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THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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

**REVISIONISTS VIOLATE
CHRIST'S TEACHING
AND AROUSE
POLITICAL IRE**

**WALKING WITH
THE WOUNDED**

**HOLINESS
BAPTISTIFICATION**





THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

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Forgive One Another

The visiting missionary commented: "You're a church family." We must learn to quickly forgive one another. Paul said, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

Since pastors stand up as public figures, we become prime targets of microscopic criticism and displaced anger. Pastors get hurt—sometimes deeply. Do we get caught off guard?

An unforgiving attitude shows up in how we talk. Paul advised, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up" (Eph. 4:29). If we are unforgiving, we tend to say things about people that we should not say.

An unforgiving attitude shows up in how we feel. We may bite our lips to control our verbal response to hurt, but people might be shocked at how we feel. Paul warns of "bitterness" (v. 31).

Our responses need to be bathed in a forgiving attitude. Forgiving people requires an attitude of kindness—not as a mask, but as a genuine, Christlike response. Forgiving people requires an attitude of compassion. Hard-heartedness toward those who hurt you creates an insensitivity to others that we pastors cannot afford. Forgiving people requires an attitude of honesty. Paul referred earlier to ". . . speaking the truth in love" (v. 15). If someone has hurt you by actions or by words, don't go around talking about it, don't get bitter, don't develop a hard heart, and don't think up unkind



by Randal E. Denny
Editor, Spokane, Washington

things to say. Remember, "In Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God" (4:32—5:1).

Hold no bitterness. Hurt feelings create a climate for indigestion, insomnia, fatigue, and carelessness. The Bible says, "See to it . . . that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Heb. 12:15).

Abstain from revenge. Joel Kauffman submits his "Pontius Puddle" cartoons to me as the editor. His froggy character, Pontius, said to a friend, "So remember, revenge may be the tempting course, but forgiveness is the path to true happiness."

"Thanks, Pontius," said his friend, who departed quite happy.

Then Pontius says to himself, "Think what a wonderful world it would be if we followed even half the advice we gave others."

Be willing to forgive. Let your posture be forgiveness even before the person asks—whether or not he asks. That demonstrates Christlike-ness.

Forgive immediately. Paul wrote, "Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Jesus doesn't

make us twist in the wind while He decides whether or not to forgive us. Jesus forgives immediately. Even on the Cross, Jesus repeatedly prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Forgive completely. When we impose conditions on our forgiveness, we reveal an imperfect and incomplete forgiveness. Failure to forgive completely is really a way to make a person earn his way back. That is penance, not forgiveness.

Forgive finally. Never throw a confessed wrong back in the person's face. Nursing a wounded spirit advertises the lack of final forgiveness.

Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, was being reminded of a hurt someone had done to her many years earlier. However, she couldn't recall it. A friend asked, "Don't you remember it?"

Clara Barton replied, "I distinctly remember forgetting that incident."

Forgive repeatedly. An angry fellow declared, "I'll forgive this time, but never again!" Something about that kind of forgiveness has an empty ring to it. Pastor, have you needed God's forgiveness only once? As a pastor, you will get hurt—not maybe, but when. Paul described this love from the heart of Jesus: "Love . . . keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

Even in our hurts—the awful stings of criticism and flashes of anger that we receive from people out of control—we can respond in ways that glorify God by our sanctified reactions. Be quick to forgive one another. After all, we are family. 

Revisionists Violate Christ's Teaching and Arouse Political Ire

Christians have been leaving mainline denominations for years, in no small part because of revisionist Scripture interpretation and domineering clerics who seem to thrive on politics. Years ago, as an ordained elder in a mainline Protestant church, I found myself opposing what many considered an abuse of power by leaders at the denominational level. Such abuse involved a successful putsch that removed a beloved pastor.

Hard on the heels of that experience, I became involved with others in drafting a statement of purpose, constitution, bylaws, and other legal documents that conceived a new community church. Defining our faith, the essential sacraments, and our order of worship was an experience probably not to be repeated in our lifetimes. There followed six of the happiest years of my Christian life. Under the superb leadership of a well-educated, loving, and accomplished pastor, politics were virtually nonexistent in the new congregation. The very strengths he brought to our church, however, elevated him to a prestigious position at the international level.

The mainline minister who succeeded him took a sharply different path. The plain meaning of the Bible, Old Testament and New, should not be taken literally, we were told. The new pastor, also a part-time journalist, was of the view that we "trivialize" the Bible if we believe it is "factually inerrant and morally infallible."¹ This revisionist philosophy and the politics that inevitably accompany it quickly sap the vitality of the Christian faith and the Jewish law from



by Lawrence A. Schulz

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which it sprang, and this church was no exception. Under such leadership, the Scriptures, prayer, and God's guidance become entirely secondary because human minds and attitudes lead people to place their trust in themselves rather than in God.

My family and I, therefore, joined



what has been described as "Exodus II," the enormous and decades-old migration from mainline's liberalism to Scripture-based churches. The movement has now reached a critical mass point. God-fearing, Bible-oriented believers have found sanctuary in houses of worship that adhere to the plain meaning of the Scriptures. They are beginning to flex their political muscle to preserve fundamental Christian beliefs and the basic Judeo-Christian values on which this great country was founded and thrived. These rock-solid believers recognize, in ever increasing numbers, that the important values contained in God's Word are under steady attack by liberal revisionists eager to promote big government and to apologize for and condone conduct clearly proscribed by both the Old and the New Testaments.

Retaliating, revisionists resort to slurs to impugn the integrity of Scripture-based worshipers. They refer disparagingly to the "Religious Right," which to them indiscriminately includes anyone who does not approve of their own pseudointellectual philosophy. Those who believe that the Bible is the product of authors who wrote because they were inspired by God, and so place faith in the plain meaning of the Scriptures, are called "literalists" and accused of "Bible worship."

Revisionists use these phrases negatively to deter Christians from Scripture's plain meaning whenever it interferes with the sociopolitical agenda that drives their attempts to reinterpret the Bible. In truth, a literalist searches for and finds God's purpose for inspiring the inclusion of

each passage of Scripture in the Bible. "Worship" means to "revere and adore" and to "feel the presence of God"—all perfectly suited to the Bible's sacred role in our lives.

The liberal agenda of a minister who regularly preaches to the Clintons [president of the United States] was recently critiqued in a masterful article by Mark Tooley that appeared in *The Institute on Religion and Democracy's* publication *Faith and Freedom*.² Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas also wrote on the subject, citing Tooley.³ Both authors showed legitimate concern for the effect on this captive audience of the pastor's promotion of his sociopolitical views and his willingness to supplant Scripture with his human reassessment of what God intended to say.

The plain meaning of the Bible, Old Testament and New, should not be taken literally, we were told.

The response was predictable, but still alarming. One mainline minister agreed with the Clintons' pastor that the Old and New Testaments contain "errors" that are "false or crude." He lashed out at the Institute on Religion and Democracy, inappropriately branding that responsible organization as the home of Thomas's "witch hunting friends." He wrote: "I don't believe everything that's in the Bible. . . . I use my head and my experience . . . [to] test what's in the Bible against other forms of reliable knowledge and information."⁴ Such "reasoning" is clearly inconsistent with a belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and directly contradicts the prayer of the ages that thanks God for having "exalted above all things your name and your word" (Ps. 138:2).

Moreover, such commentary does

not reflect reasoning at all. Typical of revisionists, this mainline pastor supported his views with references to only parts of two verses he took out of their context in the Book of Leviticus and one verse he found in the apostle Paul's letter to a small cluster of Christians living in the ancient Greek city of Ephesus, located in what is now western Turkey.

Paul's letter warned "slaves" to obey their earthly masters, just as they would Christ (Eph. 6:5). But the pastor left out the comparison to obeying Christ and skipped over Paul's stirring message to masters to treat their slaves kindly. The pastor documented his lack of faith in Paul's instruction to slaves, even though slavery was a fact of life when God inspired Paul to write to the Ephesians. The pastor sees no current application of Paul's letter, even though humanity has caused slavery to persist to the present time. To suggest that Paul's words have no credibility or relevance today is thoughtless, nonobservant, unscholarly, and clearly unchristian. Today, some people are slaves to others for purposes of labor, prostitution, or the like. Some are slaves to money, power, drugs, old age, disease, and other forces that hold them captive. Some are slaves to politics and high office or pulpits and the power they see in such positions, as were Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas.

Neither Jesus nor Paul condoned slavery, as Paul's instruction to "masters" that "their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him" (Eph. 6:9) makes abundantly clear. Through His own teaching, and Paul's letter, Jesus offered freedom to the enslaved of all generations. Obtaining that freedom means reshaping the earthly experience to one that focuses on God and salvation through His Son. The power thus supplied overcomes earthly evil and frees believers for all eternity.

One of the Leviticus passages used by this mainline pastor to justify his disbelief was part of the Holiness Code adopted by the Hebrews after they had shed the mantle of slavery. The verse forbade the use of clothing "woven of two kinds of material" (19:19). The same verse barred the mating of "different kinds of animals" and the mixing of different kinds of seed when planting fields. Juxtaposed

verses instructed the Hebrews not to deceive, slander, endanger, or hate one another, or to seek revenge. The extracted scripture was just a small portion of a greater law intended to preserve and emphasize love for God, harmony, purity, and respect by and among His people at a time when they struggled for their identity and their very survival.

God-fearing, Bible-oriented believers have found sanctuary in houses of worship that adhere to the plain meaning of the Scriptures.

Many scholars view this part of God's law as articulating a "striking advance in personal and social ethics—precepts which are far from being adequately attained even today."⁵ Indeed, in directing that grapes that fell to the ground during harvest be left for the poor and the alien, that the deaf not be cursed, and that obstacles not be placed in the way of the blind, the Holiness Code foreshadowed the Golden Rule, which Jesus taught to His disciples hundreds of years later. The Golden Rule is a fundamental part of Christianity. The Holiness Code was also completely consistent with Jesus' teaching about the first commandment to love God, and the second commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). Thus, there is a unity of meaning that God inspired in the Old and New Testaments, which bridges what, in the human experience, seems like continual change over the millennia but to God is constant and but the blinking of an eye.

The other scripture discarded by this pastor required the Hebrews to

stone to death any "man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you" (Lev. 20:27). The pastor, assuming this verse has no application to our lives, characterized it as one of those "false" and "errant" parts of the Bible. He did not understand that this part of the law directed the Hebrews to avoid practices that they had witnessed while in slavery. Instead, they were told to rely on God. Jesus' ministry was permeated with instructions to turn to God. "Ask and it will be given to you," He told those who were effectively exiled from God's love (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9; cf. John 15:7). The Jewish law and Jesus' teachings were meant to protect believers from evil forces that seek to turn them away from the plain meaning of God's Word. A revisionist might be thought of as a modern "medium or spiritist."

To suggest that Paul's words have no credibility or relevance today is thoughtless, nonobservant, unscholarly, and clearly unchristian.

Stoning was the ancient punishment for the sin of intentionally leading a person away from God, and it was still practiced when Jesus ministered as a young man among lost souls (John 8:59). Stoning eventually gave way to other forms of punishment, like the hangings at Salem. However, even these penalties pale in comparison to the ultimate punishment for leading people away from God's Word, which is the loss of sal-

vation and eternal life. Yet liberal mainline ministers seem prepared to risk that result by alienating Christians by the thousands in attempting to impose their sociopolitical views.

The more revisionists attempt to use abstract examples of what they believe to be "false" or "crude" or "errant" scriptures that are not to be read literally, the more Christians will leave that environment and gravitate toward churches that are loyal to God's Word. The very fact that *Jesus* reaffirmed the ancient law is sufficient confirmation that the writings that constitute the Old Testament were truly created by God's inspiration. The New Testament memorializes God's law as taught by Jesus, for us and for the generations that preceded and will follow us. None of the books of the Old Testament were thereby rendered "false" or "crude" or "errant." We should all pray for the soul of any Christian minister who would suggest the contrary.

Encouraging people to abandon the plain meaning of God's Word, which the revisionists think fails to pass the test of human "reason" and "experience," constitutes what Tooley has aptly termed "gnostic arrogance." More importantly, the practice violates Jesus' teaching:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. . . . For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (*Matt. 5:17-20*).

Bible-oriented Christians who have escaped from the revisionist philosophy have left behind the shrinking role such pastors expected the Scriptures to play in their spiritual lives. Their political awakening has resulted from their growing unwillingness to

allow the moral values stated in God's Word to suffer further erosion as a result of the revisionists' retreat from the rightful authority of the Scriptures. At the appointed hour, the revisionists' attempt to suborn Scripture

There is a unity of meaning that God inspired in the Old and New Testaments, which bridges what seems like continual change over the millennia but to God is constant and but the blinking of an eye.

for their personal sociopolitical reasons will be of only historical interest, for all will be sanctified when God makes "known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10). 

1. Stephen Swecker, "A Literal View of the Bible Fraught with Problems," *Buffalo News*, June 8, 1995, sec. 3, p. 3.

2. Mark D. Tooley, *Faith and Freedom* 15, No. 1 (spring 1995): 6-7.

3. Cal Thomas, "Politics and the Pastor," *Washington Times*, April 23, 1995, sec. B, p. 3.

4. Swecker, "Literal View."

5. Chamberlin and Feldman, *The Dartmouth Bible* (New York: Riverside Press, 1950), 118.

I'm Not a Racist, But . . .

Images of the fat white man running like an angry fullback still invade my mind 30 years later. His goal was Mr. Michaels, the managing editor of our hometown newspaper, the *Post Tribune*. The setting was a hotel swimming pool near historic Williamsburg, Virginia.

I was one of 14 boys in Mr. Michaels's care. Each of us had earned an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., and colonial Virginia for selling the most new subscriptions to the paper. Jacob and I were the only two Black boys. The rest of our group, including Mr. Michaels, were white.

I remember the overwhelming joy I felt. We were all in our early teens, on



by Al Miles
Honolulu

vacation away from parents and teachers. After checking into the hotel, Mr. Michaels suggested that we take a swim before dinner. About 75 people were at the pool enjoying a gorgeous afternoon, sunny and hot.

When we jumped in the pool, the mood changed suddenly.

The fat white man seemed to have come out of nowhere. He sidestepped the other guests frolicking around the pool. His fixed eyes and mad-dog look told me that he was not approaching Mr. Michaels to invite him to supper.

"The pool is closed," he shouted in a thunderous voice.

Mr. Michaels's smile quickly faded, and he replied with rage, "If the pool is closed for our boys, then it is closed for everyone."

Undaunted, the fat man yelled, "OK, it is closed for everyone. I will not have any . . . [expletives] swimming in my pool."

At that very moment, laughter and play stopped. But the fat white man pressed on. His verbal abuse toward Mr. Michaels, Jacob, and me intensified. Then he slithered away. I would never see him again, but his venom remains in my system to this day.

Mr. Michaels put his arms around Jacob and me. He spoke as compassionately as anyone could, given the devastation we had all just experienced. "Boys, I am really sorry," he said, with tears welling up in his eyes. "Try not to let this man's actions bother you. Some people are really sick."

Neither Jacob nor I spoke. We simply stared at the water. When I glanced up, Jacob looked like the 250-pound man had kicked him in the groin. I felt that way myself. I felt awful. Even more than that, I felt dirty.

This incident, which occurred when I was 14, had a profound impact upon me. I refused to learn how to swim until a few years ago. Even now I am reluctant to enter pools where there are large groups of white people.

Most people would agree that this incident was racist. But not all. After describing the situation to two colleagues on separate occasions, they both asked, "Can you be sure, Al, that this situation was racially motivated?"

Some racist remarks or acts that are less dramatic can be just as hurtful. As our churches become more culturally diverse, pastors need to be prepared



Skjold Photographs

to help their parishioners deal more sensitively with the issue of racism.

Through the years I have been able to dismiss, but not excuse, people such as the man in Virginia. Their shameless attitudes greatly offend me. I pray that their hearts receive a complete overhaul so that they will stop devastating other people with their hatred.

On the other hand, people who have expressed subtle bigotry to me are not so easily dismissed. Most are highly educated, very sensitive, well-intentioned individuals. They denounce racism and its perpetrators as appalling. Yet many say and do things that I have found painful.

For example, for more than 13 years I have ministered as a hospital chaplain. For the past 9 of these, I have directed a hospital ministry department in two different institutions. I have often been asked how I achieved these positions. I list my extensive credentials.

Some find this response inadequate. "I know your credentials are impressive, Al, but how did you get the positions?" Apparently they believe that the hospitals more likely handed me the jobs to fill some quota, rather than on the basis of my education and considerable experience.

I ask these people if they pose the same question to white male professionals. When I point out that their question seems racist, these individuals become very defensive. "That is not my intent," they begin. "Are you sure you're not being oversensitive, Al?"—a remark that discounts my perspective.

People often say to me, "Al, you are so articulate. You must be really smart. You must have gone to Harvard." It seems that I don't fit their preconceived idea of how Black people talk. I doubt that these statements are made to white professionals. Again, my suggestion that these comments are racist is defensively dismissed as an overreaction.

Several white people have said, "Al, you are not like one of *them*. You are just like *us*." This insults me on two levels: (1) The phrase "one of *them*" sounds as though they are referring to aliens or subhumans, not people. (2) The phrase "just like *us*" presumes "we" are a superior group with standards that all others should aspire

to obtain. The statement carries the huge assumption that I want to be white. This is not the case. I am very proud of my African-American heritage.

Here are some suggestions I'd offer pastors as they deal with the issue of racism:

LISTEN

People must be allowed to share from their own culture with their own heart, mind, and voice. Avoid speaking for other people, relating their experiences, or reacting strongly one way or the other to what is being expressed. If you consider the behavior that is being described to be disgusting or repulsive, acknowledge that in a short phrase. However, for the most part sit in silence.

AVOID JUDGING

Do not tell a person who says that he or she finds certain actions or behaviors racist that this impression is wrong. There is no way that we can tell another person what he or she feels.

AVOID BECOMING AN INVESTIGATOR

Asking the person for further description or information about what that one determines to be a racially prompted incident can come across as being critical, superior, or voyeuristic. Feelings cannot be explained rationally. As I once pointed out to a group of colleagues, "If I am sitting by a window with my head down, and something warm comes shining through the glass, I don't have to look up to discover that it is the sun. I know what it feels like from many prior encounters." On the other hand, a respectful request for clarification, without judgment, may be acceptable.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES

Avoid the following responses if your actions or words are characterized as being racist:

That was not my intent.

I am not a racist.

Don't be so sensitive.

I thought you could take a joke.

Perhaps you are overreacting.

I have a lot of Black friends.

These statements shift the responsibility for your actions from you to your accusers. Good intentions are not enough if they do not include a

willingness to examine and, perhaps, change one's own behavior. Most bigoted behavior I have experienced has come from well-intentioned people.

DO NOT BRING IN WITNESSES

Do not bring in Black "witnesses for the defense" in an effort to prove that your actions were not racist. This well-worn tactic goes back to the days of slavery. An especially disturbing stereotype holds that one Black person can always discern what another Black person is thinking and feeling. The corollary is the notion that if one Black says that a white person is not a bigot, then he or she can persuade all other Black people to believe it. The entire concept is ridiculous.

What I might find acceptable might be experienced as bigoted by another Black individual, and vice versa. Further, it is no one's responsibility to speak for another. I resent it when colleagues approach me after having their behavior questioned by another Black person and say: "Al, you know I am not a racist. Please tell her that her assessment of me is wrong." I refuse to speak for another person or group of people, even those from my own culture.

The best thing we can do when confronted is to listen to the complaints of our accusers. They can tell us a great deal about ourselves. Responses such as "I am sorry" and "Please help me understand" can also bring about healing. These phrases indicate a willingness to look at our questionable behavior.

Racism is still a major problem in our world. Even though castrations, lynchings, and cross burnings are no longer as common as they once were, a pervasive spirit prevents us from living in harmony with one another.

Pastors must take the lead in helping parishioners gain a greater awareness of racist behavior. This requires a willingness to listen and to change our own attitudes and views. We must accept God's people, who come from all cultures, as equals. We must allow them the freedom to express themselves with their own voices. ✠

Rev. Al Miles is employed by Interfaith Ministries of Hawaii as coordinator of hospital ministry at The Queen's Medical Center in Honolulu. This article first appeared in the January-February 1995 issue of *The Christian Ministry* and is reprinted here with permission of the author. Copyrighted 1995 by Al Miles.

When Your Children Divorce

The Church's Response

You have probably reflected many times on the day your children married. For most of us it was a gathering of loving family and friends who rejoiced in the love our children shared, who witnessed the covenant they made before God to keep the lifelong vows they made to one another. It was a joyous day of celebration, of optimism.

You knew that there would be struggles, hard times as well as good ones, but you trusted that there was a solid understanding of what it means to leave father and mother to become one flesh. You had hope that these two could love each other with sacrificial, supportive, nurturing love.

Now these hopes are dashed, and the wedding pictures are a bitter-sweet reminder of happier times. Their covenant with God and with each other has been broken. Many of us want to turn for comfort to the institution that gave this marriage its initial blessing: the church.

But can we? Do we feel welcomed, comforted, and understood? Or guilty, judged, and pushed aside? It will depend on your particular congregation or, at least, your perception of the situation. I know parents who felt like second-class church citizens after their children's marriages failed. They felt that the institutional church criticized their abilities as Christian parents.

Identifying the Old Messages

Our generation, experiencing rampant divorce among our children, is deeply influenced by messages we heard in childhood, messages from a much earlier time:

- "I'd never tell my mother if my children divorced, if I could keep from it. It would only hurt her."



by Elaine Seppa

- "Remarks I heard in childhood, like 'don't go over to the house across the street, that woman is divorced,' stayed with me into my adult years."
- "I overheard conversations as a child between my parents and grandmother as she talked about the shame she felt when her youngest child divorced."

These experiences contribute to the attitudes of our generation. We

must look at them, realize where they come from, and see how they contribute to our responses when our own children divorce. One of the questions that hurting parents have asked me is, "Shouldn't we in the church be correcting this message? Doesn't the church need to be showing the compassion and mercy of Jesus, even when it comes to the brokenness of divorce?" We all are guilty of sin and brokenness of some kind. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9[*RSV*]). We want God's grace extended toward us and should extend it toward others. Aren't we called to love each other?

Churches Take a Stand

In an interview with John Westfall, currently pastor of Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church in California, I learned that he had grown up in a church where "there *was* no divorce." It identified itself as a strong family church. Only later did he realize that the reason the church was free of divorce was that when couples began having difficulties in their marriages, they left! The message they got from the church was, "You are no longer acceptable—there is no place for you here."

John tells of this painfully common scenario:

One party of the divorce is singing in the choir, and the other sits in a pew thinking, *Bob [or Mary] is ruining this worship service for me. I can't think of anything except how painful this is.* If they stay in the fellowship and one of the former partners remarries, all three are reminded of their pain while trying to get on with their lives. It hap-



pens a lot. Somebody has to leave. They go somewhere else and start a new life. But there is a loss; the person who leaves is cut off from former fellowship and support.

In that situation you may conclude that the church is not the place to be if you are hurting, only when things are going well, when you have a job, when your life is in order. When you get it back together, then you can come back. But at the moment of pain . . . the church seems to close the door.

Sinners Need Not Apply

Russell grew up in a very conservative church. He felt his church was unwilling to understand or forgive either the divorce of his parents or the actions and divorces of his children. "While it did not alienate me from God and my vital relationship with Jesus Christ, it did cause me to look outside the church for support, for encouragement, or for help in solving personal and family problems," he said. That aspect of his life was simply kept separate from his church involvement.

Doesn't the church need to be showing the compassion and mercy of Jesus, even when it comes to the brokenness of divorce?

Now Russell and his wife are active in a church that says, "This is a place where you may cry as well as laugh. You can be known—with all of your 'warts,' your 'wayward' children, your griefs and disappointments and guilts—we will pray with you, support you, help you gain perspective,

and work with you to create wholeness."

John Westfall offers this analysis:

Some of the institutional church is embarrassed about divorce, saying, "Perhaps we have failed; what happened?" I think there is a sense of powerlessness, and since we don't know what to do, we just ignore it and hope it doesn't personally affect us. We say, "Oh, that's your private pain." Nothing should be that way in the Body of Christ. The church should be the one place that we deal with divorce realistically and compassionately.

Another pastor, who works with adult ministries in a large church, reflects:

The reason the church was free of divorce was that when couples began having difficulties in their marriages, they left!

We tend to misinterpret—to believe that if the church is compassionate toward those caught in the brokenness of divorce, by offering divorce recovery workshops, single parenting and blended family classes, it opens the door for laxity toward marriage. But Jesus gives us a model. The scribes and Pharisees had brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery. They wanted a judgment against her, thus fulfilling the law. Jesus told them that whoever was without sin should cast the first stone. One by one they left. No one remained to condemn her. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin!" (John 8:3-11). In the church we have the

opportunity to be part of the redeeming and restorative process of God.

Since we don't know what to do, we just ignore it and hope it doesn't personally affect us.

John Stott writes about the tension between the need for high standards that reinforce the biblical covenant of marriage and the New Testament model of grace. Stott points out that we can't forget that in the beginning God created marriage. He created it for the purpose of procreation (Gen. 1:28) and also for companionship in which two people nurture and provide for each other and help each other to grow and reach full potential (2:18). He also intended it to provide a way for this self-giving love to express itself in sexual union (2:24).¹

When we realize what God's ideal for marriage was, we become more aware of the tragedy of divorce. Yet even as we oppose divorce, we need to balance our conviction with compassion for each hurting person caught in that tragedy.

What People Long For

In interviews with divorcing individuals, I encountered an outcry for forgiveness, understanding, and acceptance, directed at parents, family, and the church. A high percentage of divorced individuals expressed a deep feeling of failure to meet high personal and family expectations based on the biblical standard of marriage. Meeting these expectations has become increasingly difficult in our current society, where the Christian ethic is no longer the norm.

And I got these responses to the question, "Was your church a support to you?"

- "No, I was expelled! I finally

found another church where I could receive forgiveness, instruction, and healing.”

The church should be the one place that we deal with divorce realistically and compassionately.

- “Yes, I was invited to parishioners’ homes for an occasional overnight, including Christmas Eve, so that I wouldn’t be alone on Christmas Day. I also received ministerial counseling and fellowship by participating in group activities.”
- “I never came to church before I was separated. I started coming with friends for something to do on weekends. I am learning about God’s love and forgiveness, and I found a support group for separated people and then Divorce Recovery. I still need an ongoing Divorce Recovery small group and teaching and guidance while I find my way.”

Parents, Scripture, and the Church

In interviewing divorced people, I heard this comment:

My mom, like me, went back and forth, wanting to believe that God could heal the marriage. We continued to believe in my husband. When I shared with her the details of both mental and physical abuse, she began to look at it in a different light. She stood by me through the marriage and divorce.

She felt my ups and downs, my pain. She wanted my dream as much as I did. My mother felt angry, sad, confused as I did, and *she never wanted to believe that divorce was the answer*. She continued to seek God’s guidance, was

touched by God’s grace and mercy, and was able to help both of us.

As my friend Laura and I met to help each other deal with our broken families, we both had to examine what we believed about divorce and what the Scriptures taught. Studying together was helpful. We knew that marriage, intended to last a lifetime, was given for the benefit of human beings. We knew its breakdown would bring pain and alienation from one another and from God. Yet sins of pride, selfishness, thoughtlessness, indifference, dishonesty and broken trust, anger and conflict, sometimes even infidelity, abuse, and violence accumulate—and divorce occurs. What are parents supposed to do? How should we balance our knowledge of Jesus’ offer of compassion and forgiveness, and His instruction for us to do likewise, with some of the biblically based positions of the institutional church?

We have the opportunity to be part of the redeeming and restorative process of God.

Throughout history the church has taken various positions concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage:

- no divorce and no remarriage
- divorce but no remarriage
- divorce and remarriage for adultery or desertion
- divorce and remarriage under a variety of circumstances

These positions are examined at length in the book titled *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*.² This book could prove to be a valuable resource for you as you work through the issues and your thoughts and questions.

In my interviews with more than 20 pastors of different backgrounds, I heard encouraging words. Many churches have come to recognize the

depth of the divorce syndrome in our society and attempt to offer practical help. Marriage Encounter and other programs attempt to help couples build better marriages rather than choose divorce. And there seems to be movement toward greater compassion with regard to divorce. “Some branches of the church are bringing these issues more into the open and discussing them in public gatherings where 10 years ago this might not have been true,” according to one pastor with whom I spoke. He added, “This is done realizing that *accepting the reality of divorce doesn’t mean approval of that reality*.”

Letting People Care for Us

“Did you seek professional counsel when your child divorced?” I asked a distraught pastor and father.

“No, but I don’t know why we didn’t,” he replied. “We certainly needed it.”

I have found that many in our parenting generation hesitate to seek professional help for themselves. We feel we should be able to solve our own problems. However, it can be very helpful to have another person assist us in sorting out what issues are causing our distress. An empathetic pastor can provide counsel and a listening ear or can suggest a therapist with experience in family counseling.

Another way to care for yourself is through small groups that offer support, model openness, and give you a chance to express your feelings and ask your questions. The group can act as an extended family, provide ongoing prayer and understanding, and help with the rebuilding of trust in relationships.

Accepting the reality of divorce doesn’t mean approval of that reality.

I’m so thankful that there are people in the church who are willing to

say, "I value you enough to really share who I am with you." I know that this can happen, for Karl and I have experienced it over the years in two ways. First, we were part of a couples' support group. We were one of five couples who had diverse family needs: children with serious physical or emotional challenges, heavy pastoral responsibilities, divorcing children, and other needs. We met weekly for 10 years to study God's Word, encourage one another in spiritual growth, and give practical help where possible. We experienced the joy of fellowship each week as we shared a meal and prayerfully tried to support one another in the big and little things of our daily lives.

And second, we found support in a surprising place: with a small group of university student-leaders in our church with whom we had the role of "older friends." These young people shared their personal struggles week by week—and we couldn't sit among them and pretend that there was no pain in our own lives. We felt a strong imperative to be honest, and so we talked about the pain of our children's divorces. The students were a tremendous source of love and prayerful support for both of us at a time of personal turmoil. Now, years later, we still have vital relationships with many of these young people, most of whom have married and begun families of their own.

I continue to see how helpful it is to have models in the church—people who are willing to be real, to honestly tell their stories from the past and the present, to share how to handle failures and weaknesses with grace. Perhaps you can take initiative to start a group or class in your church to help others who are going through divorce in their families.

Last year, Laura and I led a workshop called "Parents' Response to Divorce" at a women's conference sponsored by our church. It proved to be helpful not only to mothers with divorcing children but also to friends of families where divorce was occurring—and to divorced daughters who wanted to get a better sense of what their parents might be feeling.

If your church doesn't have a small-

group ministry, perhaps you can lead the way!

Learning to Care for Others

Having experienced the pain of family breakup, we can help our churches learn how to be families where brothers and sisters care for one another and give support and encouragement as well as holding high standards for marriage.

We found support in surprising places.

Don is a father of grown daughters, but he began teaching three-year-old boys and girls in the Sunday School several years ago. He had a desire to give some attentive, loving, masculine input into the lives of kids who, because of divorce and other reasons, have little influence from their fathers. He enjoys it so much that he continues to be involved and has recruited other men to join him in this vital ministry to children.

How can the church be redemptive and healing in an increasingly wounded and wounding society?

My friends Mavon and Janet, both mothers and grandmothers, spent a number of years teaching fifth grade girls in Sunday School classes. They keep close track of these girls as they advance through junior high and high

school. They listen to their joys and their disappointments, to their sorrow when parents are divorced. And they pray both for them and with them. They have found an effective way of creating an extended family in the life of the church.

Many single parents long to be included in ordinary activities with other families as well as outings and celebrations. Because you and I have experienced some isolation, we can reach out to others with true understanding. Can you choose to extend yourself to a family in this way, to show them practical, unconditional love?

Helping Our Churches Care

Darrel Young, adult ministries director at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, shared the following insight in a conversation with me:

As we look at the needs in our culture, we can be preoccupied with the endless questions of "Who's right and who's wrong? Who has failed and who hasn't?"

Instead we might better ask, "How can the church be redemptive and healing in an increasingly wounded and wounding society?" Not only is divorce a sign that deep wounding has happened, but also divorce *creates* wounds.

Fifty to 60 percent of the kids in our schools will live in a single-parent home. Before we judge the divorcing, we must consider whom we exclude by such judgment.

Where will these kids go to learn "family" if not to the church? Where will the single parent go for support, healing, and nurturing and direction if not to the church?

The challenge for the church is to strongly uphold marriage while also offering compassion, practical help, and teaching when brokenness occurs.

As I talk with parents, we agree that there is a lot to know and learn about commitment in marriage and family relationships. It may be difficult to begin to be more open with one another in the church, to learn about healthy conflict resolution and forgiveness and trust, but the rewards are tremendous. There comes a time when we have the opportunity, as I have said before, to exercise choice and make a decision to hang in there, to stay in our own marriages, to stand

by our kids regardless of their marital decisions. We can gather resource people to help enrich our own marriages and to help single parents, blended families, and those who are living through separation and divorce.

Classes for teens and preteens could include teaching on honesty in relationships, sexual purity and abstinence, respect, forgiveness, interdependence, and mutual support in family life. Such classes would be especially beneficial if the teachers were demonstrating loving family lives and good marriages.

We need modeling of good, long-term marriages, healthy communication patterns, and conflict resolution within the life of the church. Our pastors and leaders need to be honest, to be real with us about the stresses and strains of the marriage relationship and what it means to be committed. We may not be able to reverse our children's decisions. However, because we have lived through the realities of divorce in the family, we are better equipped to be agents of change. We can encourage our churches to help other pilgrims on this road to wholeness.

Stephen Ministries is a national program that trains laypeople in effective caring and listening skills to enable them to come alongside someone in crisis. It is intended to be support, not counseling. A "Stephen Minister" can provide a listening ear for a parent trying to work through the shock of a child's decision to divorce. Reaching out to others can bring perspective and healing for yourself. You might want to become involved and get such training yourself.³

Are there ongoing marriage enrichment classes in your church? They can teach good relational skills and provide a supportive network as well. Some churches provide support for families where divorce is occurring or has occurred. This support may take various forms:

- Divorce Recovery programs that help individuals through their pain and rejection. Such programs can be a first step in reconciling non-Christians with their Lord as well as themselves.

