in the home can do worlds of good for the bereaved family. I like to visit two or three days after the funeral and give them a copy of the meditation used. They seldom hear it in their grief at the service anyway, and most appreciate the concern and consideration.

I have found that these unchurched families are not especially good fields for evangelism. Some will respond to the claims of the gospel and become involved in the church, but my experience has shown that most will not. Many have lived all their lives with no meaningful relationship to the church. Even a death in the family will not necessarily send them scurrying to worship. It is best to work with each situation individually.

Summary

When doing funeral ministry with the unchurched, expect the unexpected. Assume nothing—and be on the lookout for signs of complete bewilderment in the family. You as the minister must exercise a compassionate control. Someone must be in charge. 

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How to Deal with Pressure

We could probably all agree on the fact that there are lots of pressures in pastoral ministry. It hardly draws a breath of debate. Our task as pastors is not to fear the pressures, but to deal with them in positive ways.

Hudson Taylor wrote, "It doesn't matter how great the pressure is. What really matters is *where the pressure lies*—whether it comes between you and God or whether it presses you nearer His heart."

Pastor, be encouraged! Pressures are not always bad. Sometimes they can challenge us, motivate us, and help us. What we need to decide is the background of the pressure and how we are going to respond. Like most other things, we can either respond or react.

What is the background of the pressure? Is it internal? Sometimes we are our own worst enemies, setting expectations that are unrealistic, unwise, or ill-timed. Such can create pressure—the pressure of disappointment, frustration, and defeat. Such pressures can hinder our focus and confuse our priorities. Too often we have seen such pressures drive capable persons from the pastorate.

How do we deal with internal pressures? We must be realistic in our dreams, plans, and ambitions. Certainly the drive for success and accomplishment is good—up to a point. One needs to know how to balance all the dreams and plans with ministry, family, health—all of life. Where any part is out of balance, there pressure will build.

Pastor, be encouraged. I believe we can lay our dreams, plans, and ambitions before God and seek His wisdom. Prayer must be a vital part of pressure solving. Where we have His counsel, there better and wiser expectations begin to form. Only after we have sought divine counsel do we set our expectations and chart our future in ways that create balance.



by C. Neil Strait

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How do we deal with external pressures? A large part of our pressure comes from people imposing expectations on us—often unrealistic, but nonetheless demanding.

There are no easy solutions. Let me mention some possibilities for your consideration.

One, not to be too simplistic, but to suggest that God's counsel is where we always begin when dealing with pressure problems.

His wisdom is available to His children. Pastor, be encouraged. He who called you is more interested in your battles than you are. "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). He must be our first source for guidance and help.

Two, talk with others. How have they handled similar situations? Seek the counsel of trusted friends and colleagues.

Three, read, do research, find out what is available as resources. Often good articles, books, or seminars can open a window on a pressure point that not only is a solution to your problem but also provides a wider learning experience. We grow best by our searching, our quest, our desire to find our answers.

Four, pastor, be encouraged—you can say NO! You have to know when and how to say it, but it is an option! Sometimes God's call and priori-

ty for us are a great deal different from the expectations of our friends, members—or, even family. So, on occasions you may have to say no in order to maintain balance and stay on course.

Five, pastor, be encouraged—not all expectations have to be met. At some point, we have to decide what are our priorities, then protect those priorities by either delegating lesser expectations or simply leaving them undone. Not everything in the "in basket" has to be done. Everything that comes on your plate needs to be prioritized against your core list of highest priorities. If what comes to you is higher than what you have, it needs consideration. If it is lower, it can be declined; or delegating it is often what salvages us.

Six, do not let the pressures eat away at you. They can do that—firmly and quickly. The pressures, if we are not careful, will put distance between us and God—compounding the situation. For where there is distance between us and God, there the door opens for frustrations, overreaction, and destructive attitudes. Such behaviors add another dimension of pressure, often worse than the ones we are trying to solve.

Seven, give attention to where the pressures originate. Maybe a faithful member, a friend, or a family member is right in creating a pressure in your life. We must never assume that all pressure is bad. Some of our greatest changes will come from a response to a given pressure. Pastor, be encouraged—maybe God is getting your attention through others. And through them, He may be saying some needed and worthwhile things. Learn to be objective, sensitive to the who and what of the pressure.

Hudson Taylor's advice was good—let pressures "press . . . you nearer His heart." For there, under His care and His guidance, there is a way through—and it is always the right way.

Seven Benefits of Knowing Your Spiritual Gift or “What God has gifted you to do . . .”

At a Sunday School convention, I taught two workshops, “Teaching Spiritual Gifts in the Sunday School” and “How to Discover Your Spiritual Gift.” The “teaching” workshop attracted 30 people, while the “discovery” workshop attracted about 150 people, both in a room that would seat 35. Approximately 100 people stood willingly during the hour-long presentation to discover their spiritual gifts. Much material is available to help people recognize, discover, and define their particular spiritual gifts. However, most Christians do not understand the *relationships* of spiritual gifts. They don’t understand how a spiritual gift relates to their lives, other people’s lives, the local church, or to the Body of Christ as a whole. Let’s consider seven reasons why identifying



by Larry Gilbert

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and understanding your God-given spiritual gift(s) should be a high priority in every Christian’s life.

1

Knowing your spiritual gift helps you understand God’s will for your life.

One of the most sought-after answers by every true Christian is, “What is God’s will for my life?” Knowing and understanding your spiritual gift will help you do God’s will for your life. God gives spiritual gifts as the tools for doing the work of ministry. Different people receive different gifts to handle different tasks. Thus, if God gives you a hammer, He wants you to drive nails, not cut boards. If He wanted you to cut boards, He would have given you a saw rather than a hammer. Understanding your gift in light of this principle enables you to make decisions about where to serve God, how to serve God, and, often, what occupation in which to serve God. In all cases, it helps you set priorities for your life.

Recognizing God’s will for your life will be much easier when you know and understand your spiritual gifts. *For what God has called you to do He has gifted you to do, and what He has gifted you to do He has called you to do.*

Have you “opened” the gift God gave you?

A young man received an envelope from his grandfather upon graduation from high school. He decided not to open it until he had finished college. After all, he knew it contained bonds promised to him for years. But he decided to discipline himself in keeping them to help start his career rather than using them for college. So for four long years he attended school during the day and worked evenings and nights. Finally, the day for which he had restrained himself had come. With degree in hand, ready to start his new career, he opened the gift his grandfather had given him years earlier. Just as he had anticipated, it contained several thousand dollars worth of negotiable bonds. To his dismay, it also contained a fully paid scholarship to one of the finest colleges in the land.

God has given you a gift also, whether or not you use it. It is your birthday present, given to you by God at the time of your spiritual birth. Once you open it and examine it, you too may be surprised. Don’t miss out on the blessings God has for you.

2

Knowing your spiritual gift helps you understand how the Holy Spirit works through you.

In the courtyard of a quaint little



church in a French village stood a beautiful marble statue of Jesus with His hands outstretched. One day during the First World War, a bomb struck near the statue and mutilated it. After the battle was over and the enemy had passed through, the citizens of the village decided to find the pieces of their beloved statue and reconstruct it. Though the statue was no work of art by Michelangelo or Bernini, it was a part of their lives. They loved it. Patiently they gathered the broken pieces and reassembled it. Even the scars on the body added to its beauty. But there was one problem. They were not able to find the hands of the statue. "A Christ without hands is no Christ at all," someone expressed in sorrow. "What's a Lord without hands? We need a new statue."



For what God has called you to do He has gifted you to do, and what He has gifted you to do He has called you to do.

Then someone else came along with another idea, and it prevailed. A brass plaque was attached to the base of the statue, which read, "I have no hands but your hands." On earth, Jesus has no hands now but our hands.

Spiritual gifts are God's provision for the Holy Spirit to minister person-to-person. Without spiritual gifts, you can minister one to another only in the flesh. You and I are the only vessels the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish His work here on earth. We must yield ourselves to the Spirit and learn as much as we can about how He works through us. Years ago I re-

ceived a little desk plaque from Millhuff Ministries that sums it up best: "God can if I will."

3

Knowing your spiritual gift helps you know what God has not called you to do.

After selling my business of 14 years, selling my home, moving my wife and three children 300 miles away to prepare for the ministry, probably the greatest discovery I ever made was that God had *not* called me to become a pastor.

You might say it's a process of elimination, but the more I understand what God *has not* called me to do, the more I understand what He *has* called me to do. No doubt, recognizing what you are not supposed to do can be as important as recognizing what you are to do.

When a man realizes God has not given him the gift of "mercy," he can easily turn down a position that would require that gift, without worrying that he might miss God's call. The same is true with all the gifts.

4

Knowing your spiritual gift relieves you from serving out of duty.

If the truth were known, many of our active church workers have no business doing what they are doing. They do so only because the pastor asked them or the nominating committee honored them by electing them to a position. Or, if they don't teach the fourth grade boys, that class will have to go in with the fifth grade boys.

Christians have many reasons for serving in areas in which they do not belong, areas that keep them busy but not fulfilled. Many people serve out of *duty* instead of *God's calling*. These Christians should be relieved of their duties and encouraged to find the true area for which God has gifted and equipped them. When you use the gift God has given you, you will be able to operate at maximum fulfillment with minimum frustration.

5

Knowing your spiritual gift fills a deep inner need.

Have you ever visited a hospital? Then you have probably met the mean old nurse who bites your head off every time you sit on a patient's

bed. However, usually in a hospital you find a staff of fulfilled people.



When you use the gift God has given you, you will be able to operate at maximum fulfillment with minimum frustration.

They get more fulfillment out of life than the average person. Why? Because a hospital is a place where people work in the "people-serving business," a place where people willingly wrap their lives up in the needs of other people. They also meet an inner need that God has put into us, Christians and non-Christians alike. Your spiritual gift will complement the inner need that God has placed in you.

6

Knowing your spiritual gift builds unity among Christians.

When you understand the characteristics of spiritual gifts, you see how gifts influence your desires, motivation, and behavior. With this understanding, you begin to realize why other people do not always see things or react to a situation the same as you would. It's all part of God's plan. The different gifts complement each other.

Married couples have testified that discovering their mate's gift helped them understand each other better.

Understanding spiritual gifts helps prevent you from imposing your gift or lifestyle on others. You will realize that God has not called us all to do the same thing. You will see why other people have different burdens and desires on their hearts. You will recognize God's individual calling on

your life rather than becoming only an extension of other people's lives. Unfortunately, too many Christians are living God's will for someone else's life rather than their own.

7

Knowing your spiritual gift adds to your self-acceptance.

A man who had recently discovered his spiritual gift said: "I love to teach, and I teach every chance I get. I've never done anything in the church but teach, and I really don't want to do anything but teach. If I go for any period of time without teaching, I become irritable and hard to get along with. I've taught for years, but do you know something? For the first time in my life I don't feel guilty because I'm not a pastor."

Undue guilt serves as a tool that Satan uses to keep a Christian from living up to his or her potential. Many believers consider themselves worthless or unspiritual because they can't live up to someone else's expectations.

The Christian who knows he has the gift of serving will not belittle himself because he is not a preacher or a teacher. He can accept himself, knowing that his Lord has given him a special endowment that suits him perfectly for this special position on the "team." The person who knows that her gift is administration and is functioning effectively in her capacity will not think her-

self unworthy or unnecessary because she is not a preacher or teacher.

Real winners are people who accept themselves in Christ—people with a high self-acceptance. They know who they are in Christ, and they have learned their strengths and weaknesses. They know their limitations and have learned to work within those boundaries.



Unfortunately,
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Christians are
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Most people do not let themselves become what they could because "It's not what you are that holds you back, it's what you think you're not." Think of the greatest Christian you know, one you really admire. You probably would have to admit to say-

ing, "If I could only do what he can do!" But God has called you to do *what this person cannot do.*

Knowing and understanding your spiritual gifts will add greatly to your self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-worth. It allows you to be yourself, which is not so bad after all.

In conclusion.

As a child you may have enjoyed singing "I'm in the Lord's Army." Even adults have heard it preached, "You're in the Lord's army." During the invitation comes the question, "Will you volunteer for the Lord's army?" A stirring invitation? Yes! A way to get commitments? Yes! Good theology? No! The Lord's army is not a volunteer army. It is a drafted army. The question is not, "Will you volunteer for the Lord's army?" The question is, "Are you a draft dodger or not?" If you are a Christian, you are serving in God's army. God has equipped you for battle with a spiritual gift. You have a divine responsibility to use that gift.

All Christians have been called to do the Lord's work. Doing His work demands developing the gift(s) He gave us with His promise of success and fulfillment as we go about our Father's business.

Respond to Paul's challenge: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" (2 Tim. 1:6).

Beyond Belief



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Are Mundane Chores the Best Use of the Pastor Who Is Called to Prayer and the Word?

by Wayne M. Warner

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Ben Franklin concluded, "He is not only idle who is doing nothing; he is also idle who could be better employed." We can better employ many of our church pastors.

Consider Brother Bill, who spent many hours working in the yard of his suburban church. For a long time, his family was the only church family living in the immediate church neighborhood. Since he did not golf, he found the physical work stimulating and therapeutic. Most of the members were convinced nothing would grow in the rocky soil. Consequently, Brother Bill remained the only person committed to making the church property a positive witness to the community.

More than 20 summers have come and gone since this energetic pastor resigned and relocated. Christmas cards coming annually from the Baptist neighbor assure Brother Bill that

he would indeed be proud of that churchyard. Two young housewives, sisters, made the churchyard their project. The year-round beauty attests to the tender loving care of the two young mothers who entered the church's youth group with Brother Bill's children.

While his efforts and example finally paid off in the lives of the two young women, this story represents 40 years of ministry in which the minister did everything but *what he was called and trained to do*. I perceive this to be a major weakness in the life and ministry of many local congregations.

When the apostles called the Jerusalem church together and organized seven deacons to manage the daily distribution of food, they provided a principle frequently overlooked by contemporary congregations. Paul, in Eph. 4:12, defined the pastor-teacher as a charismatic gifting that God gives

to whom He wills. Congregations today would discover new gifting and anointing by following the example of the Jerusalem church, whose leaders insisted they give their "attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Too many pastors today find themselves

chained to the desk of administration and maintenance ministry, keeping the machinery well oiled. There are bulletins and newsletters to be managed. Countless calls need to be made. Some have found yard work and janitorial a spare-time necessity.

Many churches limit the pastor's Sundays away for revivals and other preaching efforts. The midweek hour, when the church could do in-depth Bible study with the pastor, remains mostly deserted by a biblically illiterate membership. While many of us frequent camp conferences and church seminars, most local program committees keep local pastors under wraps, favoring the powerful few who escaped the mold and became strong pulpit preachers.

The church wonders meanwhile, "Why doesn't the church produce powerful preachers like it once did?" The church suffers because it has voided the real calling of its paid ministry. Pastoral ministry suffers from mediocrity because it specializes in everything except that to which it was called. Individual ministers sometimes suffer from lack of true identity, as well as lack of ability to do what they were called to do. Everyone, in fact, suffers.

The church that will make a priority of changed lives, church growth, and societal influence may want to prayerfully consider better employment of its spiritual leadership.

In Jerusalem, the Word of God spread and the number of disciples increased when the membership assumed its responsibilities and the Twelve prayed and administered the Word.



Prayer: Our First Aid

Camp meeting is a family tradition. It is as much a part of our summer as Kool-Aid, sunburn, and too much zucchini.

A few summers ago, our family was strolling down the hill from our tent when we heard cries of "Help! Help!" coming from the rustic nurse's cabin. Rushing in, we beheld a poor soul, passed out on the floor, with a rather hysterical person attempting mouth-to-mouth resuscitation between screams. My husband ran to find the nurse while I searched for smelling salts.

When my husband returned alone, I asked, "Did you find the nurse?"

Suddenly, the panicked young lady straightened up from her patient and said through tight lips, "I am the nurse!"

How often we Christians treat prayer as this young nursing student treated her patient. We have studied, gone to seminars, read that book, heard all the sermons, and counseled with a trusted friend; yet when a crisis comes, we panic and forget to go to our Teacher. We need to strengthen our prayer life as the "first aid" of our Christian practice.

The angel told Daniel, "Stand up. . . Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them" (10:11-12). There is a mystery of prayer in spiritual battles, as the angel goes on to say to Daniel, "No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince" (v. 21). How do we strengthen our defense in our homes, in our church, and in our world? I believe it is by putting the primacy of the Word in our prayer life.

Prayer is conversation with God. So often we do a whole lot of "big talk"



by Celia Jolley

*Pastor's wife,
Marysville, California*

with very little "listen." There are various ways to pray, such as the prayer closet—talking with the Father in secret; the "stop and drop" prayer in dire need; the prayer without ceasing, where moment by moment our spirit holds everything up to show to the Father, who walks beside us through the day; prayer journaling; personal Pentecost of waiting until the Spirit comes with power; and the Lord's Prayer, as Jesus taught us to pray. Yet, in all this, do we place too much emphasis on how we talk with God rather than how He talks to us?

George Müller wrote in 1841 of his personal discovery of power in prayer.

Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experiential communion with the Lord. . . . The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I

did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer.

Müller comes to mind as a righteous man whose prayers availed much in his lifework, establishing homes for the orphaned poor. He trusted God to supply all their needs in total dependence upon Him.

Children learn to pray in utter trust and gratitude, but often lack understanding. Some of our children's preschool prayers are memorable.

"Dear Jesus, we have two pennies and love in our hearts for You."


"Thank You for not making dragons real. Thank You for spiders and snakes and for even loving the people who don't love You."

"Dear Jesus, help Grandma to have a baby."

"Dear Jesus, help the devil to be good. Amen!"

"Dear Jesus, help me not to be spoiled. But I want to spoil You, Jesus, and give You everything You want."

As adults we still need to pray in utter trust and gratitude, but how childish we can be when we pray apart from the light of God's will in His Word.

In Eph. 6 we are told to put on the full armor of God. Without our spiritual battle gear it is easy to get wounded in the church as well as the world. The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is our only offense. The rest of the armor is essential defensive protection, but we take territory and gain ground with the Sword. Paul tells us, "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (v. 18), whose sword is the Word. Our first aid in prayer is the Word of God. In no other way can we face the giants in our land and help a hurting world. 

A Tribute to Abby Haire

My former minister's wife died today. Her passing will not make the national headlines, but that is appropriate. Mrs. Haire was not a headline seeker and never sought to put herself in the limelight. Yet, I have no trouble remembering her, even though it has been over 35 years since she was in our church.

This lady was a model of what a minister's wife should be. I state this with no apology. As a young girl observing Mrs. Haire, I decided that being a minister's wife was probably the best thing any girl could become. Mrs. Haire was always beautiful, always smiling, and everyone loved her. She was known as an excellent Sunday School teacher. She was loved by all the little Sunbeams (as our mission group for children was then called). She did not hesitate to help out in the church kitchen when the need arose, and it was rare that she was not found there after church on Sunday nights for Youth Fellowship.

Most of all, Mrs. Haire was never judgmental but treated everyone with a quiet warmth and acceptance. I have been unable to find anyone who ever heard her complain or utter any unkind word, no matter what the circumstances.

"The Lord has called her," my grandmother said. "She has a special role in life as the minister's wife. She knows that, and she lives it."

Yes, in the church where I grew up, it was generally assumed that the pastor's wife was called—if not by God, then certainly by the church, who fully expected to get two for the price of one! In Mrs. Haire's case, that is exactly what we got, for she put just as much time, effort, and energy in her church work as did her husband. It was generally agreed that she was truly *called*.

There is no doubt in my mind that



by Elizabeth Silance Ballard

*Freelance writer,
Chesapeake, Virginia*

she was human. I'm sure that she sometimes became frustrated with the demands on her time, irritated with her husband, worried about her children, and doubtful that she made any impact in the world at all. Yet she never allowed those feelings to show. Whatever concerns she had, they were known only within the confines of her home, perhaps only between herself and the Almighty. On the outside, she lived and moved within the context of her life as a minister's wife.



Mrs. Haire
treated
everyone with a
quiet warmth
and
acceptance.



Her husband, Pastor Marvin Haire, is a man who has always been known

for his dynamic approach to life and work, a man who would like to have 48-hour days. He has always walked quickly, talked quickly, gestured quickly, and—well, some said he did everything quickly except preach!

Mrs. Haire, on the other hand, was a gentle soul, quiet, soft-spoken, slow and thoughtful in speech, deliberate in her actions. They complemented each other, and together they accomplished much.

It is notable, I believe, that I never knew until I read her obituary that she was a graduate of New Orleans Seminary! To my knowledge, she never mentioned this fact; and that is so like her—never calling attention to her own accomplishments but endeavoring in all things to support others.

I don't know why Mrs. Haire went to seminary. Perhaps she originally planned to go into full-time religious education work as a profession. I believe she was led to seminary as a preparation for her real calling. She was called to be a minister's wife, and she fulfilled that calling with serenity, dignity, and warmth. She always had a gentle smile on her face; and the great love, loyalty, and dedication she demonstrated for her husband, her children, her position as pastor's wife, and the respect she had for herself as an individual are not often seen today in most segments of society.

