



THE

# Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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WHEN AIDS COMES  
TO YOUR CHURCH?**

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**ARTICULATING AND  
LIVING CHRISTIAN  
HOLINESS IN A  
PLURALISTIC WORLD**

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**MEN AND WOMEN  
OF GOD FOR THE  
21ST CENTURY**

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MAY 16 '94

# Interim Pastors—a Much-Needed Ministry

by Randal E. Denny  
Spokane, Wash.



**T**he holiness churches, flowing from John Wesley's Methodist concepts, more often than not followed a pattern of shorter pastorates. In some traditions, pastoral appointments were made annually. Church growth leaders today talk about the need for and advantages of longer pastorates in order to facilitate the growth of congregations. Some experts have suggested that the best years of growth begin in the sixth, seventh, or eighth years of a successful pastor-congregation "marriage." Too often pastors have moved on before they have reached the opportunities offered by the longer pastorate. To assist the process of more permanent marriages between the pastor and the parish, a much-needed ministry is the "intentional interim pastor."

My observations suggest that following a pastor who had an extended ministry or a pastor who left under difficult situations, the church will have an interim minister—intentional or unintentional. A growing realization of the need for intentional interim ministry comes out of experiences from thoughtful observers and pastors who woke up one day to finally understand that they were, indeed, unexpected interims.

I once followed a pastor, a long-time friend, who had been extremely successful over the course of nine years. My wife and I arrived too soon after his departure. Many of his closest friends in the congregation still felt the sting of the heavy loss and were going through bereavement. It seemed as though I was the next marriage partner, pushed off on them too soon after the rupture of losing their beloved. For some, I had unwittingly become the unwanted stepmother while their wounds of grief were

much too deep and raw. I had gone there with the intention of finishing up my ministry in that assignment. Three years became a long interim experience.

Nola Deffenbaugh, in *Leadership Magazine*, wrote an article titled "Benefits of an Intentional Interim." It was so good I wish I had written it. She commented, "This in-between-ministers time is proving to be valuable for congregations, not just to give them continuity until a new pastor arrives, but to provide a designated period to resolve problems, evaluate themselves, overcome the grief or anger many feel from losing their pastor, and to select priorities and goals for the future" (*Leadership*, Fall 1993, 123).

In the Church of the Nazarene, a more thoughtful process is in place now that provides opportunity to take greater care in the selection of a pastor. As no one should rush into matrimony, a church should not rush into the pastor-parish marriage. Most of the time leadership exists within the congregation, so that the absence of a permanent pastor does not leave the people directionless. A new pastor only becomes chairman—not the leader. Leadership cannot be taken, only given by the people. In time, they will award him leadership—maybe.

Meanwhile, an experienced, wise, perhaps retired pastor could serve as an intentional interim minister. Everyone should clearly understand that he or she will never be the permanent pastor. Preferably the interim pastor would be a good preacher having well-developed relational skills with the people. He or she must not participate in conversations about who should be selected as the permanent pastor. The interim must remain neu-

tral in those issues that must be worked out with district leadership and church boards and congregations. Top priorities for the interim should center on calling on the sick, preaching to heal wounds and create anticipation for the coming pastor, and helping the congregation deal with conflicts, antagonists, or other problems that may hurt the upcoming relationship between pastor and people.

Deffenbaugh told of one interim who said it well: "It has to be your decision. . . . I'll leave in a few months, but you'll have to live with the problem. If you decide to confront it during the interim period so the new minister won't have to hurdle these obstacles, I'll help you." (This approach is necessary for a successful interim ministry. The congregation's leadership must own the process)" (p. 124).

I believe that intentional interim ministry holds a congregation together better, allows for more effective transitions, and usually will wound fewer pastors and people.

At age 68, Charles Higgins is serving as a long-term interim with great success. His warmhearted ministry would grace any church and bring stability to any hurting situation. At age 72, Marly Anderson, beyond usual retirement age, serves Honolulu First Church in a longer-than-expected interim ministry. He brings joy and excitement and goodwill to any church. Whoever follows him will be blessed by an insightful forerunner. Stan Toler, resigning from a major pulpit, expressed that he felt "fully convinced" that the Lord had given him that assignment as a "transitional pastor" following a very gifted, respected pastor

(Continued on page 49)

# Men and Women of God for the 21st Century

### Editorial Note:

The author gave this address at Breckenridge, Colo., for the Consultation on Clergy Preparation, June 1992.

**F**uture forecasting is tricky business. My comfort level would improve for this presentation if the time span were longer than eight years away. Then I might be able to use one futurist's advice: "Talk about a period 100 years away so that no one can check on your mistakes."

My misgiving about futurizing increases when I recall Uncle Josh's view. He joked, "There is a great deal of speculation that is trying to untwist the untwistable. This is just about as smart as sitting down in a washtub, taking hold of the handles, and trying to lift the unliftable."

In spite of these perils, let us consider this mind-boggling task of developing ministers for tomorrow's spiritual frontiers. Our task is to answer the question, What kind of ministers will be needed for the remainder of this decade, the new century, and the new millennium?

### The World

The environment where ministry is done is in the midst of the greatest upheaval to ever engulf the human race, and there is no reason to think it will slow or stop.

Can anyone calculate the implications for our task caused by destruction of the Berlin wall, the release of Nelson Mandela, Jews and Arabs talking peace, the end of the cold war, a united Germany, the European Common Market, Japanese business competition, urban blight and decay, and unrest in El Salvador, Haiti, and Cuba?

Even 10 years ago, who envisioned a computerized society, fax machines, demolished USSR boundaries, TV marathons taking us to foxholes and Supreme Court nominations, redistributed global power, or national leaders who compromise themselves



by Neil B. Wiseman  
Editor, "Grow" Magazine,  
Colorado Springs

by vacillation or outright defilement?

Perhaps we should also ponder long-range consequences of the Vietnam war, student protests at home and abroad, the drug war, the civil rights movement, women's rights, homelessness, third world famine, abortion, and AIDS.

These staggering changes make it easy to believe new environments for ministry will be more secular, corrupt, and dissimilar from anything the church has experienced in 2,000 years—certainly unlike anything we have known in our lifetimes.

### The Church

The holiness churches, a part of the Church Universal, are experiencing their own revolution—mostly a quiet one. Our churches are signifi-



cantly different than they were even 10 years ago.

Efforts to refine our theology have spawned unexpected side effects that have given us an identity crisis in how we understand and preach our cardinal doctrine. Changing worship practices bring perplexing innovations, so we try to blend Wesley hymns, country gospel, religious rock, holiness songs, and praise choruses; who could accomplish that goal even with sophisticated sound systems and top-quality taped orchestration?

Ownership and content of clergy preparation is being renegotiated now, so every college religion department and District Board of Ministerial Studies have assumed the role of judge and jury to determine what a prepared holiness minister should be. And no one knows whether fewer people are answering God's call to ministry or whether new expressions of ministries are attracting those who used to have interest in pastoring.

Rapid changes caused by a thousand colliding forces are reshaping Sunday School curriculum, revivals, denominational magazines, book publishing, missionary giving, access to Christian higher education, pastoral relations, and now delegation quotas to General Assemblies. The list lengthens at a time when denominational loyalty seems down and diversity up.

In the midst of these massive changes, think of our assets. The list is impressive. And the old preacher was right when he thundered from his pulpit, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48, NBV).

Look at what we have weathered already.

A few years ago, no one would have believed that holiness pastors would be ministering to AIDS patients, single parents, drug addicts, blended families, sexually abused adults, homeless people, snooty yuppies, recent immigrants, or grouchy traditionalists.

Who thought of pastors writing sermons on computers?

Who predicted that health insurance premiums might force us to close churches?

Who foresaw ministering in a world bewildered by medical ethics, baffling technologies, erotic details in the media, and grasping greed in every economic class?

These differences have us perplexed and dizzy. But they also offer golden opportunities.

The task before us is to find ways to use change as a superb opportunity to deal with ecclesiastical atrophy, to uproot unproductive methodology, to refocus our mission, and to deliver the gospel to the masses. I find management specialist Waterman's idea stimulating when he suggests change can "transform threats into issues, issues into causes, causes into quests."

For our holiness denominations, this can be our finest hour. Or it can be our aging cycle with hardening of the arteries, blurring vision, and deliberate deafness. The choice may be ours. To design a compelling future on the creative edge of effective ministry will probably require a lot from us like hearts on fire for God, aggressive imagination, deliberate risks, bravery to change methods, and fresh ways of thinking.

### Credibility

Though my credibility for this presentation may be questioned, let me trace my Nazarene journey. My parents, young lay believers in their late teens, took me to church as an infant when the denomination was only 24 years old, counting Pilot Point in 1908 as the Nazarene birth date. At an early age, I heard R. T. Williams, James B. Chapman, H. V. Miller, E. P. Ellyson, and Orval Nease; I even had my picture taken with Uncle Buddy Robinson. And I have had Hugh C. Benner, Hardy Powers, D. I. Vanderpool, G. B. Williamson, and Samuel Young as pulpit guests in churches I pastored.

My call to the ministry was affirmed by the church early in my life, so I have held a minister's license or ordination for 40 years. Twenty of those years were invested in pastoral ministry, and 13 have been devoted to training preachers at Trevecca Nazarene College and Nazarene Bible College.

My views have also been shaped by other ministry experiences like Sunday School curriculum writing, creating the Dialog Series, directing the first PALCON and WILCON, resourcing at least 75 local church leadership retreats, helping plan King Conference Center, managing the minister's course of study, editing the *Preacher's Magazine*, preaching wherever anyone invites me, plus producing the Ministers Tape Club for 11 years and the Laymen's Tape Club for 10 years.

A great deal of speculation is trying to untwist the untwistable.

Now *Grow Magazine* puts me in touch with selfless modern pioneers. And the unfolding strategy for the Small Church Institute has my imagination stirred. However, the most significant raw material that has impacted my current perspective of the church comes from what students bring to the classroom; I believe they represent the church in macrocosm.

To bolster my credibility, I married into sterling Nazarene lineage when Bonnie and I became a team 34 years ago. Bonnie served as secretary to the Board of General Superintendents for 4 years. My Bonnie has deep Nazarene roots: her grandparents on both sides planted churches, and her father's ministry included numerous pastoral assignments plus more than 20 years' service as a district superintendent.

Though my perspective may be limited, I have seniority. I honestly cannot remember when I moved from being a young pastor to becoming an old-timer.

### Our Challenge

As I see it, the most pressing challenge for clergy preparation is to make our holiness/wholeness message understandable to contemporary people. Hungry nonbelievers will be attracted when they know our message offers wholeness, an attractive alternative to fragmented living. Our members will enjoy more rapid personal spiritual growth, too, when they grasp the possibilities of a truly quality life centered in Christ. And disillusioned believers from diverse religious backgrounds would join our ranks if they knew what we believe and teach.

To impact the world with massive effectiveness requires that we fully understand our mission and strengths in light of contemporary realities.

In this process of focusing on the future, a small caution might be useful. I believe too much attention to tradition produces enchanting obsolescence, but it is still obsolescence. Wesley and Bresee were productive precisely because they proclaimed the biblical message in ways their contemporaries understood. Following their lead, we must train people to competently take the old message to the new generation.

I propose that an up-to-date understanding of our mission and purpose is needed without idolatry to history and without too much fascination with fads. An uncomplicated, clearly stated vision could bind us into an invincible force for righteousness.

I urge bold action that gives more attention to what can be and less on what used to be.

I suggest exhilarating dialogue that deals seriously with who we are and less with what we wished we were.

I recommend that we identify contemporary battle lines. Recognizing emerging issues might prevent us from wasting energies on outworn controversies.

I believe the Spirit of God may be pushing us to imaginative new clergy preparation so that we may more effectively serve the church and the world. To keep step with Him, our motto might be, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; *do you not perceive it?*" (Isa. 43:19, italics added).

When I ponder the holiness potential for achievement, I consider pas-

tors to be our most encouraging hope and our most valuable resource. Shap-

New environments for ministry will be more secular, corrupt, and dissimilar from anything the Church has experienced in 2,000 years.

ing them is our assignment. That is why I press for clergy preparation saturated with authentic spirituality, vig-

Who foresaw ministering in a world bewildered by medical ethics, baffling technologies, erotic details in the media, and grasping greed in every economic class?

orous academic standards, vibrant resourcefulness, and hard work.