- Classes and groups that encourage and support single parents.
- Programs for blended families that bring insight for the particular needs that occur with step-parenting.
- Summer camps that mix single-parent families with two-parent families and support parents and children alike. The one-parent family gets a "normal" camp experience, and the single parent gets a chance to be with other adults while the kids are in supervised recreation or crafts classes.
- Support groups for children of divorce where young people can come knowing they will be understood. Such groups can also provide guidance and information about resources to meet particular needs.

One such group was formed in my church for teens from divorced families. Called "Second Wind," it is facilitated by leaders who can speak from personal experience of divorce in their families, who know what it feels like when a young person says, "I just hate it when they . . ." These leaders can offer empathy but also the perspective of time and healing. In addition, there are leaders who come out of strong Christian families where

long-term marriage has been the model. There is time to teach about long-term commitment, honest, loving communication in relationships, and sexual purity before marriage.

Second Wind is not an ongoing weekly group. The leaders try to be sensitive to where the teens in the church "are at." When the need arises, this group meets for several weeks, giving very specific support. Later it may sponsor a daylong seminar to deal with certain needs. Both formats have proved effective.

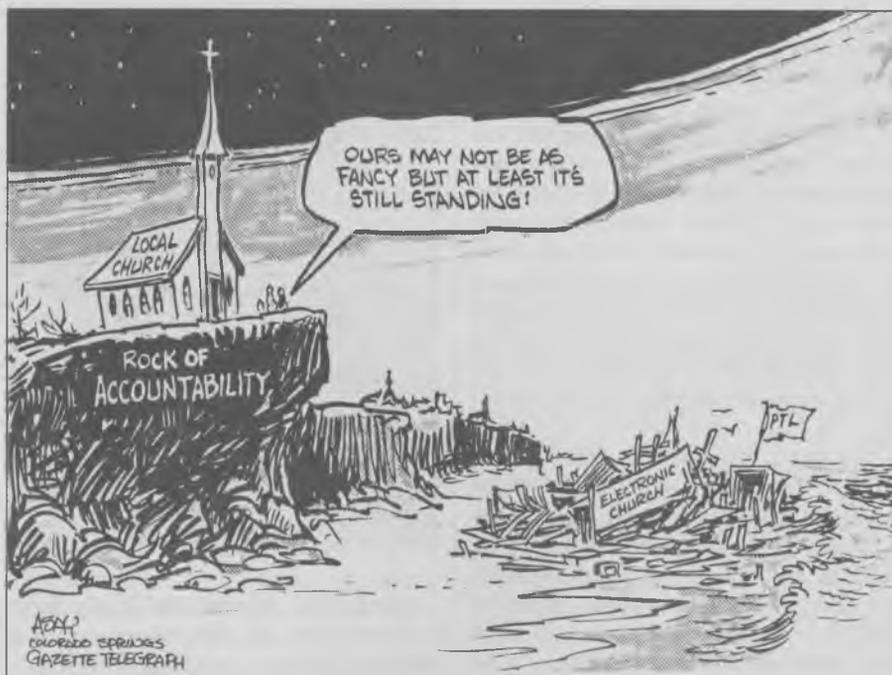
If we in the Christian Church are to represent the family of God to the culture around us, we need to do all we can to be a family to one another, to strongly support committed marriages—and yet to demonstrate compassion for families where breakdown has occurred and to help in every way we can.

1. Paraphrased from John Stott, *Marriage and Divorce* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 3-4.

2. H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

3. For information, write Stephen Ministries, 8011 Dale, St. Louis, MO 63117-1449. Phone: 314-645-5511.

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Walking with the Wounded

Fourteen years ago I faced one of life's most difficult moments. At the young age of 25, married for nearly 5 years to a minister, and looking forward with excitement to serving as a missionary in Africa, I little expected what that foggy December day would bring.

On returning from Christmas shopping, my pastor brought the stunning news of my husband, Kent's, death in a seaplane. Kent, an avid pilot, had just received his seaplane rating. Ironically, he was a mere passenger in the plane that hit a hidden television tower guy wire and exploded into flames that day.

With my mind numb with shock, I faced the difficult challenge of grieving over my husband and facing an uncertain future. Winding my way through the maze, I was often hampered by well-meaning friends. Many were clergy, but they seemed to lack the skills to minister to someone in my situation.

In the years since then, I have pieced together bits and pieces of my own, as well as others', experiences. A year serving as a chaplain in a children's hospital forced me to crystallize my own thinking about death. The following are suggestions for those "walking with the wounded."

The **first step** toward helping another through a death experience would be to **spend time studying God's Word and developing your own theology about suffering and death.** Wonderful stories in the Bible show examples of how God can sustain us and walk with us in times of sorrow. David's tears over his son, Absalom, and Job's suffering remind us that those people in the Bible were not mere characters in a story, but real mortal beings like ourselves.

Another helpful thing to do, whether as a minister or layperson, is to **read books on dealing with families in crisis situations.** Many organizations, such as Compassionate Friends, offer valuable resources as



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well as support to those suffering a death. If you have no experience with death yourself, you may want to interview someone who has. Use that person as a resource as you try to counsel a grieving person.

One simple way to help is to be **physically present with the hurting individual or family.** Jesus wept with Lazarus's family, offering His physical comfort. We may be the only physical sign of God's love and mercy in an otherwise hopeless situation.

Silence is an important gift to give a hurting family. After my husband's death, I was overwhelmed with advice. If you wait quietly with the family, they will usually ask for prayer or spiritual advice. They really do not need a sermon.

The family may need **help with practical matters** such as contacting other family members. You can act as liaison between church, community, or medical staff if hospitalized. Listen and take notes when the medical staff tells the family information because the family may not absorb news because of shock and grief.

Respect the family's own grief style, and work with them sensitively when they do not respond in what you think is an appropriate manner. Fight or flight are two common reactions that may take you by surprise if you have not done your homework.

Help the family talk. Their feel-

ings of anger and sadness need to be expressed. Many Christians fail to let friends or family members express their feelings. Emotions are God-given and need to be expressed. A kind word, your own tears, a hug, or a touch of the hand can express caring. Remember that the feeling of empathy is needed, not sympathy.

Some questions for further study can be useful. How do you deal with your own grief when you lose something precious to you? Do you have unresolved grief in your own life? Are you or your family uncomfortable with talking about death and thinking about death?

In your quiet time, the following poem can be used as a meditation to help you to act with empathy as you prepare for the difficult but rewarding task of "Walking with the Wounded."

The Empty Room

*I saw death today
Come quickly
Without warning,
Taking the life of a child,
Leaving an empty room
In the mother's heart.
I saw her run
From the pain,
And I heard her ask the hard questions,
Old as time.
And I dried my own tears
As she, like Rachel, wept
Over her child
And would not be comforted.
I saw the child,
Still and cold,
And felt the sting of pain—
Unutterable, unbearable.
I tried to say the things
For which there are no words,
And touch the pain
Which is beyond my reach,
And do the things
For which there are no actions.
There is an empty room
In my heart.*

—Karen Lunsford

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The Funeral—Obligation or Opportunity?

by Douglas L. Janssen

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When your phone rings at 2 A.M., you know the news will not be good. And sometimes when a call comes at 4:00 on Friday afternoon, the news isn't good either. That's when I got the dreaded summons to conduct my first funeral. The infant son of a church member had died unexpectedly. Little Ned's funeral would be a large one, since the family was prominent in the church and popular in the community.¹

Just as I was contemplating Ned's memorial service, my phone rang again. Another funeral for me to conduct! The circumstances surrounding the death of 87-year-old Gladys were less traumatic, but the grief of her family was no less severe.

So there I was with both funerals looming before me, and I knew of

nothing to say. Out of that desperation the Lord led me to develop a type of funeral sermon that has transformed my view of ministering to the bereaved. I now see funerals as unique opportunities for spiritual service.

The personal approach

I learned my new approach after visiting with the bereaved families. For more than an hour I listened as Gladys's children and grandchildren reminisced about her life. Although I had never met Gladys, I came to know her through the eyes of her loved ones. I shared some thoughts on the love of God and the hope of the resurrection, then left to visit the family of baby Ned.

The previous Thursday night Ned had gone to bed a little fussy. Maybe

cutting a tooth, his mother thought. The next morning he had a high fever and was breathing with difficulty. His body was covered with red and purple splotches. Doctors diagnosed spinal meningitis. Despite their valiant efforts, Ned died Friday afternoon.

The parents, Frank and Dorothy, were suffering shock when I came to visit. Even so, they wanted to talk about their good times with Ned. During the next couple hours, tears mingled with smiles as they told me his nicknames and described his cute antics. For example, Ned still hadn't learned to leave the dog's food for the dog. All of what they shared helped me understand what their child meant to them.

Now it was Monday evening, and both funerals were on Tuesday. Late that night I was still trying to prepare my two sermons. I was thinking about one family having a lifetime of memories behind them, while the other had a lifetime of memories ahead. Suddenly the inspiration came to me (I mean that seriously): I should combine what I learned about the person and family with what I know about the Bible.

The sermon for Gladys came together easily. From what her family told me, she seemed to be the personification of Prov. 31, so it was logical to use that passage. The story of Dorcas in Acts 9:36-41 also represented her devotion to both family and community. I drew a parallel between God's eager willingness to grant Dorcas life and His willingness to exercise His resurrection power for Gladys someday. I followed that with various texts referring to the resurrection and eternal life.

In addition to those Bible passages, I ministered to the family by sharing events and insights from the life of



Gladys. Friends and distant relatives saw her as the children had portrayed her to me. Along with her good qualities, I mentioned a few of her struggles. This brought smiles to the family and made her seem real. I wasn't describing an angel but a real person. The reaction of the family to this type of sermon was overwhelmingly positive.

At Ned's funeral I followed the same pattern. Obviously, I didn't have a lifetime of events to talk about, but I did share with the audience of more than 500 friends and relatives what the little boy meant to his parents. I mentioned his nicknames and the continuing struggle over the dog dish. Again, this personal information brought smiles to the faces of family members.

Throughout the sermon I spoke to Ned's parents by name. I shared the story in Luke 8 of the parents whose daughter died after a delay in healing—before Christ resurrected her. I drew the parallel: "You also, Frank and Dorothy, sought for Jesus last Friday to save your child. As with the parents in the biblical story, healing was delayed. Imagine the anxiety of those parents as they waited and waited and waited. Finally, suddenly, Jesus appeared. Life was restored. Hope found fulfillment.

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"Frank and Dorothy, like those parents long ago, you are waiting today. You called upon Jesus, but it was not time for Him to grant your request. So you are waiting—waiting for the day when Jesus will suddenly appear. When He comes, He will resurrect little Ned and give him back to you. He invites you to make an appointment today to be ready when He comes in clouds of glory."

Grieving people are hungry for the love of a pastor and the God we represent. The families of both Ned and Gladys told me they found meaning, comfort, and hope in my personal biblical messages. What a unique opportunity for ministry that we have at funerals!

Sometimes fellow pastors question the wisdom of my referring so frequently to the name and life experiences of the deceased. I can only report that the reaction of grieving families to this personal approach—connected with a parallel Bible story—has been overwhelming in every instance. Months, even years, later, family and church members express appreciation for what they heard in my sermon.

One day while riding the "coach" to the cemetery, the funeral director mentioned that he had listened to three of my sermons, and in his opinion they were among the best he had ever heard. He explained that many pastors seldom mention the deceased after the obituary portion of the service is finished. Often they conduct the service without even speaking directly to the family about their grief. He observed that I do not use a separate obituary. Instead, I weave significant events of the person's life into the sermon itself. Each event falls naturally into place, mentioned along with personality traits that the family spoke of in my visits with them.

Some recommendations

I share the above compliment only because it has made me bold to offer the following recommendations to fellow pastors:

1. See the funeral service as an opportunity to serve, not as an unpleasant obligation.

2. In visiting with the family beforehand, take note of what they say about their loved one's character and personality. An hour or two of careful listening can reap rich dividends for the funeral service. Let the family know you may include in the sermon some of what they tell you if it is appropriate.

3. The person who died has a name—use it frequently, along with any suitable nicknames. Don't be afraid to mention character shortcomings if the family is willing and you can do so with sensitivity. It's a real

person you are talking about, not an angel. Just keep in mind that "he who handles souls must have sensitive fingers."²

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4. Talk to the family during the sermon. If you are careful, you need not hurt feelings. Acknowledging the loss, the pain, and the confusion helps the family know that at least somebody understands what they are suffering. Your first obligation is to help the family cope with the reality of their loss and, where appropriate, to sense the equally strong reality of God's saving and resurrecting power. They need to know that you are talking to them, not to your notes or to some vast assembly in which they don't count.

5. Talk to the general audience as well. Drawing the friends of the bereaved into the service helps them cope with their own loss. It also opens opportunities for personal ministry.

6. If you knew the one that died, draw from your own relationship with that person—but keep the family's recollections and feelings paramount.

7. Give a "talk," not a discourse. People will not be impressed with flowery words nearly as much as with your compassion and realism.

8. Try to understand and reflect the mood of the mourners. The type of grief is different following a lingering and painful illness than when a baby's life is snatched away between daylight and darkness. Both families have grief, but the first family's grief is tempered by expectation and relief.

9. Place the person's life into some type of perspective. Someone who grew up during the depression may have a philosophy of life that their ba-

by-boom children don't understand. The funeral sermon is an opportunity to bring into the focus the various influences that made the life what it was. If the final years were clouded by disease or deterioration of the mind, help the family focus on the happier times in the past. Acknowledge the changes of recent years, but focus on more pleasant areas of character and personality.

10. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the person's life that you can share to help the family in their grief. Remember that the Spirit is the Comforter, and He wants to use you in accomplishing His work.

Suicide situation

Arthur, the father of one of my members, had an untreated infection in his leg. Rather than face an amputation, he shot himself. I wondered what I could say at his funeral. Arthur had shown no interest in Christianity. Family and friends couldn't remember any time in the previous 40 years when he wasn't, to some degree, under the influence of alcohol.

After I talked with the family, a couple factors emerged. Arthur was reclusive—except when he bundled a gang of grandkids into the back of his pickup to head for some fun. He drank heaviest when other people demanded his energies.

Suddenly a door opened in my mind. I remembered hearing or reading that alcoholism is sometimes a mask for an abnormal condition called agoraphobia (the fear of crowds). I discussed the idea with the family during my prefuneral visits. Instantly they were filled with insight

and understanding. One daughter confided that she had been treated for both agoraphobia and alcoholism. She also told me that Arthur's mother had the same combination of illnesses for many years.

During the funeral service, when I shared the possibility that Arthur had suffered from these problems, heads nodded in agreement. At dinner afterward, many friends and relatives came over to thank me for my insight into Arthur's life. As I was leaving, Arthur's son-in-law (husband of my member) approached me for prayer on behalf of his son, also an alcoholic. This man had never before been willing to discuss religion with me, and we've talked several times since. Certainly the funeral was a moment of opportunity for reaching him.

Modern Abraham

Charles died while engaged in his favorite activity, training horses. In talking with the family the evening before the funeral, I felt the love and loyalty they all had for him—except the oldest son. He couldn't bring himself to express affection for his father. What bothered him was that his father never seemed content to settle down in one place. He had many talents and managed to make a living everywhere he went. But just when prosperity appeared imminent, Charles would quit his job and move on with his family. When they related this to me, the oldest son would protest, "This won't help the pastor; let's not get into it." I assured them that I wanted to hear whatever they wished to tell me.

Later that night I began to pull into perspective what the family had told me. One extremely positive quality stood out. Charles may have moved around frequently, but he remained consistent in his relationship with God and the church. Even the oldest son acknowledged, "Dad was as straight as an arrow in his love and service to God." I searched for a Bible story that might parallel Charles's life.

During the funeral I told the story of Abraham. Always on the move, that man was often called by God, sometimes perhaps for no apparent reason. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham was always searching for something better, a city whose builder and maker is God. I pointed out the parallel between the experiences of Abraham and Charles and encouraged the family and friends to likewise persist in their own quest for God's perfect city. They could find its fulfillment together with Charles when Jesus comes.

When the service was over and we were getting into cars to head for the cemetery, the oldest son walked over and hugged me. "Thank you for that sermon," he said. "I now understand my dad better than I ever have before."

That type of response happens frequently when I follow the steps recommended above, investing time and energy in personalizing the funeral sermon.

1. Names have been changed.
2. Roland Hegstad, editor of *Liberty* magazine, at a ministers' meeting in January 1991.

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Pontius' Puddle



Opening Prison Doors for Women in Ministry—Setting the Captives Free

Margaret Thatcher, former prime minister of Great Britain, had a clear understanding not only of politics but also of the church when she said, "If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman!"

All of us ought to be aware that the Church might still be locked away in hiding if it were not for some brave women who ventured out in the pre-dawn hours of the first Easter Sunday morning and discovered the risen Lord. While the male disciples wrung their hands behind closed doors, saying, "What do we do now?" the women ran through the streets, shouting, "He is risen!"

To this very day, too many people are still trapped in prejudicial blindness. When the women came back from the tomb to tell the disciples the good news, the men "did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11). The time has come to release women ministers from their "prison of nonsense" and acknowledge them as equal partners in ministry.

Anyone who builds a prison out of one verse of scripture that tells "women" to be "silent in the churches" (1 Cor. 14:34) needs to see that "the Bible was written not to oppress but to liberate, not to discourage but to encourage, not to enslave but to emancipate" (C. S. Cowles, *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church*, 182).

Historical Setting

In this day of heated debate over the validity of women serving in the church, it is a great privilege for me to serve in a denomination whose doors into ministry and leadership have always been open to women.

The very first constitutional by-laws (in 1898) of the Church of the



by Doug Samples

Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene,
Bakersfield, California

Nazarene stated, "We recognize the equal rights of both men and women to all the offices of the Church of the Nazarene including ministry." Nazarene founder Dr. Phineas F. Bresee



was fond of saying in our early days that "some of our best men are women!" The biblical basis for this position was found in Acts 2:17: "And in the last days . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . . and your daughters shall prophesy" (RSV).

It has been suggested by some within the Holiness Movement that, even though there are no historical or theological restraints toward women entering the ministry in our church, there is a very definite (yet invisible) barrier that hinders the success of women in the ordained ministry.

Rebecca Laird, in her work *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, states that "the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s seems to have curtailed women's active leadership in the Church of the Nazarene. The radical feminist call for equality produced a backlash that led some to call for women to stay in the home to maintain family strength" (p. 15). Therefore, although "the [Nazarene] denomination officially maintains a position that allows for the ordination of women . . . there has been little denominational support for women in the ministry" (ibid.). These concerns are explored in more biblical depth by C. S. Cowles in his excellent book *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church*.

My Experience with Women Ministers

Each of us speaks out of his or her own life context. My personal exposure to women in ministry has been very positive. My earliest memories of church have a warm place for my great-aunt, Lida Strickland Paris, who was one of the great fiery preachers of her day. Although past her prime when I knew her, there was no mistaking her fervency and ability to

communicate the message of holiness. From Aunt Lida I learned that no one would dare hinder a woman who has been called by God and commissioned by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word!

My view of women in ministry has also been enriched by my wife, Cheryl, who had the privilege of growing up with a woman pastor for six years. Cheryl remembers Lottie Rynerason as a godly woman who prayed for her and brought her into the membership of the church as a young girl of 10. From Sister Rynerason, I learned that a woman pastor had no trouble in producing as fine a Christian disciple as any man could ever hope. My wife lives as proof and confirmation of the beautiful fruit of the labors of a woman pastor.

Dr. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop expanded my view of women to new heights during my seminary years. As her student assistant, I would sit in awe of the unbelievable reasoning ability of this woman. Although her health was frail, her mind and her wit was sharper and more discerning than any professor with whom she studied. From Dr. Wynkoop, I discovered that a woman could combine a sweet, humble, and feminine spirit with the rugged theological thinking so often associated with men.



The Bible was written not to oppress but to liberate.

During my seminary years, I had a teenage youth in my youth group. I knew that Jan Sharps was special and that she heard a different drumbeat inside her. Ten years later, I had the privilege of recommending Jan to my former church as their new pastor. When one of the church members called me to complain about the possibility of having a woman as a pastor, I could say with confidence, "Give her six months. You won't be disappointed!" Sure enough, Jan won him

over, along with the whole congregation. From Pastor Jan, I learned I had no fears or qualms about entrusting a congregation that I loved dearly into the pastoral care of a woman.

My most recent women-in-ministry experience is with the new "pastor to women" on our local church staff at Bakersfield First Church of the Nazarene. When Cindy Smith came and sat down in my office to tell me about the call of God she was sensing upon her life, I was excited. I had three significant lessons confirmed.

First of all, I was thankful to realize that I had exercised the kind of pastoral leadership that communicated the message to Cindy that the doors of ministry were open to her. When she heard God's call, she knew she had the freedom under my leadership to respond to that call. Second, I was grateful that I did not have to fight a theological battle with my denomination over the ordination of women. As Cindy described her call, I could turn to my church *Manual* and show Cindy that our church already had a place for ordained deacon designed and waiting for her. Finally, I was glad that God had prepared my heart to be open and receptive to the idea of women being completely competent to handle the responsibility of ministry.

The Servanthood Issue

Rather than getting caught up in the argument of whether women should be allowed to minister, more focus needs to be directed to the issue of how women are to carry out their ministry. Any woman wanting to engage in ministry today needs to hear God's call to a servanthood model that is radically different from the current feminist model that is so confrontational.

The biblical model of servant leadership is the Jewish teacher Apollos:

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to

their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (*Acts 18:24-28*).

From this example of Apollos, we see many qualities that we would want to cultivate if we want to be an effective servant-leader for Christ. Apollos was:

- a learned person (v. 24)
- knowledgeable of the Scriptures (v. 24)
- well taught (vv. 24-25)
- passionate about what he believed (v. 25)
- accurate, i.e., with integrity (v. 25)
- confident and bold in speech (v. 26)
- able to communicate help to his listeners (v. 27)
- authoritatively based on Christ (v. 28)

Any one of those leadership qualities could be expounded upon as a way to be a more effective leader for Christ. However, a very subtle quality about Apollos is hidden away in verse 26 that is needed in huge dosages by anyone wanting to exercise leadership in today's world.

Upon closer inspection of verse 26, we discover that this far-traveled, well-qualified, excellently trained teacher, who has no hesitancy whatsoever in boldly making his views known, accepts an invitation to the home of Priscilla and Aquila, who "explained to him the way of God more adequately." Don't you find it odd that this great teacher allows these two lay leaders to teach him?

This teachable spirit overwhelms me about Apollos! With all his qualifications, with all his training, he still is willing to sit down at the kitchen table and listen while someone else teaches him.

From the commentators, it would seem that since Apollos "knew only the baptism of John," he probably had not heard about the infilling of the Holy Spirit. So, Priscilla and Aquila tell him about the Day of Pentecost

and the power that God unleashed upon the Church when He poured out His Holy Spirit.

As Apollos goes off to his next place of ministry (v. 27), we see him being of "great help" to the believers, which would seem to indicate that he is now passing on the message of the Holy Spirit that he had learned from Priscilla and Aquila.

This spirit of teachability stands out because it goes against all the current, secular ways of thinking. Any business executive in today's world who had the credentials that Apollos had would never dream of lowering himself or herself to actually stop and talk to a common laborer, much less expect to learn anything of significance from such a worker. On the contrary, that successful business entrepreneur is going to charge you \$1,000 an hour to sit down and tell you how it's done. You can rest assured that kind of leader will not waste much time asking for your opinion!



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Most secular leaders today are so consumed with self-interest, self-conceit, and self-glory that they have no concept of the servanthood nature that Jesus modeled for us. The more talented they are and the more successful they become, the more intoxicated they get with an addiction to power (David McKenna, *Power to Follow, Grace to Lead*). These leaders are not very much fun to be around,

and their people follow only out of fear and obligation.

However, a new approach toward leadership is emerging today. It is slowly gaining ground in the secular world as well as the Christian world. This new style of leadership calls for a new generation of leaders who look very much like the servant-leaders that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, called us to be almost 2,000 years ago.

Some of the writers setting forth this "new" leadership agenda are:

Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art*
Janet Hagberg, *Real Power*

Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*

Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*

John Gardner, *On Leadership*

Jesus Christ, John 13:1-17

Choices That Build Bridges

It would seem to me that women in ministry and Christian leadership today are faced with two opposing models to choose between. One course of action is to pursue a more confrontational approach, which would involve speaking out on behalf of women's rights anytime those rights and privileges are threatened or ignored. Based on this approach, women must always be prepared to do battle with any male who dares to slight them or speak in any language that is not "politically correct."

From a biblical perspective, this approach seems to be patterned after the modern secular, feminist agenda more than it is the servant model of Jesus Christ. Any time that I am screaming out for "my rights," some kind of alarm goes off, telling me that I have lost my biblical footing and am standing on something other than holy ground.

A much better choice is to follow the model of servant leadership that Jesus Christ taught us, that we saw modeled in the teachable spirit of Apollos, and is being retaught in leadership circles today by DePree, Greenleaf, and so on. Any leader, male or female, who chooses to adopt this attitude will be much closer to reproducing the incarnational ministry of Christ within His Church and His world.

If we are truly looking for methods of ministry that will "build bridges," this servant-like, teachable spirit will go much farther than any confrontational approach.

- Whether you are dealing with a denomination whose biblical viewpoints preclude women from ministry.
- Whether it's a senior pastor who is so insecure in his position that he is afraid to release ministry into the care of a woman.
- Whether you are having to deal with the unwillingness of men in the congregation to accept leadership from a woman.

No matter what it is you are facing, Jesus would challenge us to creatively find ways of taking a towel and a basin of water and washing feet!



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Conclusion

As women exercise leadership in the church today, they need to resist the loud cries of the secular feminists, who would have them "fight for your rights" at every opportunity. Instead, all of us, both men and women, need to follow the pattern of our Lord, who in His very nature was God but "did not consider equality with God" something that He had to hold onto. Instead, Jesus "made himself" to be "nothing," choosing instead to be a servant (Phil. 2:6-7). 

A Shepherd's Hands



by Joyce Williams

*Pastor's wife,
Wichita, Kansas*

I looked at my pastor-husband's hands as I tenderly massaged lotion into them. My first thought was, "What's a 'dignified preacher' doing with such battered, callused, work-worn hands?" Upon careful examination I saw that a nail was badly broken, another one was blue, and there was even a fine line of dirt under a couple of them. Several fingers were twisted from breaks, some of the joints were permanently swollen, and scars crisscrossed pathways across the hands and wrists. Gene's hands are certainly not the smooth, carefully manicured, well-tended hands of a professional!

Then it occurred to me that these hands and wrists had many stories to tell if they could talk. For they are the weathered hands of a caring shepherd who has spent over four decades tenderly caring for his flock. As I gently smoothed each finger, I reflected on some of those adventures.

The right hand and wrist are a mess! These had been bruisingly crushed and broken in a fall through a roof of a construction site in Ecuador. Our church had sent a team to build a church. A misstep resulted in a very nasty and dangerous tumble. Gene was taken to the rustic local hospital. The little doctor set the breaks by suspending his entire arm from a five-gallon bucket filled with water. There was a great deal of fear that this right-handed shepherd

would have to learn to be a south-paw. The preliminary prognosis was very poor. However, the Great Physi-

cian had a better idea. He had future plans for *both* hands!

Upon Gene's return to the United



States, he immediately went to a leading orthopedic surgeon. She was astonished when she examined him and heard his story. She responded, "If you had fallen here, I would have set the breaks with pins, permanently immobilizing your wrist and making your hand virtually useless. The suspended bucket technique has worked much better. But we are so 'advanced' I would never have dared to use it!" Amazingly, the breaks have healed well, and he is still an avid right-hander!

I've witnessed those hands doing so many loving acts for the sheep in our care. They have carefully grilled, roasted, and barbecued all kinds of meats for countless dinners. They have now cooked over three tons of catfish for the entire flock's traditional Labor Day fish fry. These hands have tenderly cradled countless babies being dedicated to the Lord. As a matter of fact, he's now dedicating the babies of babies whom he dedicated! They have intertwined with the hands of hundreds of couples being joined in holy matrimony. I've seen those hands stroke a feverish brow in the hospital; wrap around the shoulders of grieving, hurting lambs; and gently touch the hands of the desperately ill, anointing them with oil while praying for their healing.

Recently those hands, which have now entered their sixth decade, determinedly clutched a bat and wore a baseball glove throughout softball season. One evening, two fingers were broken on successive plays. My stubborn ballplayer's greatest consideration was how to continue to throw the ball and swing the bat with those encumbered appendages! For, you see, he loves being out in the field with the sheep.

As I massaged the back of that battered right hand, I noticed that all of the hair had been singed off. Then I realized it was from the heat of the fire that hot afternoon recently when he flipped hamburgers for over 200 sheep. The blistering fire had slowly scalped that area, resulting in this "bare-handed look."

Reaching for more lotion, I remembered seeing those hands smoothing a child's tousled hair, carrying tables and chairs, opening the Bible, folded in prayer, patting discouraged backs, wiping away tears—taking care of the flock.

I also reflected on how those hands work in the garden, growing vegetables to be shared with others. I've yet to see the task that those hands would not undertake. They are strong, confident hands, quite sure that no assignment is too simple or too complex, too small or too large to tackle.

So how did this shepherd learn the fine art of shepherding? It began that day when the Good Shepherd called him into the field to tend sheep. The precedent had already been set. He has simply followed the leading of the ultimate Savior-Shepherd.

Later, I began to ruminate about the precious hands of our Good Shepherd. They had spent about 30 years in the home and shop of a carpenter. Those hands no doubt were also callused and scarred, thickened from years of woodworking. Have you ever thought how fortunate those Nazarenes were who had a table or chair that had been fashioned by Jesus' hands?

One day He gathered up His tools and handed them to His unbelieving half-brothers. He purposefully strode through the door of Mary's house. Perhaps He paused to stroke the smooth frame that He may have carefully sanded. Then He set out, taking the fate of all humanity into His hands.

He stretched out those hands to many. He invited fishermen to leave their nets, a tax collector to leave his table, and beckoned others to follow Him. Over and over, He gently touched blinded eyes, lifted children onto His lap, turned water into wine, cast out demons, raised the dead, fed the hungry, healed the sick and lame, took up the whip to clear the Temple, cooked fish by the sea, touched lepers, and so much more.

Ultimately the day came when He rode into town with His hands tightly clutching the reins of a borrowed colt. As He gazed down at those hands, I believe He looked ahead in time. He alone knew the agonizing events of the coming week. Yet He purposefully proceeded into Jerusalem.

Later that week those hands served bread and wine to His closest followers. The same hands took up the towel and basin and gently washed the disciples' dusty feet. Throughout that agonized night, He folded them in

prayer as blood seeped from their pores. He compassionately paused to pick up and restore the soldier's ear. Then those hands were tied together. For hours He bore unspeakable atrocities. The Omnipotent One willingly remained bound before His accusers, seemingly powerless.

Finally, those hands were untied so that they could grasp the crossbeams of a rough, rugged cross strapped to His lacerated back. Then His arms were stretched out, and His wrists were pinned to that tree. Huge nails pierced and tore His flesh as His heaving body slowly died an agonizing death on that Friday afternoon. The Good Shepherd offered the supreme sacrifice—He laid down His life for His sheep.

Carefully, Joseph of Arimathea folded those swollen, broken, bloody hands. Then he wrapped Jesus in linen and laid Him in his own tomb.

But Resurrection morning came! Those same hands stripped away the graveclothes. He strode out of the open tomb and stretched out those freshly scarred hands to embrace a newly redeemed world! The price had been paid. The Lamb had been slain. What an unutterable sacrifice for dying humanity! The One who had been brutally murdered was alive again! Repentant sinner now could live eternally with the Shepherd!

My reverie was broken by the ringing telephone. Gene was calling to say he would be a little late for dinner. On his way home, he had passed by the home of a friend of ours, a lost lamb. My shepherd-husband saw that he needed an extra hand. So he had stopped to help him. We have been praying for that lamb and his family for a long time. Who knows what the end result will be? Some day soon, perhaps, we will celebrate when he returns to the fold!

Yes, there's nothing to compare with the close scrutiny of a shepherd's hands. I'm so thankful for the privilege of smoothing those of my careworn husband.

Somehow, I believe the Good Shepherd is watching. Maybe He is reminded of that weary, dusty day when Mary anointed Him and the comfort that this loving-kindness brought to Him. Perhaps He even smiles and waves a nail-scarred hand in approval!

The Eighth Quarter of Ministry

A few years ago I wrote an article in the *Preacher's Magazine* on "The Third Half of Ministry." This was my positive response to a wonderful article, "On the Second Half of Ministry," by J. Grant Swank Jr. For ministers who are laying aside active employment, either by choice or mandate, at approximately age 65, there often remains a number of significant years. For myself, I considered 20 years as a possibility, and thus my title, "The Third Half of Ministry." Now I'm approaching the upper end of that third half, and I want to write on "The Eighth Quarter of Ministry."

How is it now? Can we graciously turn loose without losing that sense of significance? What new awarenesses rush at us? I have found new awarenesses to which we are challenged to relate, with which we must grapple and learn to appreciate.

AWARENESS ONE:

The joy of greater liberty

The necessary organizational harness that enabled us to do productive, measurable, and observable work has been laid aside. Some ministers have great inner turmoil over letting go without feeling useless, like a shirker. There can be joy in letting the harness go because God has something better in the eighth quarter.

AWARENESS TWO:

The immediacy of instant ministry

It is a matter of letting the light of Christ and the life of Christ in us shine out. *Let* it shine! We don't have to *make* it shine or *organize* its shine. Just let it



by Kenneth Vogt

*Retired district superintendent,
Abbotsford, British Columbia*

shine. In the joy of our newfound freedom, we exude Jesus' light and life everywhere and anywhere—to loved ones, to strangers, and to casual friends.

Some envy us this freedom and would tie us down again to restrictive tasks. I have the conviction that our greatest contribution now to the Kingdom and the family of God is the deep contentment of our God-given joy. We have worked long and hard and savingly to fulfill God's holiness in our lives in the final stages. Almost daily there are persons on whom Christ's light and life shines through us.

I'm not a great coffee drinker but found myself in a wayside cafe. Not five minutes later I knew, in my freedom, God had directed me to this place to listen and to let His light and life shine through to a well-dressed, prosperous man seeking reconciliation with God and his family. That is the immediacy of instant ministry to which the eighth quarter adapts itself.

AWARENESS THREE:

The honors of past achievements

All of us who are nearing the

brightening sunset have some mementos of past achievements in our files or on our walls. The greatest blessing, however, is to meet someone unexpectedly in our freedom journey. A lady said to me the other day: "You were as an angel to me. You called in my home when I needed someone so desperately. Then you kept coming until my crisis was over." I have no memory of that event. Think what heaven will be like when we all rejoice with each other in remembered blessings!