I cannot begin to imagine the grief of the man to whom she was wife, lover, friend, and beside whom she walked more than 50 years. Obviously, his work here is not finished, for he has been left behind. However, I do know this: he will have the legacy of her love and the spiritual resources to enable him to finish his work. When it is over, she will be waiting for him with pride and a smile as I saw her do so many times on earth. 🙏

Letter from Heaven

Soon after my father passed away in January of 1993, my mother sent me a letter that she found among his things. He had written it to me years earlier but, for some reason, had never mailed it. With the sadness of losing Dad still fresh on my emotions, it was like receiving his letter from heaven. He had written it some 12 years earlier to encourage me when I was going through a time of illness while pastoring in Berkeley, California. The letter was full of reflections and insights from his many years in the ministry. Could I share some excerpts with you? I hope they will be as helpful to you as they have been to me.

Dear Kids,

Mary Margaret is at work, and I am at the hamburger place for lunch. I like to eat a hamburger and write notes or write a letter. I have been wishing I could come see you kids and talk with you for a long time. . . . Don't be afraid to let us know if we can help you. Sometimes we are wise to share as much as we can with parents. I'm not psychic, but not much escapes my impressions. I talked to your mom twice about your health this year. I get impressions that I don't argue with anymore . . . they are from the Lord. I pray for you often in the night. . . .

I have been trying to isolate some of my own feelings to share with you.

He tells about some of the things that bothered him before he went through a time of illness himself.

My conflicts . . . some of them may help:

1. I could not bear preaching



by Randy Bynum
Missionary to Bolivia

without every effort to be perennially fresh in thought and spirit. For years prior to getting sick, I got up at 5:15 and studied and prayed 1½ hours before your mother and you kids got up. During those years I never once had a desk or a study with controlled heat. Culver, Oregon, church gave me a study and a thermostatically controlled, small electric stove. . . .

2. Trends of our country and our church families—to be slovenly attired or oriented regarding sexual behavior or seeking affection to which they were not entitled—troubled me. Things are now in our church and in America exactly as I "prophesied."

3. I underestimated the influence of our ministry and of the church—the Sunday School in particular. I worried because people were so slow to respond when I was dying inwardly. If I had known how God works over longer periods of time, I would have been confident a lot more. A lot of them got saved later. . . .

He closed with some reflections about the family:

If I could do my ministry over . . . I would include you kids and your mother in more of my conversation and activities—more of my time and activities would be shared with you. I would compliment you more often—a lot more often—I loved all of you so much and preached my heart out to you and for you, but didn't express myself enough. . . . I wouldn't be as hard on you kids—I wanted you to be models, and you were and still are—but I was unaware of how much you needed emotional and mental freedom. I resist any temptation to impose bondage above and beyond what is necessary.

Well, take lots of vitamins.

Go away overnight with just you and Kathy.

Plan to elaborate on and expound what God has already given you when you preach again—when you don't feel like writing a sermon for a while. Repetition is needed.

Buy a trinket for each other, and write a little note to each other often.


Lay aside the church, relatives, even the Bible for intervals to get total emotional rest, etc.

[He began to amend.]

We love you and believe in you and Kathy without reservation.

—Dad

Why Dad never mailed the letter, I'm not sure. Maybe it was laid aside and forgotten. I do know that by receiving it after his death, it has taken on more significance as I realize the importance of what he said, and as he joins those who are still speaking, though they are in eternity with the Lord.

God bless you in your ministry. I pray God's best for you. 

When Our Ministry Ended Abruptly, God Sent Rudy's Gift

The telephone's piercing ring reverberated throughout the uncarpeted kitchen area. Could it be just a month ago that I had complained about its incessant ringing, rolling my eyes when it disturbed yet another family time?

For too long now the telephone had rested silently in its cradle. Yes, it had been a month since my husband, Don, had been asked to resign from his pastorate. Losing a ministry, I discovered, was more traumatic than losing a job. Not only did my husband suddenly have no task to attend to each day with a paycheck for his efforts, but also we no longer had a place of worship, a meaningful ministry, or supportive friends. It felt as if we had undergone surgery without anesthesia and that a large Quarantined sign had been placed high above our house on the hill. Only long-distance calls from concerned family could be expected these days. That is, until Rudy called.

Rudy was an impressive-looking Mexican man. At 6 feet, 4 inches, 350 pounds, he was the type you'd want to call "sir." Rudy's violent background consisted of frightening stories of robbing private homes for drug money, stealing cars, and holding up convenience stores for an adrenaline rush. In those days, Rudy furnished his rented room with a coffin and colored strobe lights because of his preoccupation with witchcraft. He would get high while lying in his coffin and would become savage if disturbed. Miraculously, Rudy's abused body survived six heart attacks and multiple drug overdoses before he was 30 years of age.

Conversion to Jesus Christ transformed Rudy so dramatically that he attended two years of Bible college, then launched out with his family as an independent missionary in Mexi-



by Rhonda Wehler

*Freelance writer,
Salem, Oregon*

co. There he had been deeply wounded by believers and had fallen back into old habits.

When Rudy's faithful wife, Carol, began attending our church, she sat alone in the front row. Each week she stood before the offering was taken to say, "Please pray for my husband, Rudy. He is away from the Lord." When she thought the time was right, she invited Don to visit Rudy in their home. Rudy's heart was tender to words of encouragement that night. The following week, Easter Sunday, Rudy was sitting with Carol in the front row. When Carol stood and announced, "Thank you for praying for Rudy; he is here today," the congregation applauded. That morning Rudy walked to the altar, which was only a baby step away, and returned to his Lord.

When Rudy called, he asked me if he could visit us that night. His brother, Tony, had just been released from prison. He knew we had prayed regularly for Tony and wanted us to meet him.


When they arrived at our front door, Rudy's enveloping hug and Tony's timid handshake were the beginnings of their ministry to us. Tony explained in a halting manner how he had come to know the Lord Jesus while he was in prison and how he had finally forgiven Rudy for involv-

ing him in drugs and crime. Then Rudy asked if he could bring in his guitar; he had some songs he wanted us to hear.

Rudy had sung in a nightclub for years. His strong but mellow voice now sang country gospel ballads and choruses for his Savior. Although Rudy stuttered when he talked, his words flowed when he sang.

He strapped his guitar around his neck, perched on the edge of the mauve recliner, and began to sing. Tony moved in closer and knelt on the floor by Rudy. He had never heard these Christian tunes. Rudy moved almost naturally into singing in Spanish. Tony interpreted for us. For over an hour we felt God's Spirit comforting us through these humble children of His, and reassuring us of His presence in the midst of the alone times, reaffirming His deep love for us, and reminding us that we are treasured by Him—a gift from soul to soul. The lonely living room was transformed into a place of worship.

When they had finished their songs, we knelt by the pine chest that doubles as a coffee table and thanked God for His faithfulness and unceasing, amazing grace. I thanked God for Rudy's gift, beginning with a phone call and ending with a ring of truth—the priceless gift of unconditional acceptance.

I realized that a stumbling experience didn't mean the end of ministry for me. It hadn't for Rudy or Tony. I asked God to help me, like Rudy, to freely extend a hand up to others who sit dazed and humiliated from a fall on the path of life. We must offer it without questioning how they stumbled, without immediately judging how soiled and shamed they look, covered with the mud of their failure. Then I too will be imparting a welcome gift—a gift like Rudy's. 

Multiplying Prevenientency

by Neal Gray

Pastor,
Glen Heights, Texas

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Besides a "going before," the intention of "prevenience" is to "give attention to another's need."¹ The Lord cares for our most important need, namely, our need for salvation. He purposefully *gives attention to the unsaved person's salvific needs* by

The presence and prompting of His

Holy Spirit on the heart of the lost person, *and,*

Using His Christians to demonstrate, or witness, His grace in everyday earthly life.

The first item is called God's "prevenient grace," and the second item is our call in the Christian life to extend that grace to others.

The Doctrine of Prevenient Grace

Prevenient grace is the preparatory

grace of the Holy Spirit exercised toward man helpless in sin. For the guilty seeker, His grace is mercy; for the helpless seeker, His grace is enabling power.²

In summary form, the doctrine of prevenient grace includes the following five assertions:

1. Man himself is totally depraved and not capable of either thinking or doing any good thing.
2. Previous to regeneration, man's very existence is in some sense a state of grace.
3. The Spirit of God leads the sinner from one step to another toward Christ in proportion to the response of the sinner.
4. The sinner must cooperate of his own free will with the divine Holy Spirit to effect the work of salvation.
5. God gives this grace to all men in order to bring them to salvation through Jesus Christ, but this grace may be resisted by the free will of man so as to be rendered ineffectual.³

We Christians Can Extend Prevenient Grace

By the Lord's design, He empowers Christians to assist in the wooing of men and women to Jesus Christ. We are a factor in helping the lost person make the decision to embrace the gift of God (assertion No. 4 above), because we can affect how another person thinks, especially how he or she perceives the person of the Lord Jesus, whom we claim to love.

In a very real sense, we, as His agents, *multiply prevenient grace* to a lost and fallen world. Let's look at some of the biblical truths that lead to this conclusion.

HOW THE LORD USES SAINTS AS HIS GRACE

Ambassadors

Jesus gave many specific instructions to spread the good news of sal-



vation through His atonement. He has given us the "ministry of reconciliation," that is, of intervening to help others reconcile themselves with the Father. We are now "ambassadors for Christ, *as though God were entreating through us*" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20, NASB, italics mine). As you face a lost world in general, and speak with a lost person specifically, remember that God has given you the special status of speaking on His behalf, of being an ambassador.

An ambassador speaks on behalf of his government. Your task, therefore, is to speak for the Lord. Keeping the truth always in the fore, speak diplomatically—as an ambassador would—such that you influence the person's free will toward Christ Jesus. That means speaking the truth to the person in a way that he or she can understand the message.

Prevenient
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toward man
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When I was 13 years old, an elderly Christian lady wrote a letter to me. She told me how that I had been on her heart and mind lately, and she described in simple language the salvation that God had made available through Jesus. Her letter made a powerful impression on my mind—she was speaking God's message to me in a written communiqué as His ambassador. And she did it with love and concern for me.

Witnesses of True Love

Who will deny that the people of the world, both saved and lost, are looking and longing for true love? We are the beneficiaries of the truest love that has ever existed. And Jesus has instructed us to love each other so

that lost persons will know that His love is genuine (cf. John 13:35).

We Christians, the Lord's Church, have a tremendous opportunity—nay, rather an awesome responsibility—to demonstrate God's true love to a lost world. As Christ's Church and His witnesses, our first duty in serving Him is to truly love one another.

People in your community see your life; they watch how Christians conduct themselves. Our demonstration of love for one another, which comes from the Lord (cf. 1 John 4:19), is a powerful facet of grace. God is pleased when we love each other, our lives are better for it, and sinners may be enticed to seek the Christ we have.

Parents

Christian parents long for the day when their child trusts Jesus for his or her eternal salvation. God has given parents the responsibility to educate their children about the Lord so that indeed the children will trust Him. Each day parents are to speak to their children about the Lord (cf. Deut. 6:4-7).

There's an axiom that says, "More lessons are caught than taught." Children observe their parents' behavior. When parents put God first in their lives, children see how important He is in life, and they catch the most important of life's lessons. Parents influence their children's thinking about God and thus extend His grace to their lives.

One man in our church testified to the wonderfulness of being raised by Christian parents. I remember his words as he said, "I've been fortunate to have parents that kept me, sometimes forcibly, out of activities that lead to gross, sinful living. I know that God saves men and women who have fallen deep into sin, and I praise Him for that. And though we have all sinned, I also praise Him for keeping me from falling into harmful things such as promiscuity, drugs, foul language, et cetera. I thank the Lord for my Christian parents."

Faithful Wives

In the second general Epistle (1 Pet. 3:1-2), the apostle Peter instructs the wife to remain faithful to her husband—even if he is not a Christian. Peter calls upon the wife who has an unsaved husband to bear the grief of living with that godless man. At the

same time, the wife is to demonstrate the holy behavior that shows that God has done a mighty work in her life. Who knows? Perhaps the husband will be won by this testimony.

As you face a
lost world,
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speaking on His
behalf.

Many a wife has won her husband to the Lord simply by being faithful to God. I speak from firsthand experience here. When I met my wife, I was not a redeemed Christian but rather a philosophic zealot (cf. Rom. 10:2). Still, my wife thought I was a Christian, and we were married. Of course, she soon discovered that this religious man was no Christian. But she remained true to the marriage vow, prayed daily for my salvation, and continued to live for God. Seven years later my heart was softened, and I trusted Jesus as the only Son of God and my Savior. Thanks be to the Lord for my wife's faithfulness that showed the grace of God upon me!

Teachers

The call of the Bible for Christian teachers is to extend the grace of the knowledge of God to their students (cf. Deut. 6:6-7; Ps. 51:13; Prov. 1:8; Rom. 12:7; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2:2). Teachers have a tremendous influence over their pupils' lives and a tremendous responsibility before God. Yet, by using this spiritual gift, teachers provide God's grace to others.

One of my seminary professors taught me what grace means. He had given us a take-home closed book exam (you can only do this in a Christian school!), and we were grading our own exams in class as the profes-

sor revealed the answers. Students asked questions regarding the validity of their answers, such as, "Well, Prof, I didn't put exactly that answer; I put this answer. Is that OK?"

Our first duty in serving Him is to truly love one another.

When we reached the end of the exam, the professor turned to the chalkboard behind him and wrote the following words: "I accept your provision of grace. [Signed, your name.]" He then said to the class, "I have taken this exam—closed book—and I have made a perfect score. Now, I am offering my score to you. All you have to do is indicate to me that you wish to accept my perfect score by writing these words from the chalkboard on the front page of your exam and signing your name. Of course, some of you scored a 93 or a 97 or some other high score, and you wish to keep your earned score. That's OK. But know that you such people will have your exams regraded by 'the law.' And when the law grades your exam, you will undoubtedly receive a much lower score than the one you awarded to yourself."

I cried all the way home that day. I had learned what God's grace through the perfect score of Jesus Christ meant. That teacher extended grace to me by his teaching method and true concern.

CONCLUSION

Speak with Grace

With the help of the Lord, we will become a blessing to other persons. Our speech is so very important and so revealing. The words from our lips should not condemn us, as they surely will if our hearts are not pure. Rather, our speech must be seasoned with the grace from the Lord. Then,

our words will be a soothing balm of grace to weary persons (cf. Matt. 12:34-37; Col. 4:5-6).

Lights of Grace

The good works that exhibit the grace of God come from persons who are being transformed into *the image of Christ*, shining their light so that others will glorify God (cf. Matt. 5:16; 2 Cor. 3:18). Only as we receive God's grace in our lives are we able to demonstrate the same type of love for fallen persons that the Lord Jesus did. We are called for that very purpose; namely, to be compassionate persons whose relationships are characterized by love and forgiveness, whose lives exhibit the transforming touch of God's grace upon their world.⁴

When parents put God first in their lives, children see how important God is in life.

Others

We now come full circle from where we began, namely, that the intention of prevenience is to give attention to another's need—*others*. Christ gave His life for others; our measure of Christlikeness must also include our willingness to give attention to others (cf. Phil. 2:4-5).

This is our calling as God's ambassadors: Multiply His prevenient grace to the lost souls of the world. May the Lord Holy Spirit give us an abundance of His grace to share—with others! †

1. *American Heritage Dictionary*, 1978 ed., s.v. "prevenience."

2. H. Orton Wiley, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940-43), 2:345-46.

3. *Ibid.*, 352.

4. M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 33.

God Has Never Failed Me, but He's Sure Scared Me to Death a Few Times

by Stan Toler

(Honor Books, 144 pages, PA 156-292-1304 \$8.99)

God can do anything but fail!" comes across pointedly in *God Has Never Failed Me*. Throughout the pages Stan shows his deep conviction with his unforgettable stories, irresistible sense of humor, and delightful insights in his inspirational book. *God Has Never Failed Me* reminds readers that God still works in the world and never forgets our needs. He probably will scare us to death with the incredible ways He provides for us!

Toler explores how God can be trusted by drawing on his own remarkable experiences, on witty anecdotes, on memorable real-life stories, and on Scriptures. Stan shows that God keeps His promises, reveals himself in times of crisis, conquers fear, strengthens our faith, and more.

To keep the readers reading, he keeps the chapters short and sprinkles them with sharp quotes and excerpts. This is lighthearted reading with a serious purpose. As "The Geranium Lady" Barbara Johnson wrote, "Stan has the ability to bond laughter with the solid truth of the Scriptures so that I felt that bubble of joy erupt as he describes incidents of God's faithfulness."

Stan Toler will inspire readers to trust God for their own miraculous stories.

—Derl G. Keefer

Preying on the Church

by Daniel D. Busby

CPA and freelance writer,
Indianapolis

Few things are more disturbing than so-called Christians fleecing churches and other Christian organizations. They don't rob the church at gunpoint like common criminals. They offer almost unbelievable investment schemes. They describe how you can multiply your ministry dollars overnight.

Rarely do scam artists offer something for nothing. Instead, you get next to nothing for something. But the value of what you are buying is often difficult to determine—until it's too late. They are long on clever words, but short on written materials. They are experts at deception. "And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (2 Pet. 2:3, NASB).

The exposure of the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy scam highlights the need for churches to be diligent in the investment of funds. While only a few churches were caught in the New Era web of deceit, it demonstrates how fraudulent promoters can "prey on the church."

The Foundation for New Era Philanthropy offered a 100 percent return by anonymous, "extremely wealthy" philanthropists who didn't have the time to find worthy causes and who were relying on New Era to do it for them. All churches and other charities had to do

was deposit the money for six months with New Era. Some organizations had been promised that their money would be tripled or even quadrupled. Others were told that if they did not withdraw their money in six months, their money would double again.

New Era has filed for bankruptcy, listing \$551 million in liabilities and

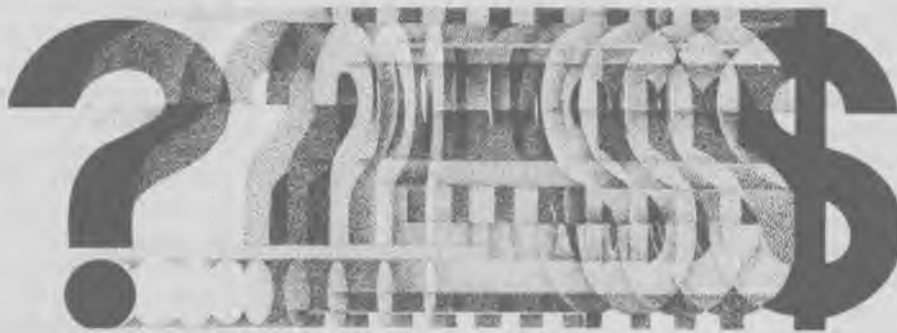
promoters. The amazing thing is: *these people continue to sell their scam to churches.* Remember, investments must pass the "smell" test. If an investment sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

Here are some simple rules for investing church funds:

1. Make capital preservation the first and last rule of investing. Don't go whole hog for rate of return.
2. Err on the side of conservative investment vehicles.
3. Diversify investing large sums of money.
4. Invest short-term money for the short term and long-term money for the long term.

5. Make accountability your watchword of investing. A decision to participate in an unconventional investment, like New Era, should be made at the board level, not by staff or not by delegation to a board subcommittee.

6. Avoid certain investment vehicles, including loans (unsecured or secured); investments with church members, their friends, or their relatives; real estate (unless it will be used by the church); small businesses; limited partnerships; commodity futures, options, and warrants. ¶



\$80 million in assets. The anonymous donors never existed.

In recent months, I have received calls from churches that were considering investing in offshore trust schemes and other high-risk ventures. One promoter promised over 100 percent return annually. Another program called for the church to provide a bank letter of credit that "would never be used." In exchange for the unused letter of credit, the church would receive a 100 percent return on the face value of the letter of credit. Since the letter of credit would not be used and the return would be paid with no money invested, the rate of return is immeasurable or infinity.

One state securities commissioner told me he had a file over an inch thick with complaints on one of these

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Today's Books for Today's Preachers



Holy Scripture (Vol. 2 in *Christian Foundations*)

by Donald G. Bloesch

(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press,
1994, 384 pp., PA 083-081-4124, \$24.99)

This is the second volume in Bloesch's projected seven-volume systematic theology. With his two-volume *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* and numerous other theological (and devotional) books, it is sure to entrench him as one of the most distinguished American evangelical theologians of our century.

Bloesch is my kind of evangelical. He vibrates to what is classical (as Tom Oden does) and to what is "Reformational." He likes John Wesley very much and often uses Wesley's middle-of-the-road Word-plus-Spirit vision. So I tend to forgive him that on some basic matters he comes out as Reformed. This year for my systematic theology course at Olivet Nazarene University, I used as one of the main texts Bloesch's two-volume EET, along with H. Ray Dunning's *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*.

In politics, Bloesch would be thought of as moderate. He mediates between all of us evangelicals and is the principal such person of our time. He is an evangelical theological ecumenist: irenic, courteous especially to all the evangelicals who locate to the right of him. He is ameliorating toward Carl F. H. Henry, and even to fundamentalists who locate to the far right, such as Norman Geisler.