#### Hope

On pessimistic days, I hear hillbilly evangelist Vance Havner's warning that religious organizations always run a ruinous course that moves from

a man to a movement to a machine to a monument. Without appropriate resistance, that could be our course both in denominations and at the colleges.

It is sobering for me to consider where the holiness churches are on God's timetable. Deep in my soul I wonder how the Almighty grades our efforts, especially mine. And in the future, will our churches flourish to impact the world or shrivel into insignificance?

On hopeful days, I believe intentionality, daring, and God-inspired strategies will enable us to avoid decline. Kierkegaard expresses my excitement for our future in his moving sentence, "If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye, which ever young and ardent, sees the possible."

Now let us turn to more specific proposals for growing stouthearted men and women of God for the 21st century.

#### 1. THE MIND OF CHRIST

As a bedrock foundation for ministry, men/women of God for the 21st century must pursue and understand the mind of Christ.

With its noble simplicity and its profound depth, the mind of Christ is the meeting place of vital piety and sound scholarship. Deep spirituality and ardent learning find their highest maturation in allegiance to Him.

Think of the magnetic appeal. A world, only slightly interested in religion, will be drawn to ministers whose ministries are filled to the brim with the resurrected life of Christ. And fidelity to Jesus will draw students into ministry and will attract them to Christian colleges.

To attain this aim, thick walls that artificially separate theory and practice of ministry must be demolished. Educators in medicine, law, social work, music, and business would be laughed out of their professions if their educational efforts permitted such a dichotomy between theory and practice in classrooms, libraries, or faculty offices.

Since no such separation exists in Scripture or life, why do we allow or promote it?

Beyond our theory versus practice debate stands the absolute necessity

that our churches must be led by Christ-centered thinkers who are loyal saints and ardent students of the Bible and life.

With all the passion of my soul, I want our graduates to be rational, intellectual, orderly, informed thinkers. They need Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Curtis, Wiley, Dunning, Staples, and Grider.

But our graduates need more so that they are thoroughly trained to think like Christ. The raw materials for such thinking include Jesus' outlook, His values, His reconciliation, and His hope.

The most pressing challenge for clergy preparation is to make our holiness/wholeness message understandable to contemporary people.

Doctrine without incarnational application quickly deteriorates into a system of orderly assumptions and cerebral deductions. I propose that our sound logic be set on fire with the mind of Christ, so that preachers' and parishioners' hearts beat faster, and their lives are revolutionized by truth.

Let the mind of Christ be the frame of reference we cultivate in students so that their orientation, direction, and devotion are taken from Him. Scholarship and spirituality must be judged by the mind of Christ.

#### 2. ACHIEVEMENT

Men/women of God for the new century must be inflamed with passion for achievement.

Let us all agree: ministry is breath-

lessly trying to keep up with what Jesus wants done.

However one defines effectiveness, more is needed. A burden for the world must infect our pastors so that they live out the reality that competency in ministry always begins with a passion for world evangelization.

We do candidates for ministry a severe disservice at this point with preaching and teaching that praises faithfulness without results. Is it possible to be truly faithful without some apparent result? The parable of the talents must be read again to hear Jesus reprimand the "no increase" steward as an "unprofitable servant" who is to be "cast . . . into outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30, KJV). In the parable, faithfulness is praised only in those who multiplied what was entrusted to them. Think of the implications of that idea for ministry in our time.

Wesley and Bresee were productive precisely because they proclaimed the biblical message in ways their contemporaries understood.

Inspired bustle is not enough. God expects and empowers achievement. And to accomplish this goal, our graduates need to apply the gospel to human hunger in cross-cultural settings, especially urban, small town, and rural situations.

### 3. PERSONAL PURITY

Men/women of God for the new century must be living examples of holy character.

Pastors, like everyone else, need a personal Pentecost to cleanse and settle self-sovereignty. And they need to see that truth lived out in us who prepare preachers. But lifelong intimacy

with Christ is also required if they are to resist the temptations public life brings.

Close contact with Christ will force them to question their own playacting, duplicity, doublespeak, political upmanship, image building, and petty dishonesties. They need pure talk authenticated by a pure walk.

Though inner assessments are difficult for us to measure in ministerial students, we can prod, counsel, exhort, and model holy living until graduates discern the issues, live in intimacy with Christ, and are repulsed by substitutes.

Integrity, morality, and selflessness must be the rule of life for tomorrow's Christian leaders. Socrates is right: "The shortest and surest way to live with honor in the world is to be in reality what we appear to be."

Like a pinch of leaven, personal piety in pastors will invigorate the churches they serve with principle, fairness, and holiness. People are glad to follow Christian workers who demonstrate rocklike fidelity to Christ.

### 4. ELITISM

The men/women of God for the new century must renounce elitism.

Throughout church history, our preachers have warned us about pride of grace, race, face, place, and lace. But sly forms of egotism are allowed or even encouraged these days.

Let me press this conviction. I mean that students must give up spiritual conceit and intellectual haughtiness. Bible college graduates are no more spiritual than any other believers. Neither are they smarter. They are no more worldly or more intellectually limited than others.

Our task, then, is to stimulate intellectual growth and ignite spiritual commitments. But at the same time we must warn that every kind of pride wounds a minister's witness and shrivels his or her soul.

### 5. SUPPORT

The men/women of God for the new century must grasp economic realities.

Fiscal facts about student loans, bivocationalism, and income supplement must be understood by faculty and students of holiness institutions. There is a strength we can cherish in the fact that our denominational bud-

get systems strongly encourage a pastor to good management of congregational and personal finance.

In the future, will our churches flourish to impact the world or shrivel into insignificance?

However, we must also recognize the fact that heavy economic burdens of many churches are being carried on the spouse's shoulders. Pressing financial issues may, in the future, compel our denominations to institute resourceful clergy compensation and placement procedures.

But for the present, many beginning pastors will need to secure income supplements for their families. As a result, our graduates must be encouraged to acquire employment skills or sharpen existing ones.

### 6. OUTREACH

The men/women of God for the new century must give priority to outreach.

Integrity, morality, and selflessness must be the rule of life for tomorrow's Christian leaders.

Such an emphasis on the Master's mandate will refocus our mission, increase our membership, and help churches outgrow bosses that stymie progress.

The components of this big picture include missions, church planting, church growth, revivals, evangelism, witnessing, discipleship, assimilation, and nurture. Our pastors must be

awed by the fact that our Lord wants the whole world won through people like them. And as they do ministry, they must feel God's passion for the whole world.

Outreach must have priority in the ministry because it is a central issue in the Bible.

#### 7. RENEWAL

The men/women of God for the new century must become pacesetters of renewal.

Both the world and the Church desperately need a revolutionary spiritual awakening. We must have it. The renewal for which I intercede is summarized in two sentences from John Gardner: "Institutions are renewed by individuals who refuse to be satisfied with the outer husks of things. And self-renewal requires somewhat the same impatience with empty forms."

Our ministerial students must be taught to establish and maintain spiritually vigorous churches where they serve healthy and frequent doses of faith, hope, and mercy. They must also learn to stir up holy fires in dying churches. They must be taught to use God's timeless renewal remedies such as worship, prayer, Scripture saturation, fasting, and personal piety. The world is ripe for spiritual reformation, maybe even ready for a prophet to point us all to God. I pray that our pastors will be on the front line of such a breakthrough.

Our pastors must be awed by the fact that our Lord wants the whole world won through people like them.

It might even require them to reevangelize some church members—such an idea is already in our heritage. Bresee thought holiness leaders were to Christianize Christianity.

#### 8. ETHNIC/URBAN

The men/women of God for the new century must be skilled in urban and ethnic evangelism/ministry.

Social scientists project that by the turn of the century one child in three in the United States will be from a Hispanic or non-Anglo background. To reach these underevangelized groups, we must recruit and train more ethnic pastors, especially Hispanics, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Asians. At the same time, Anglo students must be trained to respond to this challenge, which is too big for any ethnic group to accomplish by itself.

#### 9. USER-FRIENDLY CHURCHES

The men/women of God for the new century must develop user-friendly churches.

Both the world and the Church desperately need a revolutionary spiritual awakening.

Laity will be more alert and less passive in the new century. Many who need the gospel will not be attracted by pious mumbo jumbo, obscure theological jargon, religious pop psychology, or archaic procedures.

Preachers must recognize there is a momentous difference between a layman's tolerance and wholehearted endorsement of the church's ministry. For the layman, the contrast is like eating oatmeal to keep alive or feasting on steak or lobster. Laymen, seeking some kind of ministry that is relevant to life, vote on these issues with intensity of involvement, attendance, and giving.

To help ministerial students make churches user-friendly requires that people like us listen intently to laymen, sinners, culture, and anyone else outside our frame of reference. Then we must take clearer understandings of the deepest yearnings of

the Church and the needs of a broken world into our classrooms.

We must take clearer understandings of the deepest yearnings of the Church and the needs of a broken world into our classrooms.

An accurate exegesis of these needs must be branded into every student's perception of ministry.

Such a developing sensitivity on our part might even lead to a candid self-doubt; that is, theological educators and religious professionals may not have the last word on what the contemporary Church needs. Since the new realities will be unlike any the Church has previously faced, history or experience may not be trustworthy sources for understanding how technology, culture, and new expressions of sinfulness will complicate the transmission of our message in the new century.

My plea is this—we must increase our grasp of the contemporary Church and the changing world so that we understand how laymen think and how they must function away from the church in the secular environment. Then our new perceptions must be built into our teaching.

#### 10. CONNECTIONS

The men/women of God for the new century must connect theology to life.

A life-throbbing link must be forged between theology and ministry. Correlations that seem obvious to us are not always understood by ministerial students. We must answer their "so what" questions. Doctrine must be understandable and incarnated on Main Street. Neutrality never wins wars and does not work well in a clergy educator's classroom. Our

yes must be heard with certainty and our no with conviction.

While I tried to preach in an African-American church, a brother helped me by shouting, "Make it plain, brother. Make it plain." That is our task too!

Fervor for truth, righteousness, and morality must be evident and emphasized in every classroom of holiness educational institutions. Truth we know about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, assurance of resurrection faith, plus realities about hope and love must be connected with intensity and affection to the everyday world where people live, work, and die.

### 11. EXPEDIENCY

The men/women of God for the new century must be taught to live beyond expediency.

Let us call ministerial students to a holy character so that they reject cutting corners and political accommodations. Let us call them to biblical scruples so that shoddy shortcuts will not lure them.

Then people will follow our pastors into the deep things of God. When sinners have had their fill of moral brokenness, they will turn to our pastors to find eternal life and the holy way.

### 12. RADICAL LIFESTYLE

The men/women of God for the new century must be challenged to live a radical New Testament lifestyle. Little in the culture or the Church encourages such a commitment.

The ministry must be seen as an adventure worth any sacrifice. Challenge them with downward mobility in a world dominated by upward mobility. Prepare them to tackle tough assignments so that they so thoroughly transform hard places that others will gladly go to churches they vacate. Call them, as Jesus does, to die for a cause. The Lord might even want them to give their lives for a specific place.

I hope it is not too visionary to think our ministerial students may be the best hope for hundreds of struggling churches that are now stagnant or dying.

### In Summary

I believe innovative imagination is needed in curriculum and course design, especially now. I think the time

has come to drop defenses about ministerial preparation between administrators, pastors, and clergy educators. I strongly urge us to be super-careful that we do not waste the

The classroom situation we create determines the kind of graduates we produce.

sacrifices students make to have an education. I hope we demonstrate how to apply theology to life. I hope we will be worthy of the increasing trust of our publics. I pray we will listen with all our hearts to the Church crying for spiritual reality and hear the world sobbing for hope.

Let us face the fact—the classroom situation we create determines the

kind of graduates we produce.

Therefore, let us clarify our purpose by considering Albert Einstein's warning, "Perfection of means and confusion of goals seem to characterize our age."

While we could be driven by enrollment, self-defined agendas, personal graduate school experiences, or student demand, I hope we will be compelled by a visionary pursuit to be all we can be, to be what our founders intended and more, and to be what the Church needs us to be.

Though I am not a futurist, I am persuaded that a fruitful future will not be automatic. We must be intentional in shaping Christian colleges for the new century.