AWARENESS FOUR:

The satisfaction of living on past savings

We have something left over for kin and Kingdom. Being provident wasn't easy during the lean years. It took the same discipline to put a tenth away for savings as it did to tithe to God's kingdom. The church and the government have both been helpful to encourage us to do that. I rejoice daily in God's sufficiency, even though it is not always abundant.

AWARENESS FIVE:

The allurements of an ever changing and brightening sunset

I'm attracted by what is out there in God's future. The sunset will come to finality for this earth. My heart is increasingly curious about what lies beyond. What God has planned for us is better—much, much better! "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, KJV) in the here and now as well as in the hereafter!

1 + 1 = SURVIVAL

I interviewed several candidates for a staff position. I asked each candidate to describe his or her expectations regarding relationships with me, with other staff members, and with members and friends of the congregation. One young man answered with a sigh, "I've been told I should maintain my distance and have no close friends. I guess that's what I'll have to do."

His tone of voice prompted me to ask, "Do you feel comfortable with that?"

"No," he answered, "but I've been told that's the way to do ministry."

The Dominant Pastoral Model

Solomon, a careful and perceptive observer of life, said:

I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless—a miserable business! (*Eccles. 4:7-8*).

Isolated independence, a dominant pastoral model, says we cannot enter into relationship with congregants without forfeiting leadership authority. Consequently, all relationships must be kept in equal balance, equal distance maintained from everyone. By our trying to live free of relational risk, no close friendships are formed, peers are not trusted with doubts and difficulties, confidences are not shared with superiors. These choices leave us seriously isolated. Like the man Solomon describes, we end up all alone, with neither son nor brother.

Chuck Swindoll, master of the captivating phrase, calls *Eccles. 4:7-9* the "lonely whine of the top dog." He says these verses address

the emptiness of those who make it to the top. If you are there, chances are you'll find yourself nodding in agreement. If you are en route, take special notice that such a destination isn't all it's



by Carl C. Green

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cracked up to be. Those who envy the ones who make it to the top don't stop to think of the price paid to get there. The top dog is usually a lonely, frustrated individual.¹

For most of us pastors, there seems no end to our toil. Our eyes see no contentment in our accomplishments. Will we one day conclude that the distanced, professional anonymity we so carefully guarded wasn't worth the price we had to pay? Will it ever seem to us that the things we sought were much better from afar? The man in Solomon's story asks himself, "For whom am I toiling, and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" Standing there "with everything, and nothing too," he concludes, "This . . . is meaningless—a miserable business!"

Perhaps we should pray, "Father, take me home. Let's go back to Your way!"

What is God's way? Not detachment, but *attachment!* Contrary to much traditional, well-intentioned counsel, the risks do not all reside on the side of attachment. Detachment is not empty of risk.

Another Pastoral Model

It was May 1986. A class of high school students were stranded on Mount Hood. The entire Northwest followed daily reports of the search for them. The hours stretched into what all feared were too many days. Finally, good news came. Huddled together, two or three had survived, but all who had become detached per-

ished in Mount Hood's winter grip.

Life illustrates what God's Word declares:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (*Eccles. 4:9-12*).

Out of community, standing alone, one cannot keep warm. 1 + 1 = survival. Therefore, true spirituality connects us; it does not disconnect us. Why, then, does the dominant pastoral model seem to encourage disconnection instead of connection?

Paul assures us that we have been "blessed . . . in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." He prays "that the eyes of . . . our heart may be enlightened." He wants us to "know the hope to which [God] has called" us, "*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*, and his incomparably great power for us who believe." He declares that Christ is "head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (*Eph. 1:3, 18-19, 22-23*, italics mine).

We think about Christ as the believer's fullness; we are not used to thinking about Christ needing fullness. Yet the Church, Christ's Body, completes Christ. Paul's word picture is gruesome: When we detach from one another, we decapitate Christ. When we disconnect from others and avoid transparency, we reject Christ's Body while embracing His severed head. If this is not sacrilege, it is a significant departure from God's way.

Most of us are comfortable with the hope to which we have been called and with the idea that God's power is incomparably great. However, our strange reluctance to enter into the kinds of "fellowship intimacy"

we routinely encourage our people to practice demonstrates that we are *not* comfortable with the saints. Yet “the riches of his glorious inheritance” are extended to *us in the saints!* Each saint is a branch bank, a depository of God’s heavenly resources. Each saint is surrounded by other saints—branch banks, depositories of God’s heavenly resources. *We must interact transparently with other believers if we are to access God’s resources!* When we detach, choosing isolated independence, we end up “alone, with neither brother nor son.”

Bruce Larson challenges pastors to overcome the fear of intimacy too often cloaked by the dominant pastoral model. He says:

Releasing people to minister involves risks, both for pastor and people. For the pastor, it means giving up control. . . . Sometimes the desire to seem self-sufficient is their own, but sometimes other people want them to live up to that image. Either way, if lay people are going to minister effectively, pastors must resist that image. . . .

People need role models for that kind of vulnerability—pastors and church leaders who will risk sharing their pain and their dreams. If we want to release lay people to minister, we’ve got to give them permission to share their pain and minister to one another. *Ministry comes out of community, and community comes out of people sharing themselves* [italics mine].²

I was serving as pastor in my first church. The concluding service of our district’s annual meeting was under way. Seated front and center, I was flanked by a row or two of our people, many of them new Christians. Though our church had experienced good growth, represented in the large number of new Christians surrounding me, I found myself in a spiritual dry spot. When the speaker invited the congregation to pray at the altar, the Lord prompted me to go forward. I argued, “Lord, what will these people think, these people who’ve come with me and look upon me as their spiritual leader? They’ll lose respect for me.”

I stalled and argued. The Lord persistently prompted. Finally I crawled

over a half-pew of people and went forward. When I finished praying, I discovered the people from my congregation gathered around, praying for me. My vulnerability and openness deepened and solidified our relationship; it did not diminish my ministry.

Sadly, we operate under the false notion that vulnerability is taboo. This notion disconnects us and puts us at very high risk. Two are simply better than one when it comes to survival. Even pastors cannot stay warm alone.

A Story of Survival

My second grade teacher began each day’s arithmetic class with the announcement, “Carl, you can go to the back of the room and play with the building blocks now. You’re too dumb to do arithmetic.”



The top dog is usually a lonely, frustrated individual.

As a sixth grader, my physical education teacher saved me till last, gathered the class around, and said, “Let’s all watch while Carl tries to do a pull-up.” He knew I couldn’t.

Growing up, I gathered the strong impression that any church over 100 in attendance had gotten that way by abandoning the “standards.” I also grew up with a definite sense of who I was and who I wasn’t. I knew those groups of people to which I did not belong.

Ten years into ministry, I attended a crusade at a neighboring church. The pastor invited me to the platform and asked me to pray the prayer for the evening. Suddenly, unexpectedly, sometime during the early part of the service, I broke into a cold sweat. After a decade of achievement, I experienced isolating fear and panic. I do not know what triggered the panic. It was not the size of the crowd. Every Sunday morning I preached to twice the number present on that particular night.

I do understand the source of the panic. My early failures and the deep feelings of inadequacy associated with them burst to the surface. Beyond that, I was in conflict with my roots. My congregation had over 200 people. Had I let down the standards? I sat on the platform of one of the large churches in our district, next to the pastor who was a good friend. In a moment of horrifying insight, I realized my circle of friends included many people who did not belong to my growing-up strata—district and denominational leaders, educators with advanced degrees, doctors, lawyers, and professional people. I hadn’t planned it; I had simply kept my nose to the grindstone, trying to do a good job, and it had happened. I froze up inside. I felt naked. I was scared. I felt like the crowd, able to see all my inadequacies for ministry, was laughing at me. That night I entered a dark period of identity crisis.

Prior to this crisis-triggering event, God had made Rom. 12:3 meaningful to me: “By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather . . . with sober judgment, *in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you*” (italics mine). During my dark days, God repeatedly used this verse to inform me that He was uncovering the fears and anxieties of a lifetime one layer at a time. He would not uncover more than He would give me faith to deal with.

God lifted another verse to mind as well: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom. 8:26). “Helps” is a conjugation of three Greek words—*sunantilambanetai*, “to take hold of along with from the other side.” Many times God reminded me that He was uncovering parts of my life that were handicapping me for the ministry that He had in mind for me. As He uncovered each layer, His Word reminded me that His Spirit was taking hold of my infirmity—my weakness, my fear, my anxiety—along with me from heaven’s side.

God’s Word and my relationship with Him served as keys to survival in those days. Small groups of people were also instrumental in my survival. They dispensed God’s grace to me. Remember, “Two are better than one.

... A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."



When we detach from one another, we decapitate Christ.

One small group met for breakfast. For two years, we met every other Tuesday. We developed a close and valued friendship. Though the group consisted of people out of my strata, this never seemed to matter at any conscious level. One morning, about six months after the night of crisis on the platform, I went to breakfast as usual. I had carried my panic internally during those six months. I hadn't voiced it to anyone, not even my wife. At breakfast I entered into the conversation, and it happened—I spoke, everyone listened politely, then moved quickly to other conversations. This had never happened before. That morning, it happened twice. In my fragile emotional condition, I felt rebuked. My comfort as a member of the group vanished. I was again in a second grade classroom and on the platform, stripped naked in front of everyone. The two rejections confirmed what had long lain dormant. I didn't belong! These were not my kind of people! I felt horribly out of place.

I left quickly after breakfast, intending never to return. Yet the Lord, citing Rom. 12:3 and 8:26, quietly urged

me to return in two weeks.

I said, "I'm not going back!"

He said, "Go back and tell them exactly how you feel and how they intimidate you. Tell them how stupid you felt. Tell them about your experience six months ago, about your conflict with your roots, about the internal panic of these six months."

The level of vulnerability on which God insisted was frightening, but I went back and told the group all the things I was feeling. When I finished, one by one, these people, whom God had given to me *before I knew I needed them*, extended His help to me. They shared with me the things that intimidated them. They affirmed me. They dispensed heaven's inheritance to my frightened heart. My healing began that day.

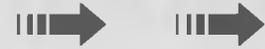
Two [really] are better than one.

... If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Postscript

God continues to uncover layers of my life. He continues to take hold of things along with me from heaven's side. He continues to connect me too. I have discovered the importance of staying connected to brothers in the Lord. I have benefited, for they have often dispensed His grace to me. I would not have made it this far if God had not given me brothers. Without shame I admit that. For me, 1 + 1 has been the difference between survival and fatality. I have experienced the truth that "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Choose relationships. Reject isolated independence. 1 + 1 = survival. It is God's way!



We must interact transparently with other believers if we are to access God's resources!

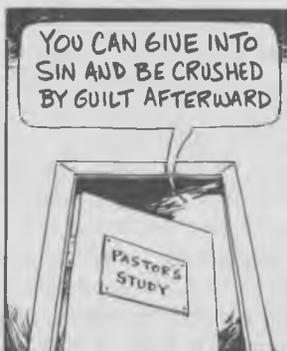
A Prayer

Father, I pray, not for those with personal inclinations toward privacy and sufficient strength to survive on their own, but for us whose souls, caught in the wintry isolation of ministry, are freezing. Set us free from our isolation. Help us avoid disaster by opening our eyes to see that two are always better than one, that together we can stay warm, that a cord of three strands cannot be easily broken. Give us permission to shed the isolating front of self-contained sufficiency, and the courage to risk relationship. Thus set free, weave us each into a cord of several strands so we will not be easily broken. Amen.

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 112-13.

2. Bruce Larson, "The Risky Business of Lay Ministry," *Leadership*, Fall 1989, 28-30.

BEYOND BELIEF



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Salvation and Judgment: Two Sides of God's Love

by Robert G. Tuttle Jr.

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Can salvation and judgment dwell in the same house? John Wesley (a man of one book) might well respond, "Let God speak for himself." "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10); "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body" (5:10). Connect this thought with "The dead were judged according to what they had done" (Rev. 20:12); "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves. . . . For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph. 2:8, 10). The answer, at least from a biblical point of view, seems apparent. These and other passages affirm time and again that if we are in fact saved by grace through faith, then clearly we are judged by our works, the inevitable fruit of that salvation.

Recently I was asked, "Does the Wesleyan understanding of salvation eliminate a doctrine of judgment?" In our fuzziest moments some of us might wish so, but we get no encouragement from either Scripture or Mr. Wesley. Nonetheless, in light of the various trends in theology, this is a fair question (if not a profound one); so let's attempt to answer it fairly (if not profoundly).

Perhaps to be true to the spirit of John Wesley is to be faithful to his method. Wesley would probably answer such a question with several questions of his own: (1) What is salvation? (2) What is judgment? (3) Does one necessarily preclude the other, and if not, how are the two

connected? Let's address these questions one at a time.

What Is Salvation?

Within theological circles the term *salvation* is usually a more comprehensive word including concepts of redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and so on. Since it is obviously necessary to narrow our focus considerably, let's look at its nature and source.

When persons, whether on their own or by the influence of some superior power, lose their freedom to implement their own wills, they often can regain their freedom only by the intervention of someone else. The various terms used in Scripture to relate to salvation express just such intervention. Words like *free* or *loose*, *ransom* or *redeem*, *save* or *deliver* all speak of a loving God wanting to free creation from a bondage that is less than God's intended purpose and to restore creation to a relationship of intimacy and trust.

Genesis portrays the dilemma in the tragic story of the fall of our first parents. As a result of believing the tempter's lie (a veritable masterpiece of deceit), they did not become like God. Rather, as created beings they simply became horribly aware of the contrast between God and God's creation. Sin now ruled a mortal body, their nature permanently altered. Their senses, once attuned to the eternal, would now readily submit only to a purely physical world where everything else could be seen only as a "poor reflection." If fellowship with God were to be restored, then God must condescend, stoop to reveal, draw us out. John Wesley clearly

speaks to our predicament and to God's solution in terms of salvation from sin. He writes rather cautiously:

The doctrine of salvation has been grievously abused by many Methodists. The term gospel has become a mere cant [trite] word. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal that has neither sense nor grace bawl out something about the blood of Christ and his righteousness and all of his hearers cry out: "What a fine gospel sermon." Surely Methodists have not so learned Christ. We know no salvation without salvation from sin.

Since sin is the "stuff" that hell is made of, Wesley wanted salvation from both.

Clearly salvation is salvation from sin. Since Scripture describes sin as a militant power diametrically opposed to the divine will and its purposes, God's Word flies in the face of such naive notions that sin and evil are only necessary shadows. Sin, both personal and systemic (remember that Leviticus insists on sacrifice for the sins of the nation as well as for the individual), so alienates, so oppresses, that God alone is our hope for reconciliation. Sin turns us inward. We care only for ourselves. Psychologists speak of narcissism. Martin Luther writes that we are "snatched away from ourselves and are placed outside ourselves." Bonhoeffer states it pointedly: "Life was intended to be lived from the center with God as our center, not at the center with ourselves at the center." Salvation (in a phrase) is by grace (the wooing of the Holy Spirit) through faith (in the provision of God's Son Jesus Christ), so that we exchange the kind of a world where

we are at the center for the kind of a world where God is at the center.

What Is Judgment?

God is radically opposed to sin. God is against those things that separate us from God, ourselves, and those around us. God as Judge both draws and exposes, restores and rejects. Unfortunately some (like the Scholastics) would attempt to separate God's judgment from God's love. God would seem to have two minds mutually opposed. On the other hand, some (like the humanists) simply dismiss, or at best ignore, God's judgment as inconsistent with the love of God. Both extremes weaken the significance of a doctrine that is absolutely crucial to the whole gospel.

Judgment, interpreted as present consequence for sin and as future (during the *last days*) reckoning for deeds done in the past, is always the judgment of love. It is a distortion to separate God's love and judgment. Such a separation makes God appear capricious, unreliable, avenging. If God seems so, our metaphors simply have broken down in an attempt to describe the spontaneous power of God's opposition to evil. Blame the writer, not the Source. God has no opposite nature inconsistent with love.

The love of salvation is the love of judgment. God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Wesley (taking his lead from some of the mystic writers) suggests that hell itself is the creation of God's love, not God's wrath. He imagined those standing before judgment, pleading their own case—unwilling to repent and refusing the provision available through faith in Jesus Christ. Suddenly they realize the utter futility of their own argument. As their sins are exposed, they cry out for a place to hide. Wesley suggests that the darkness of hell was created by God's love to provide just such presumption a place to escape the awful exposure.

God is not some kind of cosmic killjoy. God's judgment is against sin

because sin is the greater deceiver, ultimately promising what it can never produce. God's laws are to expose and protect. Judgment requires us to take them seriously. Judgment seeks to restore. The doctrine of judgment reminds us of the inevitable fruit of faith—the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that delivers us from sin and its penchant to alienate and corrupt.

Judgment is *present* in that sin has its immediate consequences. God disciplines those whom God loves. Just as one does not have to die to experience the fruit of faith, one does not have to die to experience the fruit of disobedience and its immediate consequences. Again, the "stuff" that hell is made of is all around us.

Yet, though judgment is present, it is also *future*. During the "last days" we will all stand before God, saved by grace through faith but judged by works as evidence of our salvation. Judgment is not merely a doctrine of divine vengeance. An "eye for an eye" may be legitimate as an elementary expression of retribution, but it is certainly not the mind of Christ—who, as Wesley reminds us, will judge all things at His coming in glory. Be encouraged; God will rule, and the things of this age will have their own reward.

What Is the Connection?

Does salvation necessarily preclude judgment, and if not, how are the two connected? The groundwork for this section has already been done. Wesley believed that God's love is revealed in salvation and judgment. So, what is the significance of such a connection for the church today?

Simply stated, God acts primarily as Creator, Savior, and Judge. As Creator, God fashions us in God's own image. As Savior, God acts as an immediate result of God's spontaneous love to restore the image that has been lost. As Judge, God acts as to whether or not that restored image bears its necessary fruit.

Perhaps John Wesley's greatest genius was to combine perspectives normally at odds with each other. The issue at stake here is a classic example. Wesley united Reformed theolo-

gy (with its emphasis on justification) with Catholic spirituality (with its emphasis on sanctification). He did not allow the necessity of the one to undermine the reality of the other. This is an important point. For Wesley, salvation was both an event and a process including justification *and* sanctification. In an irritable moment he labeled both Luther and Calvin "silly saints" for not fully understanding the implications of their theology. Grace, for John Wesley, fulfills the law. Repentance and belief (the point of the Spirit's sword) create fresh starts; thus, the "prodigal" experiences grace and a new beginning. As Christians, by virtue of our faith in Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit is released to fulfill all righteousness. God's judgment against sin makes salvation not only necessary but unattainable unless God intervenes. That is the point. Grace is available. We are without excuse. Wesley writes: "Methodists that do not fulfill all righteousness deserve the hottest place in the lake of fire." Salvation and judgment link faith and works as our peculiar legacy. Judgment, however, is not designed simply to keep the justified honest, but to remind us that ultimately we know a tree by its fruit.

Once again, we are saved by grace through faith and are judged by our works. God's love is revealed *to* us in salvation and *through* us in judgment as our actions bear witness to so great a salvation. Both doctrines are absolutely essential to the integrity of the gospel. Wesley's balance strikes at the root of Pelagianism (works righteousness) on the one hand and at antinomianism (the blatant disregard for law) on the other. Salvation nurtures the roots; judgment inspects the fruit. It insures active participation ("working out our salvation with fear and trembling"). We must "walk the talk." "God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" empowers us to abolish strongholds and storm the gates of hell. 

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Holiness Baptistification

Since Wesley, we are all Arminians." This was a hyperbolic observation, but there has indeed been an Arminianizing of Calvinism.

H. Orton Wiley spoke of the 80 percent Arminians among the Calvinists, who often accept four of the five points Remonstrant Arminians have made, but still hold to the fifth point: eternal security. He even said that many of them fly Calvin's flag but ride in Arminianism's boat.

These observations of Wiley were and are also a bit hyperbolic. Yet a Northern Baptist Seminary professor once said to me at a meeting of scholars that we Arminians surely must take satisfaction in the fact that many Calvinists now locate where we do on important points. He was referring to such matters as our views that atonement was made for everyone, and that people can resist God's saving grace.

Although there is some truth in all this success of Arminianism, I have been concerned of late about Baptist inroads into our camp. I have been concerned about a Holiness Baptistification—to use a Martin Marty word.

Our low-church, extremely congregational, Baptist fellow believers are doing right well in their work—as a large part of the evangelical picture in many countries. They are adept at using electronic and print media. As a consequence, Arminian Evangelicals keep getting spillovers from their camp into our bailiwick. Our people see them, hear them, and read them, and we have in many ways tended to be indoctrinated by these confident and rigorous Evangel-



by J. Kenneth Grider

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icals—many of whom are also Fundamentalists.

One Holiness Baptistification is in our wide practice of not baptizing, but of dedicating, infants and of-unaccountable-years children.

Our long tradition is to baptize them. Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Wesley, and Wiley did. Roman Catholicism always has, as well as Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism; and by far the majority of Protestants—mainly because four entire households were baptized, according to the New Testament. Yet many Holiness people do not even know what the long Wesleyan tradition has been. They dedicate infants, not even seriously considering whether to baptize them.

Another Holiness Baptistification consists in the widespread understanding that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins instead of that Christ suffered for us—which is the long-

held Arminian-Wesleyan understanding. Twenty-two times the RSV states that He suffered for us, and never that He was punished or paid the penalty. Scripture teaches this because, as sinless, Christ was guiltless; and as guiltless, He was not punished but suffered.

The reason why whole classes of about 50 ministry students have often told me they understood that Christ paid the penalty is because of this Holiness Baptistification I am discussing. An example is in the fact that, unless a recent change has been made, the Billy Graham organization trains all their altar workers to use the punishment theory as they counsel people in the Graham meetings.

A third area of Holiness Baptistification is in their influence as to teach that Christ purchased our salvation.

They can teach such, because it means that the salvation of elected persons is a done-deal. We teach that Christ provided for everyone's salvation, not that He purchased it. The "purchased" view is taught in a book on personal evangelism widely used by Holiness people: James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*. That book also teaches that people can receive the gift of heaven, since they believe in eternal security and understand that if we receive salvation (which is what Scripture says) it is the same as receiving the gift of heaven.

I would much rather that we Holiness people make Arminians out of Baptist-like Christians, instead of that they make Baptist Christians out of us.

A Theological Way to Avoid Ancient History: A Book Review

Salvationists have always had a bent—more like a U-turn—for the practical. This kind of pragmatism of the empirical sort is closely allied to experience. Thus it is helpful for me and my comrade soldiers in the Salvation War to be reminded periodically that any spiritual experience will eventually become ancient history if it does not ultimately bring together (1) what and how we *feel* and (2) what we *know* and how we *think*. The faith that appropriates any aspect of the Christian life must move on to become the “faith that seeks understanding.” This indispensable dimension of ongoing faith is, according to a very wise man from another era, the essential description of **theology**.

Like most of the denominational readership of the *Preacher's Magazine*, The Salvation Army is part of a larger spiritual movement called the **Wesleyan tradition**. In this tradition, the search of faith for understanding has led to viewing theology as a framework shaped by **holiness**. Holiness is the attribute that centrally characterizes the nature of God. Through His Fatherly sharing, He wants it transformingly to characterize the natures of His children. This transforming characterization is rooted in that indispensable moment within the *ordo salutis* that Wesleyans, with Paul, call **entire sanctification**. Even as the experience of entire sanctification does not stand in isolation from the total sweep of the Christian life, the doctrine of holiness—which includes the truth of entire sanctification as its crowning point in this life—must be seen within the wider framework of Christian theology.



by John G. Merritt

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Southern Historical Center,
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As a Salvation Army officer, I know of no better place for Salvationists to discover the framework for and explore the contents of a Christian theology that centers in holiness than *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, by J. Kenneth Grider.

I know the bare mention of “**theology**”—both inside and outside the Army—sometimes strikes the layperson in the pew or, dare I say it, some pastors standing behind the pulpit as a needless trip to Dullsville that is reached over a route through irrelevant, and frequently dangerous, countryside. Although occasionally true, such a reaction reflects a misunderstanding of the nature, function, and utter necessity of theology—of “faith seeking understanding.” Dr. Grider transports us away from this kind of misunderstanding as his book leads in a different direction highway *in language that everyone can understand and enjoy!* Thus, he starts us on a journey by persuasively demonstrating the practicality of sound theology. He does so by describing theology “as a discipline whose business is

to help us reflect on our Christian faith in ways that make a difference in our lives.” Professor Grider goes on to tell us why:

Theology [makes this difference because,] when . . . meshed into life as it ought to be, it is not mere verbiage nor ivory-tower speculation. It is as practical as the next breath we are to breathe.

It bites into life, hitting home to people. It helps us make more or less articulate our experience of God's grace. It puts wonder into our worship—and into the work we do within that saved and saving community called the Church. . . .

Instead of being divorced from the many practical aspects of the church's life, theology is the very commodity that makes all the practical matters practical. . . . It is our theology, our Christian beliefs, in their interrelatedness, in their intermixture, in their overlappings, in their essential and nonessential congruities, that constitute the basis for and the importance of all these so-called practical matters (p. 19).

One of the ways that Grider validates this high claim for the practical bearings of theology on life will make Salvationists perk up their ears: “Theology is pawnbroker William Booth taking the Methodistic faith to London's streets and streetwalkers and sending forth bands of workers who are as terrible as an army with drums and slogans and generals who sit right next to God” (p. 24).

Because of all this, Dr. Grider proposes that theology can pop up in all kinds of places. Indeed, because of its holistic nature, it *must* do so, for “theology today seeks to do what it is

in libraries and classrooms and out on the front lines where faith confronts unfaith in the world" (p. 20).

Within this understanding of theology, Dr. Grider takes us through the whole gamut of Christian doctrine:

- **God in His Trinitarian nature.**
- **The truth and function of Scripture.** His approach to this bottom-line issue goes a long way toward casting light on, rather than generating more heat about, the current debate surrounding the reliability, trustworthiness, and authority of the Bible.
- **God's creative purpose for, and redemptive restoration of, humanity.** What Dr. Grider says may be a startling revelation that the difference between Calvinistic and Arminian understandings of Christ's atoning work involves more than the question of whether He died for an elect few or for all the fallen children of Adam. It also may provide a corrective to our unwittingly being more Calvinistic than Arminian at some points in the proclamation of the Cross.
- **The discrete but interrelated dimensions of deliverance from the total spectrum of sin.** Professor Grider's detailing of *justification* and *entire sanctification* against the backdrop of *glorification* validates and explains what we Wesleyans mean by the terms "first work of grace" and "second work of grace." To my knowledge, no Wesleyan theologian since H. Orton Wiley has devoted so much space (102 pages) in a volume of systematic theology to entire sanctification unapologetically described as a "second work of grace." This is done within the context of the current debate about the biblical and theological appropriateness of identifying the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit with His sanctifying ministry following conversion. This analysis will provide Salvationists with a needed biblical and theological corrective to what I consider the over-

ly confident claims of a vocal minority in the Army that, unfortunately, parallels what is being proposed in some of the other parts of the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement: that the outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts are moments of conversion rather than part of the biblical foundation of a "theology of subsequence" on which entire sanctification as a second work of grace is built.

Professor Grider wraps all this up by pointing out instances, "**Touches of Error**" he calls them, where some exponents of Wesleyan holiness have shot the Wesleyan tradition in the foot. He proceeds to remove the theological "smoking gun" and bring healing to these conceptual wounds by addressing several theological distortions, biblical misunderstandings, and experiential misperceptions regarding the nature and consequences of the grace of entire sanctification. This is a "must read" before the next Sunday Morning Holiness Meeting (morning worship service)!

- **The Church as God's instrument of His divine purpose in human history.** Although Dr. Grider and probably most of the readers of this journal take a different approach to the sacraments than Salvationists would, his reflections on the nature and purpose of the Church is of contemporary relevance to Salvationists in the emerging, but long overdue, development of the Army's theology of the Church.
- **The consummation of universal and redemptive history in the second coming of Christ.** Here Professor Grider affirms the personal return of Christ in a way that fairly summarizes the various views about the relation of His second advent to the controversial millennium, concerning which we should not forget, The Salvation Army and several other Wesleyan-Holiness churches have never made official, specific commitments. Although those Salvationists who are strongly in-

fluenced by Scofield-type dispensationalism, which is rooted in a form of Calvinism rather than in Arminian presuppositions, may not be receptive to what Dr. Grider calls "realized millennialism," I suspect that William Booth would not have had too much trouble with it!

This *Wesleyan* mode of "faith seeking understanding" within a framework shaped by holiness is one that Professor Grider pursues from an *Arminian* perspective of grace-prompted human responsibility at each step of the Christian pilgrimage. This explains why he brings together, with such urgency, thinking and experiencing at the point of ongoing response to the God who in Christ calls us to spiritual maturity: "The various means of grace through which spiritual growth occurs are especially important to Wesleyan-holiness theology" (p. 511).

For one thing, in the understanding of this theological tradition, a believer may fall from grace. Taking steps to prevent this is therefore urgent. Also this type of theology is interested in discipline toward holy living. Holiness of heart should issue in a holy life (p. 511).

Allow me to conclude on a personal level: In reading *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, I was able to reconnect with and renew the history of my own theological pilgrimage from a Keswick-oriented denomination toward Wesleyan-Holiness convictions that eventually landed me in The Salvation Army. Thirty-three years ago J. Kenneth Grider became one of my two mentors, along with Richard S. Taylor, in things Wesleyan at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Probably most of you have not had the opportunity of sitting in his classroom, but any of you can plumb the life-changing truth that was communicated there by reading this volume. Begin by buying it. It is not an inexpensive book. But that is not an insurmountable obstacle if you will refrain from going near a fast-food restaurant for a month. The difference it could make in your life and ministry will be more than simply lowering your cholesterol level!

What Really Makes a Difference?

What are the things that really make a difference in our ministries? When the options are sifted out, what remain as the rock-solid, dependable ingredients that can make a difference? Fair questions for the pastor, for at times we are prone to wonder if anything works.

Pastor, be encouraged. There are things that can really make a difference and that are available to everyone. When discouragement eats away at you, when you cannot see through the dark clouds, be reminded that some realities, with God, will never change. Some things will make a difference.

Before we look at some of these, one priority every pastor will need—a God-centered focus. Robert Callender, writing in the Winter 1995 issue of *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*, stated that “it is only when ministry is truly God-centered that it becomes clearly focused and we can see God’s plan for us” (“Re-Focusing to Re-Empower a Ministry Gone Flat,” 5).



by C. Neil Strait

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Our God-centered life puts all the things that matter in perspective. To use the resources of God without a relationship with Him is to misuse Him and to invite disappointment.

Let’s look at some of the things that, if you have nothing else, will make a positive difference in your ministry and in your life.

Let’s start with the obvious—**prayer**. Prayer is a positive influence that makes a difference. Prayer is one of the exercises of the soul that can-

not be improved. Nothing will ever take its place. Prayer will never become obsolete. Pastor, be encouraged—prayer remains one of your greatest resources. Prayer will make a difference.

Charles Stanley, in his book *Handle with Prayer*, says, “Many Christians are top-notch persons of prayer. Prayer serves as the avenue through which we have contact and communion with God. We bear our souls to our Father through prayer. We lay ourselves before Him and invite His counsel by way of prayer.” Max Lucado reminds us that Jesus responds not to our eloquence, “but to our pain.” (*He Still Moves Stones* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993], 99).

Every pastor, at some time on his journey through ministry, has come to the low moments, when it seems futile and hopeless. At such moments, you have a choice. You can let the hopelessness invade and destroy, or you can lift your weary soul to God and plead your case before the One who can and will lead you out of the lowlands. It is your choice. There is a resource that will make a difference.

The second resource that will really make a difference is **the Word**. On a devotional calendar that one of my pastors gave me one Christmas, there is this statement by Mountford: “For knowledge to become wisdom and for the soul to grow, the soul must be rooted in God.” Prayer is one way to be rooted in God, but another is through the Word. God’s Word is His instructions to us—instructions for the joyful times and for the joyless times. His Word invades the heart and leads you out of darkness and into light.

Warren Wiersbe, in his book *Something Happens When Churches Pray*, gives this counsel:

If your church is going through



problems and difficulties, if Satan is opposing your work and using people in your community to make things difficult, what is the solution? The Word of God and prayer. That is the source of our wisdom, the success of our witness, the secret of our warfare ([Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984], 51).

As pastors, we seek solutions, answers, a way through, and a way out. Pastor, be encouraged—one of the resources that really makes a difference is the Word of God. Among the last words of Pope Paul VI were these: "Apart from the Word of God, there are no valid solutions to the problems of our day."

A third resource that will really make a difference, in the long haul, is **obedience**. The word "obedience" is a much-maligned word. But God has not changed His mind about obedience. He has not renegotiated its terms or its importance. God still honors obedience. Sometimes, in the low moments of ministry, the only option may be simple obedience. Yet, by taking that step, God responds with blessing and with care.

John R. W. Stott commented on a phrase from Ps. 119:73 (KJV): "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." He states that "our whole nature fulfills its destiny only in obedience to the will of God" (*Decision*, n.d.).

There are spiritual benefits to obedience—though that is not why we are obedient. Every pastor needs to know that God still honors the obedient heart. It is a rock-solid principle that really makes a difference. When ministry seems empty—maybe even hopeless—it is simply time to be obedient and to trust the future to God. Such a testing moment, while not easy, gives a true test of our trust in the God who has called us. In the low moments of the soul, God has a way through for us. We can find it only along the path of obedience.

Pastor, be encouraged—the things that really matter are still intact. They are the handles for the soul through the narrow passageways. These resources never change. They will always be there, amid the ever-changing environment and challenges. They are the things God has ordained. He will honor those who use them.

On the Wall Hung a Sling

by Joseph Seaborn

Chair, Center for Christian Studies,
Indiana Wesleyan University,
Marion, Indiana

Just walking through the room, you never would have noticed it. It hung on a wooden peg that jutted out from the wall. Against the prairie brown background it hardly stood out. Its earth tones struck about the same color as its background, and most people entered and left that room and never saw it.

But David knew about it—at times more than others. But he knew about it. He put it there. He could remember the day when he first moved into his new office with his sacks of military weapons and his piles of parchment documenting his exploits. He had spent the first day scattering his memorabilia around on shelves and tabletops. He had laid the parchments in a drawer along with a couple of smooth stones that he had taken from the Valley of Elah. But on the wall, he hung the sling.