Bloesch is friendly toward "propositional revelation" (p. 52), "inscripturated" (p. 67, see also p. 97) revelation, and total inerrancy. Yet in the usual and obvious senses of these matters, he rejects them. He says that "revelation comes to us in a myriad of

literary forms" (p. 52). Of the Bible he says that it is "not in and of itself a revelation of God but is the divinely appointed means and channel of this revelation" (p. 57).

He says that there has been a long church tradition of biblical inerrancy teaching, but he is "uncomfortable" (p. 27) with much of the recent teaching on it. This is because "it has been coopted by a rationalistic, empiricistic mentality that reduces faith to facticity" (p. 27). He says here (as he does in volume 1 of this series) that Scripture is revelation to us only when the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it. He writes here that truth "is a property not of the human witness itself but of the Spirit who speaks in and through this witness [of Scripture]" (p. 27). In this, Bloesch is similar to Luther and Calvin (and Wesley, for that matter). In it he is different from recent and present-day fundamentalists. He is in line with the long tradition of Scripture's being our Guide on matters of "faith and practice" (p. 17).

Bloesch forthrightly admits that Scripture is inspired. He feels that whereas the apocryphal books are often (but not always) theologically sound, they are not properly a part of our canon. On interpreting Scripture, he uses the literal method when such seems appropriate—as Luther and Calvin and Wesley did. He does not decry the critical study of Scripture's forms but says that its content is not subject to our appraisal. It should criticize us; not vice versa.

Bloesch is most knowledgeable in the area of bibliology, especially of writings that are recent. He treats Schleiermacher and various other modernists such as Shaler Mathews; Roman Catholic scholars (Aquinas,

Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, Vatican II, its liberation theologies); the neoorthodox (Barth, Brunner, the Niebuhr brothers); and evangelicals, including the fundamentalists. He complains about the "wooden" views of Scripture in fundamentalism, along with its being so rationalistic.

Bloesch's most controversial chapter in this book—even more so than the similar and last next chapter—is the one that treats Rudolph Bultmann somewhat favorably. He here admits that much in the Bible is myth of a sort and not history as such. He weaves through Bultmann and Ernst Kasemann and many scholars who are much more evangelical, and comes out saying that history is there, importantly, in the biblical record. But he views so much of the biblical materials as myth and a mixture of myth and history that, no doubt, most evangelicals will not buy into this attempt at mediating between the "enduring" Bultmann and them. Yet if we evangelicals would buy into his views at least to some considerable extent, it would help us not to be as prescientific and closed-minded and obscurantist as we are often perceived as being.

I highly recommend this volume, as I do volume 1 (1992) of the series—and I anticipate the appearance of the others.



J. Kenneth Grider

Is All Truth God's Truth?

To support the integration of humanistic psychology with biblical Christianity, "Christian psychologists" use a phrase that has become quite popular in recent years: "All truth is God's truth." Many, however, are not clear as to what constitutes "God's truth." Is "God's truth" Carl Rogers's idea of human love? Or is "God's truth" the behaviorism of B. F. Skinner? Maybe it's Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Logically and spiritually, there are problems with this statement. Today truth and reality are so privatized and relativized that they are often understood only in terms of what they mean to an individual person. A pragmatic culture like ours will see truth as whatever works for any given person or whatever the current cultural guru says it might be.

David Wells, in his book *No Place for Truth*, writes, "Such a culture will interpret the statement, 'Christianity is true,' to mean simply that Christianity is one way of life that has worked for someone, but that would not be to say that any other way of life might not work just as well for someone else."¹ Truth, then, is no longer objective but subjective.

Francis Schaeffer once wrote: "When I say Christianity is true, I mean it is true to total reality—the total of what is, beginning with the cen-



by Gary Skagerberg

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tral reality, the objective existence of the personal-infinite God. Christianity is not just a series of truths, but *Truth*—Truth about all of reality."²

The word "truth" is found about 235 times in the Bible. Jesus said of himself, "I am the . . . truth" (John 14:6). He also declared in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

If we are to learn of truth, we must turn to God's Word. Truth has two meanings in Scripture: one, temporal facts man may observe about himself and the physical universe; and two, eternal and spiritual reality pertaining to God and His relationship to His creation. When the Bible speaks of "the truth," it means the latter.

Several hundred years ago Isaiah wrote: "No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies.

. . . So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found" (59:4, 14-15). This description of Israel fits today's world and, in some ways, the church. We have opted for lies and have been deceived.

The major rationale for the integration of biblical Christianity and humanistic psychology is the clause under consideration: "All truth is God's truth." This confuses temporal facts and God's eternal truth. That they are not the same should be obvious. Jesus said, "*The* truth will set you free" (John 8:32). By *the* truth, Jesus didn't mean facts. Therefore, even if it were a science, which it is not, psychology could not be a part of "God's truth."

Freud and Carl Jung knew nothing of the truth that Jesus referred to when He told Pilate, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37). When we begin to rely on information based on sources other than the Bible, we open ourselves to deception, Satan's mightiest weapon.

God tells us in Ps. 138:2 that He has exalted above all things His name and His Word. The integrity of His name is incapable of being separated from His Word. To incorporate unbiblical practices as a means to spiritual growth is to say that God and His Word are insufficient for instruction in regard to our relationship with God. This is contrary to Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

When Jesus established the new covenant, He established all the terms of that covenant, as contained in the New Testament. Shouldn't we think it strange that within the past 100 years God has apparently inspired men like Freud, Jung, Rogers, Maslow, Fromm, and M. Scott Peck with "truth" hidden to the Holy Spirit-inspired Bible writers? If Jesus is correct when He said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17, KJV), then psychology deals in an area in which God has spoken with finality. God's Word is truth, not partial truth with the rest to be supplied at the end



of the 20th century. There are no parts of truth missing from the Bible only to be discovered by humanistic psychology. Old Testament, New Testament, up-to-date Testament? I think not.

Yet we have been asked to believe that a part of God's truth unknown to those who were inspired by Him has been discovered by those who are not of Him. And that this new insight should be integrated by the church into its understanding of the Bible and how life should be lived. To even make such a suggestion is destructive to the very faith that "Christian psychology" says it is trying to enhance. "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal. 3:3). There are no new terms, new revelations, or new methodologies to achieve spiritual maturity.



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Paul wrote to Timothy that all Scripture is "useful," so that we might be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The word translated "equipped" is the word *artios*, which means "fit, complete, capable, sufficient." This simply means that the Bible gives us the information needed to meet every situation we face in life.

But as though that were not enough, Paul says we are "thoroughly

equipped." One of the ways this phrase was used described a ship that was fully loaded for a voyage or a rescue boat that was completely outfitted and prepared for an emergency. The point is that the Bible claims to give us not only true and accurate information but *all* the information we need to handle any and every situation that might arise in our lives. To look for truth in any other place other than God's Word is to guarantee that we will not find it.

In their book *A Holy Rebellion*, Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr. point out that within the realm of human viewpoint, one way to attempt to establish truth is an attempt to find truth independent of God and His Word. This is called rationalism. In its pure form, rationalism is the belief that each person is born with certain innate ideas. On the basis of these innate ideas, man can use reason and logic alone to discover ultimate truth. The rationalist does not believe that he must be dependent on God's Word in order to think true thoughts about reality. Their beginning point, their foundation is their own logic and reasoning. They arrogantly assume that their own logic is sufficient for finding truth. Not only is that idolatry, but also it is sheer foolishness.³

God doesn't reject the use of reason or logic, but He does reject its independent use. The divine viewpoint uses logic and reason dependently, starting with God's Revelation as a foundation. Ice and Dean say, "The all-knowing God has already told us what is true, and dependent logic seeks to apply truth to every issue of life to see how it does or does not stack up with God's revelation."⁴

A person would be foolish to start with error, or a mixture of truth and error, to try to end up with truth. Only when you start with what Francis Schaeffer called "true truth" can you arrive at the full truth in all of its ramifications.

A problem arises with this statement because, like all other religions, psychology includes certain elements of truth. Even Satan's temptation of Eve included truth. Satan said, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). As the fallen couple was leaving Eden, God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing

good and evil" (v. 22). The enticement of the "All truth is God's truth" fallacy is that there are some similarities between biblical teachings and psychological ideas. However, similarities do not make psychology compatible with Christianity. They simply indicate that psychological systems are religious.



God's Word is
truth, not partial
truth with the
rest to be
supplied at the
end of the 20th
century.



Since there is not one standardized "Christian psychology," each "Christian psychologist" decides for himself which of the many psychological opinions and methods make up his idea of "God's truth." When that happens, the subjective opinions of mortals are placed on the same level as the inspired Word of the immortal God. They have come to the erroneous conclusion that what has been observed by the finite mind of man equals and, at times, surpasses God's infinite truth. Only the Bible contains the pure truth of God. All else is a distortion limited by man's fallen nature—which psychology denies.

"All truth is God's truth" is discussed in the *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology*. The book claims that its contributors are "major scholars involved in current discussions of the relationship between psychology and Christianity." In a review of the book, Dr. Ed Payne wrote, "Almost certainly the message of the book and its authors is that *the Bible and psychological literature stand on the same authoritative level*" (emphasis added). Heresy! But this book merely reflects what the church has come to ac-

cept. Unscientific, unproven, unsubstantiated, always changing opinions of man have now been leavened into the church, through the abracadabra of "All truth is God's truth."

How in the world did Christianity survive for almost 2,000 years without psychology? It appears that the men and women of the Bible and the saints right up to the present time did quite well without it. It's a little scary to think what a 20th-century therapist would do with Elijah. What would he say to Jonah and his fish story? Highly delusionary! Imagine the years and the expense of therapy for Hosea once he told his "counselor" that "God told me to marry a hooker." "Make yourself comfortable, Hos', and tell me about your mother."

To even hint that the often conflicting discoveries of such unredeemed men as Freud, Jung, et al. are God's truth is to severely undermine the Scriptures. Integrationists claim that these teachings of man support God's Word. Since when did God's Word need mortal men's support? The Bible alone stands as the truth of God. The truths of Scripture are eternal. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). The psalmist declared, "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal" (119:160).

There are currently over 450 brand-name psychotherapies on the market.⁶ They come at problems from many varied angles, but one thing is common to all: they start with a biblically defective view of man, namely, that man is basically good and able to solve his problems apart from God. If you start from the wrong base, you can't build a system that complements Scripture. Which of the 500 psychological "truths" is eternal?

If people solve their problems of living with the opinion of man, they will end up worshipping man rather than God. Consider the words of one secular therapist:

Psychology has become something of a substitute for old belief systems. Different symbols of therapy offer visions of the good life and how to live it, and those whose ancestors took comfort from the words of God and worshiped Yahweh now take solace from and worship at the altars of Freud, Jung, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis and a

host of other similar authorities.⁷

We cannot approach Bible study with our own opinions. The Bible must teach and train us. If the Bible is truly God's Word, then it will tell us what we didn't and couldn't otherwise know, and our lives will be transformed if we obey.

"Christian psychology" is an alarming example of a wrong approach to Scripture. It is based upon predetermined psychological theories that are imposed on the Bible. These ideas were not developed by redeemed men. Freud and Jung were definitely anti-Christian and therefore of "the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:1-3). Their ideas, opinions, and theories were contrived because of their hostility to God and the church. This is a fact "Christian psychologists" cannot deny.



How can humanists improve on what the Holy Spirit has given us?



Bruce Narramore writes: "Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-esteem. This is a good and necessary focus."⁸

Read that quote again, carefully.

This is an acknowledgment that it was men opposed to the truth of the gospel who originated theories that gave "Christian psychologists" a new interpretation of the Bible, one which neither they nor any other Christians before them had ever discovered from the study of the Bible. The Early Church scholars missed it. John Wesley missed it. John Calvin, Martin

Luther, C. H. Spurgeon, H. Orton Wiley all missed it. Yet Christians today are to gladly embrace "the influence of humanistic psychologists." Wake up, O Church of God!

And so the argument goes, "But if it is 'biblical psychology,' what's the harm?"

Our response must be: "Why not then go straight to the Bible? If 'all truth is God's truth,' why tread through the false teachings of humanism to find that one nugget of truth?" What makes Jung biblical?

Do we search the Book of Mormon for biblical truth? How can humanists improve on what the Holy Spirit has given us? "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa. 8:20). *The Living Bible* reads, "If their messages are different than mine, it is because I have not sent them; for they have no light or truth in them."

We wouldn't call mathematical theories or chemistry formulas truth in the biblical sense. There is no validity in saying, "All truth is God's truth," as though there is a pool of truth outside the Bible that supplements the Bible. If humanists stumble across biblical truth, that does not make them biblically true any more than finding biblical passages in the Book of Mormon makes Mormonism true. We must measure everything by the Word of God.

Too many Christian teachers and authors would say they are dead set against humanism in one form but then teach and write about it in another because they don't recognize it. "Christian psychology" claims to deal with how man lives, that which the Bible says is its sole province. It deals with spiritual matters that can only be correctly accomplished through our relationship with God and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Humanistic psychology is another religion, and it cannot be integrated with Christianity.

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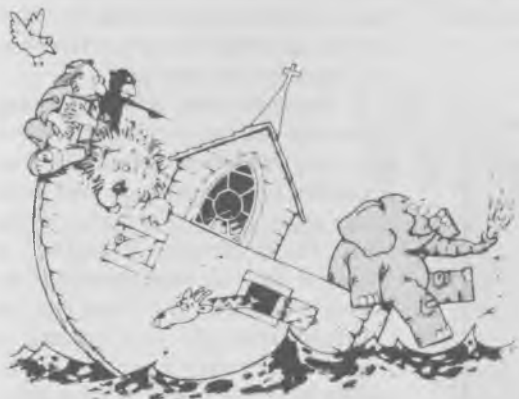
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The Church Potluck Dinner As a Key to Church Growth

The little packet of cards was tempting me, making fun of me. "Come on, open us up," it called out. "You'll be glad you did." Glancing down the hall to be sure my secretary wasn't watching, I pulled the red tape on the cellophane pack, and index cards spilled all over the desktop. There were cards advertising choir robes, handbells, carillons, church software, baptisteries, steeples, etc. I was addicted to these little packages of joy, and I hated myself for it. For some reason, this deck got to me. Maybe it was the contest for the free computer giveaway. Or maybe it was the card saturated with the sweet essence of orange oil. Open the pack I did.

I flipped through the deck mechanically, embarrassed for having memorized 90 percent of the cards. Month after month, few of them change. This time I found a new one. A man's face smiled out at me. The card heralded as "Paul Parsons, the Potluck Dinner Evangelist."

"You've tried everything else to grow your church," Rev. Parsons noted.

"You've used homogenous units, bus programs, friend days, Bible studies, photo directories, cookbooks, analyses of your building, Sunday School, and tape ministries. Nothing has really helped. Now try MY method—exegeting your church growth potential through potluck dinners. I'll get your church growing like a stinkweed, or your money (a generous love offering) cheerfully refunded!"

It did sound a little odd, but I was willing to try anything. So I wrote the potluck dinner evangelist, and he came to our church. He didn't sing. He

didn't preach. He didn't speak to senior adults, talk to our teens about sexual purity, or put on a puppet show for the children. As a matter of fact, Rev. Paul told me that he wouldn't come to Sunday School or morning worship at all. He was true to his word. As he had promised, Paul slipped into the fellowship hall at twelve noon sharp. Then he sat in a discreet back corner, watching my congregation wolf down their fried chicken, taco casserole, and strawberry pie. Half an hour later he slinked out of his corner and walked over to me, holding three pages of notes.

"I have what I came for," he announced.

"But you just got here!" I protested. "How could you have possibly analyzed our church in such a short time?"



"I've done this for 10 years," he replied curtly, "and I've seen enough to do my analysis."

"I hope you don't expect to be paid by the hour!" I retorted.

"I'll mail you my analysis," he offered. "Then you can pay me whatever love offering you think it is worth." With that, Rev. Paul Parsons, our potluck dinner evangelist, was gone.

As you can imagine, I didn't expect much from Rev. Parsons. I guess that's why I was so surprised by the accuracy of his diagnosis. Here's what I learned, in case you want to test it on *your* people. Think of me as having saved your church a love offering. His letter read:

Dear Rev. ———:

Every church, regardless of size or denomination, is made up of five basic types of people. These five types are represented by the foods they bring to church potluck dinners. In an ideal situation, your church should have an equal number of these five types. In other words, each of the five categories of people should comprise 20 percent of your church. These five people types are:

1. People who always bring vegetables and salads. These people think meats and heavy main courses are unnecessary. Their favorite chapter in the Bible is Daniel 1, where the three Hebrew children lived on vegetables and water for 10 days. In church, they only come for the music. They don't care if you preach or not, as long as the choir sings well and the special music is tastefully done. You need these people because they are your future choir leaders and soloists. They just need a little tender, lov-

ing care to move them from enjoying the music to being a part of it.

2. People who always bring healthy foods. These people are thin and often tan. They pride themselves in bringing foods low in fat, cholesterol, sodium, calories, and flavor. In the church, they tend to be pharisaic, looking down on those who eat doughnuts or dishes with lots of cheese. You don't want to attract any more of these people; but you can't afford to get the ones you have now angry with you. Health food eaters inspire guilt in others and, therefore, have a large following. Criticizing them will only split your church. Besides, they look so good that they are excellent advertisements for your church.

3. People who always bring fast food from restaurants. I call this group the "paper people." Everything they bring arrives in a paper sack or cardboard box—pizza, hamburgers, tacos, fried chicken, frozen or deli pies and cakes, prebaked rolls, etc. This crowd is normally young couples with children and large disposable incomes. They are always "too busy" to make something at home and find it better to have someone else cook. They like variety, often making two or three stops to purchase their potluck contribution. They also like variety at church and will soon leave if you don't provide it for them. They are the least loyal of the

"five basic food groups" in an average church. But you need them, because you need their money.

I was surprised by the accuracy of his diagnosis.

4. People who always bring home-baked food. These homebodies enjoy your potluck dinners far more than do their fellow congregants. They look forward to these covered-dish suppers with great anticipation, scouring dozens of cookbooks for new and exciting recipes to share with pastor and people. They are the only group of the five who commonly ask for each other's recipes. They spend hours in the kitchen and shake their heads when people in Group 3 carry in their store-bought food. Group 4 people are your salt-of-the-earth, church pillar types. When the Groups 1 and 2 people vote you out of the church, the Group 4 people will vote you back in. (Group 3 doesn't care much, either

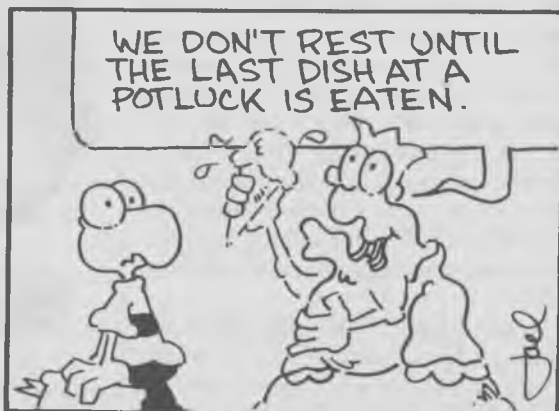
way.) This home-baked group is always middle-aged or elderly. They are wonderfully supportive and will stick by you forever.

5. People who always bring desserts. These people are sweet, and they eat lots of them. They are typically happy, round, and comprise most of your hospital visitation. Their favorite beatitude is "Blessed are the peacemakers," for that is what they are. They put out church fires for you (many of which you never hear about) by taking pies and cakes to your members' homes, sitting for hours visiting and praying for them. They want everyone to have a big slice of crumb-topped apple pie with a scoop of french vanilla ice cream and to be friends. You can't visit people in Group 5 without taking goodies back home with you.

So, Pastor, fill up your church with a balanced number of these five types. Right now, you have far too many Group 1s, a few too many Group 2s, and too few from Group 4. Your Groups 3 and 5 ratio is just about right. If you will follow my advice, your church will grow, and your potluck dinners will improve too. Please find enclosed the invoice for my love offering. Take \$50 off that if you can send one of Mrs. Hogan's rhubarb pies. God bless you.

Food for thought,
Rev. Paul Parsons
The Potluck Dinner Evangelist ✠

Pontius' Puddle



WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Randal E. Denny

June/July/August 1996

Prepared by Randal E. Denny

INTRODUCTION

Necessary economic changes within the Department of Pastoral Ministries caused the financing for the writers of *Worship and Preaching Helps* to be diverted. With Dr. Robert Foster leaving Nazarene Publishing House as president, I had to postpone seeking help from NPH. Recently I had opportunity to visit with Dr. Bob Brower, the new leader of Nazarene Publishing House. He has agreed to find the necessary finances for continuing *Worship and Preaching Helps* with money for the selected writers. Personally, I wish to thank both Dr. Foster and Dr. Brower for their support and encouragement of the *Preacher's Magazine*. An editor could not hope for better help than they have extended to me.

Meanwhile, to fill the vacancy of the usual *Worship and Preaching Helps*, I as editor submitted this collection of expository messages in chronological sequence from the early ministry of Jesus Christ. I did not have the time to develop the *Worship* aspect for this issue, but hope that the sermons will be useful. As a full-time pastor of a growing church, time restraints made this adjustment necessary for this issue.