I love the story of a veteran pastor who had just finished dedicating a child to God. After solemnly charging her parents and the church to nurture the child, he said to the sleeping infant, "My dear one, I have no idea where life will take you, but I know our Lord will go with you wherever you go." That is the bottom-line confidence I have for our minister in the 21st century.



"With this support from above we'd better mention roof repair costs in today's sermon."

# What Happens When AIDS Comes to Your Church?

### PROBLEM

The Church of the Nazarene where I serve as pastor was a warm, middle-class church in the suburbs of a major Southern city. For years it had been moving along with the normal problems all churches face. The people faced many situations, handled them well, and then moved ahead. Several of the people had been a part of the church for many years. Some had recently become a part of the church after being saved from an awful life of sin. It was a blend of longtime church members and new converts. The sinful problems they had been reading about were miles away in the big cities. Surely, we would never have to face the major issues of the rest of the world.

The church was experiencing a great time of growth, reaching many unchurched and unsaved people. Lives were changed around the altar as many came to Jesus. Alcoholics had been transformed, homes had been mended, and backslidden Christians had returned to the Lord. During this time, our church ministered to six teenagers and adults who had attempted to commit suicide. It was exciting to hear the difference that Jesus Christ was making in the lives of our people.

One of the new converts was a young, single mother of two girls. To protect her privacy, she will be referred to as Mary, and her children as Sue and Jane. Mary went to the altar and glowed with the radiance of Jesus as her sins were forgiven. When I met her, she gave the appearance of a normal, everyday, typical churchgoer. After her encounter with Jesus, she wanted to talk to me concerning some struggles she was experiencing as a new Christian.

As we were chatting, she began to cry and tell me what Christ had done



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for her. She shared the difference He had made in her life. Then she unloaded a burden that was more than anyone her age could handle. Her first husband had left after the birth of Sue. Mary began a lifestyle that was shocking to hear. She had been sleeping with different men in an effort to find joy. One of her encounters was with a married man. In this one-night stand, her life became a nightmare. She became pregnant, which was complicated by the fact that she was not married and he was married to someone else. Then the phone call came with the message that the man had AIDS. Testing began, and it confirmed that Mary had contracted the HIV virus. The toughest news of all was that, not only did she carry the



HIV virus, but also her newborn baby was infected.

Then the problem arose for me as pastor and for the church. Questions had to be answered soon. Whom would I tell? Whom *could* I tell? Should I reveal it to anyone? Since the words HIV and AIDS were associated with homosexuality, what would be the reaction of the church? Would the congregation condemn and ostracize Mary? How would we accept the person without condoning her sin? What message was being sent to our children and teens? How many families would we lose to the church when they found out that AIDS had come to our church? What would happen if the community learned of AIDS in our church? The biggest question that was faced was, what would we do about the baby and the church nursery? The only thing I knew was that fear of the unknown is paralyzing.

The problem was compounded by the fact that most church people had chosen to ignore this worldwide problem. It was easier to become a "holy ostrich" and bury one's head in the sand, hoping the problem would go away, than to face the reality of the problem. Perhaps the problem was ignored because it was perceived as a disease of homosexuals only. Second, it could never happen in our clean church. Reality hit hard when the church looked into the face of a sickly eight-month-old child. We were forced not only to confront a medical problem but also to deal with a theological problem. Would our theology work when faced with real life and not just theory?

### ANSWERS

In searching for a solution to our problem, we found that there were not many consistent answers avail-

able from other sources. The medical authorities did not agree as to the ways the disease could spread nor the way we were to handle the situation.

First, it was vital that I clear all discussions with Mary. We did not want any legal entanglements over her right to privacy. Also, it was important for me to keep my pastoral integrity by not breaking her confidence. After much counseling with Mary and a time of gaining her confidence, she was very cooperative. She did not, nor did I, want the whole church to know that she had HIV. After a time of analyzing the problem, we both felt that the church board should be informed.

Confidentiality was of utmost importance. On one hand, there was the right to privacy on the part of the individual concerned. This privacy protected the individual from discrimination and the irrational fear of others. On the other hand, society had the right to protect its people as well as help those in need. The following insights from *The Church's Response to the Challenge of AIDS/HIV* has since become helpful in showing the advantages of each view.

Openness with regard to HIV status has a number of advantages. Some of those advantages that should be considered when making a decision on the level of openness that is desirable include:

1. The individual may receive greater support from others.
2. There is a reduction in stress and fear of the unknown.
3. The quality of life can be improved through the spiritual, emotional, and material support of others.
4. The ill person is better able to prepare for the limitations of his or her illness and death.
5. Openness helps to remove the stigma surrounding HIV infection.
6. Openness provides an opportunity for others to learn about HIV illness.
7. Openness provides greater opportunities for ministry and to assist in the emotional well-being of the individual with HIV/AIDS.
8. When openness does not exist, information circulated by rumor often causes a response of panic.

Confidentiality with regard to HIV status has advantages as well as being a legal right:

1. The dignity of the infected individual can be protected.
2. By maintaining confidentiality, the individual is less likely to suffer from irrational discrimination in an uneducated congregation or be subjected to unjustified fear and rejection.
3. Confidentiality is a legal right.
  - a. Does the church leader have the written consent of the individual to inform others?
  - b. How can church leaders help the infected person inform family, friends, and members of the congregation? (40-41).

How many families would we lose to the church when they found out that AIDS had come to our church?

Since the baby was in the nursery, and there were more potential problems in this area than anywhere else, I felt that this was the only reason the church board should be informed. If I had kept it a secret and the word of our nursery situation had become public knowledge, then my ministry would have been finished due to lack of confidence and to the fear of this unknown disease. If it had only been the mother, it would not have been necessary to share with such a large group of people.

I informed the district superintendent of the problem and kept him updated. This was done, not only to apprise him of the problem and seek his counsel, but also to keep him informed of my actions as pastor, in case there would be future problems

from the congregation or Mary. No one would be able to accuse me of a cover-up.

Our second task centered on immediate education of HIV and AIDS. Most of us did not know the difference. We learned that a person could carry the HIV virus, which potentially could turn into AIDS, and still not have full-blown AIDS. It was clear that after all the questions and all our research, even the doctors would not make a conclusion about the safety of our nursery children. Our questions finally centered on the following question: Could HIV be caught from a dirty diaper, tears, cuts, vomit, breathing, or saliva on the toys, or drooling?

Since our major concern was the church nursery, we had to take steps to insure safety in our nursery. We gleaned the following simple procedure from talking with doctors and telephone calls to others.

1. Nursery hygiene and sanitary conditions should be followed regardless of the threat of AIDS. Universal precautions should be enforced. Common diseases are so easily transmitted in a nursery. Hepatitis is of greater danger in a nursery than HIV virus.

2. Make sure each child has his own storage space for supplies and personal belongings.

3. Guard against the baby picking up another child's bottle or pacifier. When an infant or toddler is seen putting an object into his or her mouth, this object should be cleaned with a disinfecting solution before being returned to the toy container.

4. The hardest and, in reality, the most impossible task is to make sure each child plays with his own toys. A child naturally wants the toy that another child has. Since the baby will always put the toy in his mouth, it is important to try to keep him or her playing with the same toy.

5. Workers need to wear rubber gloves when changing diapers or cleaning up vomit. This is not exclusively for the workers' protection, but to keep from spreading germs from child to child.

Strict hand washing is of utmost importance in the prevention of the spread of infection. Nursery workers should wash hands after each diaper change, after taking a child to the toi-

let, after assisting a child in wiping his or her nose, after contact with blood, after using the toilet, and before food preparation. Workers should also make sure that a child's hands be washed after using the toilet, after use of tissues for wiping eyes and nose, and before eating. Disposable towels will be used after hand washing.

6. Keep changing tables clean after each use. A disinfecting solution made of 1 part household bleach to 10 parts water will be sufficient. It should be used for wiping up all spills, soiling by blood, urine, or feces. It should also be used for cleaning toys and equipment.

7. Do not put anything else on changing tables. Clean up the child only on a changing table. The doctor shared how common it was to see a child's cookie lying where a baby's diaper had been changed.

8. The only adults who are allowed into the nursery area are the workers. Passing a child over a Dutch door can sometimes be aggravating to the parents, but it does keep down the spread of germs.

9. At the end of each use, disinfect the nursery thoroughly. All diapers and trash shall be placed in trash bags and put in trash cans with lids after each use of nursery.

## Fear of the unknown is paralyzing.

Millington Baptist Church of Basking Ridge, N.J., had faced this problem and gave other insightful information concerning a church policy on AIDS:

At this point, I realized our church needed a policy covering these questions. I wanted it to be a policy that would hold true regardless of whether the person in question had been in our church for years and was perhaps a victim of an infected blood transfusion, or was fresh off the street. . . . It is easier to stay objective when the people who will be affected by the

policy are still without names and faces (*Pendell, 94-98*).

It also became necessary for us to have a policy regarding parental responsibilities:

1. Parents would be required to refrain from bringing their child to the nursery if the child has a temperature greater than 100 degrees, has a rash, or if diarrhea and vomiting are present.

Reality hit hard  
when the  
church looked  
into the face of  
a sickly eight-  
month-old  
child.

2. Parents would be requested to use only disposable diapers during the time that their child is in the nursery.

3. If any child persistently bites workers or other children while in the nursery, the parents will be asked to keep the child with them.

The church had to institute these procedures in the nursery before a problem arose. If all of a sudden there was an extensive change from a homey little nursery room to a more clinical facility, it could cause concerns to the parents. They might sense that something is wrong and either not leave their child in the nursery or find another church that they feel more comfortable in leaving their child. Also, this would eliminate singling out the one with AIDS.

Any policy regarding AIDS must be consistent with other policies. Universal precautions will help in this matter. It is vital to be consistent in following the guidelines. If one baby comes with a fever and you allow him or her in, and the baby with HIV comes and you turn him or her away, then you have a problem morally and legally.

When the church notices a big change in the nursery, explain that it

is for the health of the children. Since baby boomers first look for a church that is best for their children, it would be wise to upgrade the nursery anyway.

Our main issue was still not faced. Little baby Jane still had HIV, and our nursery was filled with babies whose parents might not understand or appreciate her presence. We knew that we could not legally or socially separate her in the nursery. We talked with many people all over the country but could not find a situation of HIV in the nursery. Many churches were dealing with adults that had AIDS, but none that we could find was dealing with a baby.

After talking with the doctors and after much prayer, we came to a hard decision. If we let the baby stay in the nursery, we could lose many families when they found out. We could also be at risk of the disease being transmitted to another baby. If we did not let the baby in the nursery, we could lose the young mother. Though she was only one, she still needed the church now more than ever.

We decided that we would not permit the baby to be in our nursery. The decision was not easy, nor was it made hastily. Yet we had to find a solution. The church board was willing to hire someone, if possible, to babysit the baby at home or at church. We did not want the mother to miss any of the services, since she needed them so much. A lady in the church volunteered to keep the child in a separate room during all the services. The mother decided that it would be best if she kept the child with her in class and worship. Admittedly, this was noisy at inconvenient times. Every time the child would cry in the service, all I could see was a mother whose life was falling apart, but whom Jesus had loved and reached down to pick her up.

Confidentiality  
is a legal right.

It was hard to tell Mary of our decision. As I explained all the implications, to my amazement, she under-

stood and was willing to work with us any way she could. She understood that for the rest of her life there would be situations that would be different for her and her family. She was so aware that her one-night stand brought lifelong consequences.

Also, we had to face other problems with church activities. Philadelphia church added to their policy a statement that may become necessary.

All individuals who work directly with food preparation and serving must remove themselves from such tasks when there is physical evidence of illness or there are exposed lesions. Individuals who test positive for the AIDS virus but do not evidence any symptoms or illness will be allowed to assist with food preparation and service (*Pendell, 98*).

It was clear that after all the questions and all our research, even the doctors would not make a conclusion about the safety of our nursery children.

After concluding what to do with the child in the nursery, my attention as pastor was drawn to Mary. Sometimes she would sit in worship services and cry. She was always faithful in her attendance.

As would be expected, a few people in the church found out our dilemma. Everyone wanted to know

why baby Jane was not put in the nursery. A few people knew the reason, and most did not spread the new gossip. One dear saint tried to get discord stirred up, but the people did not allow it to spread. As Mary felt more acceptance and grew spiritually, she shared her problem with several people. No one, to my knowledge, rejected her. The secret was kept better than I thought it would be, but I would be assured that it would not remain a secret.