It was hardly a deluxe version. Shepherd boys weren't known for having the deluxe of anything. They were just earthy peasants, poor and durable and full of faith in God. They might occasionally kill a lion or a bear, but they hardly needed a special sling for that. If their simple sling failed, like any other boys, they would simply outrun the beast.

On that particular day, things were different. That man who stood ranting and foaming across the valley made both victory and flight seem impossible. Even at a distance, he was gigantic. But the rock—David's first rock—had found its mark. A sling that was undersized for the job took him down. "Giant killer," they called him. But David knew better. That's why on his wall he hung the sling.

As the days moved into months and

years, David faced an arsenal of enemies. Fear of failure, fifth columns, loss of morale among the troops, a nation divided by war, temptations without and within. Time after time, when the odds were stacked against him, when Goliath seemed like a pygmy, he walked into his office and set his eyes on that sling. "The God who made that sling to slay the enemy will do so again. The battle is not mine, but the Lord's." And David would walk back out into the Judean sun with a different perspective.

If David were here to share his heart, in his pocket he'd have a sling—not as a relic to worship, but as a pointer. A pointer to this great reality: The battle is not yours, but God's. You will never have abilities large enough to complete your work. You will never, in your own prowess, have the skills to build the Kingdom and fight the devil and grow a church. Not by yourself. That's why you need a sling.

You need to get yourself a nail and a wall and a sling. And when, out there in the solitary fields of battle, when the war is fierce and the company of your fellow soldiers seems several valleys away, ease into your private office and turn your eyes to the sling. To the simple instrument that God used to slay the giant! Remind yourself, *The battle is not mine, but God's*. Somewhere, sometime, someplace down the future, find you a wall and a nail and a sling. When the size of the enemy, even at a distance, seems gigantic, remember that on your wall hangs a sling. And the God who helped you wield it for His glory before will . . .

So on your wall, hang a sling. 

Making It at the Struggling Church

I pastor a struggling church. For some time, I thought that I was somewhat alone in this plight. However, after having scouted about a bit, I have discovered that there are scores of "challenges" like mine—regardless of the denomination.

When my family moved to this congregation in May 1980, there were a dozen faithful laypersons present our first Sunday. In the previous 10 years, eight ministers had come and gone. The church sign needed painting. Back rooms in the building had accumulated junk. The parsonage needed a new dishwasher, for the front door had sprung on the one we inherited.

The front "lawn" was little more than a rock pile, since a previous pastor (who had once been in construction) grew discouraged while building the house and left before completing the outside work.

To top it off, there was no salary for the five of us—a situation that continued throughout the summer.

But we made it! And so the winter came on. On Wednesday, January 7,



by J. Grant Swank Jr.

*Pastor,
Windham, Maine*

1981 (funny how such dates stick in our minds), I walked into the church around noon. There, in subzero weather, I discovered that the building was flooded. Going into the sanctuary, I walked upon a carpet that had been transformed into something like a large kitchen sponge. The walls were streaked from water condensation. The varnish on the open-beamed ceiling was peeling. The pews were stained at the bottom from standing in water. The piano and the small organ were wrecked because their under-

sides were soaked. The tile in the foyer had begun to curl.

When I walked downstairs, I saw three to four inches of water throughout. When I looked up, water was streaming through the electrical units. All the furniture was drenched, including Sunday School literature, Bibles, another piano, Ping-Pong tables in the fellowship room, carpets in the nursery, Christmas decorations, tables, folding chairs.

I took a broomstick and stuck it up against the ceiling tiles. Each thrust was like Niagara cascading from the other side of the rectangular pieces that already had turned a yellowish color. One by one I poked, dancing back a few steps each time in order not to be anointed with water. Looking down, I saw more floor tiles curling around my toes.

The culprit was a \$54 piece in the furnace that had malfunctioned, in turn freezing the pipes so that they burst upstairs and down.

But we made it! As it turned out, the insurance company paid for renovating the church's interior with no cost to the tottering congregation. We ended up with practically a new church. This could have never come about with our meager finances.

In the spring some kind church folk from a neighboring congregation met with us to help in landscaping a part of the parsonage's front. They dug up earth, put in new earth, and planted seed and trees.

The next Saturday, I thought I heard a truck stuck out front of our house. Running to the door, I peered out, and sure enough a '75 Chevy pickup was spinning its wheels in our newly landscaped property. With arms flailing, I flew out the door and attacked the truck. By this time, the driver had stepped onto the sod, only to weave his way toward me. He was



drunk. I looked back at the truck to see another man perched on the passenger side, smiling like a baby. Obviously, he, too, was drunk.

The driver, in his mid-30s, was new to the country, having arrived from Europe only three weeks previously. He should not have been driving anything short of kiddie cars at the fair. Yet, I later discovered, the truck's passenger allowed him to drive the vehicle after the two of them had had a few belts.

"Don't go anywhere!" I yelled at the driver, not taking into account that the fellow actually could go nowhere with the truck mired in my front lawn.

His garbled response told me only that he did not speak any English.

The police came, and a tow truck. The two men were taken away, along with the Chevy. And what a hole they left in our front yard! But, interestingly enough, it turned out that the drunk was a landscaper by trade. The next morning he stopped by to apologize and to promise to correct the damage. By sundown, the hole had been filled in and graded.

Only a week later, as the oil truck was making a delivery to the church, its belly broke. As its huge undersides gave way, 1,000 gallons of oil spilled across the church parking lot, down a slight incline, and into the parsonage's freshly manicured front lawn. I ran outside, my wife on my heels, to find two laywomen from the church standing, stunned, as they surveyed the surprise.

The crazed truck driver was running around his carriage in an attempt to plug the flow. But with all this frenzy, there was nothing to be done but let the juice have its way—and it did! Within minutes, police and fire trucks drove in. The fire chief told me to be certain not to have any matches lighted near the oil spill. Otherwise, we would have a fire.

How tidy, I thought to myself. First the flood. Now the fire.

The oil penetrated three feet into the soil. It turned the asphalt to jelly, stripping away the parking lot's curbing in the process.

But we made it! The insurance coverage took care of relandscaping and gave us a new parking lot.

So it has gone now for almost five years.

Yet we are not home free. We have not grown that much numerically.

There are 40 in the congregation now, and financially, it is a weekly struggle—living on the edge of extinction.

However, we have many means of outreach. We have a year-round, free

Financially, it is a weekly struggle—living on the edge of extinction.

clothing center in the church, making items available to anyone at any time with no charge whatsoever. We have book fairs on the lawn in front of the church throughout the summer, selling religious books, tapes, records, and gift items. We have Monday night sports/recreation times, community counseling clinics, Bible seminars, backyard Vacation Bible Schools, ladies' prayer fellowships in homes,

We will meet again—and again and again—to talk, to unburden, to pray, to communicate with our leaders our needs, and to hope.

Sunday noon fellowship meals, weekly children's hours of crafts and Bible stories, and convalescent home ministries. We continually mail news releases to community papers.

Frankly, we do not know what else we can do but continue to do what

we are doing and pray that in time our efforts will bear fruit.

I do not permit myself to get all that discouraged, for I have pastored larger churches from Canada's province of Alberta to New England. I have also had some fulfillment in seeing various writings published, including several books. And, being in my mid-40s, I figure that it's time to cultivate some patience.

I have also sought out fellowship with clergy of other small churches. Some of them are career changers who have trucked their families to seminary or Bible college, only then to spill them out into a struggling parish. They have studied several years in an idealistic environment, frequently being taught by persons who themselves have not been in the pastorate or who have not ministered to a congregation in years. Now, these idealistic parsons are faced with reality. And their sacrificing wives and children are confronted with naked truth.

In talking with these people, I find that many are severely discouraged. Some of their marriages are already in trouble. Some of their children are toying with leaving the faith of the parents. Some of the men are giving second thoughts to the vocation of pastor. I know that too many who preceded me in this very church where I now stand are no longer in the work.

Then I ask myself what can be done.

I wrote to our denomination's headquarters and received sympathetic replies. The people "at the top" say they are becoming increasingly sensitive to the problems of the small church. However, the corporate machine grinds slowly. And the few in administrative positions can only do so much, even if they gave every waking hour to the dilemma.

Therefore, one dismal morning I said to my wife that we had to do something about these precious parsonage families that are in pain. So it was that I mailed out a simple invitation to 26 preachers and their spouses, inviting them to our parsonage on a Monday morning for coffee. Practically all of them responded! They were so hungry for fellowship, for sharing, for opening up in a caring climate. One couple drove two and a half hours one way. Another family of

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five planned to drive six hours one way, sleeping over at our house, until other commitments diverted them.

All of these people were from churches that number less than 50 people in worship and/or Sunday School attendance.

Throughout all denominations there is a crying need for leaders of the struggling church to have someone to turn to.

For half an hour we chatted informally with one another in our house. Then we walked across the parking lot and lawn to the church, where we seated ourselves in a circle in the back of the sanctuary. There I had prepared a list of our 26 struggling churches and the names of each pastor. This was to communicate to us all that we were not alone!

Another sheet offered some suggested topics for discussion at ongoing fellowships. A third paper had typed at the top, "As a Small-Church Pastor, I Find the Following to Be My Greatest Joy." Halfway down the page was another heading: "As a Small-Church Pastor, I Find the Following to Be My Greatest Pain." A fourth paper simply had at the top: "I Want to Share the Following with Our District Superintendent."

We wrote out our own thoughts in the blank spaces, then we swapped papers and read them aloud—anonously. Later, so

their presence would not inhibit our statements, our district superintendent and his wife joined the gathering. We shared what we had written, leaving with them our papers for their own study later.

Near to noon, we gathered at the sanctuary's front door for Communion and worship, sharing in an informal setting. To close, we had lunch together at a nearby restaurant.

Since that fellowship, many have told me how it helped them. So we will meet again—and again and again—to talk, to unburden, to pray, to communicate with our leaders our needs, and to hope.

Through all of this, I have become convinced that throughout all denominations there is a crying need for leaders of the struggling church to have someone to turn to, if only we could find someone to listen to what we have to say. I know that even now in our own network, our leaders are so caught up in administrative work that they simply do not have the hours even to listen.

Yet this is so crucial. I know myself that I could go for weeks, even months, with no one to hear me out. Oh, I realize that if I made an appointment with my superior, we could get together. But I know his pressing schedule and realize that he hardly has time simply to meet with me. And others in similar small-church settings have the same experience. So what

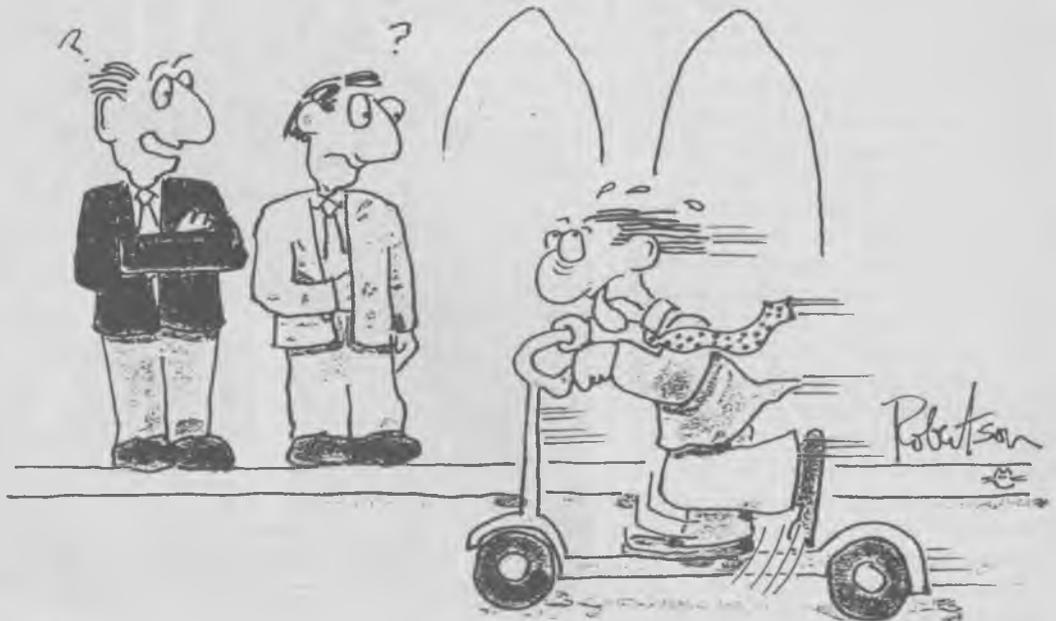
do we do? We have practically no one to talk to.

Could it be then that we have to band together ourselves? Why wait for someone else to do it? Why wait for deus ex machina—the god from the clouds to swoop down in some grandiose rescue mission, as the old Greek plays would have it?

Why, we can come together with one another, on our own. We can formulate our own agendas and then think through ways of cross-support. We can, above all, lock hearts, putting aside church politics—that "sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1, KJV)—so as to be genuinely open with one another. Then we can articulate our concerns to our church leaders, saving them time and energy by doing our own research, our own in-depth studies concerning our own situations.

At this juncture, I am hopeful. I think we stand a chance. Really, it is more than a chance. I believe fervently that God is at work in the small church as well as the grand cathedral. And so I realize that His heart does care for those of us in these struggling parishes. Yet I also believe that He wills for us to learn certain lessons in our fierce settings.

Could it just be that one of those lessons is how to come closer toward one another in seeking loving hearts among ourselves? And in the seeking there will be the finding—discovering even more than we had hoped for.



"Suppose we need to reconsider the pastoral transportation allowance?"

When Going to Church Was a Test of Stamina

by Henry N. Ferguson

Modern society has attempted to make church attendance as attractive and as painless as possible. When Sunday rolls around, there is ample time for an additional 40 winks, a leisurely breakfast, and at least a glance at the morning paper. Finally everyone piles into the family car and rides in comfort to the sanctuary.

There the family is ushered to a comfortable pew. The church will be air-conditioned in summer and heated in winter. The worship service will be of satisfactory brevity, enhanced with beautiful music, and concluded with a sermon that is not only happily abbreviated but innocuously palatable as well.

Such a service is the end product of an evolution in worship that has been taking place for the past couple of centuries. Our forebears would have found this brief and comfortable interlude in the week's routine strange fare indeed.

In the earliest days of our country, people worshiped wherever they could. At Plymouth Colony the fort was the meetinghouse, and the Pilgrims arrived at services armed with swords and guns. In other New England settlements, worship was held under trees, in tents, or in makeshift shelters. In time, crude churches were constructed of logs, with clay-filled chinks and a roof thatched with reeds and grass. Oiled paper covered the window openings. These structures were succeeded by square, wooden buildings, each with a belfry that served mainly as a lookout tower to guard against Indian attack.

After 1739, when the earliest successful glassworks in the New World was built in New Jersey, churches were able to install glass windows.



The panes were held in place with nails instead of putty.

Finally, as communities prospered, they began erecting churches with a steeple at one end. The weathered exteriors had a degree of interest, though frequently of a macabre nature. Heads of wolves killed for bounty might be nailed up. Notices of community interest such as sales, town meetings, and marriages were posted on the church door. Conveniently near were the stocks, pillory, and whipping post, with which every town was equipped.

Church bells were a rarity; parishioners were usually called to worship by the roll of a drum or the blowing of a horn or a conch shell. Sometimes a cannon was fired to announce the hour—usually nine o'clock in the morning.

Church interiors were about as plain and uncomfortable as human ingenuity could devise. Families sat in pews partitioned off from their neighbors. Three sides were fitted with narrow, shelflike seats that were never ordained for comfort. Hung on hinges, these could be raised so that members might lean on the pew walls for support as they stood during long prayers. Pews were assigned by the seating committee, the best seats going to members of wealth and dignity. Sitting in an unassigned pew could result in a fine of from several shillings to as high as £25.

The deacons sat in a deacons' pew just in front of the pulpit. Often there would be a deaf pew up front for the hard-of-hearing. High in a loft were seats for Negroes and Indians.

Oddly enough, boys did not sit with their families but were seated in groups, usually on the stairs, with tithingmen to promote order among them. Boys given to pranks during the long sermons might be confined in a cage set up outside the church.

Early churches were unheated. It required iron discipline to withstand the winter rigors of a dank, ice-cold building that had been closed all week. Yankee ingenuity helped. Fur bags made of wolfskins were sewn together and used as foot warmers. Many families brought metal foot stoves containing live coals. Parishioners were permitted to bring their

dogs to church, where they would lie on their masters' feet. A dogfight sometimes added zest to a sermon.

The churches may have been bitterly cold and uncomfortable, but apparently little thought was given to easing the pain by shortening the service. The customary sermon lasted from two to three hours, and it was not unusual for a prayer to take one to two hours. The minister spoke to a captive audience. When the congregation had assembled, the doors were closed and guarded by a tithingman, and great was the emergency that would justify leaving.



Church interiors were about as plain and uncomfortable as human ingenuity could devise.

At noon everyone retired to a long, low building nearby called the noon-house. There were stalls for horses at one end and a great fireplace at the other. Here the churchgoers ate their lunch, and often the children received additional religious instruction during the break—the forerunner of our modern Sunday School.

There were no church organs to promote a measure of harmony in the singing of psalms. Few psalmbooks were available, so a line would be read by a deacon and then sung by the standing congregation. A half hour often was required to sing just one hymn.

The offering was taken differently from today's practice. At the proper time in the service the congregation walked single file to the front of the church and deposited their gifts of money, wampum, or promissory

notes in a box located at the deacons' table.

When the service ended, the congregation remained seated until the minister and his wife had walked out the front door, where they greeted each member.

Early Americans held the Sabbath in strictest observance—they had little choice! Anyone who attempted to profane the day could expect immediate and severe retribution in the form of a fine or a public whipping. It was expressly forbidden for anyone to hunt or fish, enjoy a sail or a dance, or go for a ride except to church. No one might use tobacco near the church.

In Samuel Peters's *General History of Connecticut*, published in London in 1781, numerous statutes pertaining to the Sabbath were spelled out. According to Peters, the colonists were not allowed to "travel, cook victuals, make beds, sweep the house, cut hair, or shave on the Sabbath day." Nor were mothers allowed to kiss their children. "No one shall cross a river on Sunday but an authorized clergyman," wrote Peters.

The colonists also were forbidden to give food or lodging to Quakers, Adamites, "or other heretics." Anyone converting to the Quaker faith "shall be banished and not suffered to return but upon pain of death." And a 1617 law fined Virginians two pounds of tobacco for missing church.

Those who broke Sabbath laws were likely to do an ignominious stint in the public stocks. So rigid was the discipline that consideration was given to imposing the death penalty on anyone absenting himself from church services.

Today's churchgoers likely would refuse to attend services at all if they were forced to undergo the hardships their ancestors endured in order to worship God. Devotion to their religion was a way of life for these hardy pioneers. Many had traveled to the New World to worship God as they chose—and the hardships under which they elected to exercise this right seemed only to temper their faith. Out of their stern devotion to God has this nation been forged. ¶

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My Friends Are Dying: My Friends Have AIDS

Today a friend of mine went home from the hospital where I am chaplain. He went home by ambulance to die, after four years of struggles with a variety of illnesses complicated by AIDS. With the care of a hospice team, family, and friends, he will quietly slip away. He is 39 years old; he is my friend; soon he will die. He is not the first, nor will he be the last.

It's impossible to hold the issue of AIDS at arm's length. The people touched by AIDS are not merely names in a magazine article or a television news piece. They are my friends. I didn't go looking for people with AIDS. I was a pastor, and in 1984 AIDS came to my church. A church member, about my age, contracted the disease in another state and came home because of his health. As he went about the task of dying, we became friends. Two months later my friend died—my friend with AIDS.

I became a hospital chaplain. I didn't seek a ministry to people with AIDS. They came to my hospital. If I were to minister Christ's care, I had to get acquainted with them, listen to them, pray with them, and befriend them. They come, usually many times, and for lengthy stays as the illness unfolds. In my five years as a hospital chaplain, I have provided pastoral support to over 50 persons with AIDS. Of those, over half have already died. Many of them became my friends. I have performed the funerals for many of them. My friends are dying. My friends have AIDS.

Not long ago, a Nazarene family, who are like family to me, shared their pain and fear about their son. He was living an at-risk lifestyle and had recently buried a partner who died because of AIDS. A few months ago, my brother-in-law from another state phoned to tell me that his brother had AIDS and that he was dying.



by **Rick L. Williamson**
Chaplain, New Albany, Indiana

My friends, my family members are dying. My family members have AIDS.

I am an evangelical Christian, committed to Christ and to the Church. My calling as a Nazarene chaplain and my current assignment for that ministry are both ordered of God and blessed by our church. I am an extension of the church's care to hurting people.

Yet I am grieved that many of my friends who are living with AIDS feel they have no community of faith, at least not in the traditional sense. Some attitudes that they have experienced led many to believe that, for them, the church has a No Trespassing sign. Their emotional and spiritual support too often is restricted to friends, family, and institutional chaplains like myself. The involvement of the local church people and pastors in support of persons and families affected by AIDS is too little, too silent, in my experience.

The church has spoken out appropriately against practices that put a person at high risk. Have we been bold to speak a commensurate word of grace? Jesus touched the untouchables of His time. His ministry to them was full of grace, with compassion and love. He refused to embrace the idea that sickness is necessarily a result of sin. Christ's care, Christ's touch included everyone wounded by life.

Many of my friends have felt the pressure of the church's judgment. Too few of them have felt the impress

of the church's redemptive love. My friends are dying without the church. My friends have AIDS.

The message of a God who loves us unconditionally is a wide invitation. Forgiveness reaches the depths of any person's needs. God's Spirit restoring a holy character in us transcends our record of deeds done. The gospel centers, not on how bad we have been, but in how good is our God. The promises that encourage faith and extend grace belong to "whosoever."

When people hear words of judgment without also hearing words of grace, they may despair of trusting Christ and become embittered toward us and God. What a tragedy if, in Jesus' name, we erect barriers that exclude people from the Lord whom we would represent. I fear that happens too often. I hope that we can make it happen less. *Our* friends are dying, sometimes without Jesus. *Our* friends have AIDS. ✠

The
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of the local
church and
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How to Survive When God Purges His Church

by Joyce Strader

Pastor's wife, Lakeland, Florida

Our wonderful, peaceful, happy, growing church recently went through a split. I never dreamed it could happen. Not to us. The pain was almost unbearable.

Then I remembered a conversation I had with a pastor's wife several years ago.

"What has been your most devastating experience in the ministry?" I asked my friend. We were strolling down a shady path on peaceful retreat grounds.

Her quick response: "When people you love leave without an explanation. You've invested yourself in their lives for years, and they just up and leave."

I nodded agreement, thinking I could identify with her because I'd experienced that on a small scale.

Little did I realize the depth of her pain until several months later when I went through an almost identical trauma. The hostility transferred to me as the pastor's wife was overwhelming.

People were pulling out of our church in large numbers. Yet with the pain came the healing balm of God. When the situation became known, letters and phone calls began pouring in to us from all over the nation. What love and reassurance I received from those who had been there—and survived. While we were in the midst of our trial, a letter from Carolyn Wasdin in California described the utter devastation of such a time:

It is the attack from within the Body that hurts the most. Probably because we expect our Christian brothers to act by biblical principles, not by their fleshly desires.

A small number of people in our large congregation began to come

against our ministry. They continually complained to a few vocal and aggressive deacons. Each accusation and rumor we heard was like a knife piercing the soul. It was as if there was a power behind what was going on, and nothing could stop it.

There were no charges—just hateful and untrue accusations. The church was growing, and people were being saved and added to the church constantly. Some people became fearful and simply backed away, not knowing what action to take. It was sad to see so many hurt. We were hurt and confused, to say the least.

How do you handle it? Where is the sense of it all? There was no one to turn to but God—we were uncertain how our friends would react.

This is why we offer our love and support to you now. The Lord has healed our hearts.

He has given us a new field of ministry. The future is bright.

Another pastor's wife, close to us, unburdened her heart to me. I cried out in anguish, "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Her reply frightened me: "I didn't know who to trust." Now she knew we were going through the same agony, and we could share each other's pain.

Another letter helped me see the security in knowing that whatever the trial, God has allowed it as part of His plan to conform us to the image

of Christ. He knows how far to allow it to go, how much to prevent, and how to make it all work out in His own holy purposes.

Rita Bennett told me about the peace she received from Isa. 54:17, when she wondered what to do to stop those who might be talking about her. She taught me how to personalize the verse: "No weapon that is formed against Joyce shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you, Joyce, shall condemn" (see KJV). I saw this as my condemning the judgment against me, not the person judging, because our fight is against the evil forces of darkness rather than the person influenced by them.

Donna Tatem confessed there were times when she yelled, "Lord, I'm stretched too far! No more, please!" Then came some more, but because of Him, Donna has grown.



Sandi Barnard has been such a comfort. Her note said, "Hang in there and do what is right. Right does prevail. As for now, just shout and tell God—and a few good friends—how awful it is. Truly, sometimes all the answers aren't enough. For those times, there's Jesus! I can't explain it, but I've been there, and I do care."

If you are in a similar storm, remember:

- Your original call to ministry. Establish it every day. Outsiders cannot validate you, only God. People standing with you are experiencing their own grief.

**"With the pain
came the
healing balm
of God."**

- You have the sure promise that He has made you an able minister of the gospel, no matter what the present lying vanities are.
- Losing people you have loved and protected with pastoral covering is traumatic. However, you are left with others who love you. You can still accomplish the vision God gave you.
- Keep a forward motion. "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?" (Isa. 43:18-19, KJV).

I asked a man of God about this hostility toward the pastor's wife. His answer: "The wife is the string. Satan knows if he can break the string, the bow will be no good."

This has been my most devastating experience in the ministry. But I have already grown as I sought the Lord through it all.

Another pastor's wife and I are working up a "survival kit" to offer others going through these trials. I'll tell you more about that in a future column. 

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Prayer for Galatians 5:22-23

by Jill Jones

Freelance writer, Spokane, Washington



Lord, let my life be like burdened branches of a tree, fruitful, ready to harvest—

With love all-encompassing, surrounding those whom my day touches,

And joy bubbling to the surface as a spring sends clear water to run freely.

With peace as deep and abiding as the sea after the storm, let me sail along life's way.

Grant me patience to be counted on by those who share my days; I want to be as constant as the sun.

Showing kindness, always let me give as a second nature and to be aware of needs around me.

Let goodness radiate from my heart—not merely right choices as though made by rote,

But a very inner righteousness given only by You from above.

With a hunger of the heart, let faithfulness lead me in my loyalty to You.

Free my spirit to worship in meekness and honest gentleness as I approach Your throne.

Rule my life with self-control; let me turn from temptation and the things that draw me down,

Away from the Word, prayer, and study.

Let the fruit You make come forth in me; bring me ever closer to You, Lord.

The Rationale and Methodology of Planned Preaching

In the execution of the pastor's multiple duties, preaching must rank as number one. It is the responsibility, burden, privilege, calling, joy, agony, and ecstasy that must weigh most heavily upon the messenger of God at all times. Therefore, every preacher must strive to perform this sacred task with excellence.

Hopefully, on any given Sunday, excellence is present in the pulpit. But what about the long-term quality of the preacher's pulpit ministry? Questions of maintaining integrity to the task and maintaining balance in the overall, long-term pulpit ministry come to the surface and demand attention.

A proper understanding of the rationale and methodology of planned preaching will greatly assist the preacher in this responsibility.

The Rationale of Planned Preaching

Planned preaching is necessary for two major reasons. First, planning saves time. The preacher who does not know what he is preaching until Saturday night has invariably fretted and sweated away much valuable time during the previous week. Principles of stewardship dictate that there is a better way. Andrew W. Blackwood summarized it beautifully in the opening lines of his book, *Planning a Year's Pulpit Work*.

The wise minister preaches according to a program. He makes it himself and is free to change it at will. He thinks of himself as a gardener who is appointed by the King to feed several hundred people throughout the year. The gardener keeps a succession of plants grow-



by James T. Meadows

*Pastor,
Henrietta Assembly of God,
Henrietta, New York*

ing in various beds. He can water them all in the time that a novice would devote to a single corner.¹

God himself is a long-range planner. Recall that your place in His kingdom was selected before the world was even created. "He chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Indeed, God's Church is one large, long-range plan!

When the preacher has already selected sermon texts or ideas ahead of time and slated these for specific dates, then he has automatically initiated a rich incubation period. As Blackwood further asserts,

A living sermon matures slowly, but at length it may ripen quickly. In order to give each message time to develop, according to the spirit of life in its seed, the pastor should have in his homiletical garden sermons in various stages of growth. Herein lies the essence of a plan for pulpit work.²

As Ian Pitt-Watson has observed, "Sermons are more like babies than buildings. We do not really construct them—they grow in us."³ All the more reason for a plan.

The plan provides the substrate upon which the sermons can develop by the Holy Spirit. During the weeks or months leading up to a particular sermon, the preacher will find that illustrations, outlines, ideas, and thoughts can be filed with that sermon. Thus, when the preacher sits down to put the sermon together, he will find that he already possesses an abundance of useful materials.

The apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus, "I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27). He charged Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). Thus, a second reason for planned preaching is the preacher's awesome responsibility to preach the whole counsel of God's Word.

Although the preacher is equipped with a divine calling and anointing to preach, he is still infected with and affected by his frail humanity. Therefore, if preachers do not place themselves under the discipline and control of a long-range preaching schedule, they will ultimately allow preaching to be dictated by personal likes and dislikes. They will gravitate toward those sections of Scripture and those topics they enjoy most and will shy away from those sections of Scripture and those topics they have difficulty handling.

With a carefully constructed, long-range preaching schedule, preachers can have the confidence their preaching is not simply a reflection of personal likes and dislikes. For years this approach has been taken regarding Sunday School curriculum; it's about time that preachers implemented the same wisdom.

A few years ago, shortly after implementing a planned preaching program into his own pulpit ministry, William L. Self declared, "There is now a sense of wholeness about my preaching ministry—in contrast to the shotgun approach of my earlier ministry. I grieve over the wasted years when I did not do this."⁴

Thus, stewardship of time and the need for doctrinal balance provide strong support for planned preaching.



Preaching is the
responsibility,
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ecstasy that
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messenger of
God at all
times.

The Methodology of Planned Preaching

Mechanically, it is necessary to set up some sort of a filing system in which to hold your future sermons under various stages of development. I have chosen to use manila folders that are generically dated for a full calendar year of Sundays so that they are reusable each year. Thus, my first several folders are labeled as follows:

January, week 1, Sunday A.M.
January, week 1, Sunday P.M.
January, week 2, Sunday A.M.
January, week 2, Sunday P.M.
January, week 3, Sunday A.M.
January, week 3, Sunday P.M.

January, week 4, Sunday A.M.
January, week 4, Sunday P.M.
January, week 5, Sunday A.M.
January, week 5, Sunday P.M.
February, week 1, Sunday A.M.
February, week 1, Sunday P.M.
Etc.

Having prepared a full calendar year of sermon folders as described, I then prepared a second set of folders, using a different color ink (or folder) to distinguish it from the first set. The entire second set of folders sits behind the first set. Having the two sets of complete calendar years allows me to always be planning and working into the next year without disrupting or colliding with the current year's work. It is a simple matter of flip-flopping between the two sets of folders on an annual basis.

Regarding the actual content of a planned preaching schedule, the methodology is almost as varied as the preacher is. The preacher could choose to preach through the Bible verse by verse, beginning with Gen. 1:1. He could choose to randomly select books of the Bible and preach through them, working in this manner until he eventually preaches through the entire Bible.

The preacher could choose to preach thematically via the church year. The preacher could follow the schedule of texts in a published lectionary.

Whatever plan is chosen, let it be chosen with great care, prayer, forethought, and analysis. It will serve as your baseline for years to come; therefore it must be sound. An excellent and stimulating resource to consult on this matter is J. Winston Pearce's book, *Planning Your Preaching* (Broadman Press). Pearce not only discusses the reasons for planned preaching but also goes on to provide numerous types of plans for the preacher to consider.

An important thought to keep in mind when developing your plan is that no plan will be perfect. Obviously, each preaching plan will have its own unique set of advantages and disadvantages. What is important is that the plan will provide a valid approach to covering the whole counsel of God's Word and that you feel comfortable with it.

Another important item to remember is that the preaching plan is your servant and not your master. Never al-

low yourself to feel slavishly bound to the plan.

A good preaching plan has flexibility built into it. Put "holes" into your preaching plans here and there so that you will always have the opportunity to preach those messages that the Holy Spirit spontaneously births within your spirit. You will also need the holes for holidays, missionaries, evangelists, special emphases, and other special events.

In order to illustrate some of what has been discussed above, I will outline the preaching plan developed for my own pulpit ministry. Certainly, I do not make any claim that this particular plan is the best, nor do I recommend it for every preacher. It is simply the preaching plan I have chosen to develop and implement after my own study and prayer on the matter. It is one example of how planned preaching could be executed. My prayer is that your thinking will be challenged and stimulated in a greater way so that you can then develop your own unique plan.

Fundamental guidelines of the preaching plan are as follows:

1. Sunday morning sermons are treated as a separate track from Sunday evening sermons. Consequently, whatever plan and approach is used for Sunday evening should be designed to complement and supplement the Sunday morning plan and approach.



God himself is
a long-range
planner.

2. The structure of the plan for Sunday morning is a staggered, textual one, while the structure of the plan for Sunday evening is an alternation between book and series sermons and topical and miscellaneous sermons.

3. Textual selections are made with a slightly greater emphasis upon the New Testament as compared with the Old Testament.

4. **Preaching segments are chosen with the intention that the majority of the sermons will be expository, a minority will be textual, and a still smaller minority will be topical.**

For purposes of further illustration the Sunday morning track will be examined in detail.

The baseline for the Sunday morning track is constructed by first splitting the Bible into its 10 logical sections: Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom Literature, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, General Epistles, and Revelation. Then, a master list of preaching segments is produced by taking preaching segments from each of these 10 sections in a systematic manner. Thus, my baseline of preaching segments starts out as follows:

Matt. 1:1-17
Matt. 1:18-25
Matt. 2:1-12
Matt. 2:13-23
Gen. 1:1-5
Acts 1:1-11
Acts 1:12-14
Josh. 1:1-18
Rom. 1:1-7
Rom. 1:8-13
Rom. 1:14-17
Rom. 1:18-20
Job 1:1-5
James 1:1-4
Etc.

The baseline of preaching segments need only be developed to cover the time period that is being planned. Typically, I plan my preaching segments for a calendar year in the preceding summer or fall.