We hope to be back on a regular schedule for *Worship and Preaching Helps* by the next issue of the *Preacher's Magazine*.

DOES ANYONE SURPRISE JESUS?

by Randal E. Denny

Matt. 8:5-13; cf. Luke 7:1-10

June 2, 1996

INTRO:

Can you surprise Jesus? Gospel stories indicate that Jesus got surprised twice. Once, in His hometown when nobody believed in Him (Mark 6:6).

Jesus received a second surprise when He returned to Capernaum after delivering His Sermon on the Mount. He was pleasantly surprised by a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:10).

Whatever made Jesus "astonished" must be something of importance to us today. Let us understand this man who surprised Jesus.

I. We Need to Be People of Compassion

The centurion was a man of compassion (Luke 7:2). In that day slaves were ranked as living tools, without legal rights. Some ancient philosophers commended the economic value of examining all equipment, cattle, and slaves each year and throwing away the useless and sick ones. The centurion had unusual compassion for his slave.

Muretus, an ancient wandering scholar, was educated but very poor. He traveled around during the Dark Ages. During his wanderings, he got sick and was taken to the poorhouse. The medical men didn't know he was a scholar and thus understood Latin. Discussing his case in Latin, the doctors suggested that he was only a poor, miserable creature of no value. It seemed unnecessary to spend care and money on such a worthless man.

Looking up at the doctors, Muretus said in Latin: "Call no man worthless for whom Christ died!"

Jesus was nailed to the Cross to die for us. That alone makes us worth a fortune!

II. We Need to Be People of Action

The centurion was a man of action, not a worrier (Matt. 8:5-6). He did what he could: he took his problem to Jesus. That's the place to begin.

God's people must be persons of action. Chesterton said that if he were drowning, he would rather meet a burglar who could swim than a bishop who couldn't. Action counts!

The centurion urged Jesus—literally, begged Jesus—and kept on asking for Jesus to help.

We think talking about something is the same as doing it. We spend a lot of useless energy talking about problems when we ought to be trying some solutions. The church can't afford to be problem-centered. We must learn to be solution-centered!

This centurion did not settle down as a sideline quarterback. He went directly to Jesus.

An athlete does not develop skill and strength by wishful thinking or articulate excuses. God's medals go to those who put action to their dreams.

III. We Need to Be People of Generosity

The centurion was a man of generosity (Luke 7:5). Ap-

parently he had some spiritual sympathies with the Jewish faith. He had built the local synagogue at his own expense. Jesus did say, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). This Roman military man loved the people of God. The hunger of his spirit had not been satisfied by Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek thinkers.

ILLUS. Dr. Harris, pastor of First Methodist Church in Atlanta, said, "Keep your eye on the fellow who never makes a pledge, and you'll generally find that he never does much of anything else either." He added:

I recall years ago I preached a sermon on the subject "Hitchhiking to Glory—Heroes Along Heaven's Highway." I never got such violent reaction in my life except one other time. That was the time I agreed for my church treasurer to print a list of the members and next to their names, print in bold figures what they had paid that year to the church.

It is sort of embarrassing to drive around with a car (worth several thousand dollars) and have it known that you paid \$27 per year to the church, when a little girl who waited tables in an all-night restaurant and had a sick husband in the vets' hospital paid \$204. It wasn't the measly amount that got his goat—it was having it known.

IV. We Need to Be People of Humility

The centurion was a man of humility. Knowing that Jesus was Jewish and that a Jew was not allowed to enter a Gentile's home, he didn't want Jesus to break Jewish regulations. He said to Jesus: "Lord . . . I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. . . . But say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:6-7). He recognized his place in life. He made no pretense of being something else. He sensed his unworthiness in the presence of Jesus Christ. Grace is something needed but not deserved.

ILLUS. A man said to his pastor, "After what I have done, I have no right to pray or to expect God's help."

The pastor replied, "That's certainly true. But it's wonderful you realize it!"

No one deserves God's goodness. Humility is honest self-appraisal.

ILLUS. Two children built a clubhouse in their yard. On the wall, in childish lettering, they listed the club's rules. The first rule read: "Nobody act big; nobody act small; everybody act medium."

That's one of the best definitions of biblical humility. Humility is not cringing self-denunciation nor arrogant self-exaltation. It is right in the middle—medium—an honest self-appraisal. J. B. Phillips makes it vivid: "Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all" (Rom. 12:3).

ILLUS. The great Japanese Christian leader, Kagawa, came to speak in one of our cities. A committee of distinguished religious leaders met him and took him to the auditorium where he was to speak. To freshen up before the program, the group went to the men's room. The ministers, drying their hands and faces in a hurry, threw their crumpled paper towels toward the wastebasket. Most of them fell on the floor.

Going up to the stage, they looked around. To their surprise, Kagawa was not with them. He was found, still in the washroom, carefully picking up the discarded paper towels and placing them in the wastebasket.

While thousands were waiting in the auditorium to hear him speak, the famous Kagawa was thinking of the lowly, unknown custodian. He was trying to lighten that man's workload by picking up the towels so carelessly left on the floor.

V. We Need to Be People of Faith

The centurion was a man of faith. His faith stands out in several ways.

First, the centurion had a faith in the word of Christ. He said, "Lord . . . say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:6-7). He realized that Jesus merely needed to speak, and His will would be accomplished. That soldier had some familiarity with the Old Testament scriptures. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be"—and there was! The psalmist said about God: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (33:9). The centurion sensed somehow that God, with all His creative power, was present in Jesus.

Second, the centurion had a faith in the authority of Jesus. He said to Jesus: "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Luke 7:8). He acknowledges his own obedience and duty to his emperor. The authority and power he exerts is derived authority. His right to be obeyed depends on his own obedience. Somehow the centurion sensed this in Jesus. When the Lord heard that man's analysis, He was surprised at his faith.

We must place our faith in God, not in faith's ability. Faith is not the desired gift—Jesus is the Answer. Our faith must place its confident trust in the authority of Jesus Christ.

ILLUS. Suppose a primitive fellow from the highlands of New Guinea learned to flip an electrical switch. If he knew nothing about the electrical power plant behind it all, his faith would be in the switch—and that's superstition.

As long as the electrical power plant operated and remained hooked up to the switch, the man would get the same results. His knowledge or ignorance wouldn't make much difference. However, if somehow he managed to detach the switch reverently and take it back to his native highland village, packed neatly in a little box, he would soon discover the fallacy of placing his faith in the switch. He would have put his faith in the wrong object.

Jesus alone deserves to be the Object of our trust and confidence.

Third, the centurion had a faith that needed no physical proof nor sight to verify. The centurion was the first person recorded who realized that Jesus' physical presence was not necessary for God's miraculous power to act.

Our centurion felt no need to have Jesus go to his house to perform the usual acts of touching the patient or mixing herbs or uttering a prayer. He had faith in Jesus' word. Where faith is weak, signs and ceremonies become important.

ILLUS. A young minister came to see an old pastor. The young man was disturbed about his faith. He confided, "I'm afraid I will be a failure as a minister."

The older man explained, "If you believe in a God who is big enough to solve the problems of humanity and provide the strength to be triumphant, you preach it and leave the rest up to Him. If you have that kind of faith, God will see to it that you don't fail. If you don't have that kind of faith, you might as well get started in another profession."

The young man confessed he had some doubts. The older pastor replied, "I don't know many people who have not entertained some doubts at one time or another. You preach your faith and pray about your doubts, and God will see you through!"

Fourth, the centurion had a faith that accepted his request as answered. This soldier of faith believed Jesus would do exactly what He said. His faith in Jesus was equal to the healing—and the healing was equal to his faith.

One fellow prayed for a personal request. When he didn't see some immediate answer, he replied, "Just as I thought!" "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour" (Matt. 8:13).

Thank God for that centurion's bold faith. In the same moment, his slave friend was instantly healed. Jesus responds to faith. Your greatest need cannot stagger the imagination of God nor tax the limits of His grace!

THE RESURRECTION OF HOPE

by Randal E. Denny

Luke 7:11-17

June 9, 1996

INTRO:

Researchers studied a large group of office workers. Each person did approximately the same kind of work. However, at the close of the day, some people felt worn-out, limp with fatigue. Others seemed strong, rested, and enthusiastic.

Researchers discovered that one group had something to look forward to—a party, a weekend trip, an interesting hobby at home—something that captured their imaginations. The fatigued workers had nothing to look forward to.

Hope is vital to life! Hope stirs us into trying once again. Losing hope, you lose direction and purpose. Satan perpetuates hopelessness.

Our Scripture lesson begins with the sad note of hopelessness. Luke, the Greek physician, wrote his Gospel with a view to the underdog, the poor, the unfortunate, the sick, the downtrodden. Luke alone recorded this event in Jesus' life.

Some time after Jesus healed the centurion's servant, Jesus made a side trip to a little-known, out-of-the-way town called Nain. It was one of those little villages that you don't pass through. You go there on purpose.

As Jesus entered the village, He beheld the sad sight of grief and hopelessness. By Jesus' presence and His divine touch, we see the resurrection of hope. Three simple observations stand out for us to apply to our lives today.

I. We Can Find Ourselves in a Place Where Life Seems Utterly Hopeless

Along the narrow, winding road leading out of the village of Nain, a funeral procession marched. The body of a widow's son was carried by loving hands to caves lining the rocky road. A group of professional mourners led the parade, screaming, wailing, and beating on drums and cymbals. In that procession the boy's mother walked in despair. Having lost her son, her last vestige of hope had disappeared.

The Bible reminds us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). When hope dies, the heart goes out of a person.

Nain once had been well known in the religious traditions of Israel. In ancient days, Nain was called Shunem. A woman of Shunem helped the prophet Elisha in his ministry. As a reward, God answered a lifetime prayer and miraculously gave the family a son.

Later on, the child died, and the mother made a famous journey searching for Elisha. She compelled Elisha to return to Shunem to raise her only child from the dead. Indeed, it was one of the great miracles of the Old Testament.

Here's an important lesson to learn: Past victories do not suffice for today's needs. Sometimes past victories have added to our despair. We feel that miracles existed only in the golden past. Friends, don't lose sight of God's power today.

ILLUS. At Middlebury College in Vermont, actor Burgess Meredith, at 74 years of age, gave some bleak words to graduating seniors. He offered: "All I can think to tell you at the melancholy moment is that I have absolutely nothing to say—no news, no advice, no ideas. When you reach 70, the future can be just as uncertain as it was when you left college. How's that for comforting words?"

A Scottish preacher pointed out that real profanity is not swearwords. Swearwords are more stupid than sinful. The most profane word is the word "hopeless." When we say a situation or person is hopeless, we slam the door in God's face!

Once famous, the village of Nain had become long forgotten. For that widow, this small, out-of-the-way place seemed like a very isolated, private experience. Her deep grief did not make headlines anywhere. Her hopelessness appeared very solitary.

However, Jesus comes to the private recesses of our despair. No one expected Jesus, the increasingly popular Teacher. Somehow He arrives in our hour of hopeless confusion.

II. When All Hope Is Gone, Jesus Is Standing By

With hope vanquished, the widow met Jesus. He came in her hour of despair, her moment of deepest need.

ILLUS. A man jumped to his death from a window of a tall building. The old janitor of the building knew the man well. He drawled, "When a man has lost God, there ain't nothing to do but jump!"

As long as we remember God, hope remains. No matter how bad yesterday may have been or how bleak today may seem, with God we can always have a good tomorrow ahead.

At the end of your struggle, Jesus is waiting. When you hit bottom, Jesus is there. When you give up, let Jesus take over.

The village of Nain, still in existence today, has only one access road. The way in is the way out. While the widow and her friends walked out the road of despair, Jesus was coming in. The very stumbling blocks knocking you to your knees may be the stepping-stones Jesus will use coming to your rescue.

ILLUS. John Masefield wrote a poem titled "The Widow in the Bye Street." In the poem, a young man is executed by hanging for crimes committed against the state. His mother is in the crowd witnessing the horrible scene.

As the young man's body gives up the struggle, the pathetic mother sobs and mumbles, almost to herself, something about "broken things too broke to mend." What hopeless anguish saturates those words. A past and present—but no future!

There's much in life that seems "too broke to mend." We experience the deaths of loved ones and friends "too

broke to mend." Marriages collapse that are "too broke to mend." Dreams are shattered "too broke to mend." Circumstances can seem "too broke to mend." Yet, at this very moment, the resurrection of Jesus shouts a final word of hope and victory!

In the village of Nain, Jesus did not work a miracle to prove His credentials as Messiah. He responded from infinite sympathy and love. Jesus said to the widow, "Don't cry" (v. 13).

Earlier Jesus had performed miracles in response to requests. The centurion had come to Jesus seeking help, asking the Lord to say the word, and the miracle would be done. Jesus marveled at his faith—and responded in love.

However, this time it was different. The poor widow was lost in a fog of hopelessness. She had lost faith! Jesus responded with His wonder-working power because He loved her.

Sooner or later, you will discover that sometimes, even before we call, God answers. Even when we can't muster up the courage of faith, Jesus is standing by. He does not desert us to our foes. Before we ask, He knows the unutterable cry of our heart.

III. When Jesus Comes, Hope Is Revived

Jesus did not require faith from the widow. He stopped the procession and stepped right up to the wicker basket containing the lifeless body of her son. Jesus touched the dead body. He who is the Resurrection and the Life met death on the road of hopelessness. And Life won! Suddenly the boy sat up, spoke out, and was ushered to his surprised mother. Hope was resurrected!

ILLUS. George Watts painted a famous picture. Though most people see in it the portrayal of despair, Watts named his painting *Hope*. It's the picture of a woman sitting on the world. She is bent by hardship. Her eyes are bandaged, indicating that she cannot see ahead. In her hands is a harp, but all the strings except one are broken. They represent her shattered expectations.

The one remaining string is hope. Triumphant she strums the last string, hope. From it a glorious melody floats out over her pitiful world and fills her dark night with stars.

The painting expresses a great truth. When all else is gone, if we will strike the string of hope, Jesus will set our souls to singing again.

Jesus resurrects hope! God lights the candle of hope in everyone who comes seeking help—no matter the cir-

cumstances. Don't give up. God will revive hope in your heart if you let Him. God will "make known . . . the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

When Jesus touched the body of the dead boy, He was breaking with tradition. A Jew was not allowed to touch a dead body, a casket, or a grave without becoming ceremonially unclean. No one expected Jesus to touch the boy's body. In fact, if the people had realized in time that Jesus would reach out to touch the boy, they would have stopped Him from doing so. Think of the blessing they would have missed.

Allow God to come to you in His own way. Don't hold Jesus down to the traditions or cultural limits of our day or of the past. Give Him free rein. Let Jesus come into your morgue of hopelessness and resurrect hope and life and freedom. As Jesus reunited the widow and her son, He wishes to transform your life. The Bible says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is" (Jer. 17:7, KJV).

People around the countryside marveled at the resurrection of the widow's son. The news spread rapidly that "God has come to help His people" (v. 16). Over and over, the Lord demonstrates His care for His people.

If you find yourself in the darkroom of hopelessness, remember that we are weak. Remember that, though life looks hopeless, we belong to God. He is "our Father."

ILLUS. A little six-year-old boy and his father were walking home one dark night. As they came near the house, Father noticed that the door to the toolshed had been left open. It stood only about 50 feet away, but tall trees cast black shadows in the night. The father said, "Son, go close the door to the toolshed. I'll wait right here."

The little boy started two steps toward the toolshed. Suddenly a dog down the street let out an awful howl. The lad jumped back and said, "Daddy, I don't want to go."

The father coaxed him, "Now, son, there's no reason to be afraid. Anyway, I can see you all the way."

Quick as a flash, the boy replied, "If you'll go with me, I won't be afraid."

What a source of comfort to know Jesus is still saying to us, "Surely I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). When the storms of life seem to overwhelm, "we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:18-19).

COME UNTO ME

by Randal E. Denny
Matt. 11:28-30
June 16, 1996

INTRO:

In Copenhagen stands a famous statue of Jesus by the Danish sculptor Thorvaldsen. The sculptor was fascinated by Jesus. The mind of Christ impressed him. Thorvaldsen said, "With that brain, He will conquer the world!"

Inspired by Jesus' life, Thorvaldsen decided to make a heroic statue of the Lord. Working in clay, he fashioned a stately figure of Jesus with upstretched arms, portraying a commanding authority. It resulted in an austere, regal, dominating figure. Thorvaldsen felt satisfied, saying, "Jesus is the greatest figure in human history. This statue will represent Him."

The sculptor left the clay model in a shed to cure. However, sea mists came in the night and worked a strange effect on the clay. When Thorvaldsen returned, the upstretched arms and hands had dropped from their imperial gestures to a posture of beckoning. The hands lingered in a pleading position. The face, originally raised in regal bearing, had lowered, giving a look of compassion.

Suddenly Thorvaldsen realized this strange twist had given a far more accurate portrayal of Jesus Christ. He had intended to inscribe on the pedestal: "Follow My Commands." Instead, he placed the words: "Come unto Me." The statue gives a compelling witness to the uniqueness of Jesus. Christ still calls (Matt. 11:28-30).

I. Jesus Calls to All Who Are Restless and Burdened

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened" (v. 28).

ILLUS. Marie Antoinette traveled from Vienna to Paris to be crowned queen of France. Orders were sent to keep away all the sick and crippled peasants from the road that she would travel. Needy, broken people were forced to stay away from her.

When Jesus passes by, He is interested in each one of us. He calls, "Come to Me!" He doesn't say, "Go away!" but "Come!" Jesus' words are music to my spirit: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37, KJV).

Jesus called to those Jews who were bound by laws, rules, and regulations—those subtle attempts to earn God's favor. Trying so hard to please God, their joy had departed. Jesus lamented of them: "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matt. 23:4). The Law describes the awful distance between God and humanity; the good news of Jesus bridges the terrible gulf of sin, bringing God and humanity together again.

Jesus did not define the toils and burdens because He includes them all. The Bible says: "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you" (Ps. 55:22).

ILLUS. A mother was teaching the 23rd psalm to her chil-

dren. She explained how the Good Shepherd cares for the little lambs. One child commented, "He drives away the lions and the bears!"

Her little brother added, "And He carries them uphill when they are tired!"

What beautiful, childlike descriptions of Jesus, who stretches out His hands to the weary: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened."

II. Jesus Offers to Give Peace and Rest

"Come to me," Jesus said, "and I will give you rest" (v. 28).

Unearned grace—a rest given from the hand of Jesus to anyone who comes to Him. Do not expect an absence of problems or troubles, but you can have peace in the midst of them. Absence of problems and troubles sounds like the South Pacific island where there are no taxes, no unemployment, no beggars, no television, no jails—and no people!

Jesus does not offer lethargy. Coming to Christ, we are made alive and quickened in spirit. Jesus' rest is not inactivity, but release from weariness and frustration. His peace does not exist in a vacuum. He offers peace and strength that come from being at rest with God and yourself.

ILLUS. John Wesley, his younger brother Charles, and George Whitefield for a while attempted to find peace with God by attending every religious gathering. They partook of the Lord's Supper every Sunday. They fasted every Wednesday and Friday. They went to bed early to pray and got up early to pray. They wore coarse clothing for self-punishment. By their own choice, they ate poorly prepared food, visited the sick, taught the ignorant, and ministered to physical needs of the poor. John Wesley went barefooted for a while in order to give money away. Yet, with all their efforts, they found no peace for which their spirits craved. That kind of deep, settled peace comes only when the heart is reconciled to God.

III. Jesus Urges You to Let Him Bear the Load

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (vv. 29-30).

The idea behind that picturesque promise was the ancient training yoke in which an older, stronger ox pulled alongside a younger, weaker ox. The inexperienced one learned from the experienced one that bore the weight and direction in plowing the furrow. If we submit to Jesus' yoke, He takes the heavy load and guides us along our path.

ILLUS. A working man was carrying a heavy basket. His little son asked to help him. The father cut a stick and placed it through the handle of the basket. His end of the stick was very short, while the end toward his boy's

grasp was three or four times longer. Each took hold of his end of the stick, and the basket was carried between them. The son shared the load with his father—but you and I know that the father bore the heavy end, while his son found the burden light and easy.

When we are yoked together with Jesus, He sees to it that the burden placed on us is light. He carries the heavy end. That's part of the powerful meaning of the Cross.

What we today call the hood of an academic garb goes over the gown and around the neck. It was known in Jesus' day as a disciple's "yoke." Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." The word "gentle" means "leadable and receptive." It described an animal brought under the control of its master. Such an animal was responsive to the reins of his master.

"Humble" means "teachable." Jesus remained humbly subservient and obedient to our Heavenly Father: "He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8).

IV. Jesus Invites You to Come to Him Today

"Come to me . . . and I will give you rest. . . . And you will find rest for your souls" (vv. 28-29).

Out of all the world, Jesus invites you to come to Him today. His invitation is simple: "Come to Me." Let's not get that muddled up. Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow me" (9:9), and he did. Jesus said to the fishermen, "Come, follow me . . . and I will make you fishers of men" (4:19). They did and He did. He transformed them by that simple act of faith and obedience. Jesus calls you today, "Come to Me." Jesus based His invitation upon our need and His power to save.