Could HIV be caught from a dirty diaper, tears, cuts, vomit, breathing, or saliva on the toys, or drooling?

Mary did not need to be treated as a second-class citizen. In retrospect, I would have done something different. I would have informed Mary when I would be mentioning AIDS in my sermons. This way she would not be caught off guard.

With low self-esteem, Mary needed to be constantly reaffirmed. As pastor, it was my duty to lead the congregation in showing love. This was done by not showing fear of her as a person and not even condemning her. She wanted to be involved in church, but could not be allowed to work with children, or even to assist in the nursery. We were able to find several other avenues of ministry for her. She was not ready to minister to others with her problem, but she did want to serve the Lord. Mary had a gift of drawing. During all of this she finished her education in commercial art and advertising. She was able to utilize this in ministry.

#### **THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATION**

That afternoon when Mary shared

with me the results of her sin, it forced me to face the realities of our present age. Growing up in a strict home and in a very conservative West Virginia church did not prepare me to deal directly with her need. I was taught to stay away from all sin and sinful people. Now I was forced to confront my upbringing and compare it to the compassion of Christ. My wife and I had discussed AIDS in the classroom, since she taught in public schools. I had felt that she should not teach anyone who had the disease. Now it was not just theory. It was not some gay person in San Francisco, nor a boy in Indianapolis. It was not something that I would probably face in the next decade. But, it was real. It was not going away. My philosophy of ministry would be put to the test.

All of my life I had been around people with prejudices—against color, creed, socioeconomic standing—and I abhorred it. It frustrated me in my extended family setting, and it bothered me greatly in the church. To my disdain, I was confronted with my own prejudices. Without realizing it, I was prejudiced against people with AIDS. I thought they deserved what they got, and there was not anything I could or really wanted to do about it. When I realized my prejudice, I immediately took it to God and had Him cleanse my heart.

As pastor, it was my duty to lead the congregation in showing love.

My fears were also real. It worried me about our children being exposed to the virus in the nursery. It was a concern that my own children should not get too close to the baby. There was a fear of the unknown.

One Sunday the fear moved from the remote and came to the very specific. As I was teaching the church membership class, little baby Jane be-

came restless, so I picked her up to hold her. The class was watching a video, and the mother needed to concentrate. As I was holding the baby, she reached behind me and cut her hand on a mirror. My fears leaped inside me, though no one in the class knew it. I also had a cut on my hand, and I knew the virus could be transferred through open wounds. Also, there were many times that I would hold the baby, and her tears would flow or her nose would run and come in contact with my skin.

I was taught to stay away from all sin and sinful people. Now I was forced to confront my upbringing and compare it to the compassion of Christ.

William E. Amos, Jr., in *When AIDS Comes to Church*, has made some helpful insights into the theology of AIDS.

In the relatively short time since AIDS was reported in our society—1981—we can already see how theology has shaped the response of the church. Some ministers, in addressing both the issue of AIDS and the individuals infected with the virus, have responded from a viewpoint of judgmental theology; their statements have almost always included some clear word of judgment, spoken by the church on God's behalf, to those who are suffering with the disease. The presence of AIDS, both in society and in individuals, is seen as clear evi-



dence of the wrathful judgment of God in reply to the behavior that caused the disease to be contracted. Some of those who choose to respond out of judgmental theology have even gone to the extreme of implying that God created AIDS specifically for the purpose of punishing certain groups in society. An incarnational response centers to the people who are dying rather than on how they became ill. It struggles with a way to be present in their lives as the incarnate Word of God. An incarnational response understands the biblical reality that we are indeed our brother's brother and our sister's sister, and their keeper as well (53-54).

There was only one answer if I were to effectively serve as pastor of this family with such urgent needs. The Lord had delivered me from my prejudice of the disease. My ignorance of the disease could be taken care of with education. What about my fear? God let me know clearly that He was in control. He had called me to the ministry. He knew where I was and what I needed to be doing to minister. He had just brought my family through a horrendous hurricane named Hugo. I had never known fear as I did that night when my house was coming apart around my family. Yet God brought peace in the midst of the storm. Also, the Lord had seen

me through a stressful time in dealing with a child molester who was on our church board. This time of news coverage and inner struggle in the church had been stressful beyond belief. There came a time when I had to surrender it to Jesus. I thought of the murder trial of one of our members in a previous church. The situation grew tense as my family was threatened, and the police even walked me from the courthouse in order to assure my protection. Yet, God took care of my family and me. So at this moment, I surrendered the fear of the disease and the fear of other people into the hands of God. He gave me a peace that enabled me to minister. Sure, I used common sense, but it was in God's hands.

My philosophy of ministry would be put to the test.

An urgent part of ministering was to help the mother deal with sin's results even after forgiveness. At our first visit, she was dealing with this truth. She had gone to the altar and

asked for forgiveness of her sins. Her testimony rang very clear. The assurance of the Holy Spirit remained very evident in her life. With her sins forgiven, she was a new creation of God. I thought she would expect immediate physical healing now that God had changed her life. To my surprise, it was the opposite. She had felt so guilty for what she had done that she was willing to accept the disease as a part of her guilt. Later, after months of the disease, she would have to face new facts that sin can leave scars until we reach heaven.

I was  
confronted  
with my own  
prejudices.

She needed to be reassured that God really loved her, regardless of what she had done in the past. She knew that God through Christ had forgiven her, but she still wanted to know that He really did love her. This was not just a onetime need. Constantly she needed to be reminded of God's love for her.

During the early days of her disease, she desperately needed hope. All the news media, written reports, as well as doctors, clearly emphasized the certainty of death. The doctors told me that she would not live 10 years. She had to realize her hope in Jesus—hope for what future she did have, assurance that Jesus would be with her till the end. Her desperate situation was overshadowed by the fact that her baby had HIV. I could not share with her, but the doctors emphasized that the baby would die soon. As pastor, not having many simple answers, my task was to not only tell her but also believe in my own heart that there was hope. Her faith and hope were later strengthened when baby Jane was completely healed of the HIV virus. After many tests at the medical university, she was declared clean of the disease.

During the time that we were dealing with this problem, the general

church informed us that we should write a mission statement for our church as a part of the pastoral review procedure. Our missions statement would put the AIDS incident in perspective. It is vital for a church to keep its true mission in view during the easy times as well as the stressful times. We could take every part of our statement, and if it did not apply to Mary and her situation, then we were not really the church God intended for us to be.

#### CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT

To exalt the name of Jesus.

To attract and lead the unsaved to Jesus.

To help Christians consecrate themselves to God's purpose in their lives.

To lead the saved into entire sanctification.

To provide a climate in which personal spiritual growth and worship occur.

To equip believers for effective ministry to reach the Summerville area.

To have spiritual redemptive activities and programs that strengthen the individual and family and counteract what the world offers.

An  
incarnational  
response  
centers to the  
people who  
are dying  
rather than on  
how they  
became ill.

Each item on the mission statement applied directly to the church's ministry to Mary. To my relief and excite-

ment, the church did reach out and, even without a mission statement at that time, carried out the mission of the church.

I surrendered  
the fear of the  
disease and  
the fear of  
other people  
into the hands  
of God.

As pastor, I had to be willing to get caught in the crossroads between the community, the church, and a 23-year-old mother. I felt then, and still feel, that Mary was a first priority. I did not want the community to ostracize our church, yet I could not throw away a life that was reaching out for help. My stand to help Mary may have cost me later in the pastoral review proceedings, yet her needs had to take precedence over prejudices of some people within the church. Sometimes it costs to minister. As pastor, I was proud of the overall response of the church to an earthshaking problem.

#### CONCLUSION

No church wants to face major problems. Yet a church must carry out its mission to share Jesus with our world. The church matured greatly and was able to minister. As pastor, I was able to work through my own fears and prejudices and was able to grow. Also, I have learned another lesson. **BE PREPARED FOR THE NEXT TIME, FOR THERE WILL BE A NEXT TIME.**

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## Articulating and Living Christian Holiness in a Pluralistic World

The assigned topic is one of staggering dimensions. There are few words equal in scope individually to the words “holiness” and “world.” When they are brought together for discussion, the inherent tensions between these two entities drastically enhance the intimidation factor. Even narrowing the one term to “Christian holiness” leaves us much landscape to cover. And qualifying the other term so as to deal with the “pluralistic world” of our present time exposes us to such a complexity of matters as to multiply our difficulties. Then to make the junction between the two to be the “articulating and living” of Christian holiness in a pluralistic world is to bring forward many of the theological, moral, practical, and evangelistic issues with which our spiritual forebears and we have struggled throughout Christian history. We certainly cannot hope to deal with this topic exhaustively or definitively within the limits of this brief article, but rather to make a few suggestions that may prove to be openings for further and future studies and applications.

It appears that our topic naturally gives us a threefold structure by which we shall attempt to proceed. I shall group my observations and suggestions under:

- I. *Recognizing Our Pluralistic World*
- II. *Articulating Christian Holiness*
- III. *Living Christian Holiness*<sup>1</sup>

### I. RECOGNIZING OUR PLURALISTIC WORLD

I have deliberately chosen the word “recognizing,” because I fear that, in spite of everything, we are blissfully unaware of the true nature of our present society. We can watch unending television documentaries



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and read unnumbered books and articles, all trying to tell us how our world has multiplied in terms of persons but shrunk into one chaotic neighborhood due to irresistible and irreversible political, social, economic, technological, and migratory currents. We can measure the shifts and changes in our own land, noting the growing number and strength of various ethnic, language, and religious groupings, catching a blurred glimpse of the whole pluralistic world on our doorstep. And yet we continue our ministry in the same old patterns, with the same words and sermons addressed to the same shrinking white Anglo-Saxon Protestant audience while time runs out on us to articulate the message and develop the strategies to call our world to holiness.

We must recognize, truly recognize that we are not proclaiming holiness to the world of the 18th century in which the Wesleys lived, or the 19th century in which the American holiness movement and our denominations emerged, or even the early and mid-20th century in which most of us grew up and entered the ministry. We are responsible to proclaim holi-

ness during a breathtaking transition into the third millennium to *this* world, as strange and frightening and bewildering as it is.

How drastically has our world changed? Back in the 19th century, there was a kind of national American religion, not established by the government but recognized by virtually everyone. It resulted from an uneasy consensus arrived at in the side-by-side ministries of a relatively few major Protestant bodies. The Methodists had experienced explosive growth from a tiny sect to the largest denomination in only about six decades, with the result that their brethren from the Calvinistic camps had to Arminianize in varying degrees to survive. Perfectionist movements were in vogue not only in religion but also in philosophy, society, and politics. Postmillennial expectations pictured perfection not only as achievable but as inevitable. In that milieu the American holiness movement was born. Doesn't it sound inviting? Wouldn't it be comfortable just to slip back into that world and preach holiness? Just think what wide swaths we could cut in that context! However, friends, God did not put us there or then, but here and now!

What happened to that world? The Civil War brought the release of millions of black slaves—something our holiness forebears struggled and sacrificed to bring about. Those former slaves dispersed across the land, and their attempt to integrate into the American scene is still going on. Their children represent the part of our pluralistic world that we have had the longest opportunity to deal with, and we have not yet really responded to this challenge. Then came waves of immigrating Europeans of

Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, from which we largely walled off ourselves. Then the old Protestant consensus split apart in the fundamentalist/modernist controversy. While we shared some of the doctrinal commitments of the fundamentalists, we did not share their Calvinism or their narrowness. And while we had previously been social activists, we soon abandoned much of that to the social gospellers because we could not stand their liberal theology or see social salvation without genuine faith and personal salvation.

The Pentecostal movement exploded on Azusa Street in 1906 and took a large share of our potential audience down a road greatly similar to our own but with added emphases we perceived as aberrations. Hard on its heels came the charismatic renewal that flowed across all denominational boundaries, diminishing the perceived importance of doctrine or structure or tradition. The old fundamentalist camp also experienced phenomenal growth, leading to what Martin Marty has dubbed the "baptistification of America"; to many, the Baptists now are the truly born again, the only true evangelicals.