An essential feature to note regarding this baseline is that over a lifetime of preaching, there will be a systematic coverage of the entire Bible. As indicated previously, this is a major goal in any preaching plan.

As I have placed myself under the discipline and control of a long-range preaching schedule, I have been amazed at how God has used it to His glory. Time and again I observed that the sermon text entered in my sermon logbook 6 to 18 months ahead of time was indeed the message for

the hour when it came time for it to be preached. As Ross W. Marrs has observed, "It is always interesting how many things seem to be on target no matter how far in advance we have planned." The Holy Spirit is truly a long-range planner.



Although the preacher is equipped with a divine calling, he is still infected with and affected by his frail humanity.

I encourage you to carefully and prayerfully develop a long-range preaching schedule. The long-range, cooperative relationship between the preacher, the Word, and the Holy Spirit will produce results that are always superior to any "Saturday night special."

Let us conscientiously receive Paul's charge to Timothy: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Let us preach the whole counsel of God's Word!

1. Andrew W. Blackwood, *Planning a Year's Pulpit Work* (n.p.: Whitmore and Stone, 1942; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 15.

2. *Ibid.*, 16.

3. Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 56.

4. William L. Self, "Preaching to Joe Secular: An Interview with William L. Self," *Preaching* 4 (November-December 1988): 6.

5. Ross W. Marrs, "Sermon Preparation: Projection and Planning," *Clergy Journal* 66 (November-December 1989): 15.

At a Loss for Words

by Kathleen T. Choi

Freelance writer, Hilo, Hawaii

Rain or shine, inspired or not, a minister must preach. One morning our associate pastor was clearly struggling. He spoke a few sentences about the reading, then seemed to lose his train of thought. He shook his head, stepped back from the pulpit, took a deep breath, and began again. After a few more words, it was clear this try was also going nowhere.

I waited anxiously. Surely he'd come up with something, filling the time somehow.

Instead he stopped, smiled shyly, and said, "This isn't working, is it?" He turned and began the next part of the service.

When he said, "The Lord be with you," the congregation thundered, "And also with you."

Few preachers would have dared admit their weakness as he did. I don't know what he intended to say that morning, but I've never forgotten the sermon.

The Thrill of Church Planting

The churches are dying out all over the earth; they are struck down with death."

The words were reportedly spoken by the oft-quoted agnostic orator, Robert Ingersoll, at a Chicago meeting of the Freethinkers Association of America. Reading the story was C. C. McCabe, head of Church Extension for the Northern Methodist Church, as he headed for the West Coast by train.

McCabe picked up his newspaper in Chicago, read the story, and at the next stop cabled Ingersoll: "Dear Bob, 'All hail the power of Jesus' name!' We're building one church for every day of the year, and purpose to make it two."

Being singers in those days, Methodists made up a song to sing. One verse said,

The infidels, a motley band,

In counsel met and said:

The churches are dying throughout the land,

And soon they'll all be dead.

When suddenly a message came

That put them to dismay:

All hail the power of Jesus' name.

We're building two a day.



by **Wayne M. Warner**

*Freelance writer,
Three Rivers, Michigan*

We're building two a day, dear Bob,

We're building two a day.

All hail the power of Jesus' name.

We're building two a day.

In 1941, 60 years later, Herman Thomas was the pastor in one of those two-a-day churches in Wisconsin. One night he visited a young engineer who had moved to his city. The man met him at the door and said, "I have some questions that you may be able to answer."

After listening to his visitor a few minutes, the host asked, "Pastor Thomas, can you tell me how I can become a follower of Jesus Christ?"

The following Sunday, the young engineer went forward to profess his new faith in Christ. The next Sunday, in Methodist fashion, he was baptized. The new convert to Christ was Robert Ingersoll III.

In 1942 Robert Ingersoll IV was baptized in that same church. Reflecting on this, George Hunter suggested, tongue in cheek, had they been listening somewhere out there, they might have heard this refrain:

The only place
where a
congregation
cannot grow is
a community
that has no
people and no
spiritual needs.

We're building two a day, dear Bob,

We're building two a day.

All hail the power of Jesus' name.

We're building two a day.

Chaney used this story to challenge his Baptist peers to increase their church plants from three a day to four a day—1,460 churches x 10 years. As a result, Southern Baptists began campaigning for 15,000 new church plants.

After more than four decades in ministry, I find the following three observations to be solid, constructive convictions of which we all need to be reminded at times.

1. There are no impossible situations.

I have heard of, and served in,



burned-over fields. I have known of churches closing their doors; they were dead. I have helped congregations to resuscitate. Others I have helped to relocate, but I have never experienced an impossible situation!

The only place where a congregation cannot grow is a community that has no people and no spiritual needs. A congregation, though small, if willing to specialize in what it can give best, will not stay small for long. Everyone wants the one thing that a small church can best give—caring concern.

Church growth, moreover, has divine intent. That means it has superior resources. What else could Jesus have meant when He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18)? God himself stands behind the congregation that remains committed to outreach and mission growth.

2. *If a task is worth doing, it is worth doing right.*

Quality is the name of the game! Success will be determined by the creativity, persistence, and prayer committed to God, rather than by the amount of money available and the skills used. Growth is a spiritual work of the highest essence. God's gifting goes to those with the greatest commitment of availability.

Thus, no congregation or individual can remain satisfied with giving God the leftovers of the unrehearsed and unskilled. Christians recognize their stewardship to God as an accountability for improving themselves personally, for sharpening their personal skills, and for adding new skills as the occasions arise.

In this instance, it is worth doing

right (1) because of the One wanting it done—God; (2) because of what is being offered—salvation; and (3) because of the ones needing it done—unsaved people.

3. *Where there's a will, there's a way.*

Ten times a major denomination tried to establish a church in Dowagiac, Michigan. Ten times they failed. Finally, a young student couple came for the summer and held Vacation Bible School, led backyard Bible clubs, and did door-to-door visitation. They established a viable, ongoing presence in that community on the 11th attempt.

God himself
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mission
growth.

Who would have ever thought a village church near Flint, Michigan, could plant a church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula? I doubt Pastor Bob

Chambers even envisioned such a project when he went to reestablish a Church of God (Anderson) presence in Millington. However, Bob had a continuing burden for the area, where the denomination had no congregations.

Being a visionary leader, this dedicated pastor planted a vision in the hearts of his Millington people that has resulted in 15 years of growth and outreach. Yet, no one but a visionary would have seen a correlation between parishioners vacationing in Manistique and the planting of a church in Manistique! But Bob did!

With careful planning, wise spending, and judicious administration of a whole group of campers interested in the Manistique area, the Church of God now has a small congregation in that Upper Peninsula city, complete with a resident pastor and family.

It took an enormous amount of running up and down the highway. It also provided a number of people with a Christian purpose within their camping and/or vacation experience. It made profound use of something a group of people enjoyed doing. The result has been an enlarged family, for the Millington church is now the proud mother of a child in Manistique. Marc and Julie Hoard, homegrown Millington youth, now serve as pastors at the new church, doing the same things they saw Pastor Bob and Donna do.

There are *no* impossible situations. If the work to which God has called us is worth doing at all, it is worth doing right. When we *will* to do things right for God, we will discover through His will that there is *always* a way.

Pontius' Puddle



Practical Christian Thinking: About Children's Ministry

It was Sunday morning and time for the "toddler choir" to sing to a congregation that, judging from the facial expressions, held rather mixed emotions about the event. The parents lined the front pews and sat behind the blinking red lights of single-eyed video cameras capturing young virtuosos during these five minutes of fame. The toddler choir director sat directly in front of the children. The director seemed to alternate between pointing to the lyrics and making "smile" motions as she sang at the top of her voice in order to provide some sense of harmony. I suspected that one child closest to the microphone, so as to drown out the others, possessed a peculiar musical perspective. This child reasoned that as the notes went up the scale, one was supposed to get *louder* while maintaining an astringent G-flat tone—particularly during the chorus. Only children can redefine the musical scales and receive applause.

In spite of the chaos, these children represented two realities that morning. The first reality was that they mirrored for many in the congregation the desire to offer totally uninhibited praise to God for the grace that we have received, whether or not we are on key at the moment. The children also represented hope, hope born in a congregation and community that were going through a difficult time but also affirming that children had a right to be there and that God was in charge of the future. Those children, along with their dedicated children's workers, were a means of grace to a congregation in the midst of worship.

Children's ministry is again on the rise within the American Evangelical Movement. Baby boomers, that quixotic, post-World War II, con-



by Dean G. Blevins

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Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville*

sumer-oriented American social class, are now the proud parents of a large number of children once again gracing the church and placing new opportunities and pressures on Christian ministry. Case in point: The Children's Pastors' Conference is a national, interdenominational organization that conducts local workshops and coordinates two regional conferences annually, in Nashville and Denver respectively. This past year the two conferences hosted over 1,500 children's pastors and workers, up over 40 percent from the previous year. CPC Executive Director Dean Stone notes that the conferences grew "phenomenally" and says that churches are beginning to see the need of developing new and extensive ministries to children.

Developing children's ministries, however, is not a simple task. With the sophistication demanded by boomer mentality, there also comes the existing challenge to resource both smaller churches, often directed by dedicated but less trained volunteers, and the expanding larger churches with professional children's ministers. This is not a new quandary. Those who can reminisce back to the heyday of bus ministries and the Sunday School rallies of the National Sunday School Association in the late

1950s will recognize a familiar theme. There is a new wrinkle.

The previous generation might have contented itself with making evangelism and Sunday School a synonymous venture, but not the boomer generation of the 1990s. Children's ministry today must include thoughtful Christian education and nurture to satisfy the educational concern of the parents. Children must be dealt with on a very personal and approachable level that matches the child's mental, emotional, and social maturation.

If this was the only challenge that boomers had bequeathed children's ministry, we might look with appreciation, recognizing the power that the gospel has at any level to minister to children. But there is a downside to boomers: while they want the best for their children, they do not necessarily want to be with their children when it is offered. Nor do many boomers want children interfering with their own spiritual growth and worship. William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas have noted that "in many of our modern sophisticated congregations, children are often viewed as distractions."¹ In some churches, families may only see each other when they first arrive and finally depart from morning and evening services. Boomers become encouraged to place their own children in nurseries, separate Sunday School classes, and the growing phenomenon of children's worship. In certain circumstances, children never experience a worship life beyond the fellowship hall until they are teenagers. The result is that we have children who are both present yet "absent" in the larger church family.

I suspect that this absentee predicament is not born so much out of a selfish desire by boomers to be

alone. Nor do children's ministers and workers see it as a power ploy to insure that the children get some Christian nurture that is sorely neglected by the parents during the week. While both of these motivations represent the polar extremes of the removal of children from the larger worshipping community, I believe that the primary reasons for this growing phenomena are the struggle of the growing institutional nature of the church and the isolated, fast-paced lifestyles of many parents. Churches, as they grow, become more representative of our American institutional culture, which tends to compartmentalize activity for the sake of efficiency. Following what John Westerhoff calls a "schooling-instructional paradigm,"¹² we develop age-level classes and worship to meet children at their developmental needs and to better manage our ministry. While appropriate age-level attention is needed, perhaps we now have too much of a good thing, particularly when age-level strategies are targeted at worship as well as Christian education.

Gradually we risk becoming a totally fragmented, compartmentalized community of faith. Often with this compartment mentality comes the notion of ministry "to" children. The placement of this singular preposition, "to," usually implies that children bring nothing of value to the ministry experience, and any nurture comes from the top down, from adult to child. This notion has led to a lot of children's worker burnout. Any children's worker, however, worth his or her salt has long since recognized that children can also minister to adults at the same time. Ministry "to" becomes ministry "with" and "by" children as well. With the rise of "church growth" or boomer-oriented worship styles, a concern should be raised lest worship become so compartmentalized as to exclude the potential of children ministering to adults during worship.

Conversely, many parents approach Sunday as their one day of reprieve from work and family responsibilities. This predicament ultimately places the church in the position of mediator for exhausted young parents. If left unchecked, the desire for respite

often includes absence from the church itself for the sake of "quality family time." Perhaps the church would best serve this besieged group by providing alternative times of rest and education, such as a midweek evening child care/family education time, to help parents slow down their lives so that they may fully appreciate Sunday as a day that establishes the symbiotic relationship³ between church and family.

What ministers, both children's ministers and senior pastors, are left to discern is how to theologically understand and articulate the importance of children within the congregation. Daniel Aleshire has provided clues to determining congregational health when considering your church's attitude toward disruptive children in worship, toward unchurched children, and toward physically and emotionally challenged children.⁴ Often our attitudes toward these children reveal much of what we foundationally believe about children in general and their ability to be ministers with and to a congregation as well.

So what do children potentially bring to the church, particularly when at worship? They bring first a sense of grace and faith.

When our daughter, Rachel, was born less than two years ago, I was able to hold her just seconds after birth. While she could not see me and was probably not totally aware of my existence, I extended "grace" to her in the form of unmerited and yet unconditional love. In those first few days I suspect that my wife, JoAnn, and I came as close as we could ever humanly come to understanding God's unconditional love toward us.⁵ As Rachel grew, she acknowledged this love through a simple trust. The first learned physical action that demonstrated "faith" was lifting her arms ever so slightly as a request to be picked up. Rachel always trusted that when she was picked up, she would not be dropped; she reinforced this nascent faith with open hands that did not grasp our clothing for safety. Her mixture of love for us and trust in us again provided for me a living parable of the nature of faith.

Children also bring a sense of awe. Children are impressionable and often maintain the capability of simple

reverence in an otherwise jaded world. While adults might often critique the mechanics of worship, children may respond with a different sense of reverence.

Conversely, children can bring with them a sense of joy and irreverence as well. There are moments when perhaps we take ourselves too seriously, too formally, and a child's laughter can puncture such austere occasions and remind us of our humanity.

Children also bring with them a sense of humanity and sin. Aleshire warns that we should avoid sentimentalizing childhood to the point of overlooking sin.⁶ Often children have not learned to mask their disobedience or disdain quite so well as adults, and so they often mirror our own need for confession and to hear again the good news of the gospel. The children's place in worship, like ours, is based upon the common need of all people to praise God, to celebrate the community of faith, and to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.⁷ Ultimately children, like ourselves, bear the potential of becoming a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit will minister to those around them and us.

The actual mechanics of when and how much children will minister to us in the community of faith, including worship, should be left to each congregation to decide. There have been many creative responses to this challenge of balancing developmentally appropriate activities and intergenerational ministry once the congregation sees the need for both. One thing is clear: with the rise of children's ministry, the opportunities for children to be a means of grace to the congregation will increase if we allow them to do so. 

1. William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 96.

2. John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976; reprint, San Francisco: Harper and Row), 13, 16-19.

3. *Symbiotic relationship* is a term first introduced to me by Dr. Ed Robinson, academic dean at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

4. Daniel O. Aleshire, *Faithcare: Ministering to All God's People Through the Ages of Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 94-96.

5. See also *ibid.*, 93-94.

6. *Ibid.*, 96.

7. David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshipping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 18-30.

Beyond Incarceration: Ministering to Inmates Through Community



by **Leslie Gambill Brost**

Freelance writer,
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Our society is becoming increasingly violent. *Criminal Justice*, a textbook written by J. A. Inciardi (1993) quotes statistics from the Uniform Crime Reports of 1990. The numbers indicate that the violent crime rate—murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault—rose by 23.1 percent between 1981 and 1990.

The cost to the victims of crime should neither be forgotten nor discounted. Often, their lives are devastated or ended at the hands of criminal offenders. Ministering to these victims should be an area of concern for the Christian community.

However, as Christians, we face another important question. How should we minister to the perpetrators of these crimes? Last winter, while completing an internship for my bachelor's degree, I was placed under the supervision of a man who thinks about this question every day. His name is David Bon, a chaplain for the Washington State Department of Corrections.

Chaplain Bon is a staff chaplain at the Airway Heights Corrections Center (AHCC). This medium security prison currently houses about 1,000 male in-

mates, representing every conceivable form of felonious behavior. It is a fairly new facility and will eventually house around 2,000 inmates. During the time I worked with Chaplain Bon, I came to respect both the depth of his Christian faith and his obvious concern for people, especially the men in his care.

Chaplain Bon had 20 years of experience as a military chaplain prior to coming to AHCC. It didn't take him very long to realize that the dynamics of the criminal personality presented special challenges to ministry. The following is an introduction to some of those challenges.

Although it is important not to overgeneralize, some commonalities are found in persons who exhibit criminal behavior. Researchers, through a study involving two different prisons, found that at least half of the incarcerated offenders presented symptoms that were diagnosable as Antisocial Personality Disorder [APD] (Wilson, O'Leary, and Nathan, 1992). To further complicate matters is the marked association that has been discovered between the diagnosis of APD and drug and alcohol dependency (Smith and Newman, 1990).

Psychological research has been



able to determine a core set of personality traits among those diagnosed with APD. These individuals believe the world revolves around them. They lack the ability to make good decisions. They have little ability to look at themselves objectively. They tend to show little emotion, have no apparent sense of conscience, and are hardened to the needs of others (Smith and Newman, 1990).

Chaplain Bon indicates that the men with whom he works tend to be emotionally immature individuals who have unrealistic and ill-formed expectations about the world and the role they will play in it. When faced with situations that create stress or feelings of desperation, they usually revert back to well-learned, predominately dysfunctional, coping behaviors—for example, drug and alcohol abuse or violence. This is one reason why there are so many repeat offenders in our prisons.

The chaplain sees the men with whom he works this way: "They're full of distrust; they're angry; they're selfish; they're demanding; they're rebellious; they're desperate."

Some commonalities are found in persons who exhibit criminal behavior.

How did these men come to such a state? Researchers in the field of developmental psychology have discovered an important relationship between incompetent parenting techniques and the development of APD. These techniques can include: a general lack of discipline and supervision, or discipline practices that are inconsistent, overly harsh, or abusive; a pattern of parental responsiveness to their children's needs that is excessively critical, insensitive, or simply nonexistent; and, in some cases, parental modeling of and encouragement for antisocial behavior (Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey, 1989).

The children of these families learn to adapt to their environment by developing a set of strategies that are functional within the given situation. Unfortunately, these same strategies are inappropriate or dysfunctional when they are used in a more normal setting (Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey, 1989).

The chaplain had this to say about the familial history of the inmates under his care:

The men are unloved, or at least come from backgrounds of having been unloved. Every once in a while, we hear one of them say, "No one has ever loved me." And that is a true story for a lot of them.

To put it another way, these men have never truly experienced the community of a stable, loving family environment. Further, the instability of their past has taught them to always keep their defenses up and to never allow themselves to be cornered, physically or relationally.

A natural outcome of a past filled with broken parental trust is a basic distrust for figures of authority. In the inmates, this manifests itself as enmity toward the prison staff. Additionally, the staff is trained to be wary of inmate attempts to manipulate them and trained to maintain a strictly professional relationship with them. While understandable, this prevents the possibility of inmates developing edifying relationships with people who meet life within societal norms. Instead, the inmates naturally develop relationships between themselves. This serves to reinforce, rather than reduce, deviant behavior.

A problem associated specifically with Christian ministry arises when inmates regard God as an authority figure who cannot be trusted and the church as simply a tool of the majority culture. Religion, in the worst sense of the word, may have been used by the inmates' parents as a tool of manipulation or cruelty. Often then, Christians and the church are met with suspicion.

Suspicious feelings about religion, the church, and Christians are not the exclusive realm of the incarcerated. In other words, in addition to the challenges inmates face due to their past experiences, they also carry the frailties associated with being human in a fallen world. Some of these frailties are: a sin nature; self-pride; and the denial of any need for a redeemer.

Chaplain Bon spoke about this type of denial at a recent meeting:

A lady came up with a statement that has really helped me focus on what the issue is in opposition to Christianity. She said, "My religion has a nonredemptive theology." Others clarified the position by saying, "We don't believe in God, and we don't believe we're fallen; we don't need redemption."

The inmates tend to be emotionally immature individuals who have unrealistic and ill-formed expectations about the world and the role they will play in it.

As the chaplain processed those statements in his mind, he began to focus upon a truth. Christianity stands as unique among religions because it has a redemptive theology, and the others do not. He related:

There is no redemption; they try to do it with works. . . . And so I have something to offer. . . . These guys come in, and I say, "What is your hope?" And they say: "My hope is that I can do more good than I do bad so that the scale balances in my favor. My hope is that I can come to a place of peace." They have all kinds of ideas, but no answers.

A further challenge for the chaplain is related to his job itself. As a Christian pastor, his desire is, first, to reach the lost with the message of redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ and, second, to disciple Christian believers. As a prison chaplain, he is

there to help protect and facilitate the inmates' right to pursue religious activities and worship—regardless of their particular religious orientation. At the practical level, this means supporting non-Christian interests without condoning them. At a recent meeting of Christian pastors, he shared this comment about the tension this situation creates for him:

You walk into a prison, and you know once you get to your office you're going to have a string of men making demands. . . . They are there every day. The Wicca people think that I took too long to get them a sponsor. . . . The Native Americans and the Muslims don't get what they want. The Nation of Islam wants something. And so you spend your time helping these people, and the Christians say, "You don't care about us. . . ." It is really difficult because the very thing you want to do, you don't have the time to do.

A natural outcome of a past filled with broken parental trust is a basic distrust for figures of authority.

As the chaplain contemplated all of the issues that pertain to his goal of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ—the news of salvation, peace, and hope—to these men, a philosophy began to form. It grew around the concept of community—a faith community. Scripture teaches us that, as Christians, we are all members of one Body—a community—with Christ as the Head. Each member is called to a specific purpose within this community and to the work the Lord puts before us (Rom. 12). Further, we are to do this while displaying love toward one another (John 13:35).

To have an effective ministry for

criminal offenders, the chaplain believes this community must operate at three distinct levels. The first level happens inside the prison. The inmates need to have the opportunity to learn about Jesus, to worship Him, and to fellowship with Christian believers. The groundwork for this type of programming is well established. The chaplain works with people from the larger faith community, outside the prison, to accomplish this goal. He acts as the intermediary among the volunteers who provide various types of Christian programming, the prison officials, and the inmates.

The second level happens outside of the prison and is directed at the families of the offenders. Expressing the difficulty of working with these families, Chaplain Bon shared:

Inmates need to have the opportunity to learn about Jesus, to worship Him, and to fellowship with Christian believers.

[These] families . . . are elusive. We don't know where they are; we don't know who they are. They are just as mistrusting . . . as the [incarcerated] men—and unloved. They are afraid to ask for help. When you give them help, they take it and then they are gone. It is hard to build community with people who don't understand community. . . . One of the tasks is to find those people and include them in our ministry to the community. It is no easy task.

He further said:

The easy thing is to take 10 families and provide Christmas [for them]. The hard thing is to take 2

families and have people [who] are willing to spend time and get them involved in the church.

An additional difficulty with this level is that those who volunteer inside the prison cannot be involved with ministering to the families outside the prison. This creates too great a conflict of interest, and it is not allowed.

It is hard to build community with people who don't understand community.

The third level takes place outside of the prison and is directed at the inmates who have served their time and are being released. Although they may have experienced fellowship and worship within the prison community, upon release they no longer are a part of that particular community. Suddenly their support is gone; they have no one to turn to in times of crisis. This can precipitate a return to the kinds of inappropriate coping behaviors discussed earlier.

Chaplain Bon believes that the answer to this releasee crisis is one-on-one mentoring. This should be provided by Christians from the community into which the inmates are being released. Finding willing volunteers for this ministry is the greatest challenge of all. As an illustration of how difficult this can be, he shared this story:

I worked with a guy for about eight months. He was 34 and had been in a treatment center or a prison every birthday and every Christmas since he was 18. [The last time] he was in . . . jail he wrote to 12 pastors and said, 'I need some help; I need some fellowship.' He got one answer from a pastor of a homosexual church who wanted to talk to him about male bonding. He heard from no one else. . . . We worked for four or

five months of . . . the time we were together, trying to find someone who would sponsor him, just to be a friend when he got out. And when he left Airway Heights to go to a work release, we didn't have anyone. We just couldn't find anybody . . . that could just go and nurture the guy . . . as much as they distrust us, we distrust them.

The chaplain referred to the conversion of Paul (Acts 9) to support his idea of one-on-one mentoring:

When [Paul] went to Damascus, God called one man—Ananias—to go and touch him. And when [Paul] left Damascus and went to Jerusalem, God sent one man—Barnabas—to take him to the disciples [because they] didn't want anything to do with him.

Churches can't handle a group of these guys. It's just too much work. And not everybody is called. So we need to find the people [who] are called to do that kind of ministry, one-on-one, and can help them find jobs and help them find places to live and just get them settled in community.

As is true with respect to working with the families of inmates, the individuals who volunteer in the prisons cannot fulfill this postrelease mentoring role. Again, it opens the volunteer to possible manipulation and is not allowed.

This is the basic structure of Chaplain Bon's philosophy of prison ministry. He believes it to be effective to both bring the gospel to these hurting people and to give them a foundation upon which to build a productive life. How is it accomplished? What, specifically, can the church do to make this ministry work? The chaplain has some answers for these questions as well.

The first, and most important, need is for prayer. He asks us to pray for strength—to deal with the opposition, both spiritual and human, to pray for laborers called to do this work, and to pray that the inmates "will sense the leadership of the church and be drawn to the Christian community versus the other [religious communities]."

Finding willing volunteers for this ministry is the greatest challenge of all.

The second need is for volunteers. The chaplain's regular responsibilities prevent him from being at every single religious function and meeting. However, the men cannot meet in a group without supervision. Therefore, the chaplain depends upon committed volunteers from the community to help him provide the religious programming the inmates desire. Sometimes the need is as simple as monitoring the religion library. This allows the inmates to access the materials there. The room cannot be opened without a monitor. It is important for these volunteers to come as Christians, not as members of a particular denomination. They should also come to serve the chaplain's program and the needs of the men, not to serve their own agenda.

The third need is for members of

the Christian community outside the prison to become aware of the dynamics of this approach. Then they can pray about how God is calling them as individuals to get involved. If each member of a church body is supporting the ministry in some fashion—volunteering, praying, or through offerings—then there is an opportunity to present a true sense of community to people who rarely understood the concept before.

Many Christians are reluctant to become involved with incarcerated or released offenders because they feel that there is no common ground between them. The chaplain believes there is a link if we will see it. He refers to Heb. 13:3 to illustrate this area of commonality between inmates and Christians: "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners." The reality is that prison is a dark and horrible place for anyone. Further, prisoners often spend their entire lives alienated from and despised by the majority culture. As Christians, if we truly devote our lives to following Jesus, we too are strangers in this dark and horrible land, who are alienated from and despised by the majority culture. If Christians can accept this concept, he says, we will develop a spiritual empathy toward the incarcerated. ✠

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BEYOND BELIEF™



Picture Windows for Preaching

Following God's Plan

A young woman felt compelled to go to India as a missionary. During her preparation to leave for her new country, her mother was injured in an accident. She delayed her trip in order to remain by her mother's side. Three years later her mother died. On her deathbed, she requested that her daughter go out west and visit her sister.

The young woman did as requested. She still planned on going to India as soon as she had completed visiting with her sister. When she arrived, she discovered that her sister was dying from consumption and without proper medical aid. So, as with her mother, she stayed with her sister until she, too, died.

Once again she determined to head for India. But once again a family member's death prevented her from going. This time her sister's husband had died, and five small children remained as orphans. No one would take the five children. She determined that she would stay in the United States and raise the children so that they would not be separated.

Her plans of missionary service seemed over. She would never get to India. She took up her sister's lonely house as her mission station instead and raised her sister's children as if they were her own. Though not easy, God gave her His strength and help. Later God showed her why she wasn't to go to India. Instead of letting her go, God called three of the five children whom she had raised to go in her place. She had followed God's plan instead of her own, and accom-



Compiled by Derl G. Keefer
Pastor, Three Rivers, Michigan

plished a greater expansion of the gospel by three instead of one.

Dynamic Preaching (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds), vol. 9, No. 8 (August 1994): 22.

Fear of Change

Juan Combe returned home to Madrid, a celebrity after his trip to the New World in 1597. People from all over Madrid wanted to hear his tales of this fascinating place. He was the toast of the town—until the day it rained. As it poured down outside, Juan paraded through the streets of his hometown wearing a wonderful cape that kept him and his clothes absolutely dry.

Unfortunately Juan didn't realize that his neighbors in Madrid were superstitious. He explained to them that such a rubber-coated cape was used by the Indians in the New World. That didn't help. He was arrested by the authorities of the city.

A judge questioned Juan at length, thoroughly examined his odd cape, and then gave his verdict: Guilty! Guilty of wearing a cape through which water could not pass, and that was interfering with God's will. After all, Matt. 5:45 said that God would

send the "rain on the just and on the unjust" alike (KJV). Such an evil as Juan was committing was caused by witchcraft, punishable by death.

Juan was executed in public. His crime was wearing a cape of crude rubber, a substance that had never been seen in all of Europe, but had been worn for a thousand years by the natives of South America.

How quick we are to censure things that are new and that we don't understand. There is in all of us a fear of change!

Illustration Digest magazine (Winslow, Ark.: AA Publishing), March—May 1993.

Holiness

In his book *On Being a Servant of God*, author Warren Wiersbe wrote:

Holiness is to the inner person what health is to the body. Holiness is wholeness, Christlikeness, the fruit of the Spirit being revealed in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

Some people have made the cultivation of holiness into a private religious hobby. They enjoy fellowship with other victorious Christians, but they never seem to channel their blessings into world evangelism and the building of the church.

Wiersbe then quotes the late U.N. secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, "The road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."

Dr. Wiersbe states, "God doesn't make us holy so that we can enjoy it. He makes us holy so that He can use us to do the work He wants us to do. In other words, holiness is a very practical thing."

Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 42-43.

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Curtis Lewis

September/October/November 1996

Prepared by Curtis Lewis

INTRODUCTION

My approach to this series of sermons is to view the Gospel of John as person oriented, not event oriented. Granted, there are events, but they serve as a platform for exhibiting Jesus.

The Gospel of John does not present Jesus in an objective way as if the author were making a list or positing a creed. John's account is warm and personal, much like a memoir.

This Gospel is a photo album. Picture after picture presents another view of Jesus. It is the task of the preacher to make these pictures come alive for listeners. This has been my intent in these sermons.

God's best to you as you open your photo album and begin to reveal to your congregation the God who came in Jesus. It is my hope that your journey with John will be as enjoyable as mine has been.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT?

by Curtis Lewis

John 2:1-11

September 1, 1996

INTRO:

The first miracle of Jesus Christ, our Lord, took place at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Cana was a rather inconspicuous town that lay outside of Nazareth. It was not very prominent, to say the least. No one in the whole village was on the social register. So insignificant it took 1,800 years before Bible scholars were able to discern precisely where it was. Mary, the mother of our Lord, Jesus, and His disciples had all been invited to the wedding. We assume that it was a peasant wedding because Mary, a peasant woman, attended. The social class was very rigid in that day. Here in a humble home in an inconspicuous little village Jesus began His ministry.

There was a certain protocol about weddings in the time of the Lord. If the bride were a virgin, the wedding occurred on Wednesday. If a widow, the wedding came on Thursday. The wedding ceremony would take place late in the evening after a feast. The father of the bride would take the bride on his arm and, with the wedding party, proceed through the village streets so that the people in every home could come out and congratulate the bride and her family. Finally, the wedding party would arrive at the home of the groom. The wedding would take place at the front door, involving several days of festivity. It was a joyous time. After the ceremony, the bride and groom would be conducted throughout the village streets by the light of flaming torches and with a canopy over their heads. They were taken on as long a road as possible so that as many people could wish them well. The couple did not go away for a honeymoon but kept open house for a week. Treated like a king and queen, they dressed in fancy robes and had crowns on their heads. Their word was law.

The groom's family was expected to provide all the refreshments for the festivities. Suddenly, they discovered that they had more guests than anticipated. You didn't have a Jewish feast without wine. They didn't get drunk—drunkenness was a disgrace in Judaism. They drank their wine this way: two parts wine and three parts water. They were running out of refreshments and could actually be sued for this breach of hospitality. Evidently they did not have the money to buy any more refreshments. So Jesus' mother, apparently a close friend of the groom's mother, came to Jesus and said, "Now, Son, we've got a problem, and we need Your help. The groom's family is running out of wine." The fact that she came to Jesus lets you know that He was concerned about commonplace things. She could approach Him with any kind of problem, no matter how simple.

Jesus responded to her with a kind of detachment. He asked, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" (v. 4, NKJV). Jesus was not being harsh. Already He was focusing on His ministry and mission. From that moment on, He detached himself from family relationships to fulfill His mission. Mary evidently recognized this because of her response.

Now, what does this first sign have to do with us today?

Notice first of all that . . .

I. This Sign Informs Us That the Wine Can Run Out (vv. 2-3)

A. We can almost hear the distress in Mary's words, "They have no wine" (NKJV).

1. This intense drama provides the setting of our Lord's first miracle—the beginning of Jesus' signs. When John uses the word "sign," he always spoke of a miracle with a deeper meaning. The statement "They have no wine" goes beyond the lack of refreshment at the Cana wedding. It defines human experience without Christ. Life without Christ is life without wine. To the Jewish people, wine symbolized joy. The rabbis had a saying: "Without wine there is no joy." At the wedding in Cana their joy had run out.

2. There can come a time when the wine runs out. The wine runs out when the joy and exhilaration of life have gone.

ILLUS. An example of this in our own time is Ernest Hemingway. He had a brilliant mind. His great stories like *The Old Man and the Sea* show his genius. From his early years, he went after everything that life could give him. He was a newspaper reporter and an ambulance driver during World War I. He was involved in the Spanish Civil War. His friendships ranged from bullfighters to authors. Whatever he did, he went for all of it. He went after the natural wines of life, but there came the day when those wines ran out. In Carlos Baker's biography of Hemingway, we read these final words:

Sunday morning dawned bright and cloudless. Ernest awoke early as always. He put on the red "Emperor's robe" and padded softly down the carpeted stairway. The early sunlight lay in pools on the living room floor. He had noticed that the guns were locked up in the basement, but the keys, as he well knew, were on the window ledge above the kitchen sink. He tiptoed down the basement stairs and unlocked the storage room. It smelled as dank as a grave. He chose a double-barreled shotgun with a tight choke. He had used it for years for pigeon shooting. He took some shells from one of the boxes in the storage room, closed and locked the door, and climbed the basement stairs. If he saw the bright day outside, it did not deter him. He crossed the living room to the front foyer, a shrinelike entryway five feet by seven, with oak-paneled walls and a floor of linoleum tile. . . . He slipped in two shells, lowered the gun butt carefully to the floor, leaned forward, pressed the twin barrels against his forehead just above the eyebrows and tripped both triggers (*Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* [Scribner, 1969], 563-64).