Jesus invites you to two kinds of rest.

First, Jesus offers rest to the person who has not yet come to God: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (v. 28, emphases added). When you come to Jesus, you receive rest from guilt and the bondage of moral failures. In the Greek text, two different words for "rest" are used. This first word is a verb meaning "to pause" or "to refresh oneself," as when travelers paused to rest at an ancient wayside. When you repent and confess your sins to Jesus and believe in Christ, you enjoy the rest freely offered by Jesus. It is the rest of the forgiven heart. Only Jesus can give it: "My peace I give you" (John 14:27).

Second, Jesus offers rest to the person who submits himself to the Lordship of Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (v. 29, emphases added). This second "rest" is a Greek word that means to suggest "a place to take up habitation" or "a place to settle down." This term for "rest" signifies the complete rest of inner spirit that the believer discovers when he is cleansed from inner sin and filled with the Holy Spirit. This second rest comes to the believer who has been with Jesus and is learning from Him as Teacher. His "yoke" chafes and frets us until we make that total surrender to His will. Jesus Christ offers every born-again believer that second blessing that makes His yoke joyful to bear.

The author of Hebrews spoke of this profound rest: "Since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it" (4:1). "Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said" (v. 3). "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (v. 9). It is the rest of the purified heart.

To the sinner, Jesus calls, "Come to Me" for pardon. To the believer, Jesus calls, "Come to Me" for purity of heart. To the disciple of Jesus under tremendous pressures, Jesus calls, "Come to Me" for peace. Jesus invites you to receive that rest for which your spirit seeks.

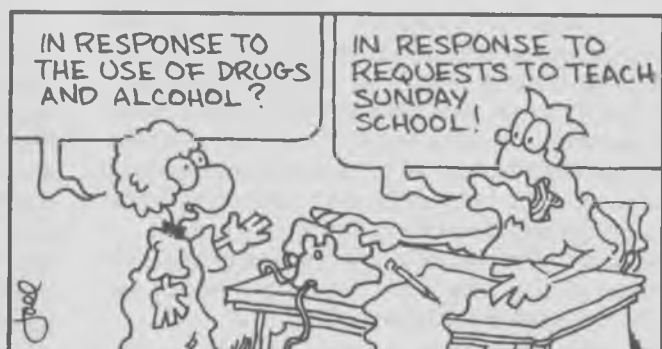
ILLUS. An old man lived in the desert wasteland of Arizona many years ago. He had the only good well of water for miles around. Every night, he would light his lantern and hang it up high on a post outside his cabin.

Some people told him he was crazy to waste his precious oil, burning a lantern all night. Yet night after night he kept the little lantern shining in that isolated and lonely darkness.

Late one night, during the terrible heat of midsummer, the old man heard a faint knock at the door. He opened the door to find a traveler almost dead—dying of thirst. The exhausted man had seen the glimmer of light in the distance. With his last ounce of energy, he made his way toward the lantern—and found life-giving water.

Almost 2,000 years ago, God lit His lantern. Shining across the centuries, it offers hope to all who will come and find rest. It shines across your path today. God's lantern will guide you to life and through life—and it will never, never go out!

Pontius' Puddle



THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF LOVE

by Randal E. Denny

Luke 7:36-50

June 23, 1996

INTRO:

Simon the Pharisee acted like a self-made man who worshiped his creator. Simon is characterized by the words of two little boys playing with modeling clay. The youngest, using his imagination, said, "I'm going to make a man."

His older brother replied, "You can't make a man. Only God can make a man."

The young lad restated his intentions, "I'm going to make a man-made man."

His big brother remarked, "All right, but it won't work!"

It never does. Simon personifies self-righteousness without love. A woman of ill repute shares the spotlight with Simon. Her actions speak more eloquently than words. Overflowing with a new kind of love, she expresses her joy in Jesus.

Standing in the presence of Jesus, these two characters make a bold contrast. Perhaps somewhere between the two extremes, we may find ourselves reflected in our attitudes toward Jesus.

I. Take Note of the Reasons Why People Come to Jesus

First, Simon came to Jesus out of curiosity. With mixed motives, Simon invited Jesus to his home for dinner. Popular gossip whispered that Jesus might be the Messiah—the long-expected revolutionary leader of Israel. Showing favor to Jesus might gain Simon an appointment to public office when Jesus takes leadership.

Jesus stirred Simon's curiosity. He cautiously hosted Jesus but neglected common courtesies of hospitality. He seemed fearful to express kindness to the controversial Teacher.

Carlyle wrote: "If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not even crucify Him. They would ask Him to dinner and hear what He had to say and then make fun of it!"

Second, the woman came to Jesus out of desperation. Anonymously, she slipped through Simon's gate and came into the inner courtyard—a common custom when people entertained a teacher or special guest. Leaning against the wall with other uninvited spectators, she listened to Jesus.

The context seems to indicate that she was known as a prostitute, but that day she turned to Jesus and was converted. While Simon found only a Teacher-Messiah, she discovered a Savior.

II. Take Note of the Attitudes People Bring to Jesus

First, notice their attitudes toward others.

Simon was critical. As the woman stood near Jesus, Simon said to himself with a judgmental attitude, "She is a sinner" (v. 39). He judged her "past." Jesus could see her "today" and her "tomorrows."

Simon felt disgust for anyone whom he perceived not to be as good as he.

The woman was humble. She knew her place. She only had access to Jesus at that moment because of the custom of the times—uninvited but allowed. Standing out of the way, she listened to Jesus.

III. One Sunday morning, John D. Rockefeller Jr. arrived at church a little later than usual. The service had begun, and the sanctuary was crowded. Rockefeller said to an usher: "I won't go to my regular pew. I might disturb the service. I'll find a seat in the balcony."

Standing nearby, a pompous stranger, not recognizing Mr. Rockefeller, blurted to the usher: "Escort me. I'll take a seat downstairs. I'm not the balcony type!"

That usher saw living demonstrations of a principle stated long ago: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

Second, notice their attitudes toward themselves.

Simon viewed himself as righteous. He dressed in long robes with wide fringes—that was very religious in those days. He wore phylacteries on his forearm and on his forehead containing the Shema—the written prayer: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). Though Simon's righteousness was outward display, he was empty spiritually.

The woman viewed herself as unrighteous. She knew what she had been. She held no claims to righteousness—except for Jesus' promise.

Third, notice their attitudes toward Jesus.

Simon feels no need for Jesus. Conscious of no spiritual need, Simon felt no love for Jesus. He deceived himself as being good in the sight of God and man. So why would he need Jesus?

The woman feels unworthy of Jesus. That attitude opens the door to God's forgiveness. The sense of unworthiness leads to repentance, the turning around of one's heart, mind, and behavior and coming to Jesus.

III. Take Note of the Reactions of People to Jesus

First, notice their inner responses to Jesus.

Simon responded to Jesus with doubts. Simon thought to himself: "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (v. 39). Simon doubted Jesus' spiritual integrity. He viewed Jesus as immoral for accepting the touch of this woman of ill repute.

Jesus doesn't share Simon's ease at rejecting people. Jesus welcomes all.

The woman responded to Jesus with joy. Having been forgiven so much, her joy overflowed. Tears cascaded down her cheeks and dripped from her chin, falling onto the feet of Jesus. His feet were outstretched behind Him as He reclined on the couch while eating.

I hope we never lose the capacity to express overflowing joy in the Lord.

Second, notice their outward reactions to Jesus.

Simon reacted to Jesus with an inhospitable spirit. Discourteously, Simon refused to extend common acts of kindness to Jesus. Simon also reacted with criticism. He and his cronies criticized Jesus.

ILLUS. A salesman came to a country store. Hearing a dog barking in the rear of the store, he asked the shopkeeper, "What in the world is the matter with that dog?"

The storekeeper answered, "He is sitting on a cocklebur."

The salesman asked, "Why doesn't he get off it?"

The merchant shrugged, "It takes less energy for him to howl than to get off the cocklebur."

Self-righteous people find it easier to be critical than to deal with God's truth when Jesus confronts our selfish ways.

The woman reacted to Jesus with a spirit of adoration. She felt love and respect for the Lord. As she listened to Him, her sense of shame vanished. The reality of being forgiven by God welled up in her spirit. As her tears of joy fell on Jesus' feet, she impulsively unraveled her long locks of hair and wiped her tears from Jesus' feet. To unbind her hair in public was considered immodest. Jews considered unbound hair the trademark of a prostitute.

While Jesus continued speaking, she caressed and cleansed His feet, anointing them with her perfume—a leftover from previous days of her trade. With affection, she kissed the Master's feet, a sign of deep reverence and respect, an outward token of acknowledging her surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

The Bible says, "For she loved much" (v. 47). She who had deliberately sold herself for evil was now giving herself to Jesus as an instrument of praise to God. The Lord revels in such spontaneous worship from us today.

ILLUS. Sir Wilfred Grenfell, medical missionary to Labrador, requested help from a head nurse in Johns Hopkins Hospital. He said to her: "If you want to have the time of your life, come with me and run a hospital next summer for the orphans of the Northland. There will not be a cent of money in it for you. You will have to pay your own expenses. But I will guarantee you will feel a love for life you have never before experienced. It's having the time of our life to be in the service of Christ."

She went to Labrador. Upon returning, she wrote: "I never knew before that life was good for anything but what one could get out of it. Now I know that the real fun lies in seeing how much one can put into life for others!"

Jesus gave a little parable. (*Read vv. 41-43.*)

IV. Take Note of the Consequences of People's Encounter with Jesus

(*Read vv. 44-47.*)

First, Simon leaves in confusion. He bows out of the picture, troubled and angry, lost in the crowd mumbling among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (v. 49). Simon discovered the hard way that "a man-made man . . . won't work."

His encounter with Jesus disturbed him, but he refused to learn, refused to listen, and refused to leap in faith into the waiting arms of Jesus.

Second, the woman leaves in peace. Jesus said to her: "Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (vv. 48, 50). What a difference an encounter with Jesus can make! The woman left Simon's house feeling understood and accepted. She provided the sinner, and Jesus proved to be the Savior.

ILLUS. A pastor served a large church for 25 years. He was not the eloquent preacher who stood in the pulpit and wrote books and poetry. He was the associate pastor who called in homes, visited the sick, counseled with the troubled. He only preached occasionally.

In the Sunday services, he usually read the Scriptures or offered prayers. He loved the people, and the people loved him. His countenance showed that he walked with Jesus. He demonstrated Jesus' compassion, joy, and love. Even the children loved him because he had time to spend with them too.

One Sunday at dinner, following the morning service, a family discussed the church service they had enjoyed. The little boy exclaimed, "Daddy, I smiled at God in church today—and he smiled back at me!"

The pastor and Jesus had so lived together all these years, that for the lad, God and the associate pastor were indistinguishable.

Simon didn't find much to inspire him. The woman discovered a great deal of love as she sat at the feet of Jesus. Let us sit at Jesus' feet so that we and our friends may learn from Him too.

NEVER FORGIVEN?

by Randal E. Denny

Mark 3:20-30

Cf. Matt. 12:22-37; Luke 11:14-28

June 30, 1996

INTRO:

On the editorial pages of our local newspaper, a cartoon was submitted by a subscriber. The artist had drawn a packet labeled "Latex Condom" and a poorly drawn depiction of the Bible. Over the pictures, a printed question asked, "Which one is currently helping prevent unwanted pregnancies and curb the spread of disease?" Under the two pictures, he inserted a "Bonus Question: 'Which one is making the problem worse through ignorance and fear?'" The sacrilegious cartoon was one more blasphemy of the Holy Bible as the Word of God. The artist degraded the good and exalted the evil.

Increasingly strident voices are calling evil good and labeling good as evil. Sadly, people can become so convoluted in their values that they think good is evil and evil is good. Critics said of Jesus, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (v. 22).

Jesus challenged their twisted thinking and added these fearful words: "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin" (vv. 28-29). Think of the possibility of never being forgiven!

I. Consider the Fact of the Unpardonable Sin

Though Jesus taught the love of God, He didn't avoid speaking about the irrevocable judgments of God. The same Jesus who "came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10) also warns, "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven" (Mark 3:29). There is an unpardonable sin!

II. Consider the Meaning of the Unpardonable Sin

What did Jesus mean by "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit"? The contextual setting in which Jesus gave warning with these words finds Him being scrutinized by the teachers of Jewish law. They observed Him healing the sick and concluded that He performed these wonders by the power of the devil. They could not recognize God's power through Jesus. They witnessed God's love in action and thought it was the power of Satan.

In Jewish thought, the Holy Spirit performed two great functions. First, He revealed God's truth to people. Second, He enabled people to recognize that truth when they saw it and heard it. Here's the key to this situation: those teachers of Jewish law failed to recognize the Holy Spirit in Jesus. Unable to see God's goodness by the Holy Spirit working through Jesus, they simply had no other way to return to God.

If you refuse the guidance of the Holy Spirit often enough, you can become incapable of recognizing God's truth when you see it.

Paul wrote a warning for our day: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

Those teachers of Jewish law had rejected God's revelation so long that they were unable to recognize God in Christ and were unable to think straight about evil and good. They decided Jesus had cast out evil spirits by Beelzebub, meaning "The lord of filth." They thought Jesus was possessed by a filthy spirit: "Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit" (v. 30, κJV).

Why should Satan perform a miracle to the glory of God? Jesus said: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (vv. 23-25). To identify the source of good with the impersonation of evil implies a moral wreck, for which God has no remedy.

The unpardonable sin does not occur as a single act or a single sin. It follows an attitude hardened against God and truth. By rejecting God's call of conviction, the sense of sin becomes dulled until there is no return.

In our day, people have begun to lose their sense of sin. Guilt is to the spirit what pain is to the body—a warning that something is wrong. It is a fearful thing to lose the capacity for pain or the capacity for guilt.

ILLUS. During the Chinese famine of 1901-2, many people suffered starvation so long that they entered a physical state where they lost all appetite for food! It can happen to the spirit as well as the body. We can lose our appetite for good and God.

III. Consider the Result of the Unpardonable Sin

Jesus warned, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin" (v. 29).

The Bible clearly teaches: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Changes in public opinion about sin do not alter the wages of sin. Polls may reveal the people's acceptance of immoral and wrong values, but they do not alter the wages of sin. Denial of absolute truths does not change the result and outcome of sin—spiritual death, separation from God.

The good result of a sense of unworthiness is a heartfelt repentance. Repentance opens the way to God's forgiveness. That disturbing sense of conviction prods you toward a restored relationship with God.

If a person gets into such a state that he can't see anything lovely and pure in Jesus at all, he finds himself in a dangerous state of mind. If, by repeated refusals to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, a person cannot feel

condemnation for his sins, then the sight of Jesus does not give him any sense of sin. Without a sense of sin, he will not repent or feel sorry for his break with God. Unrepentant, he cannot be forgiven!

ILLUS. An old legend tells of a priest who noticed a young man sitting in the congregation. After the mass, the young fellow stayed for confession. He confessed so many horrible things that the hair on the priest's neck stood up.

The priest said, "You must have been around quite a while to do all of that!"

The young man stared at the priest and then responded: "My name is Lucifer. I fell from heaven at the beginning of time."

The old priest came right back: "Even so, say you are sorry, and even you can be forgiven!"

The young man looked for a moment, turned, and walked away. He would not and could not do it. He left, still desolate and eternally damned.

It's not so much that people can't be forgiven as it is they won't be forgiven.

IV. Consider the Occurrence of the Unpardonable Sin

Many innocent, sincere people have been hurt at the expense of dramatic sermons. Unfortunately, Satan has used the unpardonable sin to harass sensitive souls and bring confusion regarding one's acceptance into God's family. The good news is that everyone can enjoy the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some people get so emotionally confused and fearful that they think they are exceptions to the Lord's invitation to come and find rest for their souls. Some people have become so obsessed with the fear of sinning against the Holy Spirit that they live under perpetual self-condemnation.

The unpardonable sin has not been committed by anyone who fears he has committed it. This unpardonable sin obliterates remorse or repentance. The very fact that you are troubled about it gives evidence that you have not committed it. The person who fears having committed such a sin shows a sense of conviction and regret. That is only possible when the Holy Spirit deals with him.

My greater fear is that some people would continue to say "No" to God's invitation until they grow dull and calloused in their spiritual sensitivity—and that leads toward blasphemy.

Fear sin. Abhor it. Don't play around with what you once knew was sin. Don't continue to reject God's truth. Don't

trifle with the Holy Spirit or oppose His work. Don't be indifferent or hostile toward God's holy things. Be careful of slander directed at God's people and His Church.

Each time you say "No" to God and say "Yes" to sin, you slip farther away from God and grow colder in your heart toward spiritual things. You become more calloused to the voice of the Holy Spirit. No one rejects God's truth without something happening inside. You can't turn your back on God's light without increasing the darkness within your own spirit. Rejecting Jesus moves you farther from knowing God.

God desires to pardon you because His love follows you to the vestibule of hell. Don't hinder the voice of the Spirit, for He alone can bring you to the place of pardon. Apart from God's drawing power, you have no other way to come to Jesus. That's why sin is so deadly serious!

If you are not walking with Jesus, yet feel no need for repentance, I urge you to pray and ask God to trouble your spirit today until you sense your need for Jesus and His forgiveness.

ILLUS. During March of 1966, I preached at a revival meeting held in Hood River, Oregon. The good pastor took me to visit with an old man living on the outskirts of town. He had no interest in God. He had not attended a church in many years—if ever. Though he greeted us cordially, I felt as if I was talking to a stone wall about spiritual things. He had no taste for God.

I left his home, shuddering inside. It was eerie to meet a person in whom there were absolutely no stirrings of God whatsoever. I cannot tell you whether or not he had committed the unpardonable sin, but the end result is the same. That man was lost and headed for hell—and I couldn't help him.

In the soul's flight away from God, there is a point of no return. However, when that point is reached, the soul has become so calloused and dead until there is no feeling apart from remorse over the consequences of sin. It is precisely the death of desire for God that dooms the spirit of man.

The first words of Jesus we opened with resound as a promise of God's grace: "All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them" (v. 28). Jesus' promise puts no limits on God's forgiving grace. If you will respond to the Spirit's invitation, God will forgive. It's not the size of your sins that keeps you from God's forgiveness, but the size of your defiance of Him. Only the person who sets himself against God's forgiveness is excluded from it.

We all need Jesus!

DO WE SEEK PROOF WHERE GOD SEEKS FAITH?

by Randal E. Denny

Matt. 12:38-45

Cf. Luke 11:29-32

July 7, 1996

INTRO:

Ten-year-old Gloria wrote a letter to God.

"Dear God:

"How do I know that You hear my prayers?

"Could You please give me a sign, like leaving a \$10 bill under my pillow?"

Gloria expressed how many people feel about God. They want some kind of sign—which actually becomes a substitute for faith.

It was the same old problem when the Pharisees and teachers of the law insisted, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you" (v. 38). What could convince them?

The Bible declares, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Eph. 2:8). If we are going to walk with Jesus, we will "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, kjv).

I. We Want Proof as a Substitute for Faith in God

The men, by seeking a sign from Jesus, were saying, "We want a substitute for faith."

Jesus was trying to teach them, "You need repentance by faith." (*Read vv. 38-39.*)

It is dangerous to seek a substitute for faith. Jesus had walked among those people day after day. Already He had performed miracles that they had both witnessed and heard about. Yet they insulted Jesus by desiring more substitutes for faith. Today some insist on a miracle or sign—even a confirmation by unusual feelings or some outstanding event that will bolster their faith. Other people go the route of worry—worry is disbelief, an insult to God's providential care.

Jesus condemned the people's desire for a substitute for faith: "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!" (v. 39). Why did Jesus speak so harshly? Because those people were asking for the same kind of sensationalism with which Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness—to prove to everyone that Jesus was the Christ.

We don't need any more signs or miracles—just plain repentance by faith, simple trust in God. Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here" (Luke 11:32). When Jonah announced God's wrath toward sin, Nineveh realized her great spiritual need for God. They repented of their sins and sought God's forgiveness. We don't need more proofs. We simply need to acknowledge our sins and seek God's pardon. Repentance shows up in the continued actions of our behavior. Repentance goes beyond emotions to the will. Repentance creates a sorrow for what we are—not simply a remorse for what we've done.

II. We Want Proof as a Basis for the Truth of God

The men were saying to Jesus, "We want a special signal in order to recognize truth."

Jesus was saying, "You need to recognize truth when you see it."

They demanded additional advantage, but Jesus said to them, (*read v. 42*).

Clamoring for a sign, they made a basic mistake. They wanted to see God in the abnormal.

Jesus used the queen of Sheba as an illustration. She traveled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to learn about God. We have the truth of the gospel at our doorsteps and at our fingertips. She went with pressures of political office. We let little things interfere with our allegiance to God. She went to hear Solomon, though uninvited. We have received invitation after invitation to come to One greater than Solomon—Jesus.

We don't need miraculous signs for proof. We need to accept the truth that we already know.