At the same time have come the migrating hordes from every corner and country of the globe. The mosques and temples of Islam and the Buddhists have etched themselves on the skylines of our major cities. The tower of Babel has been reconstructed in this western hemisphere as a seething mass of ethnic cultures, languages, and religions jostle for a place in the sun. Out of this, quite naturally, have sprung innumerable cults—thousands of them, including many under the elusive banner of the New Age.

Then perhaps the rudest blow of all. The people whom we had always thought to be our own, those most like traditional holiness people, even those bred and born in our homes, nurtured around our altars and in our Sunday Schools—suddenly they have become more interested in how their felt personal and emotional and family needs are ministered to than what the name or doctrine or tradition of the church may be. They can come and go suddenly, unexpectedly, and without explanation. They may move from one community to another and,

even if they are parsonage children, not begin their search at nor find their spiritual home in a holiness church.

We are blissfully  
unaware of the  
true nature of  
our present  
society.

As a result of our new pluralistic world, what kind of congregation does the holiness pastor face on a Sunday morning in metropolitan, urban, or even many rural settings? There are persons there, more likely among the older set, who genuinely know from proper nurture and personal commitment and experience what Christian holiness is all about. There are others who have been instructed poorly, through preaching that was confusing at best or a caricature of biblical holiness at worst. There are others who, even though they have spent their lives in holiness churches, have heard little about holiness due to pastors who themselves were confused or uncommitted. To such persons Christian holiness is a mysterious something that they may suspicion is supposed to be a distinctive, but it is just not in focus and is left for the elite to concern themselves about.

Many others have dropped in from a plethora of backgrounds and traditions who are impressed with the warmth of the services and stay because, for the time, they and their families like what they experience and feel. Many of them know nothing about our holiness doctrine. Some have been conditioned against it. Some have more background in Pentecostal or charismatic perspectives on the work of the Holy Spirit, question what they consider to be our inferior type of spirituality, and miss the point of what we are trying to say. Some represent the group that George G. Hunter calls the "agnostics," persons who do not have the remotest idea what we are talking about in religious circles.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of congregation is characteristic of our intersection with our pluralistic world. And if the gathered people of God are like this, what are the communities around us like? What about the persons in the webs of relationship and influence extending out from our fellowships?

## II. ARTICULATING CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

I want to preface my remarks on this portion of our study by pointing out that what I will be saying does not apply totally to theological classrooms, discussions, or literature. There is a place for traditional theological language and technical theological terms. The scholar and the trained pastor both need to be able to understand and use such in the proper place. But pastors speaking in the local congregation or dealing with an inquirer from our pluralistic world need more than the traditional and the technical. If all they speak is the language of the scholar and the classroom, they will speak almost entirely to themselves. Unfortunately this is usually the only language that we have to learn for our exams on the subject.

In our own denomination, when District Boards of Ministerial Standing interview candidates for licensing or ordination, they usually expect answers in the "clinically correct" language from academia. I would urge both our academicians and our credentialing boards to give attention to whether students entering active ministry also understand holiness well enough to translate it into terms understandable to the person in the pew or on the street. Hunter says,

C. S. Lewis argued that a clergy candidate's capacity to translate theology with common English ought to be a test for ordination. He remarked that "it is absolutely disgraceful that we expect our missionaries to the Bantus to learn Bantu, but never ask whether our missionaries to the Americans or English can speak American or English. Any fool can write *learned* language. The vernacular is the real test. If you can't turn your faith into the vernacular, then either you don't understand it or you don't believe it."<sup>3</sup>

Let us think together about avoiding *confusion of terms* and achieving *clarity through terms*.

Probably most of us, however long we may have been exposed to holiness preaching and teaching, have experienced *confusion of terms*. We have been confused by some of the terms that have been used.

This confusion arises from a variety of causes. There are sound biblical terms that are no longer meaningful in common speech. There are terms that have arisen out of particular, archaic translations that sound like foreign words to the person on the street. There are terms that have arisen in holiness theology, some of them reflecting biblical concepts, but evoking mental pictures that distort the truth for many.

Wouldn't it be comfortable just to slip back into that world and preach holiness?

Quite frankly, there are some terms I do not depend upon. While *eradication* as a term describing what God does in a negative way in the intensifying moment of sanctification through and through has never really bothered me, I know that for some it conjures up strange pictures and contradictions that prevent any meaningful understanding. So I do not use it. The attempt by some to find a biblical basis for it in Jesus' statement that "every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matt. 15:13) seems to be straining the scripture considerably. Some would understand it to teach a sanctification after that sin would be impossible—something that is not scriptural and which I do not believe.

We have often contrasted *crisis* with *process* when we wanted to talk about the *second event* or *entire sanctification*. Actually *crisis* as a word is quite appropriate with reference to the *second event* since the dictionary defines it as "a decisive moment," "a turning point," "a sudden turn for the better in an acute ill-

ness." But for most people today, *crisis* is a negative term associated with the evening TV news and reports of conflicts and disasters, or associated with a medical condition in which the patient is on the verge of death and may not survive. In such a case, it is understood to mean "a sudden turn for the worse"—the opposite of the dictionary definition. So I avoid it.

The term *a second definite work of grace* was a shibboleth from another generation to separate holiness purists from those who were just not on target doctrinally. It was intended to speak of the second event in such a way as to lift it in importance above the many minor steps on the way of holiness, to compare it in significance with the experience of conversion. I have no quarrel with the concept. But for most people today, it is a meaningless combination of words, the explaining of which will probably not bring either full or continuing understanding.

I have a strong conviction that we should use scriptural terms whenever we can, although even here we will encounter problems. John Wesley spoke to this rather sharply in his letter to Mrs. Maitland, May 12, 1763, when he said, "As to the word 'perfection,' it is scriptural: Therefore neither you nor I can in conscience object to it, unless we would send the Holy Ghost to school, and teach Him to speak who made the tongue."<sup>4</sup>

Some of the biblical terms are so much at the heart of holiness truth that I believe they are essential to a proper communication of our message. But most of them will need explanation, and the explanation is not easy. The words "holy," "holiness," "saint," "sanctify," "sanctification," "perfection," and "perfect love" are strange, even frightening words. They can be used carefully if people can be helped to understand the content given to each in the Scriptures and the context in which they are used in each case in the Scriptures. But one can hardly spin off a theological term from one of these biblical terms, like *initial sanctification*, in a public message and expect to be understood. Even though *entire sanctification* is formed on the use in 1 Thess. 5:23 of the expression "sanctify . . . wholly" (KJV) or "entirely" (NASB), I find that I need to clarify the term

more and more. This is due to the fact that, for the uninitiated, *entire sanctification* sounds like the same thing as *completed sanctification*, picturing for them the termination of the sanctification process, as if with the intensifying moment of sanctification no further or ongoing sanctification is needed. I do not believe either Scripture or experience support such a view.

The tower of Babel has been reconstructed in this western hemisphere as a seething mass of ethnic cultures, languages, and religions jostle for a place in the sun.

A set of biblical terms that are extremely difficult to use with clarity are the KJV terms "flesh," "carnal mind," and "old man" (e.g., Rom. 8:5-9; 6:6). Some of us have always facetiously questioned whether the use of "old man" was a kind of sexism in reverse, since the Scriptures never mentioned the meanness of the "old woman"! But seriously, when we begin to tabulate the almost countless ways in which these terms have been translated in newer versions, we begin to understand how even the best of Bible scholars have wrestled to grasp and communicate their meaning. When we add the theological spin-offs such as *carnal nature*, *original sin*, *inbred sin*, and *moral depravity*, we are again far from the vocabularies of the average person sitting in our pews, let alone the person who remains outside the institutional church.

So how do we find *clarity through terms*? What terms can we use in clarifying or interpreting the biblical ones? I am going to tell a bit about my own use, not because it is the ideal solution, nor because I am satisfied with it, but because I can speak more certainly of my own struggle and attempted answers. I know that immediately my terms will be questioned as themselves being inadequate. I am not ready to be burned at the stake for them, nor even to use them in writing new creedal statements. I am sure that I will change the terms I use many times yet if the Lord gives me more years to preach and teach. I will do so on the basis of the needs of the congregation and the occasion while trying to be true to the Scriptures. So please do not deal unmercifully with the terms I suggest. At least we will begin the discussion. I am eager to learn from others, eager to hear any suggestions you may have for me.

If the gathered people of God are like this, what are the communities around us like?

Relative to initial sanctification, I talk about sanctification beginning at the moment of our conversion. Then I strongly emphasize that sanctification progresses from that point onward throughout a lifetime of development. I talk about the early stage of this progression preparing for an intensifying moment of sanctification.

Relative to what we have traditionally called the second definite work of grace or entire sanctification, I talk about a second event, an intensifying event in the life of the Christian, involving surrender of the will and trust in Christ, and also involving the cleansing, filling, health-giving work of God in the person's life at that time. I preach that this step is so nat-

ural that unless the Spirit's work is resisted, He will lead every child of God by this point, whether the theology is understood or not, whether the terms are known or not. I use Luther's translation of 1 Thess. 5:23, also used by the NIV, of sanctification "through and through." While to talk about being "sanctified wholly" (cf. KJV) may sound strange to contemporary humans, to talk about God bringing wholeness to my person is meaningful, or to speak of wholistic healing that involves the spiritual picks up a current phrase—at least if we can avoid the coloring put on it by the New Age movement.

One of the most challenging experiences I have had was to be asked to preach on holiness to a Korean fellowship in Hawaii, a group made up of laypersons whose background was in the United Church of Christ and who were considering becoming Wesleyans. While they understood some English, I spoke most of the time through an interpreter who was a Wesleyan Korean pastor, but who himself had little background in Wesleyan theological thought. I had to bridge cultural, language, and theological gaps between myself and the audience. I tried for their benefit to picture sanctification on a continuum or conceptual time line. I spoke of there being on that time line two "big days" and two "periods of progress." The two "big days" were of course conversion and sanctification through and through. The periods of progress included progressive sanctification between the two big days and continual sanctification after the second big day. Did such a strategy work? While I have experienced some outstanding Holy Spirit visitations in some such services on our mission fields, this time they were still groping after understanding. Maybe a little got through. At least I made the effort and left the rest to the Spirit.

When I am preaching on holiness, I stress the fact that the work of sanctification goes on continually even after we have been sanctified through and through. I say that the Holy Spirit will delve into our subconscious. He will enable us to discern in patterns and habits of relationship growing out of both our genetic heritage and our early childhood development those characteristics that do not re-

flect the beauty of His presence and which need to be refined by a joint effort between the human and the Divine. I stress the fact that this part of sanctification will go on as long as we live and that growth in holiness should accelerate, not terminate, after the intensifying event.

"If you can't turn your faith into the vernacular, then either you don't understand it or you don't believe it."

I always emphasize the fact that whatever holiness may be expressed in our hearts and lives never has its origin in us, but always in that God who alone is holy. It is only as I maintain my relationship with Him, remain dependent upon Him, yielded to and trusting Him, that there can be any of His holiness reflected in me.

I try to press home to every hearer the absolute necessity of a lifelong pilgrimage toward (or better, in the literal translation of 1 Thess. 4:7, "in") holiness. The writer to the Hebrews makes that clear in 12:14, when he says that we are to "be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." I like to stress that just as we must be engaged in a continuing quest, so God is engaged in a continuing gift of holiness.

### III. LIVING CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

As difficult as is the task of articulating Christian holiness, it is still easier to talk it than to walk it. I will say unequivocally from the beginning, it is impossible to live a holy life from a center that has not been transformed by the grace of God and filled by the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to live holy lives if we don't want to be holy or if we persist in dragging our feet. It is impossible to live holy lives if that is not the deepest and strongest de-

sire of our hearts. So in all else that I shall say, it is assumed that we believe in Christian holiness, that we desire it, that we are pursuing it with all the eagerness God's grace makes possible.

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explanation,  
and the  
explanation is  
not easy.

Beyond this basic statement, there are some areas that we will have to take into account if we are to live Christian holiness in a pluralistic world.

*We will need to model the very center of holiness—holy love, agapē.* We are all aware of the various Greek words for love and of the fact that the use of *agapē* was rare in nonbiblical Greek. There it did refer to a social/reverent love, a rational act, a deliberate choice. It was a natural term for describing the kind of love that characterized God himself. The Church in turn poured the full meaning of God's love into this word.