B. No matter who we are or what we have tasted of life, a time comes when the exhilarations and excitements of life wear out.

1. For some, it comes sooner; for others, later. It can happen during the teen years. It is epidemic during the college years, and eventually it catches up with everyone.
2. The wine can run out unless it is the new wine of Christ.

II. This Sign Helps Us See That When the Wine Runs Out, Jesus Can Change the Water into the Wine of Joy (v. 5)

A. What was the solution when the wine ran out in Cana? Jesus' mother went to her Son to tell Him of the problem. She reported back to the hosts of the wedding, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (NKJV).

1. What Jesus did was to produce 180 gallons of wine. What a wedding gift! Jesus Christ turns to six great stone pots that were used for purification when wedding guests arrived. The water from these pots was poured over their hands in a ritual of cleansing. To eat with unwashed hands was an act of defilement. This purification rite, an external act, did not make anything new or bring any fresh power.

2. The whole idea of this scene is that of abundance. Jesus is the Giver of abundant joy. He did not conform or mold that wine to be just like what they ordinarily used. Jesus didn't just doctor the water so that it had a taste of wine. He is not going to take your life and sort of touch it up a little. Our hearts, like that water, have to be transformed. They have to be completely changed into another nature.

B. New England clergyman Lloyd C. Douglas wrote *The Robe* and many other best-selling novels. In his book *The Disturbing Miracles*, he says,

Surely he is a very unfortunate reader of this epic who gets himself so distracted by all their stone waterpots . . . that he misses the real and only point at issue, which is . . . the simple fact that Jesus bears a transforming power, that He turns water into wine, frowns into smiles, whimpers of fear into anthems of hope, deserts into gardens, and sin-blistered souls into saints by the catalyzing alchemy of a selfless love.

C. Jesus changes people. He can transform our whole lives. Transforming power—that's what it's all about.

III. This Sign Reminds Us That When the Wine Runs Out, Jesus Offers an Abundance of the Best New Wine at the End (vv. 8-10)

A. In times of shortages, it is hard for us to understand the providing of not just what we need, but an overabundance.

1. Grace means that you've got more than you need. The people at the wedding in Cana had more than they could ever need.

ILLUS. If you and I could visit an Arab home in the Middle East and share some refreshment with them, you would find that they would serve you first. None of the Arab fam-

ily would take anything until after the guests had eaten. There would always be more than the guests could eat. So, there was an overabundance. This was a sign of hospitality. It is what the Bible is saying that God does for us.

2. Have you ever been to the Rocky Mountains? There's an overabundance! God didn't give us just enough beauty, there are miles and miles of it; not just one mountain, or two mountains, but many mountains. Have you ever been to the coast and looked at the beauty of the seashore? There is more beauty than your eyes can absorb. Have you ever seen a field of wildflowers? Not just enough to fill a vase in your living room, but more than enough? This is what grace means; that God always gives you more than you need.

B. So the wine is poured out, and all those people present rejoice at its rich abundance.

1. Those attending this wedding have never tasted wine like this before! And the headwaiter wonders why the good wine has been kept back until now. Usually the best wine comes first, with the inferior coming at the end, when the guests "have well drunk" and cannot tell the difference.

2. This is not so with our Lord. With Him the best comes at the end! The grace we tasted cautiously at the beginning, we now drink freely, knowing the rich wonder of forgiveness and life in the Spirit. There is One among us who is pouring out the rich wine, and there is enough for everyone!

CONCLUSION:

What do you do when the wine runs out? Well, Mary gave us the answer in what she said to the servants at the wedding feast. She told them that they could discover a miracle if they would do whatsoever Jesus commanded them. If you want that miracle, do whatsoever He commands you. And it shall be done!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:4, KJV).

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

Prelude
Announcements
Call to Worship "Almighty Medley"
Welcome
"PRAISE BE TO YOU, O LORD"
Chorus of Praise "My Tribute"
Chorus of Praise "Great and Mighty"
Hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
Prayer Chorus "God Is So Good"
Pastoral Prayer
"JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE"
Sanctuary Choir "I Am Persuaded"
Worship in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings
Hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
"JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE"
Message in Song
Today's Good News "WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT?"

SOME THINGS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE

by Curtis Lewis

John 3:1-21

September 8, 1996

INTRO:

During the presidential campaign of 1976, Jimmy Carter told the nation that he had been born again. I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, if he is elected, the next four years will prove to be interesting." In the years since, we have had born-again athletes, born-again companies, born-again buildings.

During all of the "born again" hullabaloo, a publication included a letter to the editor from a woman who claimed that she was a born-again Christian. She explained that, along with being born again, she had experienced an increased capacity to love. Because of this, she and her husband were now expressing sexually their love to others—specifically to another man and his wife! Along similar lines, a young woman claimed that she was "stripping for Jesus." She reasoned that since the Lord gave her a beautiful body, stripping is the best way to use her gift!

When a phrase becomes part of common parlance, we easily forget its real meaning. Yet, this expression, "born again," which has been so misused and abused, is one that we dare not lose or ignore. Being born again is essential to being a Christian. The background helps. John informs us that a man named Nicodemus was an earnest and sincere person. The Pharisees took their faith seriously—so seriously that on the Sabbath they would carry no more food than the weight of a dried fig, no more milk than could be swallowed in one gulp, for fear of desecrating the Sabbath. They were so careful in their religious observance of the Sabbath that they limited the number of nails in their sandals so they would not carry a burden on the holy day.

At times their seriousness led them into ridiculous situations. The Pharisees were desperately fervent. Nicodemus was not playing games in his religious experience. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was a teacher. Nicodemus was a ruler, a teacher, and a seeker after truth who came to Jesus at night because the crowds during the day would not enable him to engage Christ in such an intimate conversation. This discussion with Jesus gives us an opportunity to see that there are some things that are not negotiable.

I. Nicodemus and Jesus Met Face-to-face (vv. 2-3)

A. Nicodemus approached Jesus respectfully, using the honored title, "Rabbi."

1. This title was one of respect, but it was not the highest. Rab, Rabbi, Rabban were the degrees. Rabbi was the middle title; it was respectful. "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." Nicodemus is perfectly right. He is not asking for anything. He sim-

ply made a statement and then stood quietly waiting. Does Nicodemus want an exchange of philosophical ideas? He uses the expression, "We know." He seems to be speaking for more than himself. Nicodemus may have come to voice some of the questions being raised by a group within the Supreme Court. By what authority was Jesus doing these things? What was His purpose? Did He have some new truth to reveal?

2. Unquestionably the statement was a suggestion. What was it? That he wanted the latest word from God. Jesus would say to Nicodemus later, "You are Israel's teacher" (v. 10). At this time Nicodemus was the most popular teacher in Jerusalem. He knew the Law and the Prophets. He was aware that there had been no prophetic voice for centuries until that of John the Baptizer. Now this Teacher, authenticated by signs, demonstrated that He was from God. So Nicodemus came face-to-face with Jesus, waiting to hear this latest word from God.

B. With what might seem rudeness, Jesus cut him off and went straight to the heart of the matter.

1. In that moment, the vocabulary of faith was given one of its greatest expressions—born again. Jesus wasn't talking in terms that Nicodemus could not understand. Within his own religious context, Nicodemus would understand what born again meant. There was a saying in Judaism, "A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like a newborn child."

2. Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. There must be a new birth, a new life principle, before the kingdom of God can be entered. Thus, they are seen face-to-face: the seeker standing in the presence of Christ, wanting the last word; the one final Authority speaks, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (NKJV).

Notice in the second place . . .

II. Nicodemus and Jesus Respond Mind to Mind (vv. 4-8)

A. Nicodemus is brought up short, baffled, and confused. "How can a man be born when he is old?" he asks.

1. This new life is given by God himself, a breaking in of His grace, a supernatural act bringing forth a new creation. Human birth—a mystery. Spiritual birth has a deeper mystery and reality. Physical life is born through the intimacy of human love by male and female in which there is union of egg and sperm. But there is also a spiritual act of divine grace in which God gives himself to a particular person, who, in receiving Him, is born anew.

2. When one is "newborn," he has been given new eyes and a new heart—there is a new life.

ILLUS. In a drama of the life of Christ, there is a climax built around the Crucifixion scene. The three Marys enter and approach the Roman guards. Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks to the captain, requesting permission to minister to the needs of her Son. The captain roughly pushes her away. Then one of the women comes forward and seeks permission, adding: "For old times' sake." The guard refuses her request. Then with a sweeping motion of her hand she loosens her golden hair so it could cascade down her back. "Marcellus," she asked, "have you ever seen hair like this?" And then she thrust out a foot and asked, "And have feet ever danced for you as these feet?"

He is astounded! In amazement he says, "Mary Magdalene, how you have changed!"

Facing the Cross, she slowly says, "Yes, Marcellus, I have changed; He changed me."

That's what new birth means. We can be released. We can become the person God wants us to be. We are changed by accepting Christ as the One who brings God and man together.

B. Jesus continues to respond to the question of Nicodemus: "Nicodemus, you have been listening to the preaching of John who baptizes in water and who told you of One who would baptize you in the Spirit. Except you are born of what John preached and signified by water baptism, repentance; and that which the Spirit accomplishes, regeneration, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

1. Our Lord further explains this radical change (vv. 6-7). This radical change is not something that can be accomplished by human energy.

ILLUS. There is a story of an Arabian Chicken Little, actually a sparrow, who had heard that the sky was falling. An Arab saw the bird lying on its back with its scrawny legs thrust upward. On inquiring if the bird was all right and why it was in such a position, the sparrow explained that he was doing his part to keep the sky from falling. The Arab asked, "You surely don't think you are going to hold it up with those scrawny legs, do you?"

With a solemn look at the Arab, the sparrow retorted, "One does the best one can." Our best will never suffice for us to be born again.

2. Jesus uses a common illustration to enlighten the mind of Nicodemus. It is that of the wind, which was evidently blowing. Jesus is simply saying, "Nicodemus, obey the law of the wind, and the wind obeys you. Obey the law of the Spirit, and you will know the new birth. We are born again by the intimate breath of God." It is the life-giving Spirit that changes us.

III. Jesus and Nicodemus Speak Heart to Heart (vv. 9-21)

A. Nicodemus now comes with his last question (v. 9). Now this question is different from the question in verse 4. The question in verse 4 meant, "Can they be at all?" Now Jesus chides Nicodemus. "You—you are the teacher in Israel, and you don't know these things?" Christ has not shared with Nicodemus sophisticated doctrine. These are the ABCs. If Nicodemus cannot grasp these truths, he will never be able to understand the deeper realities of the kingdom of God.

B. The answers of Jesus to the last "how" of Nicodemus is found in three movements.

1. The first answer is found in the life of the children of Israel. They were murmuring and complaining shortly before entering the Promised Land. The Lord sent fiery serpents among them that brought disease and death. The people repented and cried out, "We have sinned." Moses interceded for them. Salvation was offered through a strange provision. God commanded Moses to make a fiery serpent of bronze and to hang it on a pole. Struggling out of their tents after being bitten, they could be healed only by lifting up their eyes and looking at that serpent. They would be saved by an act of faith. God spared them. So the Son of Man has come to be lifted up on a pole. This one who is talking heart to heart is He.

2. The second movement is the lifting up of the Son of Man as an act of love (v. 16).

3. The third movement tells us that He came in love to save, to heal, and to offer spiritual birth (v. 17).

CONCLUSION:

Do you remember reading a few years ago about the man from Cleveland who left his children and expectant wife, went to the lake, and rented a boat to do some fishing? The next day the boat was found adrift, but the man was missing. After the legal length of time, he was declared dead, his wife collected his insurance, and began the task of rearing the children alone. Four days after the disappearance of this man, a stranger appeared in Omaha, Nebraska. Within a couple of years he had established himself as a prominent sportscaster, married an attractive young model, and was enjoying success. After a few years, however, through a chance encounter, it was discovered that these two men were one and the same. Many assumed that he got tired of his wife and family and bailed out—not the first time this has been done. Psychiatric tests, however, indicated that he did not remember his past. This posed many interesting legal questions.

Whatever the details of this story, one fact stands out—a new name and a new community did not make a new man. Personality was the same in both places. The new birth is different. It is not something that can be put on on the inside. It is a new being born out of the death of the old. God's action transforms old and new. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about this transformation when He said, "Be born again!" That is nonnegotiable!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	"I Sing Praises"
Welcome and Fellowship	
Hymns	"Come, Thou Fount"
	"O for a Thousand Tongues"
Chorus of Praise	"Blessed Be the Name"
Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings	
We Read God's Word	Ps. 33:1-8
Call to Prayer	"I Stand in Awe"
Pastoral Prayer	
Sanctuary Choir	"No More Night"
Hymn	"To God Be the Glory"
Message	"SOME THINGS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE"

THERE YOU HAVE IT IN A NUTSHELL

by Curtis Lewis

John 3:16

September 15, 1996

INTRO:

When Adolf Hitler was named chancellor of Germany, a frightening, devastating episode occurred. They burned books in Nazi Germany. In order to consolidate his power, Hitler decided to mount an attack against universities because they were places where moral and spiritual values were taught. He sent his followers into university libraries to ransack the shelves and destroy any books with religious, liberal, or humanistic themes. Bonfires were lighted and books were burned while newsreel cameras captured the action. Documentaries are available today that show this event transpiring. Have you ever wondered what would happen if a dictator seized control of the world and burned every Bible on planet Earth? Would the Christian faith survive?

I believe it would—with one condition. If a small group of men and women remembered a verse of Scripture: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Christian faith not only would survive but would continue to be witnessed about. John 3:16, which is a declaration, is the essence of the Christian faith. As Martin Luther so aptly stated, "This verse is the gospel in a nutshell."

This affirmation about the love of God has a fascinating setting. Jesus spoke the words himself. They occur in a conversation with a prominent aristocrat of Jerusalem named Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Supreme Court called the Sanhedrin. We meet Nicodemus three times in John's Gospel. The first encounter with Nicodemus occurred at night, where he and Jesus have a conversation that set the stage for Jesus to make some crucial statements about himself and His mission in the world. Evidently Jesus struck a responsive chord in Nicodemus because we next meet him defending Jesus when He is being condemned in absentia by his fellow Pharisees. Our last glimpse of Nicodemus came on the day Jesus died, when he and Joseph of Arimathea claimed Jesus' body and buried it in a garden tomb.

The real issue is: What does this claim Jesus makes about himself say to you and to me? John 3:16 speaks to us of three important things about God.

I. Jesus Explains the Purpose of the Gospel in a Nutshell

A. How do you describe the love of God?

1. No combination of words can do more than scratch the surface. When one tries to describe the love of God, it is like trying to tell about the beauty of a rose, the taste of chocolate cake, or the sound of a great symphony. We can, however, catch glimpses of God's love in the love we share with one another.

ILLUS. Some of you have recently become engaged or

have married. Men, remember buying that engagement ring? You and the girl of your dreams shopped around and made the choice of a ring. You went back to purchase the ring—the ring cost more money than you had. The jeweler quickly worked out an arrangement with you. You pay a deposit and so much each month. Your finance got the ring. The balance owed will be paid off over a period of time. There is a sense in which the engagement ring gives us a hint about the way God loves us. An engagement ring represents sacrifice: It is purchased at a price. It is also beautiful and lavish. There is no practical use for an engagement ring except to express love.

2. One element is missing in this "engagement ring" parable. Two people become engaged because they are attracted to each other and because of some special quality each possesses. God's love for us is different. His is an unconditional love. God does not love us because there is something special about us. God loves us because we were created for a unique relationship with the divine.

B. A little girl once quizzed a guest visiting her parents, "Do you like dollies?" When the man said yes, she proceeded to show him her entire collage of dolls. The visitor asked the youngster which of her dolls she loved best. The child hesitated a moment, then she made her new friend promise that he would not laugh if she showed him her favorite. She skipped out of the room to get the doll. When she returned, the little girl held up a doll whose hair had fallen out; its nose was broken; and its face was scratched. The visitor was surprised. "Why," he asked, "do you love that doll more than any of the others?"

"I love her the most," replied the little girl, "because if I didn't love her, no one else would."

This is what the love of God is all about—unconditional love. The beginning of the gospel message is found in six words, "For God so loved the world."

II. Jesus Explains the Provision of the Gospel in a Nutshell

A. Now let's concentrate on the gift God gave the world. God gave His only Son.

1. What gift could be greater than a son?

ILLUS. One of the goals Queen Elizabeth stressed when she ascended the British throne was to draw the nations of the British Commonwealth closer to one another. She worked at the task in a variety of ways. One of them was to send her son, Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, to school in Australia. The prince lived "down under" for almost a year, mingling that mixing with the Australian people, savoring the wonder of the country, and learning something about its culture. Apparently he enjoyed his stay, for one of the first royal tours that he and Diana undertook after they were married was to Australia. The

queen had given a part of the Commonwealth the greatest gift she could give. She shared her son.

2. In a sense, this is what God did in sending Jesus into the human situation. God chose a life before time began and said, "This will be My life in the world." Then God poured grace, love, acceptance, and hope into that life. Jesus became the fulfillment of what every person is meant to be when he or she is totally attuned to God.

III. Jesus Explains the Promise of the Gospel in a Nutshell

A. This one verse in the Bible, which Luther calls "the gospel in a nutshell," ends on a glorious note. It concludes with the promise that all who believe in him "shall not perish but have eternal life." There are many mistaken ideas of eternal life floating around.

In our understanding of eternal, we need to distinguish between interminable and the eternal. Somehow, we in the church have gotten caught up with the interminable, which simply means "ongoing." Eternal life is more than endless time. It is far more than our conceived images of harps and angels. It is much more than people wearing long white robes and floating on a cloud. I'm afraid that is the picture many of us have of eternal life. I am also afraid that many people associate eternal life only with the rustle of wings and the sounds of harps.

I have encountered misconceptions about eternal life in the church and even in the pulpit.

If you watch religious broadcasts on television, you won't watch long until some well-polished, skillful preacher with a television following will begin to talk about "rewards" in heaven. His premise will be a simple one—the better you are on earth, the more you get in heaven.

B. What is the eternal life that Jesus promised to Nicodemus and to all of us? Let me illustrate:

ILLUS. In Grace Nies Fletcher's *In My Father's House*, which is the story of her father, Lee, and his ministry in New England many years ago, she tells of an afternoon when Lee answered the parsonage doorbell. He found Molly Stark saying to him, "Lee, I've got to talk with you. I'm going to die."

"We all are, Molly," he replied. "Come in and sit down and relax." So Lee talked with her calmly as she collected herself. The doctor had just told her she had about four months left if she were fortunate.

After a while she said, "Lee, you're wonderful, but you see, I don't mind so much about myself: It's Jimmy; I can't leave Jimmy." He was her 10-year-old son who sang in the junior choir. "He's so young," she continued. "His father's a good man but has never quite grown up. I'm worried."

Lee didn't answer immediately. His thoughts turned to his own little son, Bildad, who had died as an infant about five years previously.

Finally, he said, "I'll make a bargain with you, Molly. I'll

look after your Jimmy if you'll ride herd on my Bildad. He must be about five by now. The right age for kindergarten down here. So when you see him, tell him his pop said that you were to look after him; and when he goes to school, if he gets any 'Ds' on his report card, you can give him what for!"

Molly was laughing and crying at the same time. "Lee, it's a bargain. You make it all seem so—so everyday. Funny, everyone has to die, but you never expect it to happen to you."

Then Lee's voice was soft as he said, "What people forget, Molly, is that we're living in eternity right now. The Lord holds the past, the present, and the future—and all families, wherever they are, together safe in His hands. When you believe that, you can go on."

And when the time came a few weeks later, Lee told Jimmy about the bargain. "Your mother's gonna take care of my Bildad, and I'm gonna take care of you."

C. On the eve of His death, Jesus said to His disciples, "I will see you again and you will rejoice" (John 16:22).

1. It's the personal relationship that matters. Love and fellowship make this life worthwhile and heaven too.

2. "I will see you again." Here is the pledge of the survival of individual personality and the continuance of the dearest relationships of life in some richer, deeper sense. Because of this, we can use the same words concerning those whom we have loved and lost for a while: "I will see you again."

3. Eternal life is a relationship with God—past, present, and future. It is being able to remember, experience now, and anticipate God's love forever.

CONCLUSION:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That is the gospel—the Good News—in a nutshell!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

IN YOUR UNFAILING LOVE YOU WILL LEAD

Prelude

Announcements

Call to Worship

"All Hail King Jesus!"

THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE REDEEMED

Welcome

Hymns

"Let All the People Praise Thee"

"I Will Praise Him"

Chorus "There's Just Something About That Name"

Pastoral Prayer

IN YOUR STRENGTH YOU WILL GUIDE THEM

The Sanctuary Choir

"It Is Well"

Giving of His Tithes and Our Offerings

Message in Song

Today's Good News

"THERE YOU HAVE IT IN A

NUTSHELL"

TO YOUR HOLY DWELLING

THE WELL OF SALVATION

by Curtis Lewis

John 4:1-29

September 22, 1996

INTRO:

Some of the greatest scenes of the Bible took place at a well. Hagar, after she had been driven by her mistress, Sarah, into the wilderness, found comfort at a well of water that one might call the Well of Providence. Another well is the Well of Romance. At this well Jacob first met Rachel as she came out to water the sheep. Another unforgettable well of the Bible is the Well of Bethlehem. During the days when David was a fugitive from the jealous King Saul, he longed for a drink from this well, which could be called the Well of Memory.

In our scripture lesson today we read of another well—Jacob's well. Here Jacob watered his flocks, and his herdsmen gathered to drink. Centuries later Jesus came to this very spot at midday to rest on the curbstone of the well while the disciples went into Sychar for food. Having traveled from Jerusalem, they were thirsty, hungry, and tired. From the direction of Sychar comes a Samaritan woman with a waterpot on her head. This woman had walked about a half mile to get water.

When Jesus saw her coming, He knew immediately that she was an outcast. Early each morning while the sun was still low in the sky and the air was cool, the housewives trudged out of the village to the well. Pausing at the well, the women laughed and talked. The ancient well served as a social center for village wives. Water fetching was work, but it was also a break in the monotony of housekeeping.

The wives of the village turned the necessary chore into a social event. Each evening, after the oppressive heat declined, the women gathered again at the well to replenish the water supply for their peasant huts. Again, they chatted and gossiped. Each housewife planned her daily routine so that she could join the others at the well twice each day. Like a coffee break for moderns, gathering at the well for the housewives was a pleasant diversion. Every morning and evening, the women assembled to visit at the well.

Jesus watched her approach the well. He knew that no sensible woman would make the long trip from the village to the well in the peak hours of heat. Besides, Jesus knew that no woman would want to miss socializing with the other women at the well. He sensed that this woman was purposely coming to the well at a time when no one else was about. She had come at noon alone so that she would not encounter any other village housewives.

There are some lessons in this story for all of us.

I. The Confrontation of Christ Surprises the Samaritan Woman (vv. 7-10)

A. As the woman from Samaria approached the well, Jesus did a surprising thing: He spoke to the woman, asking her for a drink.

1. In speaking to her, Jesus smashed long-standing

barriers. He spoke to a woman—something no Law-observing, self-respecting Jew would do in public. Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman—a member of a minority group regarded as half-breed heretics. Proper Jews avoided Samaritans, even detouring for miles on a trip to stay away from Samaritan villages. Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman of a dubious reputation. No conscientious Jew would consider degrading himself by talking with any woman with the faintest suspicion of a questionable character.

2. In this confrontation, Jesus brushed aside all the taboos about conversing with women, with Samaritans, and with a person of questionable morals! "Give me a drink" (v. 7, RSV), He asked, doing away with ancient rules fencing off certain persons from God. In one simple human request for a drink, Jesus enacted the searching, smashing desire of God for confrontation with outsiders.

B. The woman responds with surprise and no doubt with some suspicion. Instead of handing Jesus the leather bucket and the rope, she twitted Jesus, a Jew. She would know that He was a Jew by the tassels on His garment. No respectable woman in all of Palestine would talk to a stranger, and no self-respecting housewife even in Samaria would speak so impudently to a strange man.

C. Jesus responds, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water" (v. 10, TEV).

1. She had a wayside chance. Had the woman come a half hour earlier, she would have found the disciples there, and this encounter would not have taken place. Had she come at three o'clock, instead of twelve, Jesus would have been well on His way toward Galilee. But, in the providence of God, she came when Jesus was alone, thirsty, and sitting by the well.

2. "If you only knew." Think of that! If you only knew who it is that is talking to you. If you only knew that God's gift is near you, right at this very moment. The gift of eternal life is yours now—right now—for the asking and the taking.

II. The Claim of Christ Appeals to This Samaritan Woman (vv. 11-15)

A. Jesus spoke to this woman of "living water" (v. 10).

1. This expression meant more than fresh drinking water. Everyone in Samaria, Judea, and Galilee knew that "Living Water" also referred to God. "Living Water" was a common figure of speech for God by people in Jesus' time. The woman tries to skirt the issue by referring to the fact that the well is deep and that Jesus has nothing with which to draw water.

2. She asks Jesus if He is greater than Jacob, who gave them the well. Jesus is not put off by her. He goes on speaking about her—about what she deeply longs for. “You’ve come here for water,” He says. “Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (vv. 13-14, RSV).

B. What human heart wouldn’t respond to that? We all crave satisfaction and fulfillment. The human spirit knows a thirst of which the body’s craving for water is a sign. But the satisfaction we inwardly crave always seems to elude us. We grasp for it, we almost have it, and then it vanishes again. The old thirst comes back stronger than ever. Who wouldn’t want a satisfaction that abides, a fountain of refreshment that keeps springing up?

C. Does that speak to you today?

1. Does it speak to a restlessness within you? A clamoring thirst of the heart that nothing can seem to quiet?

2. Here is someone promising living water, a refreshment that never runs dry. Even this cautious woman, so burned by false promises, shows interest. For the first time she is ready to ask for something. “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v. 15, RSV). “By all means,” she is saying, “If you can really provide what you are talking about, please give me it! Heaven knows how long I’ve been searching!”

III. The Command of Christ Reaches This Samaritan Woman (vv. 16-26)

A. To the Samaritan woman Jesus then spoke one rapierlike command that pierced and bared the sickness of the soul. “Go, call your husband, and come here” (v. 16, RSV).

1. Jesus moved quickly and wisely and with authority. “Go, call your husband.”

See the quick intake of breath and then her answer. “I have no husband” (v. 17).

Jesus proceeds to unmask this woman completely. “I know. You have had five husbands; and the man you are living with now, he is not your husband.”

What a moment that was. Questions fly through her mind: “How does He know? Where did He learn of me? He seems to know who I am, what I have done, all about me!”

2. Jesus is commanding someone today, “Go, call your wife whom you have wronged.” To another He says, “Go, call the child that you have neglected.” To some teenager He is saying, “Go, call your father and mother.” To another He says, “Go, call the record of that business transaction.” To someone else He is commanding, “Go, call that gossip that you uttered.” Or “Go, call that secret sin that you

have hidden deep inside you.” “Go, call” is His command to someone today.

B. This woman is so like us. She tries a diversionary tactic.

1. She hopes to divert Jesus—to focus His attention on the theological and philosophical aspect of religion and worship.

2. Jesus simply deals with the issue that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (v. 24, NKJV). Again she tries to skirt the issue by bringing up the idea of the Messiah, who, when He came, would reveal all things. But the issue cannot be postponed. Now is the day of salvation when Christ encounters us and offers eternal life, or else the gift of God may not come within our grasp again. To this woman of Samaria, Jesus disclosed a truth that the disciples had not yet recognized. She looked, as they looked, for the Messiah.

Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He” (v. 26, NKJV).

This woman went home a new person, cleansed and transformed. How do I know? She left her water jar, and she ran to the village, shouting, “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done” (v. 29, TEV).

CONCLUSION:

Perhaps this story of Christ’s encounter with the woman of Samaria has reached and touched you with a sense of your own need. If the echo of His voice there by Jacob’s old well has awakened in you hope where hope was all but dead, then call on Him; say now as that woman did, “Sir, give me this water” (v. 15).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

The Spirit makes us one. Let that sense of unity strengthen your heart as we move toward worship. Our oneness is expressed in a great variety of ways. Share some of these with the pastor.

GOD’S FOREVER FAMILY GATHERS

Piano Prelude

Announcements

Sanctuary Choir “Let All the People Praise Thee”

We Welcome You to Our Fellowship

PRaise HIM WITH SINGING

Hymn “Praise Him! Praise Him!”

We Praise Him with Our Giving

O, MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME

Call to Prayer “Where the Spirit of the Lord Is”

Pastoral Prayer

Response

OUR WORSHIP CONTINUES

Sanctuary Choir Men Minister in Music “Answer the Call”

Hymn “My Jesus, I Love Thee”

WE LISTEN AS GOD SPEAKS TO US

Message in Song

Message “THE WELL OF SALVATION”

WHEN BELIEVING IS SEEING

by Curtis Lewis

John 4:43-54

September 29, 1996

INTRO:

Jesus had finished His work in Samaria and completed His journey to Galilee. Now He goes once more to the village of Cana. In John's Gospel there has been only one other miracle recorded to this point, that of turning the water into wine at a wedding. A royal official who had a seriously ill child heard that Jesus had come to Cana, so this man decided to ask Jesus to heal his son.

I have called this man a royal official—the word is one that can be translated “nobleman” (KJV), king's man, or petty king. Evidently this man served as an official in Herod's court, a man of influence. He would also be a man of great wealth, as Herod's men were apt to be. By anyone's standards, he had everything he could possibly want. However, he had a problem—his son was very ill. The boy had contracted a fever. The father had watched as the boy's life slowly drained away. The love this father had for his son is revealed by the language he uses to refer to his child. In verse 49 this official calls him “my little boy” (NRSV) or lad. This is an expression of affection.

Nothing can shatter a parent more than a child's illness. I have been with parents as they have heard the doctor's diagnosis. I have seen them turn to each other in despair and agony, saying by word and action, “This cannot be happening.” In my ministry, the second and third funerals that I conducted were for the young. One was a 7-year-old girl, the victim of leukemia; the other a 19-year-old college student who died as the result of a motorcycle accident. I empathize with this man. He found himself enshrouded in a grim darkness because the light of his life was about to go out. Though children carry a sense of immortality, the fact is they do die.

Regardless of our station in life, trouble, sorrow, and death come to all. Death was knocking at the door of this royal official as it does in homes today. Word of Jesus' arrival in Cana must have sparked a glimmer of hope, for this government official quickly set off for Cana. I like this man. He came to Jesus himself. He didn't send someone else. It says that he cared about what happened to his family.

Some truths from this miracle, or sign, would help us today as we wrestle with life and its perplexing problems.

I. We Appreciate an Unusual Request (vv. 47-48)

A. We can visualize the encounter between this government official and Jesus, the Carpenter.

1. The official began to beg Jesus to heal his son. He kept it up! Indifferent to the noise around him, unaware of the crowd, he followed Jesus, saying, “Lord, Sir, heal my son!”

Our Lord's reply to him was startling. “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, Je-

sus told him, ‘you will never believe’” (v. 48). That was Jesus' answer to a man's pathetic cry for his child. On the surface, it seems like a detached, coldly unsympathetic response. Actually, Jesus' reply was full of grace. His words were mercifully surgical. When He said, “you,” it was plural. He was referring not only to the nobleman but also to the Galileans whose tendency this official represented. Jesus' words were going to lift the father to new levels of faith and also anyone else who would listen and respond.

2. With unerring accuracy our Lord put His finger on the weakness of the people's faith. They focused on signs and wonders. They were following Jesus as if He were a religious sideshow: “Hurry, hurry, don't miss the latest miracle! Get your bagels here. Crowd in close, folks, so you can see the new miracle!” People were focusing on signs to the extent that they were missing Jesus' true identity. The government official seems also to have been confused because of his repeated emphasis on Jesus coming down to Capernaum to heal his son. He wanted Jesus to do His “good magic” to heal his son.

B. We ought not to miss the obvious application to our own day.

1. Some Christians constantly seek for signs and wonders to confirm their faith. Such people may be missing the intention of the signs, Christ himself. If we focus on sensationalism, miracles, and signs, we are not looking to Jesus, who alone is sufficient. Like this official, we want bargain-basement miracles. Jesus is actually saying, “You have to have your wonders before you will trust Me, don't you?”

2. Jerome Bosch's painting *Christ Bearing the Cross* depicts a pathetic, tragic figure of a Man weighted down by a heavy cross and bearing on His forehead a piercing crown of thorns. A soldier leans heavily upon the cross, increasing the burden. A mob presses about Him, but none look directly at the central Figure, and no one observes or contemplates the tragedy. They are nearly animals thirsty for blood. The cartoonlike quality of Bosch's character speaks of an entertainment-based existence. The kill is what they want or a miracle. Make the event bloody or spectacular, preferably both. If Jesus would leap off the Cross with a full somersault, that would be stupendous! Colossal!

3. Jesus meant to stop this kind of miracle-mongering before it got too far. This story includes the only use of the term “wonder” in John's Gospel. It is used in a derogatory sense. No cheap miracles today! Let me point out that Jesus is not deprecating miracles. He was about to perform one that would lead the father on to faith in Him. The thrust of what Jesus is

saying is, "Oh, that you might think less about the wonders and more about Me!" This request was unusual because it was for the spectacular, which Jesus refused.

II. We Discover an Unusual Faith (vv. 49-50)

A. Jesus was this man's last hope, and he was not leaving Him.

1. This man grasped as much as he could comprehend of Jesus' character. He pathetically cried, "Sir, come down before my child dies" (v. 49). It was a cry for mercy.

Jesus' answer gave him no sign. He gave only His word. In the awesome silence of that moment, Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live" (v. 50). We know that he took the step of faith, for we read, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed." He didn't argue, plead, or insist on just one little sign. He believed.

2. What happened to the official is quite the reverse of the common, "Seeing is believing" attitude in our world. For this man, "Believing was seeing." He believed that with 20 miles between them, he would see his son in good health. He was called upon to believe without sight. All this man had was Jesus' assurance—it is the very essence of faith that we should believe what Jesus says is true. So often we have a vague, nebulous, wistful longing that the promises of Jesus are true. The only way to enter into them is to believe in them with the clutching intensity of a drowning person. If Jesus says a thing, it is not a case of "It may be true." It is a case of "It must be true."