ILLUS. A fellow said to a church leader, "I don't agree with you on what constitutes sin."

The leader replied, "You don't have to. Just repent for what you know is sin!"

Those Pharisees and teachers of the law were looking direct at Truth and refused to accept Him. (*Read Jesus' response, vv. 39-40.*)

ILLUS. Among all the patriarchs, prophets, and Bible heroes painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, the most beautiful, outstanding figure is Jonah. Jonah's symbol or sign testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Down in the catacombs near Rome, you can see tracings of early Christian art on the walls. The most familiar figure is the sign of Jonah—revived in recent years. The great fish—the sign of Jonah—became the symbol of the Resurrection. Today you see it displayed on bumper stickers, shop windows, T-shirts, and posters. Most people do not know that it is the sign of Jonah.

Jesus was saying to the Pharisees: "You are asking for a sign. I am God's Sign. You have failed to recognize Me." Jesus is God's Sign, just as Jonah was God's sign or message to Nineveh. God remains a mystery until we accept His revelation in Christ Jesus.

The Lord refers to Jonah's captivity in the belly of a great ordained fish and his divine expulsion from it in order to carry out God's commission. The whole ordained fish event illustrates Jesus' burial and resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus was the number one issue of the Early Church. The preaching of the Early Church centered on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. The Resurrection was the only proof needed.

The resurrection of Jesus is sufficient proof. If the sign

of Jonah was sufficient to make Nineveh without excuse before God, how much more accountable are we who have heard of the risen Savior.

If you insist that you can't believe, generally it's because you don't want to obey. Sure, people have honest intellectual problems and doubts—don't you? But too often unbelief is a screen to cover our secret disobedience.

You may say, "I don't understand all of this." Never hesitate on that account. If a man is drowning and someone throws him a lifejacket, he doesn't argue: "I won't put this lifejacket on until I know if it's made from rubber, plastic, or cork. I must first know if the material is strong enough to hold me." No, he grasps at anything close enough to save him.

You don't need special signs to believe. You need to grasp Him who is standing near. Jesus is the "Hand let down to save us"!

ILLUS. Lin Yü-t'ang, Chinese philosopher, denounced Christianity and wrote a book telling why he was a pagan. After the passing of many years, he discovered life to be barren. He returned to the Christian faith and to Jesus Christ of the Cross. He wrote another book explaining why he had turned to Christ in desperation. One chapter ends with these triumphant words: "Put out the candles! The Sun is up!"

Yes, Jesus is alive and available to you!

III. We Want Proof Instead of the Presence of God

The critics were saying, "We want something spectacular to hold us over in Your absence."

Jesus illustrated with a little story. (*Read vv. 43-45.*)

This story has been called the parable of the haunted house. The empty house represents the heart of a person trying to reform himself. Notice, "It finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order" (v. 44)—immaculate but empty. Such a person longs to be free of evil influences. He removes the rubbish from his life. He breaks bad habits. He externally cleans up his life. However, suddenly the sin nature turns and is worse than before.

Why did that person fail? He failed because he fixed his mind on the evil to be driven away instead of on the good that should take its place. He focused his attention on the weeds instead of on the harvest of wheat. Negative religion always ends in failure!

The truth of this story warns us that life does not exist in a vacuum. A good moral man remarks, "I've never

done anything wrong or bad." Yet, he is unable to point to any positive good for the kingdom of God. Nothingness is dangerous.

The point of the parable is painfully clear. A person purged of evil must be filled. Something or someone will fill the emptiness. What will fill the vacuum? The Bible says, "Him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17, KJV).

ILLUS. Dr. Jung, noted psychiatrist, said, "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness." Since he wrote that statement, he himself has become a Christian. He has accepted Jesus as the Lord to fill the void in his own life!

It is not enough to empty yourself of evil. You must be filled with the Spirit of Christ. You must not only be sterilized from sin but also made fruitful for the Master. Therefore, our aim is not only the absence of evil but also the positive presence of Jesus abiding within.

You don't need signs or miracles to sustain you. You need the presence of Jesus. He does not have to prove His presence by some special kind of feeling, gift, or miracle. His presence and love are self-evident. By faith I take Jesus. I can have the consciousness that wherever I go, God is there!

Don't look for a sign. Look for Jesus. Are you telling yourself, "I've tried before and just can't make it"? If you fell into a ditch, you wouldn't say, "I've tried to walk, but I've failed. I'm going to stay in here." No, you would keep trying to walk.

Are you telling yourself, "I can't hold out"? You don't have to hold out or hold on or turn loose. We simply come by faith in Jesus. He promises to help us moment by moment.

Are you telling yourself, "I will become a Christian some other time"? The devil doesn't care if you feel convicted for your sin or not. If he can get you to postpone your decision, he figures to win the battle. The Bible teaches, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Don't put it off.

Are you telling yourself, "I don't know what to do to become a Christian"? First, acknowledge your sins to Jesus: "O Lord, I confess I have sinned. I have broken Your laws. I am guilty." Second, turn from your sins and accept Jesus as your Savior. Trust Jesus to forgive you right now.

Are you wondering, "Can a little thing like going forward change my life"? No! Jesus Christ changes us. He makes us children of God.

DO YOU WANT TO BE JESUS' FAMILY?

by Randal E. Denny

Matt. 12:46-50

Cf. Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21

July 14, 1996

INTRO:

The hostess conducting the party in her home had a little six-year-old girl. As the ladies arrived for the party, the mother put her little girl in a back room and instructed her to stay there. The child played alone but finally got very bored. After a long time, she stuck her head out the door and complained, "Mama, don't any of these women have a home?"

That's how Jesus' mother and brothers felt. Teachers of the law and Pharisees tagged along with Jesus. At first curious, they evolved into hecklers. An increasing number of disciples surrounded Jesus day after day. Crowding into houses where Jesus visited, they zealously learned more about the kingdom of God. It seemed everyone pushed and shoved to get a closer look at Jesus or to hear His words more clearly.

How did Jesus' family feel? His mother and brothers stood outside wishing everyone would go home so Jesus could return to be with His family.

Jesus mildly rebuked His impatient family. They must not restrict and reorder His life as they think best. He had come to serve God—not to conserve himself. He asked, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to the circle of attentive disciples, Jesus said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (vv. 48-50).

Jesus forever closed the door on the idea of kinship with Him by racial or hereditary lineage. Here He taught three important facts.

I. We Know Jesus by Personal Quest

No one becomes a child of God by human parentage. God has no grandchildren. We only know Him by seeing Him ourselves in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit leaves no hand-me-downs or religious heirlooms. Parents may act as spiritual guardians and advisers, provide religious training, and demonstrate a good Christian example. However, each person must come to Jesus individually. Tragically, some people seeking happiness pass up what is available right under their own roof.

An ancient Persian named Al Hafed owned a large farm. By standards of his day, he was a contented and wealthy man.

A traveling priest visited Al Hafed one evening. He spoke about spectacular diamonds found in distant lands. Diamonds would make a man extremely rich.

Suddenly, Al Hafed was a discontented man. He sold his farm, left his family, and set out to find diamonds. He searched to the ends of civilization without success. Discouraged, discontented, penniless, and in rags, Al Hafed threw himself into the sea and drowned.

Meanwhile, back at the farm, the new owner of Al Hafed's fields had taken possession. One day, leading his

camel to drink from a clear brook, he noticed a curious glimmer. Reaching into the water, he pulled out a stone—a diamond in the rough. As he stirred around in the sand, his finger uncovered other diamonds. While Al Hafed was plodding his weary path in search of riches, he had left behind literally "acres of diamonds."

Friends, don't be too quick to throw aside the faith of your early years. You can find the richness of Jesus Christ and experience His joy if you will seek Him right where you are.

We often put the demands of discipleship in fine print—for fear we'll scare away uncommitted "prospects." Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). You can't fool a person into the kingdom of God. Each one must seek and find Jesus for himself. Each one must personally pay the price of repentance.

When a person really seeks and finds God, nothing can shake him. Daniel chose rather to be cast into the lions' den with God than to live in the palace without Him.

II. We Know Jesus by Hearing and Obeying God's Will

Jesus turned away from His mother and brothers. Pointing to the disciples sitting at His feet, He demonstrated that we really get to know Him by hearing and obeying God's Word.

At this point, none of Jesus' brothers believed Him to be the Messiah. Later, James and Jude both became followers of Jesus and writers of the New Testament letters bearing their names. However, they did not become Christians because they were Jesus' brothers. They became Christians because they heard and obeyed God's Word.

The Old Testament had been handed down through parental lineage. The new covenant would be applied individually. God's family extends beyond the bounds of blood or race. The fellowship of believers includes all who hear and obey God's will. Entering the kingdom of God, we enter into the family of all the saints in heaven and earth. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). Those who love Jesus find great fellowship together. An early martyr said, "A Christian's only relatives are the saints."

Obedience binds all of Jesus' disciples together and binds them to himself. Good works do not save us. However, the way to heaven goes the way of obedience to God. Come to Jesus; listen to His voice; and do what He says.

Don't bother to give God instructions. Simply report for duty. Jesus teaches all who obey Him. We learn as we obey.

ILLUS. Dr. Jonathan Goforth spoke at a prayer meeting where attendance was skimpy. The pastor apologized, "Why don't people come to pray?"

The old veteran replied, "Because they don't believe God. If they really believed He meets with us when we gather in His name, and if they loved Him, nothing could keep them away."

ILLUS. A Scottish minister in a highland village made a pastoral call on a couple. He wished to encourage them to deeper commitment to God. He walked through their gate, passed the well-kept garden, and knocked at the door. When the lady of the house opened her door, he removed his hat and asked, "Does Jesus live here?"

Taken back, the lady didn't quite know how to respond or what to say. So he asked again, "Does Jesus live here?"

She dismissed herself for a moment and ran back to her husband at the back of the house: "John, the minister is here. He asked a strange question. John, he asked, 'Does Jesus live here?'"

Her husband replied, "Mary, did you tell him that on the Lord's day we go to church—and we put money in the plate? Did you tell him that, Mary?"

"Aye, aye," said Mary. "I thought of that, John. But the minister asked, 'Does Jesus live here?' And that's different, John, that's different!"

It is different. God doesn't need our money. He wants us. He desires obedience, not sacrifice. We must be willing to learn.

III. We Know Jesus by Close Fellowship with Him

To be in Jesus' family means to be surrendered to His will. As we yield ourselves totally to God, the Holy Spirit within empowers us. In His power, we enjoy fellowship with Jesus Christ. Before being martyred by Hitler, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is wrong to speak of the Christian life; we should speak rather of Christ living in us!"

The holy life is the surrendered life, the Spirit-filled life, the sin-cleansed life, the empowered life. God calls us to be holy as He is holy. Holiness is for Christlike behavior.

ILLUS. Many powerless Christians resemble the farmer who often remarked: "On the whole, I'm a pretty good man. I've cheated a little, and sometimes I get mad and swear. But then I'm honest most of the time. I rarely go to church, but I give some money to the poor. I never get drunk. So, on the whole, I think I have a pretty high batting average with the Lord."

One day he hired a man to build a fence around his field. He gave careful instructions on how he wanted it done. Upon completion, he asked the hired man if it had been done according to orders.

The hired man said: "It's pretty well built on the whole. I can't say it's perfect—just a good, average fence. There are some weak spots, but other places are extrastrong. I left a little gap here and there, but I made up for it by doubling the wire in other places. On the whole,

I would have to say that I have a pretty good average as a fence builder."

The farmer was furious: "That fence is no good! The cattle will tear down the weak places and go right through those gaps without effort. That's a lousy fence!"

Isn't it strange that average fences are not acceptable, while average lives are presumed acceptable? Jesus expects more!

You may be committed to a project but not be surrendered to it. You may be committed in marriage by solemn vows but not be inwardly surrendered to your partner. A soldier may be outwardly committed to military service but not be inwardly surrendered to it.

You may try to be a Christian because you know you ought to be one. You may have asked God to forgive your sins—and inwardly not be surrendered to Jesus. Surrender is God's answer. More than a begrudging commitment, surrender is the happy yielding of ourselves to God's love and will.

ILLUS. A Roman historian told of a man who sent a present to Caesar while he was leading a rebellion against Caesar. Caesar returned the gift with the instructions: "First, yield obedience; and then make presents."

If you've made up your mind to serve God, yield your obedience to Him now. Surrender everything—including yourself. I urge you "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1).

Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). We are Jesus' true family when we have surrendered to "his good . . . and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).



"... I was sure I had a Bible here, somewhere!"

THE MIRACLE OF SUFFICIENCY

by Randal E. Denny

John 6:1-14; cf. Matt 14:13-21;

Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17

July 21, 1996

INTRO:

The disciples huddled together, recognizing their embarrassment that afternoon: "All those hungry people out there wanting bread—and us with no dough."

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle to appear in all four Gospels. It demonstrated the miracle of God's promise (2 Cor. 12:9).

Jesus came, not to amaze spectators, but to satisfy the hunger of the human heart.

I. Notice the Selfish Crowd (vv. 1-5)

A. The crowd was huge. This well-documented miracle took place, not in the presence of a few, but before the eyes of a great crowd of people. John tells us it included 5,000 men alone.

B. The crowd was hungry. They had walked all day. Jesus had sailed across the lake, but the people hiked around the north end. They came to Jesus late in the day after a long day's walk—and they were hungry.

C. The crowd was selfish. John specifically noted: "The Jewish Passover Feast was near" (v. 4). These travelers were making their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast—only men were required to go.

Obscured in the unspoken cultural traditions is the fact that every pilgrim to the Holy City carried a wicker basket strapped on his shoulders—a Jewish backpack called a *koffeno*. Every traveling Jew carried his *koffeno* for a reason: Jews had strict regulations about food. Their food must be prepared in a prescribed way and blessed in the name of the Lord God. Therefore, traveling Jews always carried their *koffeno* especially fitted with *kosher* food. Kosher foods are still available to Jews today.

John again mentions these backpacks when the apostles gathered up and filled the "twelve baskets with the pieces . . . left over by those who had eaten" (v. 13). What does this mean? Most of the pilgrims were unwilling to share with those who had little or no food. Evidently Jesus and His disciples had empty backpacks, because they used them as leftover containers. The crowd sat, pretending to be empty-handed.

Our world is full of people with a deep spiritual hunger. Who helps them? When the basket of finance is passed among religious people, some sit there without contributing: "Sorry, but I have nothing to share!"

II. Notice the Searching Question (vv. 5-6)

Jesus never asked, "How much will it cost?" He was asking, "Where are your resources, Philip?" Why did Jesus ask this question? To help Philip discover his inadequate understanding of God's sufficiency. "He asked this only to test him."

Jesus does not ask, "How much can you afford to build

My Church?" He asks, "Where will you turn for the resources for your spiritual needs?"

When we ask, "How much?" Jesus interrupts by asking, "Where are your resources? To whom will you turn? Who is the source of your sufficiency?" After all, whom do we serve?

III. Notice the Sad Reply (v. 7)

Philip thinks too narrowly: "Have a bite!" He could only see the inadequacy of his own little wallet. Beyond his tiny, half-empty bag of money, Philip could see no hope on the horizon.

I am faced with feeding 5,000 traveling men. If I ask an atheist, "What shall I do?" his first question would be: "How much money do you have?"

If our Christian service depends only on our resources, we'll never have enough. Learn to rely on God. He loves to explode the myths of our small thoughts.

Matthew records an additional insight (14:14-16).

Philip thought it was a good idea to send the people away. Instead, Jesus invited them to join Him for dinner. Today Jesus says to us: "Your neighbors and friends are spiritually malnourished. They need the Bread of Life. Don't send them away. Give them something to eat." Without Jesus, the 5,000 would have gone hungry. Without Jesus, your friends and relatives are going to hell.

Jesus insists that the crowd's needs can be met—if we look beyond ourselves to the sufficiency of God's grace. D. L. Moody penned in the margin of his Bible next to this story: "When the Lord is your Partner, make your plans big!"

IV. Notice How Jesus Uses Simple Things (vv. 8-9)

Out of that huge crowd, one little boy offered his sack lunch to Jesus. Jesus' touch gives simple things a grandeur.

Five barley loaves and two small fish! In that culture it equaled crackers and peanut butter. Only farm animals and the very poor ate barley in Jesus' day. Dried fish was an ordinary snack—nothing you would serve to company around Galilee.

Jesus liked to use common, ordinary things—and people. God does amazing things with committed common folk—more than all the modern "Christian stars" put together.

Like Andrew, we ask, "But how far will they go among so many?" (v. 9). While you're wondering, Jesus says, "Bring them here to me" (Matt. 14:18). That's all He asks—bring to Him what we have.

V. Notice How Jesus Uses Surrendered Gifts (vv. 10-11)

Have you ever thought about the mechanics of "Operation Food"? I'm sure Jesus would bring the element of faith into it.

Jesus took those five loaves and broke them up and placed a piece of barley into each of the 12 backpacks. Taking two fish, He broke them into equal pieces and distributed about one-sixth of a fish into each backpack. As the disciples went down the rows, each person reached into the backpack to be served. The disciple himself had to exercise faith at this point. He had to feed approximately 415 persons from one-sixth of a little fish and from two-fifths of a barley loaf.

Andrew walks up to the first man on the front row and offers him the backpack. The man reaches in and pulls out his portions. Andrew knows enough about mathematics to know the backpack should now be empty. Without peeking, Andrew stepped up to the next person and made the same offer. Lo, he, too, had something to eat. It took faith just to keep on going to the next person. Surely his piece of fish and bread would run out—but Andrew kept walking in obedience to Jesus. There was always sufficient. In fact, more than enough—seconds, thirds—until John wrote, they had “as much as they wanted” (v. 11).

Corrie ten Boom told of an experience during her imprisonment under Hitler’s Nazi Germany for helping Jews escape:

Another strange thing was happening. The [vitamin] bottle was continuing to produce drops. It scarcely seemed possible, so small a bottle, so many doses a day. Now, in addition to Betsie, a dozen others on our pier were taking it.

My instinct was always to hoard it—Betsie was growing so very weak! But the others were ill as well. It was hard to say no to eyes that burned with fever, hands that shook with chill. I tried to save it for the very weakest—but even those soon numbered 15, 20, 25. . . .

And still, every time I tilted the little bottle, a drop appeared at the tip of the glass stopper. It just couldn’t be! I held it up to the light, trying to see how much was left, but the dark brown glass was too thick to see through.

“There was a woman in the Bible,” Betsie said, “whose oil jar was never empty.” She turned to it in the Book of [First] Kings, the story of the poor widow of Zarephath who gave Elijah a room in her house: “The jar of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of Jehovah, which he spake by Elijah” [ASV].

Well—but—wonderful things happened all through the Bible. It was one thing to believe that such things were possible thousands of years ago, another to have it happen now, to us, this very day. And yet it hap-

pened this day, and the next, and the next, until an awed little group of spectators stood around watching the drops fall onto the daily rations of bread.

Many nights I lay awake in the shower of straw dust from the mattress above, trying to fathom the marvel of supply lavished upon us. “Maybe,” I whispered to Betsie, “only a molecule or two really gets through that little pinhole—and then in the air it expands!”

I heard her soft laughter in the dark. “Don’t try too hard to explain it, Corrie. Just accept it as a surprise from a Father who loves you.”*

VI. Notice the Satisfied Servants (vv. 12-13)

Two beautiful lessons stand out here.

A. Jesus always takes care of His workers. When all had plenty, 12 basketsful were left over—1 for each of the 12 disciples. He promises to supply their needs: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

B. God often rewards us and blesses us through the people whom we have served. These backpacks were empty or near empty when they finished serving the people. The leftovers were not left in the packs. They were handed back by those who had received from them.

The word for “pieces” in Jesus’ command, “Gather the pieces that are left over,” is the word *peab*. Jewish custom dictated that if the service was good, the diner left some food for the servants. Today we call it the “TIPS”—the acronym for “To Insure Proper Service.” The *peab* was the TIPS for those who had served, given by the people who had received dinner from their hands.

That is one of the greatest rewards of Christian service. Those whom you have helped, have won to Jesus, have nourished on God’s Word shall often pay back unexpected dividends. What untold blessings flow from the hearts of God’s people! In fact, more than TIPS, “*Great is your reward in heaven*” (Matt. 5:12).

Matthew wrote, “They all ate and were satisfied” (14:20). Again and again our limited needs are met by Jesus’ endless resources.

Don’t you wonder what the little boy said to his mother that night? His eyes big with excitement, he told how his barley loaves and fish multiplied in Jesus’ strong hands until a vast crowd was fed to sufficiency. Perhaps with a grin, he asked, “Mom, I wonder if it would be like that with everything I give to Jesus?”

*Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1971), 202-3.

CONQUEST OVER DOUBT

by Randal E. Denny

Matt. 14:22-33

Cf. Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21

July 28, 1996

INTRO:

When election night was over, incumbent U.S. Senator Frank J. Lausche's long career had ended. At 72 years of age, the senator said in his concession speech, "The world is changing."

Our world is changing drastically. Old landmarks have been torn down. Long-accepted ideas have often ended up obsolete. Doubts have settled like a ground fog—but the Sun of Righteousness remains in His chartered course.