*Agapē* love is not at the beginning an emotion; it is a willed attitude—the result of choice, commitment, determination. In this way one can love without feeling like it. This is what God has done; it explains how He loves you and me. It is love that reflects His character rather than the virtues of others. He loves because He is loving, not because we are lovely or lovable. It is love that acts in consistency with His nature rather than reacts to other persons or circumstances—the rain and the sunshine upon good and bad alike demonstrate that.

The New Testament makes it clear again and again that not only is *agapē* love the love that God himself manifests, but also it is the standard by which His people's love and life will be judged. How does one become governed by this love? Since it is a

love of commitment, is a change of mind, an act of the will, a decision, a choice all that is needed? This is certainly involved, but it is far from enough. This love is so contrary to fallen human nature that it is out of reach except by divine grace. It requires God's gift as well as my commitment. It is part of what comes to me in the various stages of redemption and is made thorough in the through-and-through sanctification of which Paul speaks.

How does it operate in human experience? Much the same way it does in divine experience. It means loving whether you feel like it or not. It means loving everybody alike. It means loving the unlovely. It means loving in a way that reflects God's character rather than the qualities of others. It is love that acts in consistency with His character rather than reacts to the questionable or hateful or evil actions of others.

Also, as part of our modeling the very center of holiness, *agapē*, there will be a demonstration of the purity of God. In human terms, this certainly involves sexual purity, but much, much more. It involves integrity, honesty, reliability, the professed character becoming the practicing character.

*We will also need to be more biblical and realistic about some of the specific aspects of holy living.* There were certain emphases about holiness some of us heard in our youth that I am now convinced were wrong. One was that entire sanctification makes it impossible for anyone to hurt you. Since you have been crucified unto the world and the world unto you, you are a corpse, you are dead, you are impervious to hurts from others. This misses the whole point of God's hurt over sin. That was illustrated in Hosea's relationship to his adulterous wife. Jesus suffered hurt in terms of rejection and abandonment and denial and betrayal on the last night before His crucifixion. Paul's anguish over his treatment by his Corinthian converts is evident in his correspondence with them.

Another error I used to hear was that entire sanctification eliminates anger. I will agree that a holy heart has no place for carnal, hateful, get-even, strike-back anger. But I would not agree that all anger is banned.

God's anger against sin is recorded again and again in the Scriptures. In Mark 3:5, when Jesus perceived His opponents watching His response to the man with the shriveled hand, "He looked around at them in anger . . . deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts." By divine grace *agapē* love can persist in spite of hurt, in spite of anger, in spite of betrayal, in spite of rejection. When we model that kind of Christian holiness, we will bring conviction on our pluralistic world.

Whatever  
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that God who  
alone is holy.

Another aspect of life that we have not yet faced squarely is that of ambition. The Scriptures are clear that our pride and egotism and lust for position and power are the opposite of true godliness and its call for humble repentance, dependence upon the grace of God, and obedience to His assignment and direction. But we have exaggerated that to picture Christian holiness as almost turning the human being into a pawn that never thinks of itself in relation to an opening or an opportunity but waits to be moved. It has become expected that when a person is elected to high office, the person elected will say, "This was never expected; qualifications for it are absent; the preference would be for a hidden and lowly place of service, but that preference will be sacrificed to accept the call of God and the church."

For some this is said in all sincerity. For others it is an almost imposed hypocrisy. For some listening know that this individual has, in Paul's words in 1 Tim. 3:1, desired the of-

fice of a bishop or, as the Greek root suggests, has *reached* for that office. The irony is that Paul does not condemn but rather commends such a reaching. If there are spiritual gifts of leadership and administration as Rom. 12:8 and 1 Cor. 12:28 seem to say, will not those so gifted be programmed by the Spirit to look for opportunities to exercise those gifts? Will they not be restless and even ill at ease until placed in the slots for which they are designed? It would seem to me that if we are to model Christian holiness in a pluralistic world, we will have to learn under the Holy Spirit how to flee carnal ambition but exercise a sanctified ambition that respects and revels in God's sovereign choice and equipping.

Another closely related aspect of life that we still handle clumsily is that of the attitude of one leader toward another leader—the proper balance that disdains carnal jealousy on the one hand and yet, on the other hand, maintains self-respect, responsible care for one's own God-assigned ministry, and a loving and grateful respect, acceptance, and appreciation for the person and ministry of that other servant of God. After all, the Scriptures, in the context of a discussion of ambition, exhort us to look after both our own interests and those of others (Phil. 2:4; cf. Rom. 12:10, 15-16; Phil. 2:1-11).

This love is so contrary to fallen human nature that it is out of reach except by divine grace.

The challenge in modeling Christian holiness in such a way as to convict a pluralistic world comes when that other leader is of a temperament drastically different from mine, and yet that leader is achieving spectacular success and receiving all the public

and denominational acclaim. Our styles are different, our work habits are different, our methods are different. The differences from my vantage point are so great that it would be easy for me to judge the other leader as insincere, self-seeking, carnal, and unethical. Then is the time to pray for *agapē*, for patience, for broadening of the understanding, for discernment. This is the time to remember that all servants of the Lord are answerable directly to their Lord (John 21:22; Rom. 14:4, 13). It is a good time to pray for that other servant, thanking God for every good fruit of that life and ministry, asking the Lord to bless person and ministry and multiply the gains, asking Him to protect each of you from temptation, and asking Him to help you to be faithful and zealous and fruitful in the ways He intends. It is amazing how beautiful and effective that kind of response can be.

Another aspect of life that we have not yet faced squarely is that of ambition.

Finally, we will need to bring culture under the judgment of Christ. This is an area in which we all have blind spots. It is easy to see elements in the other person's culture that are at odds with the character of Christ, but very difficult to see those points at which our own culture needs to be condemned and we need to break with it and reform it. After all, it was Jesus' judgment of Jewish culture as much as anything that led to His crucifixion. We need to remember that it is more important that we be Christ-like Christians than that we be conforming Americans, more important that we imitate Christ than that we be conforming Japanese, more important that we manifest the mind or attitude of Jesus Christ than that we be conforming South Africans of any of the camps. As I have traveled abroad, I have been appalled at how virtually

impossible it seems for some, due to their culture, to overlook slights or embarrassments or mistreatment or to welcome back one who has erred. They appear to be blind to the fact that such practices fly in the face of Christ's example and teachings.

We will need to bring culture under the judgment of Christ.

But the Holy Spirit has taken these opportunities to ask me about my own blind spots. How easily do I assume an attitude of superiority to those of other nations? How much do I insist on being protected from inconvenience and discomfort so that I can enjoy my accustomed privileges? How completely am I entangled in the snares of materialism, the love of money, the lust for earthly and temporal security, the frail immortality provided by medical science regardless of the cost? I too must be willing for my culture, my reflection of my culture, to be brought under judgment before Christ.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, we must clearly recognize how much our world has changed, how pluralistic it has become, how diverse our audience is, how many hindrances and obstacles there are to our helping the people of our world to hear, understand, believe, and commit themselves to God's call to holiness. Articulating Christian holiness in this strange, new world will demand that we critically examine our use of language, both in cross-language communication and in the use of a language native to both speaker and listener. Terms that may cloud the issue will need to be avoided when possible, explained or teamed with more familiar terms when necessary. Clarity through terms will be difficult but possible under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

(Continued on page 49)

## Attitude Is Crucial

**A**ttitude is an important part of life. It does not matter the job, the relationship, the event, or anything else, attitude always remains a factor. Even more so does attitude figure in as a factor in pastoral ministry. A part of the reason comes from the fact that no job involves working with volunteers quite like the ministry does. As ministry changes—and it has over the last 5 to 10 years—attitude remains the one constant factor.

As any pastor knows, attitude is the one factor that affects morale in the local church—perhaps more than finances, building needs, or a host of other things. It is present as a positive influence, or a negative deterrent, in every situation. Here are some major factors about attitude.

First, attitudes occasionally will be positive. Every pastor is grateful for a positive spirit in his or her people. It makes pastoring a joy and is an encouragement to the fellowship. Pastor, drink deep from the well of the positive folk. Be encouraged by their support, their attitudes, and their service. Sometimes the positive people are neglected, not out of intent, but simply because too much time goes to grease the squeaky wheels. Nurture and care for the positive people. Let them know that you appreciate them, and pray that their kind might increase.

Second, attitudes, at times, will be negative and divisive. Every pastor has seen such expressed. They can crash-land the best program, sidetrack anything good, and demolish what has taken years to build. Such attitudes are carnal, sinful, and tragic, but we say too little about a bad spirit in the church for fear we will hurt someone's feelings. So, where a bad-attitude person exists, we tiptoe through the process, hoping against hope that everything will hold together. The church, too often, is held hostage by negative and destructive attitudes.



by **C. Neil Strait**

*District superintendent,  
Church of the Nazarene,  
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

Negative attitudes have been with the church since its beginning. Nothing you and I do will rid them. Our strategy, then, must be to nurture the positive crowd and not always give in to the negative folk. Easier said than done, I am aware. Most of all, we cannot let the negatives rub off on us or draw us into similar retaliation. We gain nothing and lose a lot by such actions. Pastor, be encouraged by the fact that there are more positive people than negative—usually. Or else how would the church have survived these many years?

What pastors must guard against is letting negative attitudes affect their ministry and the ministry of the church. A negative word is never a good word for the church, and certainly, it is not the last word.

A crippled boy was asked, one time, how he could face life and be involved with living when he was so crippled with a disease. The boy replied, "It never touched my heart."

Pastors must know that negative and bad attitudes are like a disease and must guard it from touching the heart and spirit.

Third, attitudes determine relationships. Years ago I made pastoral arrangements in a church where I thought the pastor that the church called was less equipped to serve than the pastor who was leaving. But, to my amazement, great growth occurred. When I met with them during

my annual visit, they said to me, "We know he loves us. He cares. He has a great attitude." That had become his entry into their lives, and it gave him a track for effective ministry. While the other pastor was more qualified, his attitude had kept his talents thwarted and stymied. Pastor, be encouraged. Your attitude, if it is caring, loving, positive, and helpful, will enable you to build great relationships with your people.

Fourth, attitude must ever ask what is the main purpose. Too seldom does one stop to consider the objective or purpose, but often lets emotion and the negative override.

I heard of a man who went to London to tour the land of Wesley history and to do research in the universities. It was an opportunity of a lifetime! When he came home, all he could talk about was the fact that his hotel window in London would not open. He never talked about the great "walks with Wesley" or the greatness of the country. His trip was remembered by a stuck window.

We pastors must guard our reactions to attitudes, people, and events. A thousand things will come along to tempt us to be negative and reactionary, but the mission of our work invites us to look above the current battle, to see the goal of influence, love, care, and ministry.

Ernest Campbell said in one of his books that "it doesn't really matter whether an action is profitable or popular, whether it is practical or realistic, whether it wins a salute from a city or a nation. What matters only and always is whether it can be understood as following Jesus Christ."\*

So, Pastor, be encouraged! Love those who may not be lovable, understanding that your "labor of love" is your ministry and that your real strength comes from God and His positive people. †

\*Ernest Campbell, *Locked in a Room with Open Doors* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1974), 34.

## How to Love Your Husband

### A Message to the Minister's Wife

**B**eing a minister's wife is a great privilege and a high calling from God. Our duties are many and varied. Each minister's wife fulfills different functions in the ministry.

Some teach Sunday School; sing; direct the choir; play an instrument; lead worship; work with Missionettes, women's ministries, children's church, or the youth group—and the list could go on and on.

Others take a more behind-the-scenes role. Their ministries might include intercessory prayer, counseling, or visitation.

Still others say their ministry is simply being 'there'—present in the services as a support for their husbands, and not filling a position in the church at all.

Whatever our duties as ministers' wives, it is certain *our main and foremost duty is that of simply loving our minister/husbands.*

I asked several ministers' wives how they "loved their husbands." The answers were as varied as the women themselves. Sharon from Florida said: "Be a good listener. And respect goes along with it." Carol from Missouri said: "Every husband is different. Learn to know him." Dee from Louisiana said: "Realize his responsibilities and set him free to do his work. Don't be jealous of the time spent away from you on church-related work."

Because of the heavy burdens they face and the many responsibilities that rest upon their shoulders, ministers have unique needs far different from the average man. How can we as ministers' wives meet these needs? What are some specific ways we can show love to our husbands?



by Kristy Roberts Dykes

Pastor's wife,  
Bartow, Fla.