B. The testimony of Scripture is unified about the relation of faith and sight.

Faith enables us to see the unseen. Faith sees the unseen. Believing is seeing. Faith gives living color to God's words. Seen through the lens of faith, the promises of God flame alive. We see the unseen. On the basis of Jesus' words, this official saw his child healthy and well, the color back in his cheeks. The father believed with such conviction that he departed. Unusual faith is summed up in the words "Believing is seeing."

III. We Enjoy an Unusual Result (vv. 51-53)

A. John reports the result of this man's faith with an economy of words. Did you notice that word "yesterday"? I find this amazing. If he had left Cana at the seventh hour, or one o'clock in the afternoon, and had he hurried back to Capernaum, he would have arrived home by five the same afternoon. But he didn't get home until the next day. He believed so thoroughly that he simply picked up his work where he had left and went on about his business. The Greek tense (imperfect) implies that he stayed in Cana and finished his business—he did not rush home. When he got home the next day, he learned that his son had been healed

instantly the day before, at the very hour in which Jesus had spoken to him. What a tremendous story this is! And it is all the more exciting in that the man came to such a strong faith from such a weak beginning.

B. This man was not a man who got out of Christ what he wanted and then went away to forget. "He and all his household believed" (v. 53). That would not be easy for him, for the idea of Jesus as the Anointed One of God must have cut across all his preconceived ideas. To him it must have been a staggering fact that the carpenter from Nazareth was the Messiah. It would not be easy at the court of Herod to profess faith in Jesus. He would incur mockery and laughter. No doubt, there would be those who would think he had gone mad. This government official faced and accepted the facts. He had seen what Jesus could do. He had experienced it, and there was nothing left but to believe and surrender to Christ. He had come to Jesus with need—a desperate need. That need had been supplied. His sense of need had turned into an overwhelming, overmastering love.

C. This man believed what Jesus said to him and went on his way. He had his values in the right place and acted on his faith.

CONCLUSION:

Marian Anderson was once told by the famous conductor Toscanini that she had the voice of the century. She sang for the president of the United States and the king and queen of England. Thousands had experienced the beauty of her voice. A reporter asked her on one occasion what she felt was the greatest moment of her life. She answered, "That day I went home and told my mother that she didn't have to take in washing anymore." She had her values right.

It was so with this official. He knew enough to trust Jesus, and he acted in accordance with that trust.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

*Surely the Lord is in this place;
therefore receive with meekness the Word,
which is able to save.*

"PRAISE BE TO YOU, O LORD"

Prelude

Announcements

Call to Worship

"Bless the Lord, O My Soul"

Welcome

Hymns

"Arise, My Soul, Arise"

"He Brought Me Out"

"WE PRAY IN ONE SPIRIT"

Prayer Chorus

"I Love You, Lord"

Pastoral Prayer

Sanctuary Choir

"O What a Reason"

Worship in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings

"JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE"

Message in Song

Message

"WHEN BELIEVING IS SEEING"

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A LAME MAN

by Curtis Lewis

John 5:1-15

October 6, 1996

INTRO:

Charles Schulz, in one of his "Charlie Brown" episodes, depicts Charlie and his friend Linus looking over a fence with their weary faces resting in their hands. They are consumed with self-pity and depression. Linus looks at Charlie sadly and says: "Sometimes I feel that life has just passed me by. Do you ever feel that way, Charlie Brown?"

Melancholy Charlie replies, "No, I feel like it has knocked me down and walked all over me."

Jesus is about to encounter a man who could express similar feelings to those of Charlie Brown. Jesus will meet this man on a feast day. Which feast? John does not inform us. He just puts it down that this was a special occasion. On this particular feast day, Jesus did not go up to the Temple. He went to a local healing shrine, a place called Bethesda, which means "house of healing." This shrine had developed a reputation through the years based more on superstition than fact. The locals believed that the mysteriously churning pool could be explained by the special visit of an angel. Five porches had been built around the healing shrine. The floor of these porches were strewn with the lame, blind, and paralyzed. It was a place of suffering and misery. What a sight the crowd around that pool must have been—a very distressing scene except that on this day Jesus came.

Christ was alone. Without His disciples He could move about unnoticed. As our Lord looked over the mass of hurting humanity, His eyes focused on one of the worst cases, a man who had been confined to a bed for 38 years. He had never been able to reach the pool in time.

I. Focus on a Helpless Man (vv. 5-7)

A. Jesus saw the man lying by the pool. John does not tell us how Jesus came to know that the man had been there for such a long time. John simply informs his readers that "Jesus . . . learned" that this man had been in this condition for a long time. This man does not approach Jesus; Jesus approaches him (v. 6).

1. Jesus asked the man a very pointed question: "Do you want to get well?" The answer to that question seems so obvious—surely he wants to be healed? It isn't that simple. This man's illness had allowed him to settle into a comfortable pattern. He knew what he could do and what he could not do. Also, he probably was a beggar, and being healed meant that his livelihood would be taken from him.

2. If the crippled man were made well, he would lose his comfort zone. He would have to take responsibility for his own life. To be healed meant that he would have to enter into an unknown life filled with possibilities and perils. What did this man really want?

THUS. This man reminds me of an early Charles Schulz

cartoon in which Charlie Brown and Linus are leaning on a wall and watching the sunset:

"I hate to see the sun go down," says Charlie. "I've wasted another day."

Linus asks, "What do you consider a day not wasted?"

Charlie responds, "A day where I met the girl of my dreams, was elected president of our country, won a Nobel prize, and hit a home run!"

To which Linus concludes, "I can understand why you hate to see the sun go down."

This man is afraid to try. His fear has him paralyzed.

B. Did this man really want healing? Jesus' question moves right to the man's will. Did he really want health?

1. What about you and me? Do we really want to respond to Jesus? Are we willing to be changed?

2. Many people do not want to have anything to do with Christ because they do not wish to move out of their comfortable, selfish ways.

3. To know Christ is to be introduced to a life that those who have experienced it never want to lose. There is a price; you have to leave your old life. For this man to be whole, he will have to give up his old life.

II. Delight in the Healing Christ (vv. 7-8)

A. All this man can see is the pool. He really doesn't respond to Jesus except to imply that his struggle to get into the pool demonstrates his desire to be healed.

B. Jesus does not discuss the pool. He simply tells the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (v. 8). Why did Jesus command the man in this manner? To show him that the bed that had carried him through the day, he now will carry.

C. The healing was instantaneous. This man did what Jesus told him. He picked up his mat and walked. The power of Christ was greater than that of the man's infirmity. Think of it! With one word of command, Jesus healed the paralysis that had lasted for 38 years.

III. Don't Copy the Hinderers (vv. 9-13)

A. This lame man had been healed on the Sabbath. This led to trouble. The religious leaders opposing Jesus were more interested in the letter of the law than in mercy and help.

1. The Jews speak to the healed man (v. 10). They drew attention to the fact that it was the Sabbath, and this man was violating the holy day by carrying his mat.

2. The day was more important than the healing. They ignored the healing completely. Their pre-

cious regulations mattered more to them than the lame man's healing.

B. The religious leaders begin to question this healed man.

1. He defended himself by saying it wasn't his fault (v. 11).
2. The Jews demand to know who it was that told him to take up his pallet and walk (v. 12). He did not know. He could not point Jesus out.
3. There are always religious leaders around who will hinder the work of God by placing regulations before human need.

IV. Listen to the Helpful Warning (vv. 14-15)

A. Later Jesus finds this man in the Temple (v. 14).

1. Jesus looked for this man. Jesus sought for this man to bring him face-to-face with spiritual realities. This man's healing is permanent, but Jesus points to his sin and urges him to abandon it. We do not know what the sin was, but Jesus knew. This man has a new physical life, but Jesus wanted him to start a new spiritual life.

2. Jesus pointed out to this man that the eternal consequences of sin are worse than the paralysis from which he had been delivered. Tragically most of us do not take the "something worse" seriously enough.

ILLUS. Leon Morris tells the story of Bishop Warren A. Candler, who was preaching on the way Ananias and Sapphira lied to God. Candler pointed out the seriousness of sin.

"God does not strike people dead these days for lying," he said. "If He did, where would I be?" A ripple of laughter went through his amused congregation. The bishop paused for a moment and then roared right back at them, "I'll tell you where I'd be. I'd be right here, preaching to an empty house!"

Each of us should take Jesus' words more seriously. Christ's warning remains relevant to us.

B. The man announced Jesus as the One who made him whole (v. 15). This man was not ungrateful for Christ's healing. He made a positive announcement to the Jews. He had begun to live a whole life.

CONCLUSION:

The question before us today is the same one that Jesus asked the paralytic man by a pool in Jerusalem. "Do we really want to be made whole?"

If we answer, "Yes," then God can move miraculously in your life and mine.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:4, KJV).

WELCOME TO THE FIRST FAMILY

Prelude
Announcements
Welcome and Fellowship

WE ARE CALLED TO CELEBRATION

Hymn "How Great Thou Art"

WE CELEBRATE IN SONG AND PSALM

We Read Together Ps. 63:1-5

Hymns "Holy, Holy, Holy"

"O Worship the King"

WE JOIN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN PRAYER

Call to Prayer The Lord's Prayer

Family Prayer

OUR WORSHIP CELEBRATION CONTINUES

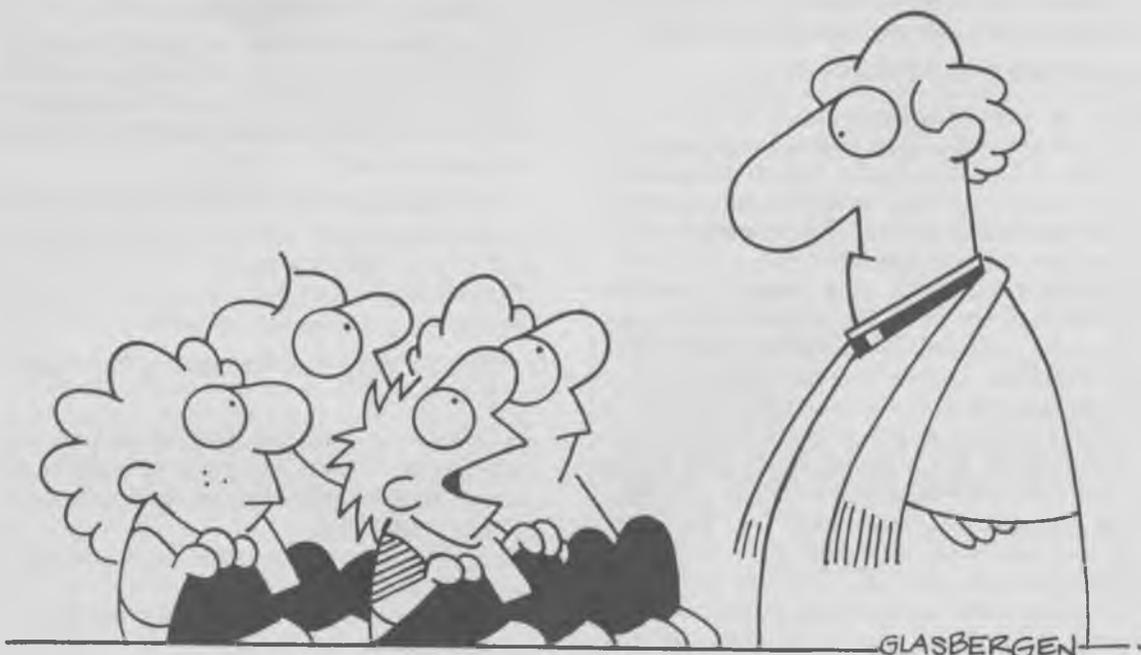
Men's Quartet "I Sing the Mighty Power of God"

Worship with His Tithes and Our Offerings

WE ARE MINISTERED TO

In Song "God and God Alone"

In Message "A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A LAME MAN"



"You should get a halo! That would look awesome!"

WHEN A LITTLE IS A LOT

by Curtis Lewis

John 6:1-15

October 13, 1996

INTRO:

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is one miracle of which all of the Gospel writers inform us. Matthew, Mark, and Luke share with us some of the background that eventually led to this miracle. John is not so much concerned with the background as he is with the miracle itself. He starts John 6 with the expression, "Some time after this . . ." What does he mean? What is he talking about?

John refers not to John 5, but to the events that led up to the feeding of the 5,000. What were these events? First, this miracle took place shortly after the 12 disciples had returned from their first mission. The miracle occurred almost immediately after the death of John the Baptist. The crowds followed Jesus everywhere, placing strenuous demands upon Him. Jesus had little time to eat or sleep or be alone with His disciples, nor was time available to commune as He so desired with God His Father.

In order to be alone with His disciples, Jesus set sail in a boat from Capernaum to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a distance of four miles. It was easy for the crowd to see the direction He was going. The people hurried around the north of the lake by land. The river Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee at the north end. Two miles up the river near the village of Bethsaida, there was a place known as the fords of the Jordan. Here the people could come and make their way to where Jesus and His disciples were.

When Jesus and His disciples arrived on the other shore, they went up on the side of the mountain. Jesus is sitting there with His disciples when the people begin to appear in droves. It was nine miles around the north side of the lake and across the ford. The people had made the journey with all the speed of which they were capable. At the sight of the crowd, Jesus' sympathy is kindled. They are hungry and tired, and they must be fed.

I. We Have an Impossible Situation (vv. 5-9)

A. To help solve the problem of how to feed the hungry crowd, Jesus turns to Philip. Philip is a native of Bethsaida, and this event happened near his city. Jesus turns to Philip because Philip would know where the resources might be to feed such a crowd. Also, Jesus is testing Philip. The test result will show that from Philip's point of view, the situation is impossible.

1. Jesus asks where they can find bread, but Philip doesn't respond to the question. He has his computer spreadsheet out, and it says the situation is hopeless (v. 5).

2. Using his trusty mental calculator, Philip finds the bottom line. The bottom line shows that it would take eight month's wages to begin to feed such a crowd. Philip's mathematics tell him, "This

can't be done!" (v. 7).

B. Andrew gets in on the action (v. 8).

1. One thing that can be said for Andrew; he is consistent. He consistently brings people to Jesus. He brought his brother, Simon Peter, and now he brings a boy. John does not tell us who the boy is or how Andrew found him.

2. This boy, Andrew told Jesus, had five barley loaves and two little fish. These barley loaves are the food of the poor, so that we can assume the boy came from a poor family. The fish that this boy has are mere tidbits, something to go with his bread.

C. However, this boy offers his lunch to Jesus. Andrew is prepared to bring the boy and his lunch to Jesus, but he doesn't see any hope for this impossible situation, for he asks the question, "But how far will they go among so many?" (v. 9).

II. We Find a Divine Solution (vv. 10-12)

A. Human resources were not adequate to take care of an impossible situation. Jesus, who knew what He was going to do, moves to a divine solution. How?

1. Jesus has the people seated (v. 10). The verb means to "recline." This was the normal position for a meal. Since this was a grassy area, it is logical to conclude that the people reclined and were comfortable.

2. John describes the miracle very simply. Jesus took the bread and gave thanks for it, and the disciples distributed it to the people (v. 11). He did the same thing with the fish.

3. Jesus gave the people as much as they wanted. The people were satisfied because they ate all they wanted. This was not a token meal but one that satisfied the hunger of the crowd.

B. What really happened at this miracle? There have been various suggestions.

1. Some have suggested that those who brought food with them shared their meal with those who had no food, and the miracle was a "miracle of sharing." After the sharing, there was food left over.

2. Others have contended that what transpired on this occasion was something like a Holy Communion. It is suggested that the crowd was fed primarily spiritually and that the feeding was only symbolic.

3. What really happened was a real miracle. Jesus, being the Son of God, brought a divine solution to an impossible situation. He provided the food that was necessary to satisfy the physical hunger of a multitude.

C. The disciples are told to gather up what was left so that nothing would be wasted (v. 12). It is astounding that there should be so much at the end when there

was so little at the beginning. When Christ solves a problem, He does so in abundance.

III. We Watch the People's Response (vv. 14-15)

A. The people were impressed. They did not understand all that was involved in what John calls a "sign," but they knew that Jesus had done something wonderful. The people responded by giving their verdict, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (v. 14). These Galileans did not see Jesus as the Messiah, only as "the Prophet," a prophet much like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18).

B. The people wanted to make a king out of Jesus. So Jesus withdraws (v. 15).

1. The Jews detested being under Roman rule. They longed for a militant Messiah who would defeat the Romans. Jesus was their Man. If He could feed the crowd, surely He could defeat the Romans.
2. Jesus was not a king in that sense. He wants to be King in the hearts of His followers, but that is different. Tragically these people tried to make Jesus into their kind of king. People still make that mistake. They try to get out of Jesus what they want. We must submit to His kind of Kingship.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus always does a lot with a little. Will you give Him your little today? You will be amazed what He can do with it.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

The joy of being in the house of God with our brothers and sisters in Christ is a source of strength. We anticipate that the illumination of the Word in this service will guide us to a meaningful expanding of that strength through Christian service. So share freely the warmth of fellowship.

PRAISE HIM WITH SINGING AND FELLOWSHIP

Prelude

Announcements

Choral Call to Worship

Celebration Choir
"Holy Is He"

Welcome to Our Fellowship

Hymns

"I Want to Be like Jesus"
"Open My Eyes, That I May See"

PRAISE HIM IN PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING

Pastoral Prayer

We worship Him who is our Altar.

This place of prayer by His grace is open to all.

Be free to share with the pastor.

Response

"Bless God"

OUR WORSHIP CONTINUES

Ministry of Music

Celebration Choir
"O What a Reason"

Worship with His Tithes and Our Offerings

We Sing Together

"Find Us Faithful"
"Lord, Be Glorified"

WE LISTEN AS GOD SPEAKS TO US

Message in Song

Message

"WHEN A LITTLE IS A LOT"



J O H N S O N

"For a five-minute speech I'll need at least three week's notice.
If you want an hour's speech I can do it right now."

DO YOU WANT A DRINK OF WATER?

by Curtis Lewis

John 7:37-39

October 20, 1996

INTRO:

After the harvest had been gathered in Israel, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles took place. For eight days the entire life of Israel was dislocated. Shelters sprang up in the most unlikely places—on rooftops, in dark alleys, and even in the courts of the Temple. This celebration was well attended. The exciting festival was one of three festivals required of every Jewish male living within the province.

We need to be aware of one daily ritual in order to understand John 7. Each morning a great crowd of people gathered at the Temple of Herod, carrying a citrus fruit called an ethrog in their left hands. The ethrog reminded the people of the land to which God had brought them and of the bountiful blessings they had enjoyed. In their right hands they carried a lulab, which was a combination of three trees—a palm, a willow, and a myrtle. This symbolized the stages of their ancestors' journey through the wilderness. The people with the ethrog and lulab would follow the white-robed priests, who carried a golden pitcher to the Pool of Siloam, chanting psalms and waving their lulabs in rhythm. As they came to the pool, the priest would dip his pitcher into the water, and the people would shout, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3). The crowd then marched back to the Temple to the blast of the priests' trumpets, entering through the Water Gate. The priest who had led them circled the altar once and, with accompanying priests, ascended to the platform, where the water was poured out.

Jesus came up to Jerusalem when the feast was half over. Finally, on the last day, the high day of the feast, Jews went up into the Temple. The ceremony proceeded. The white-robed priests returned, chanting their song, "You will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation" (NASB), and carrying a golden pitcher filled with precious water. As they made their way into the Temple, a vast throng of people gathered around. There was clamoring and murmuring and excitement as on this day the priests marched seven times around the altar in memory of the march around Jericho. On the seventh time around, the priest went to the altar and poured out the water. The people shouted and waved their lulabs toward the altar. As soon as all began to settle down, the voice of Jesus rang out, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (v. 37, NASB). Jesus used this dramatic moment to turn the thoughts of the people to God and their thirst for eternal things.

I. Jesus Speaks to Us of a Grave Condition (v. 37)

A. What was the grave condition that Jesus Christ our Lord spoke about? It was that of thirst.

1. How aptly and fittingly did Jesus choose His illus-

trations. Usually they were right before the people's eyes. The strength of His imagery is enhanced by the manner in which they fit so appropriately to the situation at hand. It was now autumn in Palestine. A long time since the winter rains had come. The hungry sands had lapped up the river's water, the sun had sucked up the waters of the reservoir. The people so familiar with thirst saw it again at its worst of the year. "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Like the melody of the song, this theme of water weaves its way into the Gospel of John. The imagery of water is found in the first sign, the turning of the water into wine in Cana of Galilee. To the Samaritan woman at Sychar, Jesus promised "a well of water springing up to eternal life" (4:14, NASB). And now, at the Feast of Tabernacles, He speaks of a grave condition—"If any man thirst, . . ." (ASV).

2. Thirst has little terror for us in Western cultures. I doubt that any of us have ever suffered very badly from thirst.

B. Jesus takes a common experience, that of thirst, and turns it into spiritual meaning.

1. Jesus is trying to turn our eyes from the temporal to the eternal. One of the tragedies of our age is that deep inside we may be thirsting after God and yet interpret that longing as the desire for a new car, an exciting event, a new love.

2. Jesus is talking about thirst, not merely a thirst for temporal, physical water but a thirst for God, a thirst for eternal things. Jesus encouraged a healthy thirst. Are you thirsty today? Is your condition grave? Only God can satisfy. "If any man is thirsty, . . ."

II. Jesus Speaks to Us of a Gracious Invitation (v. 37b)

A. Jesus calls to us with an invitation: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (NASB).

Jesus offers unto us the waters of life eternal. It is free! Eternal life is free! It is the gift of Christ. Have you received it?

ILLUS. A group of Arabs from a small country visited England. The things that fascinated them the most were the faucets on the bathroom fixtures. They could not get over the fact that you turned on a tap, and out poured water. Their visit came to an end—and they tried to tear the faucet out of its place! Water was a rare commodity. People are like that. They search all around the Source. Jesus says, "Drink it. Find out if I really quench the thirst of life. Try and see if I really satisfy." We quench our thirst by coming to the Lord, who gives freely. No one needs to wait. Anyone can drink this water—child, teenager, adult—*anyone!*

B. Though Jesus' offer is open and the water is free,

there are terms. C. S. Lewis illustrated the terms in *The Silver Chain* (Macmillan, 1953). Jill had just seen a lion and was frightened. She ran off into the forest and so wore herself out that she was about to die of thirst, or so she thought. Just then she heard the gurgling of a brook in the distance. She got up and went toward the sound of the brook and was about to take of its water when she saw the lion in front of her. The lion spoke to her: "Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. As Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh, dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion. No one who had seen his stern face could do that. Her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.

C. When we come to the water, we too are coming to a lion—to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. We must come to the water on the Lion's terms. We have to yield ourselves by faith to drink of the water. You can accept this invitation and come to Him in faith and receive the water that refreshes to eternal life.

III. Jesus Christ Gives to Us a Glorious Promise (vv. 38-39)

A. This promise of satisfaction has two interpretations.

1. This promise is for the person who comes to Jesus Christ to accept Him. That man will have within him a river of refreshing water.

2. The second interpretation is to see this statement as referring to Jesus himself. The Church has

always identified Jesus with the rock that gave the Israelites water in the wilderness. One cannot live without water. Christ is the One without whom man cannot live and dare not die. From Christ comes the gift of the Spirit, which cleanses and strengthens.

B. In verse 39 John gives us an interpretation of verse 38.

ILLUS. A great power can exist for years and even centuries without being tapped. The power is there, even when people do not know that it is there. An example would be atomic power. Men did not invent atomic power; it was always there. The Holy Spirit has always existed, but human beings never really enjoyed the full power of that Spirit until after Pentecost. They had glimpses of Him, foretastes of Him, but it was only after Pentecost that the floodgates opened and the tide of the Spirit flowed out to men.

May I remind you that there could be no Pentecost without Calvary. Before that, the Spirit had existed as a power, but now we understand the Spirit as a Person. The Spirit to us has become the presence and the power of the risen Christ always with us. In this apparently startling sentence, John is saying that it took the life and death of Jesus Christ to lead to Pentecost and to open the floodgates for the Spirit to become real and powerful to all men.

CONCLUSION:

Christ went to the Cross and suffered the agony of hell to give us a drink of the Water of Life. It is free. Have you? Will you? May we drink? Do you want a drink of water?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

*Welcome to His house and His presence.
May this Lord's day be a day of new beginnings
for each one of us.*

WE GATHER TOGETHER IN HIS NAME

Hymn "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
Responsive Reading "Thanksgiving"
Hymn "Give Thanks"

WE LIFT OUR VOICES AND SING

Hymns "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
"He Never Has Failed Me Yet"
Sanctuary Choir "Jesus Will Walk with Me"

WE SHARE WITH OTHERS

Family Altar Time
We Worship with Our Giving
We Greet and Care for Each Other in His Name
We Are Ministered To in Music
Today's Good News "DO YOU WANT A DRINK
OF WATER?"
Hymn "Open Our Eyes"

A STONE'S THROW FROM DEATH

by Curtis Lewis

John 8:1-11

October 27, 1996

INTRO:

My phone rang about 9:30 on a Thursday night. As I answered it, I heard the sobbing voice on the other end of the line say, "Pastor Lewis, this is Joan; do you remember me?" I assured her that I remembered her and that I had been trying to contact her. Through her sobs, she stammered out these words, "Please pray for me—I desperately need your prayers." Then she poured out her confession: Two failed marriages, and now she carried the label "divorcé." She had been a closet alcoholic for years. She came home after work and drank herself into a stupor. Now she was entering a detox unit at a local hospital. I sensed her despair and depression. She confessed that she was carrying a heavy load of guilt from her past and that she was having a difficult time coping. Assuring her of my prayers and concern, I immediately thought of the labels she was wearing; divorcé (twice), alcoholic, unfit mother, no-good person. It was no wonder to me that she felt guilty.

I had been studying the Gospel of John for a graduate class I was teaching at Trevecca Nazarene University. My mind immediately went to John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery. It was easy for me to relate this lonely woman and her situation to this chapter. As I thought of her and studied this passage (vv. 1-11), I came to see that this raises the question, "Is Jesus God?" Also, I came to see that this is a story of how grace overcame guilt.

This passage has some textual problems associated with it. Most scholars, even those who are extremely conservative, feel that Johannine authorship is doubtful, and they usually deal with this passage as an appendix to the Gospel. This story undoubtedly was recounted in the Early Church. Some scholars feel that it actually belongs to Luke's Gospel. My position on the accuracy of this passage is that of Bruce Metzger, the noted Greek scholar. Metzger feels that, while Johannine authorship is doubtful, this has all the earmarks of historical veracity. (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1971], 220).

Though some things about this story may be debatable, this is something that Jesus would have done. I do not doubt that this event actually took place. I also believe I understand why it is included in the Gospel. It is there to show us that when Jesus forgives, He takes away our guilt and brings us from darkness to light.

I. Notice the Setting—Jerusalem at Holiday Time

A. It is holiday time in Jerusalem. People have gathered in the capital city to celebrate a joyous feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths. Mosaic law required all men who lived within the province to go up to the city for the feast. As with any

celebration, people poured into Jerusalem from all over the country.

B. The festival commemorated God's graciousness to His people. When the nation left Egypt, they lived in booths, temporary dwellings in the wilderness. Finally God brought His people into the Land of Promise, where they enjoyed a permanent homeland.

C. At harvesttime each year the people came together in Jerusalem to give thanks to God for their blessings. As a reminder of their past, they built booths to live in during the week of the feast. These booths sprang up everywhere—in the streets, on the rooftops, all over Jerusalem.

D. With the crops gathered in for the winter, the people of God were ready to celebrate and give thanks to God. As so often happens with religious holidays observed year after year, this feast had become a bash without much religious significance. It reminds one of our holidays—like Thanksgiving and Christmas. As time has passed, these days have degenerated into times of debauchery. This feast was a sort of Mardi Gras with the accompanying revelry and drunkenness.

Against this background the story takes place.

II. Notice the Scene—a Woman Caught in Adultery (vv. 2-3)

A. It is morning in Jerusalem, and most people are asleep after their night of partying. Some of the faithful are coming to the Temple to worship. A very interesting group came to the Temple that morning (vv. 2-3).

B. Catch the scene! Who was this woman? How did they catch her in the act of adultery? The text indicates she was caught in adultery, so she was probably married.

1. Where is her husband? Is he a merchant on a trip? A businessman out of town? Did she drink too much or stay too long at a party? How did she end up with a man who was not her husband?

2. Was this woman used in a setup to trap Jesus? Did someone see her go into a booth with a man who was not her husband? Suddenly she is yanked out of her sleep and hurried half-dressed toward the Temple.

3. Think of the questions that filled her mind. What would become of her? Would they put her to death? What would she say to her husband? Calling her names, they drag her through the streets.

III. Notice the Scribbling—Jesus Writes on the Ground (vv. 4-9)

A. The scribes and Pharisees tried to impale Jesus on a dilemma. They hurled their questions at Him. What did Jesus do? He stooped over and began to scribble on the

ground with His finger. In this act, the focus moved from an embarrassed woman standing shamefully to the Christ scribbling on the ground.

B. What did He write? Some of the ancient manuscripts add a line that is not in our Bibles: "And with his finger [he] wrote on the ground [v. 6, kjv]—the sins of each one of them." Could it be He wrote the sins of the scribes and Pharisees? He would have known their sins.

C. Jesus delayed responding to the scribes and Pharisees questions. They press Him, "What is your answer? Give us your answer."

D. Our Lord straightened up and responded to them (v. 7). He stooped down and scribbled some more on the ground. Pharisees, whether in the 1st century or the 20th century, are always condemning someone else. "If any one of you is without sin, throw the first stone." There was no sermon! He did not indict them. He uttered only one single sentence and then went back to His scribbling.

E. Slowly the crowd began to slink away (v. 9). They filed out, the oldest ones leaving first, followed by the younger. Christ had exposed them. As the Pharisees left, Jesus was still scribbling.

IV. Notice the Savior—"I Do Not Condemn You" (vv. 10-11)

A. This woman stands in the presence of the Savior. He asks her a question (v. 10). She is guilty and she knows it. The only one who could have stoned that woman is Jesus, for He is without sin; but He does not.

B. This woman hears words coming from Christ's lips that she can hardly believe (v. 11). She is forgiven. Now she feels clean, whole, restored. She has met the Savior, and He has changed her life. This woman who was a stone's throw from death has found Life.

CONCLUSION:

Where do you and I fit into this story? Are there those who would accuse us? If so, let us look to Jesus for pardon and forgiveness and hear Him say, "Neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (v. 11).

**This sermon is a frame narrative. The gospel story is introduced by another story, which is used to frame the narrative. This text lends itself beautifully to this style of sermon.*

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS

Prelude
Announcements
Call to Worship "This Is the Day"
We Welcome Our Guests

PRAISE HIM WITH SINGING

Hymns "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
"Come, Thou Fount"

OH, MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME

We Read God's Word Together Ps. 1
Choral Praise "I Give All"
Pastoral Prayer
Choral Praise "Lord of All"

OUR WORSHIP CONTINUES

Ministry of Music Celebration Choir
"Empower Me"

We Worship Him Through Our Giving
Hymn "Blessed Be the Name"

WE LISTEN AS GOD SPEAKS TO US

Ministry in Song
Message from God's Word "A STONE'S THROW FROM DEATH"

Response



"... He doesn't like paperwork but he enjoys arranging it . . ."

WHO IS YOUR FATHER?

Curtis Lewis

John 8:33-47

November 3, 1996

INTRO:

R. Kent Hughes tells of an unusual gathering that took place in the resort town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1873. Close to 500 descendants of Jonathan Edwards arrived for a family reunion. They lunched under a great tent, which was provided by Yale University, and then admired memorabilia from the Edwards family. They saw Sarah Edwards's wedding dress, the silver bowl from which Jonathan ate his nightly porridge, and they looked around the old house, which was substantially unchanged. The family reunion boasted professors, business executives, government officials, ministers, and women of unusual beauty and force of personality. The mood of the reunion was expressed by the initiator of the gathering when he said, "Let God be praised for such a man." His remarks were followed by other speeches that stirred the pride of Jonathan Edwards's descendants. This was as prestigious a celebration of ancestry as has been held in North America. A study by the New York Genealogical and Historical Society concluded: "Probably no two people married since the beginning of the 18th century have been progenitor of so many distinguished persons as were Jonathan Edwards and Sarah Purripont" (Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man* [Westminster, 1971], 204).

There is one statistic about the Edwardses that is rarely mentioned. In 1756 Jonathan and Sarah's daughter Esther gave birth to a boy. When her son was still a baby, Esther described him as "very sly and mischievous . . . has more spritleness than Sally . . . handsomer, but not so good tempered . . . very resolute and requires a good governor to bring him to terms." These words were written about Aaron Burr, who as an adult killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel and plotted to crown himself emperor of Mexico. Somehow these wonderful genetic qualities and the godly heritage seemed to be demonically reversed in Aaron Burr.

The people to whom Jesus was speaking had a proud heritage, and yet their spiritual health was not good. People with the most favorable spiritual background may be in spiritual bondage. When Jesus suggested this possibility to the people around Him, they completely missed His point. Jesus was speaking on a spiritual level, but they were thinking physically. They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone: How can you say that we shall be set free?" (v. 33).

First, let us decide who our father is by looking at . . .

I. The Condition That Enslaves (vv. 33-36)

A. Jesus' talk of freedom annoyed the Jews. They claimed that they had never been slaves to any man.

1. The Jews were slaves, though they would not admit it. They so deeply hated what had happened to them over the centuries that they protested both in-

wardly and outwardly, "History may say it, others may say it, but we will not admit to being slaves!" It was an insult to suggest to any Jew that he might be in slavery.

2. When the Jews said that they had been no man's slaves, they were saying something that was a fundamental article of their creed of life. Even as they were talking to Jesus, these men carried coins in their pockets that bore the image of the Roman emperor and thereby testified to Rome's dominion. Yet they said, "We have always been free." They might be slaves in body but never in spirit.

B. Jesus was speaking of another slavery. "Everyone," He said, "who commits sin is the slave of sin" (v. 34, NASB).

1. Jesus was speaking to the people of His time about spiritual bondage, and they refused to listen. Today, 2,000 years later, most people are deaf to the suggestion that they are in bondage. The worse their condition, the more they resent being told. We see this tendency in an alcoholic. "Me, an alcoholic? I can stop anytime. Where did you hide the bottle?" People don't want to believe they are slaves, so they become desensitized to their true condition.