In Arlington National Cemetery rests the grave of William Jennings Bryan, that great statesman who stood solidly for Jesus. On his simple gravestone are engraved these words: "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief."

Most of us have breathed that same prayer. With changing scenes, doubts arise. Any thinking Christian has to admit: "Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief."

Roy Stults, editor of *World Mission* magazine, saw a sign on a college campus, placed beside the lake: "Please do not walk on the water." It seems people are afraid of the impossible. Jesus walked on the waters of fear and doubt to help His disciples. It is the story of conquest over doubt.

I. Doubts Come When Conflict and Frustration Arise

Having fed 5,000 men from five barley loaves and two fish, Jesus told His disciples to sail over to Capernaum. Jesus went off to be alone and to pray on a mountain at the north end of the lake. While the disciples sailed toward Capernaum, their headquarters, a storm arose. Storms even lash out at those following Jesus.

"But the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it" (v. 24).

When we get our eyes on the waves, frustration builds. If we will remember that Jesus sent us, doubts and fears become unnecessary baggage.

To make matters worse, "the wind was against it." They faced head winds. Rowing in such conditions makes it difficult to keep a boat headed into the wind, much less to make progress. As they sailed, they had to tack back and forth. The state of the art of sailing did not allow them to go upwind very much.

Questions began to take their toll: "If Jesus wanted us here, why did He let this storm come up?"

There's a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is "I can't believe." Unbelief is "I won't believe." Doubt is honesty. Unbelief is stubbornness. Doubt looks for light. Unbelief is content to remain in darkness.

It's bad to suppress doubts. It's better to face them honestly.

II. Doubts Bring Darkness to the Spirit

Night had fallen over the struggling disciples. The

storm seemed at its worst during the fourth watch—from 3 A.M. to 6 A.M. Doubts pull down the shades on hope.

You may be in a time of darkness of spirit. Perhaps your desire to pray is gone. The Bible seems a closed book. There's no conscious sense of God's presence. You feel emotionally dry and unmoved. Faith is but a dim memory.

ILLUS. Cardinal Manning experienced a great depression and darkening of his faith. During that time, he went into a bookstore and saw one of his own books advertised, titled *Faith in God*. Waiting for a copy of his book to be sent up from the storeroom, he heard a clerk call up from the basement, "Manning's *Faith in God* all gone!"

It's folly to say, "Lord, I will never doubt You again." You may be forced to retract that statement or be dishonest. To question is not to destroy your relationship with God. Only as you repudiate His work in your heart does His Spirit recede. Even when you sincerely question, God does not withdraw His Spirit.

III. Jesus Comes to Us Above Our Doubts

"During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake" (v. 25). In those long, dark, distressing hours of storm and doubt and danger, Jesus saw His disciples—even though they didn't see Him. "He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them" (Mark 6:48).

A. Jesus came during their darkest hours. He always does! In my moments of deepest distress and doubt and questioning, even when I don't sense Him near, Jesus has promised, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20, κϒ).

B. Jesus came striding across the distressing waves. What seems our point of doubt is nothing for the Master. He steps right over and comes to our side.

ILLUS. Ancient Egyptians had no alphabet. Their hieroglyphics were little pictures that portrayed ideas. The Egyptian hieroglyphic to express the idea of impossibility was a picture of two feet walking on waves. Jesus specializes in the impossible.

C. Jesus called those disciples in the darkness: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (v. 27). Seeing someone mysteriously approaching over the water put fear in them. They thought it must be a ghost! But Jesus called a word of assurance. Sometimes we fail to recognize Jesus as He comes to us through the storms. In His own way, He calls: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Jesus is standing near.

The Bible urges: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

Peter called out, "Lord, if it's you . . . tell me to come to you on the water" (v. 28). Peter was not so eager for a miracle as he was eager to be with Jesus. His request was

not for showmanship, but the response of impulsive love. "Lord, let me come close to You!" Jesus knows us. What may sound like poor judgment or impulsive reaction, Jesus knows is our intense devotion to Him.

D. Jesus invites us to come to Him. In that dark hour, Jesus invited Peter, "Come" (v. 29). Jesus never even hinted for Peter to reason it out first, but: "Come. Step out on faith!"

Never let what you don't know disturb your faith in what you do know. You cannot rationally explain the experience of hearing a Beethoven symphony by analyzing the sheep gut of violin strings. You cannot explain the experience of majesty in hearing Handel's *Messiah* sung over television by analyzing the kilowatts involved.

The invitation to the honest seeker is, "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psa. 34:8).

IV. We Make Our Way Through Our Doubts by Keeping Our Eyes on Jesus

When Jesus beckoned, Peter stepped out into the unknown by faith in Jesus' word. He, too, did the impossible! Peter walked on water toward Jesus, though he couldn't explain it.

Peter was doing quite well as he approached Jesus. Suddenly, he looked away from the Lord. Maybe Andrew warned him about a big wave advancing on his starboard side. Seeing the wind and waves, the swirling, tossing storm, Peter was overcome by doubt and fear. Down he went. A person begins to sink the minute he ceases to look up to Jesus.

In moments of doubt, you may get mixed up about what to believe. But if you'll focus on Jesus again, you will get straightened out. What really counts is not "What do I believe?" but "Whom do I trust?" Put your faith in God—not in people or even the organized church. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He will not let you down!

ILLUS. George Whitefield asked a man, "What do you believe?"

The man replied, "I believe what the church believes."

Whitefield asked, "And what does your church believe?"

Again the man answered, "Oh, the church believes what I believe."

Whitefield pressed, "What do you both believe?"

The man replied, "The same as each other."

The Greek word for "doubt" means "pulled in two ways." That's what happened to Peter. Peter's trust in Jesus' power gave way to his working knowledge of the power of the storm. But the storm did not endanger Pe-

ter; his littleness of faith did that. Doubts overwhelmed Peter.

Peter then prayed the shortest prayer in the Bible: "Lord, save me!" (v. 30). You can't cut any word out of that prayer and get the same thing! The Greek text means, "Lord, save me, and do it quickly!" Poor Peter always seems to be falling, but he never finally failed. Always in his moment of failure, Peter clutched for Jesus.

The wonderful thing about Peter is that every time he fell, he rose again by faith. Even his failures brought him closer to Jesus. A saint is not someone who never falls, but a person who gets up and goes on again every time he fails. Peter's failure made him love Jesus even more.

V. The Presence of Jesus Conquers over Doubt

Poor Peter, slipping beneath the waters of the storm in his doubts! But Jesus reached down and took hold of him. In spite of our doubts, Jesus rescues and keeps us.

While you may founder in doubts and frustrations, Jesus is standing by to reach down and set your feet on the solid Rock. Paul testified, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). Look to Jesus through the fog of your doubts!

Jesus and Peter walked together over the storm toward the boat. Turning to Peter, Jesus asked, "You of little faith . . . why did you doubt?" (v. 31). "Peter, what made you lose your nerve like that?" Jesus didn't rebuke Peter for his request to walk on the water, but for his unbelief.

We imperil ourselves when we take our eyes off Jesus and concentrate on our weaknesses, worries, and temptations. In Jesus, we have an ongoing victory over tendencies that would pull us down. Jesus doesn't rebuke us for attempting too much, but for trusting Him too little. No one can live in doubt when he has prayed in faith.

When Jesus picked up Peter, drenched like an old shaggy dog, I don't think Jesus was scolding, "You of little faith . . . why did you doubt?" I think Jesus was smiling and amused—laughing *with* Peter!

ILLUS. The terrified passengers huddled together one night in the sailing ship's main cabin. Their safety seemed threatened by the storm. Finally a passenger got the courage to crawl up on deck. Moments later he came back with a new glint of hope in his eyes. "We're going to make it. In the flash of the lightning, I caught a glimpse of the skipper's face, and he was smiling."

Jesus lifts you with His loving arms out of the angry waves. Love conquers doubt!

THE BREAD OF LIFE

by Randal E. Denny

John 6:22-26, 30-35, 41-42, 48-59

August 4, 1996

INTRO:

After feeding the 5,000 pilgrims returning from Jerusalem with five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus told His disciples to take a boat ride across the lake to Capernaum, His headquarters. He would meet them later. First, He must spend some time alone in prayer.

During that night, the traveling pilgrims went to sleep on a full stomach. The disciples of Jesus battled a terrifying storm in their little sailboat. Sometime during the fourth watch, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Peter, in his impetuous way, wanted to walk to Jesus. So, by Jesus' invitation, Peter miraculously walked toward Jesus on the water until his doubts got the best of him. At last, Jesus and His 12 disciples landed safely on shore.

On that bright morning, the pilgrims began searching for Jesus. He had last been seen walking alone in the hills, and His disciples had set sail in their boat without Jesus. How surprised they were to find Jesus with them in Capernaum! The huge crowd still wanted to acclaim Jesus as King. They had hopes of another tremendous banquet at the miraculous hands of Jesus.

The excited crowds hoped to see more signs and miracles to bolster their faith in Jesus as the coming Messiah. The superficial crowd issued their ultimatum to Jesus: "If You do it our way, we'll have faith in You!" It sounds as if they were selling their votes.

Jesus confronted them, "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (v. 26).

As Jesus emphasized the spiritual demands of discipleship, the huge crowd lost interest. When He fed their bodies, they thought He was special. They wanted Him for their King! People generally expected the Messiah to usher in a social order of Jewish superiority and benevolence—a way to get bread without working.

Jesus issued a sharp rebuke: "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

The Jews asked: "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (vv. 30-31).

Jesus corrected their error—Moses didn't give bread at all. God had done it! In fact, the Israelites murmured against Moses because they had to eat manna, the bread-like provision. Jesus added, "It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . . I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (vv. 32-33, 35).

Jesus follows this theme throughout His discourse on the Bread of Life, including most of John 6. In it, Jesus applies the theme to himself as the Bread of Life. Bread is

the staple food in the village. Every meal consists of bread eaten with some other food to add flavoring.

The villager eats his meal by breaking off small pieces of bread and dipping them in the common dish.

ILLUS. Saturday, February 4, 1995, was the birthday of our daughter, Shelley. We offered to take her and her husband to dinner at a place of her choosing. Shelley wanted to try something different. She selected the Marrakesh, a Moroccan restaurant. The style of eating was exactly the same as in the culture of Jesus' day. Our tabletop served as our plate. Various kinds of dishes were served, such as rice and lamb shish kebab, flavored vegetables, meatballs, and sauces. A basket of bread was passed around. The bread became our only utensils for eating, beside our fingers. You must skillfully work your piece of bread into the communal dish and come out with something on it. My bread was usually only flavored with whatever sauces were mixed into the dishes. I wasn't very good at it. But the food looked good!

The very word "bread" has strong emotional overtones missing in English translations. The villager says, "We are a people who eat bread." He means by that, "We are poor and have very little else to eat." A man does not work to "make a living." Rather, he works to "eat bread." Their language was full of idioms referring to bread. Life itself was called "the eating of bread."

I. Bread Symbolizes That Which Sustains Life

As always, bread has been a synonym for the staff of life. People must have bread to live—meaning the physical necessities. During Jesus' powerful temptation in the wilderness, He quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy: "Man does not live on bread alone" (Matt. 4:4).

Bread represents all food, all nourishment for life, without which death would be sure to come. Applying this truth to himself, Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

ILLUS. John T. Seamands wrote: "Among the tribal people in the mountains of New Guinea, there is no such thing as bread. They have no word for 'bread.' The staple food of these people is the sweet potato, which they eat two or three times a day, day in and day out. So the words of Jesus, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:48), are translated as 'I am the sweet potato of life.' This, of course, conveys the real meaning of the words of Jesus and makes sense to the people of New Guinea."

Faith in Jesus is not compared to admiring Him at a distance, but with digesting Him for nourishment. We are to assimilate Jesus and His words into our system. We are nourished on Him who is God's Word: "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

II. Bread Symbolizes God's Great Provision for Human Need

The Jewish pilgrims brought up the discussion of God's

provision in the days following the Exodus from Egypt. Those were times when the Israeli people hungered in the deserted wilderness, so God provided manna. It's as though they were saying to Jesus: "Yesterday You fed us. Today we have come looking for another meal from You. All You're giving us today is talk about having faith in You. Moses did better than that! He gave fresh manna every morning! Either produce—or we will not follow You."

As Jesus pointed out, Old Testament manna was a gift from God. The strange, but nourishing breadlike substance always provided enough for each day's need for each person. One could gather all he or she needed for that day. But manna couldn't be hoarded or kept over for another day. It would spoil if one tried to keep it for future provisions. Manna would spoil if not used immediately. Manna gave nourishment, but not life. It perished, and so did Israel.

Jesus announced that He was the living Bread—the true Bread. The Old Testament manna was only a type or shadow of heaven's true Bread—Jesus Christ.

Compare the qualities of Old Testament manna with our New Testament Jesus—God's true Bread. Jesus came from God as God's Gift or provision for our daily needs. Seven times the phrase "coming down" is used in John 6. Jesus was saying, "Not only do I give you more than Moses gave your fathers, but I am the Father's Gift!"

As enough manna was given for each day's needs, Jesus, the true Bread, brings grace enough for each day's needs. He emphasized often: "Don't worry. God takes care of birds and flowers. You are more important to Him than they. Trust Me a day at a time." Jesus says, "It is my Father who gives you the true bread" (v. 32). The Greek present tense suggests His giving is a continual process. He keeps on giving day by day.

Manna perished and a whole generation of Israel died in the wilderness, but Jesus, the living Bread, has eternally lasting results. Jesus declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Jesus never fails!

III. Bread Symbolizes Jesus' Mission

In three important ways, bread symbolizes Jesus' mission.

A. Common bread emphasizes the incarnation of Christ. I like the way Jesus always took common, earthy, everyday items as lessons or illustrations or aids to memory. People in Jesus' day ate bread twice every day. Jesus identifies with our workaday world. He came to walk among us, not to be cooped up in slightly used sanctuaries.

B. Common bread reminds us that Jesus is readily available to everyone. Jesus is as accessible to us as a crust of bread is available to anyone in town.

What could taste better now than fresh strawberry pie? But it is out of season. There's never enough at today's prices for us to satisfy everyone's appetite for strawberry pie. I'm glad Jesus didn't think of himself as strawberry pie. Jesus saw himself as a piece of bread—always available, in season and out of season, in hard times and good times, and always readily accessible.

C. Common bread is broken for a world to share. At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread again and demonstrated how He, the Bread of Life, would be broken for you and me. Brokenness says, "I am ready to be used." At the Last Supper, Jesus "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19).

When Jesus, the living Bread, died on the Cross, He suffered from a broken heart. He felt broken because He was rejected by the people whom He loved. He felt broken because we take it all so lightly. He felt broken because people forget there is no other way under heaven whereby we can be saved! "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3).

The broken bread soon to be passed among you reminds you that "Jesus loved you enough to be broken for you."

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty'" (v. 35). The habit of coming to Jesus is incompatible with unmet spiritual hunger and thirst.

The Lord's Supper is not a banquet for those who have arrived, but a picnic lunch for an army on the march!

Pontius' Puddle



WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE JESUS?

by Randal E. Denny

John 6:60-71

August 11, 1996

INTRO:

I find great joy in being a Christian. I feel doubly blessed to serve the Lord as a pastor over a congregation whom I deeply love. Yet I am saddened by people who once were excited about Jesus and were faithful in serving the church. Now they no longer walk with Jesus. Those losses make me wonder, "Is my ministry defective?" Like every other pastor, I take it personally. "Why do people leave Jesus?"

John wrote: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (6:66). Why would they leave Jesus?

Those people had witnessed miracles. They had heard Jesus teach with authority and had witnessed unusual events—yet they were reluctant to follow Him. It bothered Jesus, too, for He commented: "Yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:40). Even Jesus himself could not persuade everyone to follow Him. Why do people leave Jesus?

I. Some People Leave Jesus Because of the Price of Discipleship

Jesus said to one group: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). If you decide to follow Jesus, but start looking back at your old life left behind, with a sense of longing desire, you aren't fit to be Jesus' disciple.

To another group, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:25). If you want to make your life count, you have to invest in others, not in yourself.

Jesus challenges every age: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). His demands cause some to turn away and no longer follow Jesus.

II. Some People Leave Jesus Because of Pride

Pride makes some people fearful of what others think of them. They hesitate to declare themselves as Christians.

Think of missed opportunities people have to say a word for Jesus, but their pride stops them.

Not so for one doctor, who said, "I never treat a patient without taking opportunity to say a word to him or her about what Jesus means to me."

III. Some People Leave Jesus Because of Hardness of Heart

Perhaps you have come up against new light from God's Word. You have refused to walk in the light. Your heart grows calloused to God's voice.

Every time Pharaoh refused to yield to God's instruction for Moses and His people, Pharaoh's heart grew more stubborn, calloused, and insensitive. Perhaps you have rejected the voice of Jesus until, even now, God has difficulty getting through to your heart. Jesus emphasized: "This is why

I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (v. 65). We can't just reel Jesus in and out of our lives at our own wish. We can only respond to God's invitation. Each time we ignore or reject Him, our hearts grow more and more hardened against God.

Don't harden your heart to the call of Jesus.

IV. Some People Leave Jesus Because of Doubt

If you feel sick, you go to a physician. He looks at you and says, "Uh-oh." Then he scribbles some unreadable Latin for a prescription. You take it to the druggist, who reads the note with a grim expression, then looks over his glasses at you, and says, "Hmmm!" You go home with a pill bottle to get well, convinced you are on the road to recovery. The medical doctor has been trained and properly licensed. You have faith in him. The druggist likewise has been schooled in chemistry to know the difference between aspirin and strychnine. You trust him.

But some people don't trust God's Word. The Bible insists: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Repentance involves confessing to God that you are a sinner and that you are now exercising faith in God's Word to believe He will forgive your sins. Doubt chooses to live by life's unanswered questions rather than to live by faith in God.

ILLUS. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (v. 66). Many of them were like a man who sits with his back to the sunset.

I describe its breath-taking beauty. He says: "I don't believe it. Prove it to me."

I reply: "I can't prove it to you. But turn around and look at it; it will prove itself to you."

He replies: "I won't. Prove it to me."

Is he fair? . . . He is unfair both to the sunset and . . . to himself.*

Don't let doubt lead you away from Jesus!

V. Some People Leave Jesus Because of the Priority of Pleasure

People say: "I am enjoying life as it is. Perhaps someday I'll give myself to the Lord." The Bible speaks about "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25, κῑν). Pleasures don't last. Once you discover that pleasures give no lasting joy, you become aware of the deep emptiness. Temporal things can never satisfy our spirit. We were made for God—and we'll never feel fulfilled apart from Him.

In high school days, I played football and took swimming under a tough coach, a former U.S. Navy frogman in World War II. He pushed discipline, practice, hard work. He never had room for foolishness. But his tough, severe demands brought out the best in us. We deeply respected him—and I do to this day. The delight came in winning. Under Coach Jack Skadden, you postponed pleasure to have the ultimate fun of excelling.

Following Jesus isn't a Sunday School picnic. He lays heavy claims on us and takes us through narrow passages and chastens whom He loves. But we find great joy in serving Him because we're on the winning side. I want to stay on His team!

VI. Some People Leave Jesus Because of Procrastination

Postponing our most important decision is dangerous. Satan delights when he hears you say to Jesus, "Tomorrow, tomorrow—some other time." Many people on the road of life are surprised to pass into eternity with good intentions, but without God. Don't put off the most important decision of your life until it's too late.

ILLUS. November 11, 1940, was a holiday. Around Minneapolis, it was duck season. Thousands of duck hunters huddled over the countryside waiting for the southern migration of ducks. About noon, it began to snow. By 3 P.M., a blizzard of great intensity struck the area. The storm shut workers off from their homes. Traffic slid to a stop. Nearly 100 people lost their lives as a result of that storm.

Bodies of duck hunters were found frozen. The reason: the ducks, driven by the storm, were coming out of the north by the thousands. Many hunters refused to leave, thinking that one or two more shots would be enough. They didn't attempt to leave until it was too late. They had waited too long. Fear gripped them for a while, but numbness of cold brings on the frightening attitude of indifference. This is the last step before a freezing man lies down to sleep—and die.

When a person grows cold in his own soul, it bothers him at first. Tragically, he gets less concerned, until he doesn't care whether he makes it or not. The attitude pervades: "I'll put it off a little longer. I'll wait until tomorrow—some other time."

Those were telling words that John recorded that day: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (v. 66). Let me ask you three questions:

A. If you walk away from Jesus, where will you take your sins? In the deserts of Sinai, the Israelites

complained against God. So, a plague of venomous snakes infested the camp, biting many people with their fangs of death. In response to their despair, God gave Moses a remedy—a brass snake on a pole. Whoever would look upon the brass snake would live and not die from the snakebite. Many centuries later, Jesus explained to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). So, if you ignore Jesus, where will you take your sins?

B. If you walk away from Jesus, where will you go when sorrow comes? Sorrow will come—to everyone. All other comforts fail and turn out to be empty promises. Wouldn't you really rather lean on Jesus?

C. If you walk away from Jesus, where will you go when death comes? Already some of my close friends have died. It makes you stop and think about where they are now. If you don't look to Jesus, where will you go when death comes? Jesus offers eternal life. Avoid the only other alternative at all costs.