Here are some that came to my mind:

*1. Respect him as the man of God.*

"And the wife must see to it that she deeply respects her husband" (Eph. 5:33, TLB).

When I was growing up, my mother instilled in her children a deep respect for the man of God. She revered and esteemed him highly and often quoted the verse, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (1 Chron. 16:22, KJV).

Now that I'm married to a minister, it doesn't lessen my responsibility at all. I must still respect him and his of-



face. We teach our congregations to do this. Can we as ministers' wives do any less?

Communicate your respect in verbal ways. Say things like, "Honey, I deeply respect you. You have so much wisdom." Likewise, communicate it in nonverbal ways. Rest in his authority. Honor his decisions.

*2. Realize he, not you, is the minister.*

"Wives, fit in with your husbands' plans" (1 Pet. 3:1, TLB).

Free him to be the minister. Let him make the major decisions in the ministry. You can disagree with him, but don't let it put a strain on your marriage. For instance, maybe you're a detail person and your husband isn't. Don't let your way of doing things cause contention in your home. "Better to live in the desert than with a quarrelsome, complaining woman" (Prov. 21:19, TLB).

Margie from Florida said, "I can tell Buddy my opinions, and he respects me. If he doesn't use my idea, I back off. It's really the old submission thing. The way we phrase our words has a lot to do with it. If I say, 'You *ought* to do this,' or 'You *should* have done that,' I don't get anywhere. But if I say, 'Honey, let me share this with you,' he usually receives it."

Sharon said, "Use your words wisely." She was simply paraphrasing Prov. 31:26, KJV: "She openeth her mouth with wisdom."

Louise summed it up by stating that we should learn to be aggressive without being threatening.

After a decision has been made, fight the urge to say, "Why did you do it that way?" My husband said, "It's much easier to sit on the sidelines and be an armchair quarterback

when you're not in the thick of the battle."

### 3. *Be his cheerleader!*

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18, KJV).

Compliment his sermons; be specific. For instance say, "That was a wonderful illustration about the seagulls," or, "You really brought out some great truths," or, "I never thought about that scripture in that way."

Have a pleasing expression on your face during his sermon. Pray as he preaches that God will anoint him and guide him and give him wisdom. Visualize yourself as a cheerleader cheering the quarterback on to victory as you show interest in what he has to say and therefore help him do his best.



Our main and foremost duty is that of simply loving our minister/husbands.



Be an encourager. Be up when he's down. One pastor's wife told me of a time when her husband was discouraged. She wrote faith-building Scripture verses in large print on poster paper and placed them in strategic spots around the house. When her husband came in and saw them, he was reminded that God cared about him in his particular need, and he was lifted out of the depression.

### 4. *Overlook his faults and concentrate on his plus points.*

The Bible says, "Love covers a multitude of sins [faults, TLB]" (1 Pet. 4:8, RSV).

No one is perfect, including you. We all have faults, so realize this and

don't be so hard on him.

A few years ago I had a hard time understanding why ministers made mistakes in the pulpit. "Milton," I frequently said, "remember to announce the WM spaghetti supper [or something else]." If he forgot, woe be unto him!

Then I started teaching a large sanctuary adult Sunday School class. One Sunday, a little old lady asked me to make an announcement to the class. "Sure," I replied, "I'll be glad to."

By the time I opened in prayer and remembered all the details of the prayer requests, led in a chorus or two, greeted visitors, took up the offering, and reminded the ushers to pass out our new Sunday School books, I completely forgot the announcement! My eyes were beginning to open.

The real clincher came when Milton asked me to speak on Mother's Day. Very quickly it occurred to me that all preachers are geniuses! How else can they find three different sermons for each week of the year when one sermon took weeks for me to compile? And how do they know how much material to use and keep the sermon within an allotted time period? And how do they remember all the fine points of leading a service? If every minister's wife had to stand in the pulpit and preach a sermon and lead the service once a year, she'd complain far less!

### 5. *Respond to his sexual needs.*

"Because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another" (1 Cor. 7:2-5, RSV).

Learn your husband's needs and be a "helpmeet" to him in this area. I recommend two books: *The Act of Marriage* by Tim LaHaye and *Intended for Pleasure* by Ed Wheat.

Also remind yourself that your husband is "the cream of the crop." Try keeping a mental picture of him the way other women in the congregation see him—nice looking, well

dressed, a great leader, a good father, well liked are just a few qualities the public sees. He's tops; so realize this.

Glenda from South Carolina said, "When I see Mark in the pulpit, all dressed up and preaching before a crowd of people, I love him so much. I realize I'm the only woman around who can share his heart, his home, and his bed. I'm proud to be his wife."

A famous actress said of her husband, "When I hear his key in the lock, my heart flutters."



It's really the old submission thing.



Does your heart flutter when you think about your minister/husband? Are you proud to be his wife? Do you tell him so?

And finally,

### 6. *Don't look to him for your happiness.*

"The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10, KJV). "In thy presence is fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11, KJV).

No person, place, or thing on earth can offer deep-down happiness. And that includes Spirit-filled minister/husbands. Lasting happiness comes only from the Lord. "Only Jesus can satisfy your soul," we sing. How true!

While in a dress shop the other day I met a woman who related her sad story to me. She had recently divorced her minister/husband. "He didn't make me happy," she said. "I wasn't getting happiness at home, and so I looked elsewhere." But she still wasn't happy.

Look to the Lord for your joy, your encouragement. Keep your relationship with Jesus up-to-date. Seek Him diligently. As you do, you'll gain new love for your minister/husband. And guess what? It's a two-way street: he'll gain new love for you!

## How to Deal with Reactions

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

*Pastor,  
Church of the Nazarene,  
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**W**hen delivering the message, the preacher should be familiar enough with the sermon topic to be able to pick up the congregation's reactions. In today's jargon, some would refer to these as "frequencies" or "vibes."

It is interesting, however, on occasion to note a speaker who seems to be totally oblivious to the listeners' responses. Someone can drop a hymnal—bang!—while three little children traipse down the aisle to go to the rest room as a baby screams from the back pew. Does it faze this preacher? Not at all.

Many of us envy this type. What is that person made of? Where did he or she come from? Where dwells his or her nervous system? On the plus side, this kind of speaker lives long because tension is unknown. Consequently, that preacher may have many more years left to preach in comparison to those who easily get the jitters. However, on the minus side, there is a chance that this preacher's unfeeling nature will mean that the communication bridge-building with the congregation is not all that solid. In other words, because of being insulated away from the confusion, perchance the preacher's whole personality is far from the people as well.

The rest of us, then, have to deal with these offbeat things that go on when we preach.

As years pass, stories unfold from all preachers as to the odd phenomena they have had to deal with while seeing through a worship service. Consequently, there does develop a sense of audience response with the speaker as communication skills mature. The question is: How does the preacher deal with the varied reactions? If they "get to him or her" so as

to be unnerving, that preacher may quit the job altogether, going back to selling cars. But most of us will forge onward, coming to master all the interesting quirks.

Not all audiences give bad vibes, however. Some can be caught in the palms of our hands, as John Wesley experienced:

We rode thence about five miles to Stonesey-gate, which lies in a far more fruitful country. Here was a larger congregation at six o'clock than I had seen since my leaving Birstal. They filled both the yard and the road to a considerable distance; and many were seated on a long wall adjoining, which, being built of loose stones, in the middle of the sermon, all fell down at once. I never saw, heard, nor read of such a thing before. The whole wall, and the persons sitting upon it, sunk down together, none of them screaming out, and very few altering their posture: And not one was hurt at all; but they appeared sitting at the bottom just as they sat at the top. Nor was there any interruption either of my speaking, or of the attention of the hearers.<sup>1</sup>

That is the kind of rapport that every preacher prays for every Sunday morning! Heaven for the pastor is when every person is seated at attention in place, face alert and happy, and the children just as riveted to the sermon as all the adults.

But, of course, it cannot be the preacher's Eden here on earth. At least, not quite yet, for "the devil is malicious and mean, more so than any of us can imagine, and he marauds constantly with the destructive intent."

And so we have Wesley, consequently, coming upon still another

audience that prompted this scrawl in his journal: "I preached in the church at Shoreham, morning and afternoon. The congregation seemed to understand just nothing of the matter."<sup>2</sup>

The Wesleys counted on grace to keep them up, regardless of the reactions of their listeners. After all, their first allegiance was not to popularity, but to the clear message of salvation through Jesus Christ. "Gradually barred from the pulpits of the Church of England, Charles and his brother became mass evangelists. Ironically, the message which had brought their exclusion won them an audience among the multitudes larger than any church could hold."

All sound preachers know that in the end only God truly understands all that is going on in the souls of the hearers. Consequently, with sermon content and delivery, we are bound only to be at our best for Him. All else is given over to the final judgment of God, as John Bunyan, the tinker of Bedford, concluded when he said: "I stirred up to wish for their salvation; and that these very souls have, after this, been given in as the fruits of my ministry. . . . Sometimes, when I have thought I did no good, then I did the most of all; and at other times, when I thought I should catch them, I have fished for nothing."

No doubt the humblest and most encouraging word picture coming from the various jottings of this preacher could be summed into the simple drawing of John Wesley at the close of one of his sermons: "Some who were laughing when I began, hid their faces soon, being ashamed to be seen in tears." 

1. Wesley, *Works* 2:55.

2. *Ibid.*, 34.

# Preaching and the Spiritual Development of Believers

by William Youngman

Professor,  
Mount Vernon Nazarene College,  
Mount Vernon, Ohio

**W**hat is the long-range goal of preaching in the pastorate? Presumably every pastor has some notion. But if we would become "useful preachers" and avoid the "tragedy of aimlessness," it is imperative that we have "some definite conception of our end or aim in preaching."<sup>1</sup>

This clarity of thought applies in two ways. First, we need a clear understanding regarding the responsibility of preaching given to the Church; and, second, the preacher needs a clear understanding of the purpose of each individual sermon. Both are essential for the spiritual development of the believer, but only the first will be considered here.

## PREACHING HAS FOUR ASPECTS

### *Evangelism*

Preaching as one of the responsibilities given to the Church is multifaceted. The most commonly identified aspect of preaching is that of evangelism. Many pastors would agree with Phillips Brooks that the purpose of preaching "is for man's salvation."<sup>2</sup> Probably few would disagree that Christian preaching has a *missionary task* in it.

The task of preaching as given to the Church, however, includes more than evangelism. Not only are we "to evangelize the spiritually detached, to bring them in," we are also "to identi-

fy the spiritually attached, to build them up."<sup>3</sup> J. B. Chapman once defined effective preaching in this threefold formula:

- I. Winning men to God.
- II. Establishing God's people in the doctrines of the gospel.
- III. To inspire and direct the Church in faith, unity and good works.<sup>4</sup>

Pastoral preaching especially "should carry people far beyond the starting point of the Christian life."<sup>5</sup>

### *Education*

Beyond this starting point, we find the other aspects of preaching essential for the spiritual development of the believer. One of these, education, is the foundation of spiritual development. This is the *theological task* of pastoral preaching.

Instruction in sound doctrine should always stand as a high priority in the pastor's preaching plan. Without a solid theological foundation for their lives, believers tend to put themselves at the center of their concerns and see God as pledging himself to be in their service. From this distorted perspective, spiritual maturity is neither desirable nor necessary. The church becomes a religious cushion, "a preaching station where Christians gather—to renew one's sense of well-being without having a serious encounter with the living God."<sup>6</sup> Providing a personal sense of well-being,

however, may not be a part of God's agenda for His people. I suspect that inviting persons to have a serious encounter with God himself leads His agenda. Solid theological education from the pulpit remains absolutely essential if spiritual development and stability are to take place in the pew.

### *Edification*

Another aspect, edification, is the *nurturing task* of pastoral preaching. In fact, it appears from Eph. 4:12 that the ministerial office in general is charged with the edification of the Body of Christ as one of its major responsibilities. When applied to persons, it implies the advancement of one's welfare or prosperity. When directed to the Christian community, it refers to the development of the inner spiritual life and thus the advancement of the work of God. "Always," says Barclay, "the work of the office bearer is construction and not destruction."<sup>7</sup>

### *Equipping*

The fourth aspect in preaching is equipping. This is the *ministry task* of pastoral preaching. Nonbelievers need to be evangelized, but believers need to be educated in the theology of the Christian faith, edified by the hope and promises of the Christian faith, and equipped for service that demonstrates the Christian faith.