2. The whole point is that a man who sins does not do what he likes but does what sin likes.

C. Jesus in verse 35 issues a warning to the Jews. He is telling them that in any household there was a difference between a slave and a son. The son was a permanent resident in the house; the slave could be ejected at any time. In effect Jesus was saying, "You think you are the sons in God's house; you think that nothing can ever banish you from Him. Take heed! You by your conduct are making yourselves slaves; and the slaves can be ejected from the master's presence at any time." This warning is for more than the Jews; it is for you and me.

D. I have some good news for you. You don't have to be enslaved, for Christ says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (v. 36).

Let's look at . . .

II. The Claim to Legitimacy (vv. 37-41)

A. Jesus is dealing a deathblow to the claim that to these people was all-important. They remind Christ in verse 39 of their claim to legitimacy by saying, "Abraham is our father."

1. It was commonly believed at that time that Abraham was so godly that he had stored up a vast treasury of merit from which his descendants could draw to attain righteousness. They believed that Abraham was spiritual security. Some years later Trypho, the Jew, alluded to this belief in a conversation in which he claimed that the eternal Kingdom

would be given to those who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, even though they are sinners and unbelievers and disobedient to God. These people who confronted Jesus were living proof that they were not the spiritual descendants of Abraham, in that they were attempting to kill Christ, who was Truth (vv. 39-40).

2. Let us apply these words to ourselves. We are reminded that the faith of our parents will not insure eternal life for us. The only substantive measure of our faith is what we do. This matter we must answer individually. A godly heritage has inestimable worth. Yet, if the heritage is not appropriated and lived out, it can become a curse.

B. Jesus informed them that they were doing the deeds of their father. They responded with a sharp retort, "We are not illegitimate children. . . . The only Father we have is God himself" (v. 41).

1. They felt that God was their spiritual Father when He was not.

2. In his book *Father and Son*, Edmund Gosse, a famous Cambridge professor, tells how he finally rejected the godly heritage and faith of his parents. He recounts how his loving father was so desirous that his 10-year-old be baptized that he convinced the elders to interview him. Gosse writes of that incident: "I sat on a sofa in full lamplight and testified my faith in the Atonement with a fluency that surprised myself, so that the person interviewing me was weeping like a child."

The performance was perfect, but something was missing. Edmund Gosse did not know grace in his life. These Jews did not have grace in their lives. They were trying to claim they were legitimate heirs of God by riding on Abraham's coattails. You cannot be a child of God on someone else's religious experience.

Let's look at . . .

III. The Characteristics That Condemn (vv. 42-47)

A. Jesus responds to their claim to legitimacy by giving characteristics of the person who is not spiritually related to Christ.

1. The first characteristic is a lack of love for Christ (v. 42).

2. The second characteristic is spiritual deafness (vv. 43, 47).

3. The third characteristic is disobedience. The disobedient do not desire to do God's will.

B. Satan is a deceiver, and those who follow him are characterized by deceit (v. 44).

1. They deceive themselves about God and the way to eternal life. Some even imagine that they are children of God when they are not.

2. How can we know who our father is? By asking and answering truthfully these questions: Do I truly love Jesus? Does His Word have a place in me? Has He changed my life?

If you have passed this test, praise Him for the validation of your faith; if not, acknowledge your lack of love, your insensitivity to His Word, your unchanged life, and ask Him to meet you in your sin and forgive you. Become His son or daughter, and let Him be your Father.

CONCLUSION:

Years ago a young dental student studied in Philadelphia under a dentist who was known for the perfect way in which he made amalgam fillings. He made them so well they looked like inlays, which are normally much harder to make and more expensive. The fillings were so good that the dentist was known as "the amalgam king." The time came when the young student finished his course and was drafted into the army. In the army he did dental work and eventually ended up on the West Coast, 3,000 miles from his home city of Philadelphia. One day a draftee came into his office for some work, and the young man who had studied in Philadelphia began to examine the fillings. Suddenly he straightened up and asked, "Do you come from Philadelphia?"

"Yes," he was told.

"I thought so," the young dentist said. "Your work has been done by Dr. Ward C. Miller, the amalgam king."

I am sure you can see the application. We must bear the stamp of Christ. There must be a family resemblance to our Father. If we act like our Father, we will reveal His workmanship in all areas of our lives.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GOD'S FOREVER FAMILY GATHERS

On this, the Lord's day, let each of us allow the Spirit to make us one. May a sense of unity strengthen our hearts as we move to worship our Lord.

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS

Become quiet before Him. Ask God to help you focus on Him. He is here!

WE PRAISE HIM WITH SINGING

We lift our voices in praise and sing:

"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"

"This Is the Day"

"Garment of Praise"

Hymns

"To God Be the Glory"

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

LET US MAGNIFY HIS NAME TOGETHER

We magnify His name as we pray. The altar is now open for you to come with your praise and petitions.

"Hear Our Prayer, O Lord"

We are called to prayer as we sing

"Worthy Are You, Lord"

Celebration Choir

"It Is Well with My Soul"

We Magnify Him in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings

A Moment of Caring and Friendship

WE LISTEN AS GOD SPEAKS TO US

We Are Ministered To in Song

Today's Good News

"WHO IS YOUR FATHER?"

Closing Hymn

"God Will Take Care of You"

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

by Curtis Lewis

John 9:1-39

November 10, 1996

INTRO:

For years the man who was born blind in John 9 was an outsider, a beggar, an outcast of society, his body and spirit aching for light and love. And one day Jesus came to him with a touch of compassion and gave him new eyes. You cannot read this story without sensing that it points beyond itself. This story comes to us on two wavelengths. It is the story of a man who came to see the light of day, but it is also a story of a man who came to see Him who is "the true light, which enlightens everyone" as well (John 1:9, NRSV).

This story is drama. One way of understanding drama is to ask, what did the actors in the drama see? And that is a good question. What did those involved in this story really see? As we endeavor to answer that question, may our own eyes be opened.

I. What Did the Crowds See? (vv. 8, 2, 1)

A. The neighbors and friends indicate what they saw with this question, "Is not this the beggar?" They saw a beggar.

1. I wonder if they did not have a shadow of guilt pass over them concerning the man. Often they had seen him out begging for alms. It was his only livelihood. He depended on the charity of others. As he sat there on a corner near the Temple, they no doubt felt a twinge of irritation, even anger. Yet always they passed on with a shrug and a comment, "Oh, that's our beggar." Let's not be too hard on them—we have all done the same. We have some neat stereotypes. We put people into slots in a file: alcoholic, nerd, loafer, no-good, tramp, divorce. Somehow just classifying them eases our conscience.

2. Jesus came upon this man just outside the Temple. I find that ironic. The one who most needed what the Temple represented never got inside. Evidently his darkness was not relieved by so much as the warm, human, sympathetic touch of a priest. Is it any different now? Is it not true that the ones who most need the Church are often not found within it? They just sit on the outside, perhaps even at the gate. But they do not come in, not as often as we should like. Perhaps they cannot. At least, they may feel they cannot. Like the beggar, they have little to encourage them. The friends and the neighbors saw a beggar.

B. The disciples disclosed what they saw by their question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2).

1. They saw a theological problem. The mere sight of the blind man launched them into a discussion of an old theological theme that professional religionists had been chewing on for a thousand years.

IIUS. I read somewhere about the bonsai trees in Japan. They are malformed over as much as 400 years. A young pine is set in one inch soil in a shallow dish. As the tree grows, each root is trimmed and the branches cut back. The tree is so tended for 19 or 20 generations, and it never outgrows this shallow dish. So the bonsai tree becomes a patriarch, standing 20 inches high, very much alive, with a gnarled and twisted top three feet across.

2. The disciples had come on a theological bonsai tree. They would get the answer from Jesus himself. Seeing the blind man, they saw an old, contorted, theological problem. "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It's easier to ask a question like that than to grapple with the real flesh-and-blood problem.

The crowd saw a beggar. The disciples saw a theological problem.

C. Jesus saw a man: "As he went along, he saw a man" (v. 1).

1. Jesus saw this man and came to help.

Jacob Riis, a young newspaper reporter in the late 19th century, made a visit to the ghetto section of New York City. What he saw drew him back again and again. Finally, he wrote a book about the kind of life some men live, victimized as they are by ignorance, superstition, poverty, and their own apathy. He titled this book *How the Other Half Lives*. Theodore Roosevelt, among the first to read the book, was deeply moved by it. He went to see Mr. Riis at his office, but the author was out. Roosevelt took out his calling card and wrote that he had read the book and had come to help.

2. Jesus sees him—this man. And He stops! For Him, no one is ever lost in a crowd. He knows each of us, where we are, and what our need is. That was this man's hope—it is your hope and my hope. Although the disciples spoke first, Jesus saw **the man** first. It is great to be orthodox—neat to have a good theology—but there is nothing more important than helping people. When Jesus passed by, He saw the man—a man for whom He would soon die.

II. What Did This Man's Parents See? (vv. 18-23)

A. As this story unfolded, the parents were called before an investigating committee of the Pharisees. These Pharisees were not conducting an unbiased inquiry. They had already reached a verdict. They were simply looking for supporting evidence. They went at their business as some people go to the Bible. They don't want the Bible to speak; they want to tell the Bible how it is. Theirs is not an openhearted search for truth. They already have it! All they want is corroborating evidence, a proof text of some kind. Even the devil finds

odds and ends of Scripture lying around that can be used to his advantage. You may recall how he kept spouting Scripture to our Lord in the wilderness temptation. The Pharisees used the same type of tactic.

B. The Pharisees asked their first question laced with innuendo (v. 19).

1. In that question, this man's parents saw trouble coming. They answered cautiously, but honestly. The first part of their answer was emotion-laden. "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind" (v. 20, KJV). In their answer, these parents affirmed two things: (1) that the healed man was indeed their son; and (2) this was part of what they knew, and they were not afraid to affirm this. On the other hand, they denied knowing two things: (1) how he came to see, and (2) who did the miracle. However, in this denial they were not entirely truthful. If they did not know how he was healed, then they would not have known that any person was involved. That they spoke of a person shows that they had at least heard the story and knew Jesus' role in it.

2. Having admitted he was their son and he was born blind, they went no farther. They feared that they would be run out of the church—excommunicated. There were two kinds of excommunication. First, there was the ban by which a man was put out of the synagogue for life. Publicly an individual was cursed in the presence of the people and cut off from God and man. Second, there was a sentence of temporary excommunication, which might last for a month or some other fixed period. The parents answered that their son was of legal age; let him speak for himself. The Pharisees hated Jesus so much that a lifetime banishment could have been the fate of this man's parents. Bluntly, the parents did not want to get involved.

C. The problem with this man's parents was that they were old—too old to break out of their own religious security system.

III. Did the Blind Man See? (vv. 6-7, 35-39)

A. What did this blind man see?

1. He saw the light of day because Jesus moved decisively in a surprising, almost strange way, to drive out the darkness. Jesus gave an intimate part of himself as He mingled His own saliva with some soil—that lowly, earthy stuff out of which we have all come.

2. Jesus then commanded the man to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. This man obeyed, and the scripture says he "went and washed, and came home seeing" (v. 7). The ways of Jesus in healing are rich and varied. But He always calls for obedience, the active response of faith.

B. The blind man came to see Jesus as the Light of the World.

ILLUS. Recently I read of Jerold Hayes. The pastor found himself seated next to Jerold during a Sunday evening Communion service. After the Lord's Supper, Jerold

leaned over and whispered enthusiastically, "Boy, I understand things about this now I didn't even know when I first came here."

Jerold had first come 2 years before when he showed up in a church out of a work release program for ex-cons. He had done 22 years in a half a dozen state penitentiaries, most of his trouble caused by mixing booze with destructive hatred. He showed up in church and made an unexpected commitment to Christ. It was only a short, emotional trip. In a few weeks he was out of sight, back into his old ways. A year and a half later he showed up again, repentant and scared, but much more honest. He had a gray, gaunt look about him as he moved forward from the back of the church to make a public confession. This man who had been to hell and back felt Christ anoint the darkened eyes of his heart as he washed in the cleansing pool of Christ's forgiveness.

Jerold was given new eyes, a divine illumination.

C. The man finally discovered who had healed him. The One he first called "Jesus," then "a prophet," and then one from God, now revealed himself as the "Son of God" (KJV). Here is the end of all the blind man's seeking. With eyes of faith, he cried out, "I believe!" (NKJV). And in trusting wonder, he fell to his knees in worship and adoration.

D. This blind man saw a new truth and, at whatever risk, he embraced it. He did more than embrace abstract truth; he embraced Him who is true, Jesus the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

The way of the blind beggar is the way to sight. He did not argue with Christ. He owned his condition of blindness. He submitted himself to the hands of Jesus, was obedient to His Word, and received the miracle of sight to his eyes and to his heart. Do you want to see? If so, you must do the same thing.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"God, I am grateful for this time of worship. Teach me the real meaning of worship. May I not be a spectator, but help me to participate in this celebration of the Lord's day. Amen."

LET ALL THE PEOPLE PRAISE HIM

Congregational Singing "This Is the Day"
"I Will Enter His Gates"
Hymns "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
"We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer"

HOLY SPIRIT, YOU ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE

Prayer Chorus "We Give You Praise"
Open Altar of Prayer and Intercession
Response "Blessed Be the Lord God Almighty"
Celebration Choir "We Worship You"

JESUS, BRING US THE WORD OF LIFE

Worship in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings
We Greet and Care for Each Other in Jesus' Name
We Are Ministered To in Music
Today's Good News "WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

THE FUNERAL THAT BECAME A FESTIVAL

by Curtis Lewis

John 11:1-44

November 17, 1996

INTRO:

Jesus stayed the last week of His public ministry at Bethany. The town is still there, but it is no longer called Bethany. Today it is known as Lazarus's town. The name indicates the most important event that ever happened in that little town's history—Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Even the Muslim inhabitants who live there remember Lazarus as a local saint. At Bethany a funeral became a festival.

In this last, most dramatic sign, the One who is life confronts death and overcomes. The raising of Lazarus is the doorway by which we enter the passion of Jesus. It is as if the glimpse of splendor seen in the raising of Lazarus gives a foretaste of that greater glory when Jesus steps forth in radiance and power on Resurrection morning.

Interesting similarities exist between Jesus' first sign at Cana and His last at Bethany. The one was so quiet and the other so awesome. Each takes place within the intimacy of a family circle—the one a wedding and the other a funeral. The central purpose in both miracles was that the glory of God might be manifested. At Cana Jesus' disciples believed in Him, and at Bethany they were strengthened in their faith.

I. We Observe a Response That Wasn't Expected (vv. 1-16)

A. There was an emergency in Bethany at the house of Jesus' friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

1. Lazarus was very ill. His sisters sent word to Jesus, who was in the wilderness with His disciples. They were certain He would come right away to heal their brother. Jesus was a special friend of theirs. He had chosen to make their home a place where He could rest and be at home. Surely, Jesus would hurry back to Bethany. They sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (v. 3). The word they used for love means a close friendship.

2. When Jesus received this news, He responded, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory" (v. 4). When John wrote of Jesus' action, he used another word for love, *agapē*, that unstoppable and highest form of love (v. 5). How was staying put giving the evidence of the highest love? We can understand this only if we can learn to see from God's perspective. For only then will we see His delays as delays of love.

B. For two days Jesus went about His work far from the anguish and grief of the two sisters.

1. No doubt Mary and Martha were in a frenzy—watching, waiting, looking, and hoping.

2. Jesus informed His disciples that they were going to Judea because Lazarus, His friend, was asleep. The disciples thought that Jesus was speaking of the healing sleep that comes after the crisis

and fever had passed. Lazarus would then become well, and that would make the trip unnecessary. Then Jesus bluntly stated the fact: "Lazarus is dead" (v. 14).

3. The response of our Lord confused both the disciples and Mary and Martha. They couldn't understand why He had come. The disciples couldn't understand why He was going. Verses 4 and 15 show us the reasons for Christ's response: for the glory of God and that the disciples might believe. This will turn a funeral into a festival.

II. We Observe Some Reactions at the Funeral That Became a Festival (vv. 17-37)

A. Three reactions are expressed in this passage. First, there is the reaction of Martha.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21). No doubt she and Mary had said something like this many times in the past four days. The wait had been agonizing as they wondered, "When is the Lord going to get here?" Martha's words were almost a reproof to Him; almost as if she catches herself, she says, "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask" (v. 22). Have you ever felt as Martha did? Lord, where were You? Lord, You are too late. Where were You when my marriage dissolved? Where were You when my father became an alcoholic? Where were You when I was cheated out of my promotion? Where were You when my child went wrong?

B. Where is Mary while all of this is taking place? She is back at the house, where all has been turned around in keeping with funeral tradition. When Mary came to the place where Jesus was, she fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 32). There is that refrain again—the song of grief is on her lips also.

C. Notice how Jesus reacts to all of this (v. 33). He feels the sorrow.

1. The word for "deeply moved" comes from an ancient Greek word that describes a horse snorting. When taken in context here, it implies that our Lord let out an involuntary gasp. Verse 35, though only two words, tells us worlds: "Jesus wept." He did not wail. The tears simply ran down His face.

2. Here we see a picture of a great God who loves us, who allows us to go through the ultimate extremity, and then comes and enters into our sorrow. He enters then in such a way that He gasps. His whole being shudders, and He weeps with us. If you are hurting, He wants you to know that He weeps with you. Jesus is not a stoic, impossible God. We know that when we pour out our heart to Him, He comes and sorrows with us.

III. We Observe the Release That Turned This Funeral into a Festival (vv. 38-44)

A. Jesus takes over! What a difference that makes.

1. When He gets to the tomb, He simply commands that the stone be removed from the cave. Here the gruesome finality of death is made vividly clear again. Martha, who has expressed such loving faith in Jesus, protests, "The body will stink." Her brother has been in the tomb four days. What can anyone, even Jesus, do with a decomposing body?

2. Jesus reminds her that she will see the glory of God if she will believe. God so often chooses to reveal His majesty unexpectedly in lonely, broken, needy, hurting places. There is the cry, the loud shout, "Lazarus, come out!" (v. 43). The prayer and the act of obedience now become one. The Greek word "shout" or "cry" is used only eight times in the whole Bible, and six of these times in John's Gospel. One of the old Puritan fathers states that the reason Jesus called Lazarus by name was because if He had just said, "Come out!" all of those who were dead would have come forth!

B. Lazarus comes forth, still bound in the old grave-clothes.

1. Jesus gives those in the crowd an opportunity to participate. He allows the crowd to be participants in this miracle. As they begin to unwrap him, they are part of the biggest celebration as they wept over him, hugged him, and danced about in their bare feet. The funeral becomes a festival!

2. It will be 27 years this June, as a pastor of congregations, that I have watched Jesus call men and women out of spiritual death into new life. I have

never lost the wonder and excitement of that kind of resurrection.

CONCLUSION:

Alvin Rogness wrote a book that I have in my library titled *Appointment with Death*. In that book he speaks of the tragic death of his son, Paul, and offers help and counsel to others. I have used that book on several occasions. This week I picked up insight from the pen of Roger Fredrickson, whom I have enjoyed listening to and reading often. Fredrickson tells of making a hospital call and being stopped in the corridor by a doctor friend. The doctor was eager to tell Fredrickson that if he hadn't believed before in life everlasting, he did now. He had just returned from a small Minnesota town where he had attended the funeral service for Paul Rogness, who had been struck down 10 minutes from his home by a truck on his return from two years of study at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. In a moment of time, this gifted life had been snuffed out.

The funeral service was a great, triumphant affair. At the cemetery this doctor experienced the power of the Resurrection anew. Paul's father, Alvin, conducted the committal service for his own son through Scripture and prayer, and finally he led the family in a favorite song:

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

As the people began to sing these strong and hopeful words, they were so overwhelmed by the occasion and the presence of the Lord that they could no longer sing. Finally, it was the clear voice of Alvin Rogness at the head of the grave that stood out.

*Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain
shadows flee.
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

—Henry F. Lyte

Our funerals will become festivals when we trust the One who is Life!



"Amen" would do just fine, thanks."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Surely the Lord is in this place; therefore receive with meekness the Word, which is able to save.

"PRAISE BE TO YOU, O LORD"

Prelude
Announcements
Preparation for Worship
We Praise His Name as We Sing "Honor the Lord"
Hymns "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
"Be Still, My Soul"

"WE PRAY IN ONE SPIRIT"

Prayer Chorus "I Seek You, Lord"
We Read Together Ps. 121
Pastoral Prayer

"JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE"

We Worship in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings
Sanctuary Choir "I Still Believe in Jesus"

"JESUS BRINGS US THE WORD OF LIFE"

Message in Song "He Giveth More Grace"
Message "THE FUNERAL THAT BECAME
A FESTIVAL"

WHERE IS YOUR TOWEL?

by Curtis Lewis

John 13:1-17

November 24, 1996

INTRO:

"Actions speak louder than words."

The right action is valuable in many circumstances. So we should not be surprised to learn that on His last full night with His disciples just before His crucifixion, when He wanted to teach them many things, Jesus began His teaching, not with words, which might be missed by them, but by a significant action—washing His disciples' feet.

Why did Jesus perform this act? Because the disciples were preoccupied. They were terrified of the Jewish leaders; they suspected that Jesus was about to be arrested; they were afraid that He would die and that they would die with Him. Because of their fear, they were not able to listen to His teaching. Jesus acted boldly to get their attention.

Jesus was doing far more than giving an example of humility. He was giving a dramatic illustration of His entire ministry. This enacted parable for the instruction of His disciples dramatized for them the character of His ministry. Jesus wanted these disciples and future disciples to become "towel people."

I. Jesus Loved His Disciples (vv. 1-3)

A. It is typical of John that he speaks of Jesus' love. In chapters 1—12 John used the noun love and the verb to love 9 times. In chapters 13—17 he uses them 30 times. Love is a dominant theme in the story of what went on in the Upper Room.

"Towel people" have a heart of love.

ILLUS. James Boice, in his *Commentary on John* (4:22-24), tells the story of Czar Nicholas I of Russia. The czar was greatly interested in a young boy because he had been friends with the boy's father. When the young man came of age, Nicholas gave him a fine position in the army and stationed him in one of the great fortresses of Russia, making him responsible for the moneys of a division of the army. The young soldier did quite well at first, but as time passed, he became a gambler. It was not long before he had gambled his entire fortune away. Then he borrowed from the treasury and gambled that away, a few rubles at a time.

One day he heard that there would be an immediate audit of the books. He went to the safe, took out his ledger, and figured how much money should be in the division's accounts. Then he subtracted the amounts that he had taken and discovered he had an astronomical debt. As he sat at the table with the accounts, he took out his pen and wrote, "A great debt, who can pay?" Not willing to face the shame, he took out his revolver and vowed he would take his life at midnight. It was a very warm night, and as he sat at the table, he dozed.

Czar Nicholas had the habit of putting on a common soldier's uniform and visiting his outposts. On that very

night, he came to the fortress. As he inspected, he saw a light on in one of the rooms. He knocked at the door, but no one answered. He tried the latch, then opened the door and went in. There was the young man to whom he had given so much. When the czar saw the note, his first impulse was to awaken the young man and arrest him. Czar Nicholas, suddenly overcome with a wave of generosity, picked up the pen and wrote something under what the young man had written. Later, the young man awoke and reached for his revolver. His eyes fell on the paper. Under his notation, "A great debt, who can pay?" was written, "Nicholas." He dropped the pen and ran to the files, hurriedly thumbed through the files, and checked the signature. It was authentic. The young man realized that the czar had been there and had taken on himself the debt. Soon the money arrived to pay the debt. The czar's act was an act of love. He paid the young man's debt. Nicholas's act was a gracious act, yet it was an easy act—as easy as signing his name and sending the money.

The love of Jesus cost Him everything.

B. The Greek tenses used in verse 1 mean that in the whole range of Christ's contact with His disciples, He loved them. In the Upper Room, Jesus makes love the overriding issue.

1. Teaching His people to love was one of Jesus' overall purposes in the Upper Room discourses.
2. Another aspect of the Savior's heart we must see. Jesus knew exactly who He was. Notice the parallel thoughts in verses 1 and 3 of John 13. It was not that Jesus forgot He was God and so humbled himself. Rather, being fully conscious of His supremacy and coming exaltation, He became Lord of the towel! What love!

II. Jesus Washed His Disciples' Feet (vv. 4-10)

A. In deliberate steps, Jesus' every word is weighed, every movement measured (vv. 4-5).

1. Jesus "riseth from supper" (κῆν) and takes off His garments, stripping to His loincloth like a slave. He puts a long towel around His waist in such a way that the end of it is free to be used in wiping the feet. A courtesy usually extended to guests was to have a slave or servant wash the feet. If feet were to be washed, one of the disciples would have to do it. Who wants to wash dirty, smelly feet? Jesus takes the position of a slave and begins to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them.

2. This passage has fascinated me. In my study I realized that it relates to the Incarnation. He "rises from supper" (cf. κῆν, etc.). Just as in the Incarnation, He rose from His place of perfect fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He "lays aside his garments" as He once set aside His glorious

existence. He "takes a towel," as He once took the form of a servant. He "girds himself," as He came to earth to serve. He "pours water into a basin," as He was soon to pour out His blood for the washing away of human sin. And He "washes the disciples' feet." In this enacted parable, Jesus portrayed His ministry, from birth to death to resurrection to glorification.

B. All was quiet until Jesus reached Peter. Peter was not about to let Jesus wash his feet (vv. 6-8).

1. Jesus responded, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (v. 8, NASB). This parable in action gives to us the truth that we cannot secure our salvation by our own efforts, but that only Christ can cleanse all who trust Him. We can be freed from our sin and be brought into Christ's salvation.

2. Peter did not want to be excluded from those who belong to the Lord (v. 9). Jesus picked up on the imagery of the situation—the person going out for a meal has a bath before leaving home. It is true that one will pick up dirt and defilement along the dusty way, but if one's feet are washed when one arrives, one will be "altogether clean" (v. 10, NEB). Jesus gave some teaching that they will presently understand in connection with His death. His death will be like a bath; it will cleanse them wholly. This cleansing by Jesus' death would also be daily.

III. Jesus Taught His Disciples the Meaning of his Action (vv. 12-17)

A. After Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He reclined at the table (v. 12). A hush settled over the room. All look down at their cleansed, refreshed feet, suddenly self-conscious in their shame.

With a question that penetrates, Jesus made sure His message was clearly understood (v. 12). It seems these men were having a difficult time accepting the lowly level of His service to them. In Luke's account of the Upper Room, we are told that they argued among themselves as to which of them was the greatest (22:24). With the Cross only a few hours away, the disciples were still arguing over matters of pride. They were willing to fight for the throne, but no one wanted a towel. Yet these disciples were under obligation to do what He had done to them. They had a debt. They "ought to" wash one another's feet, which means laying down their lives for one another. They must enter into the sacrifice of the Cross in their relations with one another.

ILLUS. In 1878, when William Booth's Salvation Army had just been so named, men from all over the world began to enlist. One man who had once dreamed of becoming a bishop in the Methodist Church left a great church and journeyed to England to join Booth's Salvation Army. His name was Samuel Logan Brengle, who later became the Salvation Army's first American-born commissioner. At first, Brengle accepted his duties reluctantly and grudgingly. Booth said to Brengle, "You've been your own boss too long." In order to instill humility into Brengle, Booth had Brengle shining the boots of the other trainees.

Brengle said to himself, "Have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic in order to polish boots?" And then, as in a vision, he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough fishermen. "Lord," he whispered, "You washed their feet; I will clean their shoes."

B. If we call ourselves followers of Christ, we must be people of service, people with a towel.

1. This means we are to serve the people of God. This is sometimes more difficult than serving those outside the Church.

2. Yet serving those close to us has a cleansing effect on other believers. The impact of Jesus' words is this: The Church has received the essential cleansing by Him in the forgiveness of sins, but we can help take away the day-to-day dirt of the world by humbly serving one another. As we serve each other, we encourage one another to godliness.

CONCLUSION:

How do we become "towel people"?

First, we must have the heart of the servant as Jesus had. He was overflowing with love for His own (v. 1).

Second, we must follow the example of Christ the Servant (v. 15).

Third, we need to know who we are. We "towel people" are servants of one another.

Jesus gives a final word to them about service: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (v. 17). We don't need to learn more about being servants, we just need to do it. Have you joined the Holy Order of the Towel?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS

Organ Prelude
Announcements
Silent Prayer

WE PRAISE HIM IN SONG AND WORD

Call to Worship Sanctuary Choir
"Ye Servants of God"
Hymn "I Am Thine, O Lord"
God's Word John 13:1-17
Hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated"

WE PRAISE HIM IN PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING

Prayer Chorus "Spirit of the Living God"
Pastoral Prayer

OUR WORSHIP CONTINUES

We Greet One Another in His Holy Name
Worship in Giving His Tithes and Our Offerings
Hymn "Make Me a Blessing"

WE LISTEN AS GOD SPEAKS TO US

Ministry of Music
Message "WHERE IS YOUR TOWEL?"
*Ministry in Music "He Washed Their Feet"

WE LEAVE TO SERVE OUR LORD WHO SERVED US

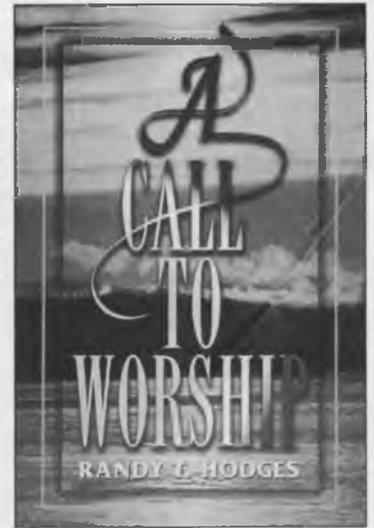
**During this time I washed the feet of two staff members and a child.*

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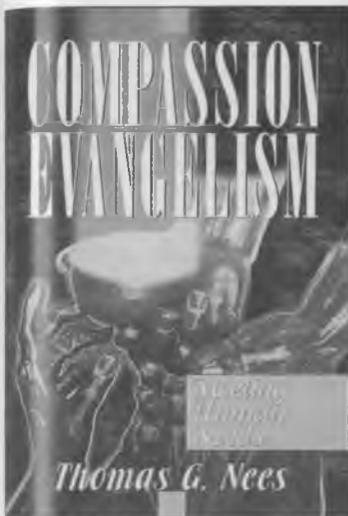


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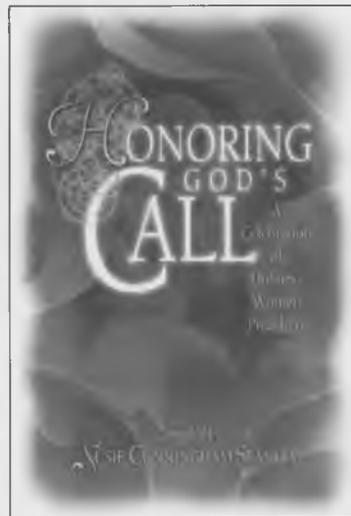
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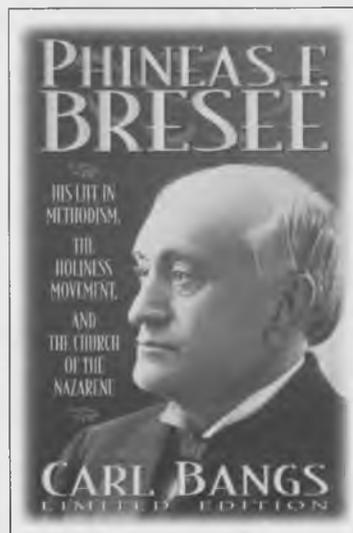


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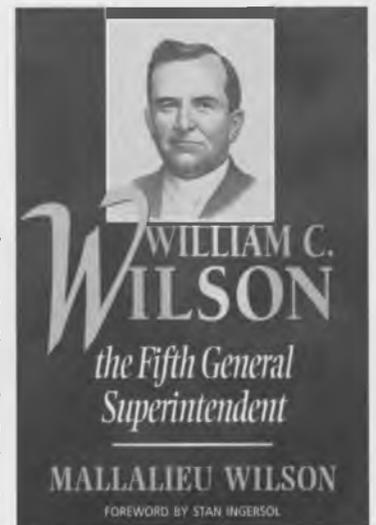


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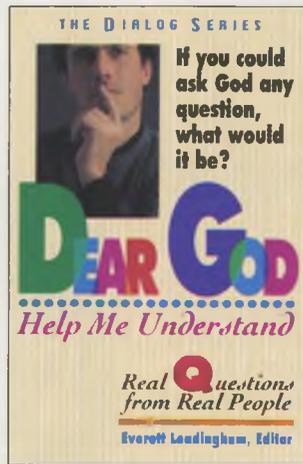
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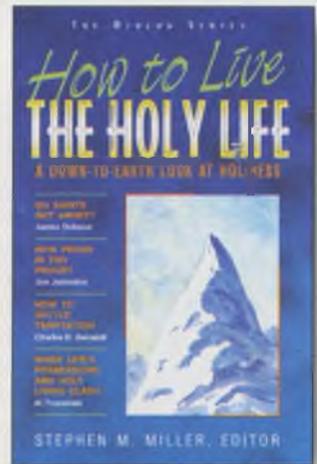
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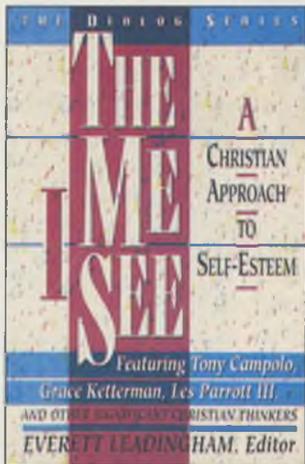
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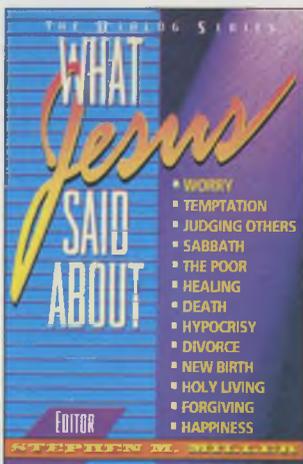
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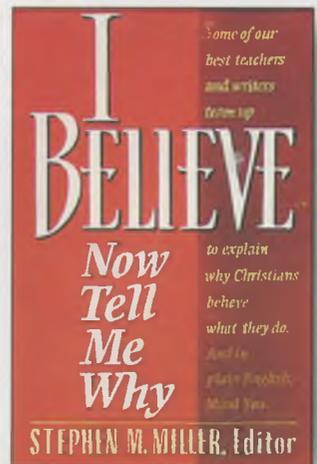
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