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." The very next verses say: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God' (vv. 66-69).

And to whom will *you* go? Jesus' beloved parable of the prodigal son teaches us that you cannot come back so ragged that God will not clothe you, or so hungry that He will not feed you, or so sinful that He will not forgive you!

At this moment, you can ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69).

*E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Garden City, N.Y.: A Doubleday Galilee Book, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1978), 23.

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF THE CHURCH

by Randal E. Denny

Mark 7:1-23

Cf. Matt. 15:1-20

August 18, 1996

INTRO:

I saw a disturbing picture with a banner emblazoned with homemade printing: **"The Seven Last Words of the Church."** A cross was painted below with these seven words: **"We Never Did It That Way Before!"**

That's the reaction of traditionalists who are more interested in the form than in the power of the gospel. That's the cry of people to whom custom means more than evangelism.

People in one church reacted to their unexpected growth: "This is a little church, and we want to keep it that way." That attitude locks the church in the icy grip of tradition. Tradition can kill the spiritual life of the church.

Let's be responsive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We have a world to tell about Jesus—even if **"We never did it that way before."**

Jesus ran into this problem of calcified convention. Our Scripture lesson (Mark 7:1-23) sums up the great controversy that Jesus had with hard-core religious traditionalists. It turned out to be a head-on clash between traditional and spiritual perspectives. For the Pharisees and teachers of the law, religion was observing rules, regulations, and rituals. For Jesus, a relationship with God was a matter of the heart that expresses itself in compassion and kindness. That clash exists yet today.

The question arose: "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" (Matt. 15:2). The issue is not about cleanliness, but about an elaborate ritual to remove symbolic evil from their hands. They had a lot of rules that spelled out what was "clean" or "unclean." In fact, so many things were considered "unclean" that you would invariably make yourself defiled by simply walking through town. Since Gentiles lived in Israel, the very dust touched by a Gentile was considered "unclean." So the Pharisees developed an elaborate system of washings to make you "clean."

This rigidity Jesus had to confront. These rules and regulations had become the essence of religion. To observe them was to please God. To break them was to sin. Therefore, Jesus clashed with traditional religion because it was inadequate to save this poor, needy, unclean old world.

I. Tradition Emphasizes the Wrong Points

The Pharisees saw only little things—unwashed hands; but they missed the big things—Jesus bringing hope and healing to broken people. Legalists focus on regulations rather than redeeming lost people. The ruin of modern Christianity is putting fussy little things ahead of the deep, divine, inward things of God.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law only found fault with Jesus. They had not gathered to learn from Him, but to criticize. Those religious fellows had come to judge Jesus.

That's about as absurd as the nearsighted man and his wife touring the art gallery. Looking at an ornate frame and squinting critically at the portrait, the man said: "My goodness! That's the ugliest portrait I've ever seen!"

His wife tugged on his sleeve. "Come along, dear. That's a mirror!"

To criticize Jesus is to judge yourself.

II. Tradition, Whether Important or Not, Rules the Mind

The Pharisees assumed that because they washed their hands ceremoniously, it should always be done. No one knew why—it just had to be done. In fact, it was considered so serious that a person could be excommunicated for neglecting hand washing. I'm sure God is pleased with cleanliness, but not at the price of broken fellowship. However, this tradition must be carried out—and nobody knew why.

ILLUS. A bride served baked ham to her new husband. He noticed that the ends were cut off the ham. He asked why. She replied, "Well, that's the way Mother always did it."

The next time his mother-in-law visited, he asked her why she cut the ends off the ham.

She, too, replied, "That's the way my mother always did it."

When Grandma came, he inquired of her why she always sliced the ends off the hams. She said, "That's the only way I could get it into my small pan." Leaving the ham intact would elicit the response, **"We never did it that way before."**

To the legalists, Jesus said, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you. . . . 'They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'" (vv. 6-7). What a tragedy when we perpetuate people's opinions in place of God's Word! That's why some people endure religion while others enjoy salvation.

Those Pharisees confused their priorities. They neglected God's commandments while they held fast to traditions of men. Jesus said: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. . . . You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (vv. 8-9). Things that do not matter much became life-and-death issues with the legalists. To them, the prohibition of eating pork or rabbit was just as important as God's prohibition of adultery or murder. They got it all mixed up. In fact, to maintain some of their traditions, they actually violated the commands of God.

Jesus gave them an example. God had commanded, "Honor your father and your mother" (v. 10). That command included caring for their needs along with giving respect for their elders. Moses taught in the Old Testament: "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be

put to death" (v. 10). However, the self-centered traditionalists held to a custom that enabled them to avoid their responsibility of financial care for their parents. (*Read vv. 11-13.*)

If your parent came and requested help, you could officially dedicate all your money and property to God and the Temple. Then your property would be Corban—God-offered, dedicated to Him. You could tell your father or mother: "I'm sorry, but I can't give you anything. Everything belongs to God." The Jews had developed a regulation to bypass one of God's Ten Commandments. Our priorities need to be examined in the light of God's Word.

III. Tradition Governs External Religion, While God Deals with Our Inner Commitment

As a religious movement grows stale, its followers tend to emphasize external things more than inner communion with God. Jesus quoted God's word to Isaiah: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (v. 6).

Have you done all the expected religious things but found there's no joy? Have you no vital relationship with God? You don't enjoy a daily walk with Jesus. There's no spiritual glow in your heart from the freshness of the Holy Spirit. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage sale makes you an automobile. Where is your inner commitment to God?

A \$10 bill got into circulation and did a lot of good. It helped purchase fuel for a needy old woman, helped buy medicine for a sick child, and even showed up in the collection plate of a church one Sunday. However, it fell into the hands of a bank teller, who spotted it as counterfeit. The test is not how many good things you claim to your credit, but rather, can you pass inspection in God's sight? He knows what you really are inside.

Jesus referred to His critics as "hypocrites" (v. 6), meaning "actors." Their outward appearances were different than their inner commitments to God. That's the liability of the attitude that says, "We never did it that way before."

IV. Tradition Cannot Change Our Nature, but God's Grace Can

Defilement of one's character comes from within, your inner nature, not from things outside. Jesus said, "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'" (v. 15). What you eat or what you eat out of has nothing to do with defiling you. Your depraved sinful nature is the source of your sins—not temptations, or influences, or circumstances. Those things merely reveal what is inside you.

Jesus described the depraved nature within us. (*Read vv. 21-23.*)

Matthew's account of this same incident has these additional words of Jesus: "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (15:13). Jesus is talking about eradicating, plucking up by the roots, that sinful nature within. The Bible teaches us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the

devil's work" (1 John 3:8). Born with a sinful nature, we are saved "through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Our only remedy is God-given—holiness of heart and life! God's great grace has provided for us a new nature, free from sin's pollution.

ILLUS. A young man sat with a friend looking out the window of a café. The youth confessed to moral decline. He said: "I can't stand the kind of life I'm living. It is hell! I can't live with it anymore. I've got to get away from it."

Again he pleaded: "I've got to have help! I've fallen for all the talk that this was the kind of life to live. But there's no fun in it. And I feel dirty! Dirty! What will I do?"

The two gazed out the window toward a beautiful snowcapped mountain nearby. The young man continued: "I never saw anything like that. That's the way I want to be—clean, like that!"

The listening friend replied, "You can be, if you will bring Jesus Christ into your life."

"Oh, thank God!" the young man exclaimed. "That's what I wanted to hear you say!"

Yes, the Bible gives the solution for the sin problem: "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool'" (Isa. 1:18).

Nothing you can do will earn you God's saving grace. Only what Jesus Christ has done at the Cross for you can bring you into a saving, loving, intimate fellowship with God. And He alone can cleanse your heart and fill you with His Spirit.



"We used to be warned about FIRE and BRIMSTONE; now we're warned about GLOBAL WARMING."

TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD!

by Randal E. Denny

Mark 7:24-30

Cf. Matt. 15:21-28

August 25, 1996

INTRO:

God urges us to cast all our cares upon Him. A long parade of people still carry heavy burdens. People stagger under the weight of physical burdens—failing strength, chronic illness, or other “thorns in the flesh.” They feel the heavy weight of lost happiness, stifled ambitions, deep disappointments, anxiety, temptation, and the heavy burden of guilt—real and imagined. That parade plods by often unnoticed.

ILLUS. The preacher asked his little boy to get the big concordance off his desk. He was busy writing a sermon. So the lad went upstairs—but didn’t return. Soon the father heard his boy sobbing. He rushed up to find the little boy with the large book on the floor.

“Oh, Daddy,” he cried. “I can’t carry it. It’s too heavy for me!”

Quickly the father picked up both his son and the big book in his strong arms. Later, the preacher thought to himself: “That’s how God deals with His children when they cry to Him in need. He carries both His child and his burdens—and there’s no need for tears anymore.”

The Syrophenician woman carried a heartbreaking burden—but she refused to accept the tragic circumstances as inevitable. She expressed her heavy burden: “My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (Matt. 15:22). Hers had to be a heart-wrenching prayer.

News of Jesus spread like wildfire. Now here He was—and hope stirred within her.

Bring along your burdens, and follow this mother as she meets Jesus.

I. Jesus Stands Available to Your Need

(Read vv. 24-26.)

Jesus slipped north from Galilee to what today we call Lebanon. He needed rest. He had been surrounded by people. He had given himself in compassion and empathy. But it was difficult to conceal Jesus from human need. Though weary, He was available. He never did become calloused to heartaches and burdens.

ILLUS. Julia Ward Howe, composer of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” was trying to get a politician to give aid to a person in great need. The man in public office replied, “Julia, I’ve become so busy helping humanity I can no longer concern myself with individuals.”

Mrs. Howe responded, “Fortunately, at last report, God Almighty hasn’t reached that stage yet!”

Jesus has time for you and your burden today.

The woman came to Jesus in desperation. “She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter” (v. 26). The word “begged” is in a Greek tense that suggests, “She kept at it.” That mother wasn’t about to be turned away or denied. In Matthew’s account, she kept crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (15:22).

You may have reached the point of quiet desperation with your burden. Maybe you feel like the deep-sea diver who had just reached the ocean floor when a message came down from the surface ship, “Come up quick; the boat is sinking!” That’s really being down in the dumps!

Abraham Lincoln told a friend during the Civil War that he was often driven to his knees—for there was nowhere else to go!

Some people lack faith and submit meekly to their problems. Our God is able to deliver—why settle for less?

II. Jesus Understands Your Motivation

Jesus’ response to the Greek woman seems strange to us. He was testing her faith and character.

Matthew’s account shows her pleading desperately at Jesus’ feet: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

“Jesus did not answer a word” (15:22-23).

Jesus tested her faith with silence. Yet she kept right on pleading. Sometimes it seems God is silent. His silences can trouble and perplex us. Sometimes the spiritual disciplines of attending church, Bible reading, and prayer don’t seem to bring any break in God’s silence—that awesome hush between heaven and our hearts.

Burdens may seem so big and heavy that we don’t even expect God to hear our plea. Sometimes He seems mysteriously silent. But God is testing your faith—not your emotions. I don’t have the answers for those times—but I know He is still on His throne. He will not leave you alone, even when He seems silent.

The three Hebrew men refused to bow down to the false god of Nebuchadnezzar. With confidence, they said, “The God we serve is able to save us” (Dan. 3:17). When the soldiers bound them with ropes, marched them down the corridor to the blast furnace, I’m sure they felt that God had become silent! But our God understood their faith, and He answered in His own time and in His own way!

ILLUS. A man rushed into the pastor’s study. He grabbed the minister and shouted in anguish: “My son just got killed! Where was God when my boy got killed?”

The pastor received the answer in a flash: “Where was God when your boy was killed? In the same place He was when His Son got killed!”

Under heavy burdens, *(read Ps. 28:1-2)*. Believe, not in God’s silence, but in His Word. The silence of God is always temporary, but the Word of God is unchanging and eternal. The silence of God challenges us to wait until His love reveals His response.

Jesus tested the Greek woman’s inner response. “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs!” (vv. 27-28).

Jews considered Gentiles as "dogs." Jesus' words seem harsh and out of character for One who is Love Incarnate. But a close look at the Greek text softens the blow.

The dogs of that day were usually scavengers and were generally despised by the people. The Greek word for such an animal was *kyōn* and was used in various New Testament passages. However, the word here is *kynarion*, which means "little dog" or "children's pet dogs." The woman picked up Jesus' word and accepted her non-Jewish status—and got her request.

Jesus tested her inner spirit and found her free from hatred and resentments. A person's spirit is the final test. Whatever burdens you may be carrying today, remember, if given to God, they can make you better, not bitter.

In spite of burdens, the woman had a sense of humor and a fervent faith—a wonderful, winning combination. With quick wit and understanding, she turned Jesus' comment to her advantage. Jesus' eyes must have lit up with delight at such great faith.

III. Jesus Responds to Your Potential

(Read vv. 29-30.)

Jesus is eager to help. His reluctance is not waiting to be overcome by our persuasion. He knows it is best for people of faith to grapple and grow under the challenge of burdens. If God allows a burden to be placed on you, He will put His own arm underneath you for support and strength.

ILLUS. The baseball catcher says to Charlie Brown, the pitcher on the mound, "The bases are loaded again, and there's still nobody out."

Charlie Brown asks, "So, what do you think?"

After a silence, the catcher comments, "We live in difficult times."

We do, but we don't have to face them alone. Jesus has come among us to help us.

Some people feel perplexed that committed Christians stand in a minority. What can we do?

The periods when Christians knew they were a minority have been the times of greatest power. During the time that Noah was building the ark, he was in the minority—but he won by faith. When Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery by his 10 brothers, he was in a minority—but he won by faith. When Gideon and his 300 men with broken pitchers and flaming torches faced the Midianite army, they were a distinct minority—but they won by faith. Elijah prayed down fire from heaven and put the prophets of Baal to shame. He was a minority—but he won by faith. When David, ridiculed by his brothers, went out to meet Goliath, he was a minority—but he won by faith. When Jesus was crucified on the Roman Cross, He was a minority—but He won by faith in God's purposes and plan. He will help us in our day if we will take Him by faith. Take your burdens to Jesus!

Learning this lesson, Peter wrote words of encouragement. (Read 1 Pet. 1:6-7.)

Jesus responds to faith. He said to that desperate mother: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted" (Matt. 15:28). Come to Jesus with believing faith. Faith looks at the future with confidence. God vindicates His people. He is "King for ever and ever" (Ps. 10:16).

In the communications of old-time sailing craft, the three signal flags—*B*, *C*, and *N*—mean, "I will not abandon you." If the ship's lookout spotted a shipwrecked seaman bobbing and tossing in the sea, the captain would immediately run up those three flags. While the operations of changing course for rescue would be under way, the frightened sailor would see the signals and gain courage to hold on a little longer. "I will not abandon you."

Are you feeling distressed? Anxious? Afraid? Heavy-hearted? Are you carrying all alone burdens that seem too big to bear? God's signals are flying from the central Cross: "Have courage! Take heart! Trust Me! I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will not abandon you!"

The psalmist wrote: "You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me" (139:5). God's love surrounds us. He cups us in His hands. We are hemmed in by His grace. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. . . . He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (91:1-2). "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (46:1).

Out of the background of slavery and a clear call to serve God in the ministry, Charles Albert Tindley wrote the beautiful song, "Take your burden to the Lord, and leave it there."



"My wife says we aren't having any kids until we finish raising some of you!"

AT THE CROSSROADS OF METHODISM AND THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

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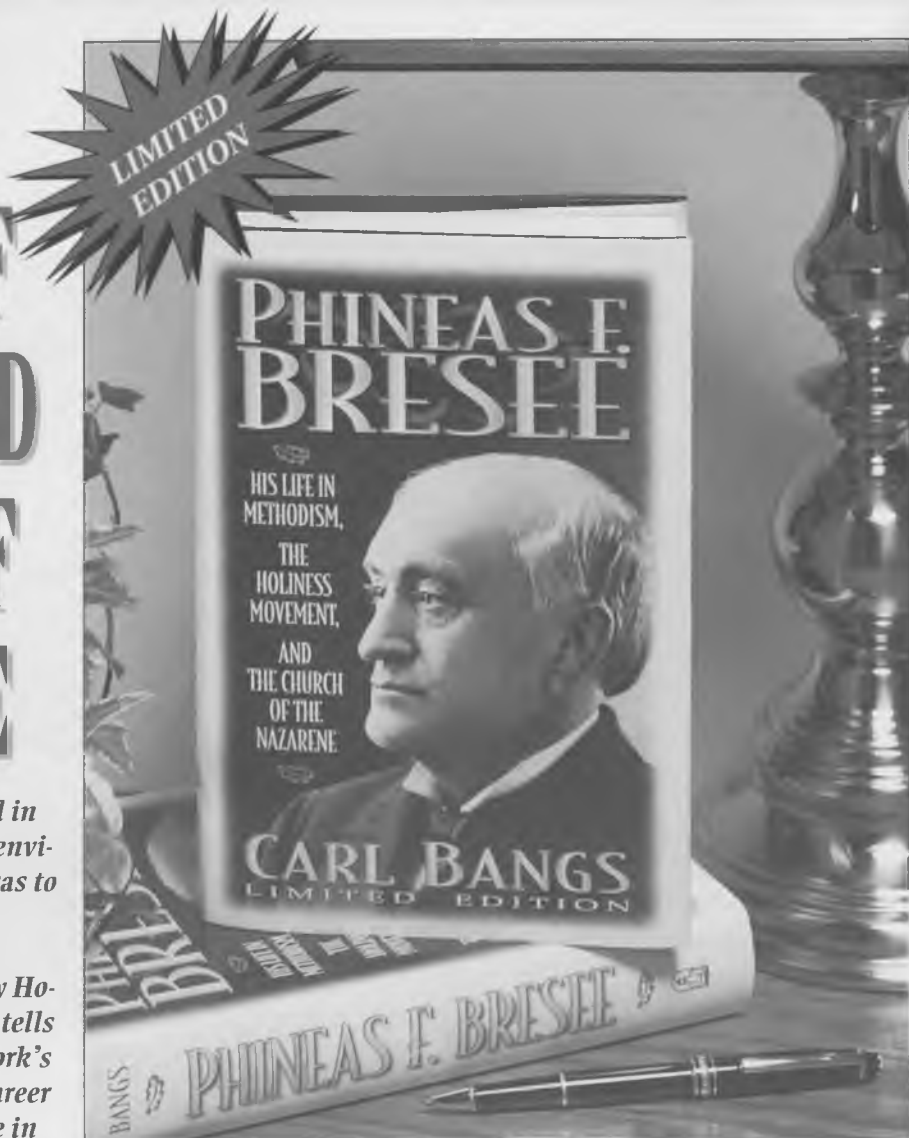
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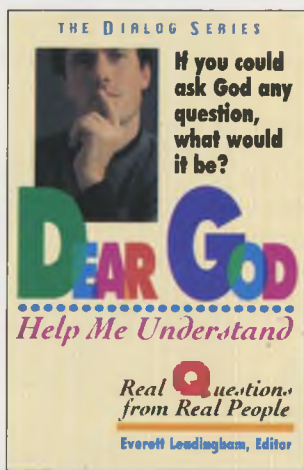
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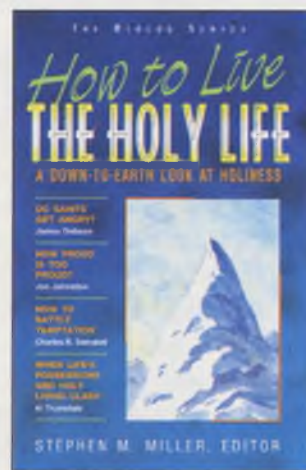
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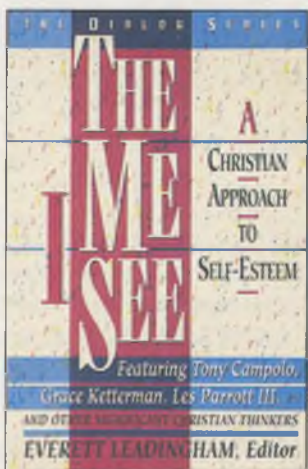
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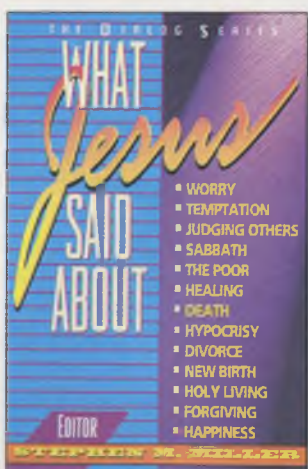
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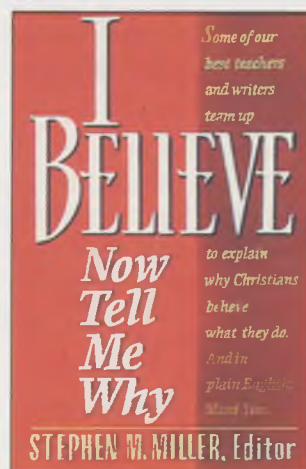
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