Every Christian has a calling to do

ministry. Every official position has a responsibility to equip the believers for ministry. This equipping task, however, often gets overshadowed by any or all of the other three tasks. Yet involvement in ministry remains crucial for Christian identity, authenticity, and maturity. Donald Messer reminds us that ministry

is God's gift, not first of all to the individual, but to the community of faith, who in turn chooses who should represent it in leadership roles. The Church is ministry. Its *raison d'être* is service to the world. There is no other reason for the Church to exist.<sup>8</sup>

Pastoral preaching that equips the people of God for the service of God helps them recognize that the street, not the sanctuary, is the real place of ministry. This preaching for equipping focuses on the believer's calling more than his personal concerns.

Preaching that equips for ministry stands as the ultimate purpose of pastoral preaching. Preaching that focuses on evangelism, education, or edification reach toward this end. God calls all of His people to serve as light and witness to the nations. He calls pastors to equip them for this mighty work of service.

The spiritual development of the believer focuses on the long-range responsibility of preaching. That development needs theological instruction, nurturing support, and ministry expression. By helping the saints to know, to hope, and to serve, pastors will function as useful preachers. ¶

1. Paul M. Bull, *Lectures on Preaching and Sermon Construction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1923), 53, 60.

2. Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., n.d.), 32.

3. Arthur A. Cowan, *The Primacy of Preaching Today* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 23.

4. James B. Chapman, *The Preaching Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1949), 68-74.

5. Cowan, *The Primacy of Preaching Today*, 25.

6. C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 20.

7. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* 2nd ed., in *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 176.

8. Donald E. Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 64.

# Sunday Evening Visitor

by Lewis Clark

Freelance writer, Yakima, Wash.

**F**ive-forty-five, a parking lot, cars without faces.

An inviting foyer with multiple sanctuary entry points.

Door number one, preoccupied greeters.

Number two, unattended entry for Middle-aged man escorting elderly woman.

A group of women, uninterrupted conversation.

Quickly scanning,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Five-fifty, faces without names.

A young couple practice a song as More faces without names drift past.

Occasional glances our way,  
Some are familiar faces from past settings.

Silent greetings, people milling about.

Quietly waiting,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Five-fifty-five, five rows ahead to the left,

An older woman rises and comes our way.

"Welcome, my name is Mrs. Walsh."

Delivered with warmth and interest.

In return, "Hello, I'm visiting from out of town," and

"This is my mother visiting from a local nursing home."

Silence broken,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Five-fifty-nine, many people; do they wonder who we are?

Mrs. Walsh, a face with a name, she reached out.

Who are the others,  
Sunday evening visitors?

Those familiar faces, what are they thinking?

At a distance, friends. Do they notice?

Service begins,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Six-fifteen or so, a time of greeting. Mostly friends greeting friends.

In front and from behind, two more names,

One a familiar face.

Memory had faded, but he remembered my look.

Reminded, we took our seats.

Quiet again,

Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Six-thirty; "Turn to Revelation chapter 12, please.

Vivid imagery, a vision captured by John.

Satan attacks, God's provision prevails.

Having problems with sin or Satan's ploys?

Tell him that Jesus is your Counselor.

Victory is ours, Satan is swallowed up!

A good message,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Seven or so, an invitation, listen to the Spirit.

Standing now, the foyer and parking lot a goal.

Wait, Steve and his friend, Esther Lane, are headed our way.

Handshakes and hugs . . .

Esther resides in the same nursing home.

Steve and Esther,

Reflecting God's love.

Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit.

Seven-thirty, parking lot in rear-view mirror.

Who were those people standing about?

Did they know we were Christians?

What if we were looking for a church home?

A middle-aged man and his elderly mother.

"Thank You, Lord, for Mrs. Walsh, Steve, and Esther."

Sunday evening visitor,  
Fifth row from the back,  
Safe place to sit. ¶

# Listening—an Important Ministry of Healing

by Victor M. Parachin

Ordained minister and counselor,  
Virginia Beach, Va.

Recently a study was conducted by Dr. Lyman K. Steil, professor of rhetoric at the University of Minnesota, to determine how well people really listen. Participants were asked to sit through a 10-minute or shorter presentation.

Questioned 48 hours after hearing a speaker, Dr. Steil was shocked by the results. He discovered that most people understood and retained only 25 percent of what they heard. Also, the speaker's ideas were seriously distorted by the audience.

While listening is a vastly underrated ability, pastors, Christian educators, and other spiritual leaders know that listening is a powerful skill that can help heal hurting people. Here are 10 suggestions for improving and deepening listening skills.

## Evaluate Your Listening Habits

Don't carelessly assume you are a good listener. Examine yourself and your listening style. Dr. Steil urges people to evaluate current listening habits in order to strengthen them. He suggests asking yourself the following questions:

1. Who are the best and the worst listeners I know?
2. What makes them that way?
3. Which traits do I recognize in myself?
4. What do I share with a good listener?

5. What do I have in common with a bad listener?

Basically the goal in this exercise is to minimize weakness and maximize strength. Another suggestion: Invite someone whose opinion you trust to describe you in terms of listening skills.

## Say Very Little

William Shakespeare preceded modern psychological insights when

he wrote: "Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice." Like Shakespeare, professional counselors know that the one who is hurting should be allowed to do the most talking. This was Job's lament about his talkative, judgmental friends. In an angry outburst, Job demands: "Keep silent and let me speak" (13:13.)

In *How to Help a Friend*, counselor Paul Welter says that "a response no longer than 12 seconds is

usually an effective length in a counseling or helping situation." Twelve seconds permits you to respond with one or two carefully chosen sentences, about 25 words. "If our responses are long, then the focus is taken off the person we are trying to help, and the helping process is slowed down," says Welter.

## Remember the Goal of Listening

Understanding is the goal of all listening. People come alive when they feel understood and accepted by another person. Famous psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger observed: "Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward, and we want to sit in their radius. When we are lis-



tened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand."

Dr. Menninger further explains how this awareness affected his own relationships: "Before I discovered this, when I went to a party I would think anxiously: 'Now try hard, be lively.' But now I tell myself to listen with affection to anyone who talks to me. This person is showing me his soul. It is a little dry and meager and full of grinding talk just now, but soon he will begin to think. He will show his true self, will be wonderfully alive."

#### *Make the Speaker Comfortable*

Because listening requires complete attention, make the speaker comfortable by eliminating all distractions. Turn off your phone, offer coffee, close a door, lower a shade to ensure privacy, direct the person to a comfortable chair. All these things tell a speaker that you are intensely interested in what she has to say, and you want her to be comfortable as she speaks.

#### *Empathize*

Interject short sentences that show your understanding, empathy, and acceptance. Some excellent statements of response include: "That must cause you a lot of pain"; "I'm sure that was frightening"; "That must be hard to accept." Statements like that deliver comfort and convey your compassion. This advice from the Book of Proverbs is worth keeping in mind: "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (25:11).

#### *Withhold Judgment*

Usually when people seek out a friendly ear, they are already hurting. Judgment only deepens their pain. On the other hand, acceptance eases pain because the person feels he or she has a friend who cares enough simply to listen and not pass judgment. Alan Loy McGinnis is a minister and counselor in private practice. In his book *The Friendship Factor*, he stresses the importance of listening and makes a healthy distinction between acceptance and approval:

Much of the material I hear in my office is in conflict with my own moral code: accounts of extramarital affairs, plans that do not seem wise, and crimes of every sort. If I felt compelled to render an opinion about all these matters and to protest when the patient is

doing something wrong, I'd be putting myself in the place of God. I've learned that without approving or disapproving of what patients tell me, I can show that I accept them simply by listening.

#### *Avoid Advising*

Be careful about problem solving too quickly. Psychotherapist Doris Wild Helmering calls this approach a "communication blocker." In her book *Happily Ever After*, she describes one scenario: "A classic example is the fellow who comes home from work and says, 'I'm exhausted. I must have had 20 phone calls today plus the usual. And everybody expects immediate action.' To which his wife says, 'Why don't you quit that job? It's not worth the hassle.'"



People come  
alive when they  
feel understood  
and accepted by  
another person.



"This husband now has two problems. Not only does he feel wrung out from the day's events, but now he must defend his job. All this husband needed was to be able to complain a little and get some sympathy. Everybody needs time to talk, to complain, to moan and groan, and to be listened to. So be careful that you give your spouse this kind of time," she says.

#### *Verify and Clarify*

Never fake it. If you don't understand something, ask about it. Here are some effective statements of clarification:

1. I'm not sure I understand you. Did you mean this . . . ?
2. Here is what I hear you saying. Am I correct?
3. When you say that, do you mean . . . ?

4. What you just said is important. Help me understand.

Seeking verification and clarification lets a speaker know you care enough to truly understand what he or she is saying and feeling.

#### *Listen for What Is Not Said*

Good listeners "hear" the meaning behind the words. They maintain an awareness of body language and emotions along with spoken words. Writer Raphael Marie Turnbull eloquently praises a friend who has exceptional listening skills:

She listens when I talk, but more than that, she always hears me. She hears the subtle shading in my voice that tells her what my words do not. She catches feelings, carefully concealed behind words, and understands. She is my friend, and so she doesn't damage my hurt pride by pointing out my frailties. She simply says a thoughtful word or two, and suddenly I'm able to accept, to speak aloud my worries and embarrassments. I talk to her, and as I do, my confidence returns.

#### *Let the Speaker Conclude*

The most effective listening sessions last approximately an hour. Listeners become oversaturated if a session goes too much longer. Also, the speaker tends to begin rambling and repeating himself or herself after 60 minutes. As you see the time approaching and as the speaker begins to wind down, pause and ask: "Is there anything else you want to share?"

Although the speaker may add a few more sentences, generally she will terminate and thank you for listening. By asking that question, you allow the speaker to have the final word and are thereby assured the important points have been covered this time around.

Finally, by listening well, you strengthen friendship and deepen intimacy. This happens because listening shows that you care enough to respond to human hurt. In the book *Out of Solitude*, writer Henri Nouwen says, "When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand." ✦

# Dealing with Difficult People

by James L. Wilson

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Baptist Church,  
Turlock, Calif.*

**I**t felt like I was hit in the stomach with a sledgehammer. A trusted church member walked into my office and said: "Jim, I need to talk to you. Your preaching has been going downhill lately." It was not unusual for Bruce to give me feedback on my performance. He was that kind of person. But never had his comments affected me like this. He reached into his pocket and deliberately pulled out a list of complaints. I knew we were in for a long session.

## Difficult Situations

Bruce, a retired captain from the military, came to our church when he discovered he had terminal cancer. Every six months he would make an appointment to talk to me. I often felt like a sergeant at a periodic review meeting. In the beginning, I hated these meetings. But with time, I came to look forward to our "talks," knowing Bruce would say something that would help me improve.

After listening to Bruce, I understood his complaint. He loved my evangelistic preaching; I was preaching a discipleship series. His imminent death made heaven seem a day away. He wanted others to hear the gospel and respond to Jesus. Christian growth sermons seemed far less important to him than the salvation of the lost. I showed him my sermon calendar and explained where this series fit in with the year's scheme. He understood.

The best way for me to deal with a difficult situation is to not get defensive, but to listen. It is difficult for a professional speaker to listen. Every Sunday people gather to hear what I have to say. Sometimes I forget that in counseling, people want to be heard, not hear a sermon. Listening is more than a pause from speaking. It is not an opportunity to "reload my

mind so that I can shoot off my mouth." It is an opportunity to understand what the speaker is conveying. I need to listen with empathy.

Bruce and I addressed the issue behind the problem. I listened to him. He listened to me. As a compromise, we agreed that I needed to continue to preach Christian growth sermons, but to end them with an evangelistic invitation. His suggestions made my sermons better.

## Difficult People

Helen, a new member of the church, seemed pushy. Within a month of joining our church, she came into my office with a list of demands for changes in the nursery. Her suggestions seemed reasonable. I appreciated her bringing the deficiencies to my attention. We made the changes. I thought that was the end of the matter. What I did not know at the time is that she boasted to the nursery workers about how fast she was able to get things done. They resented the implication that she was able to do what they could not do for themselves. Her gloating caused major discontentment among the nursery employees. As a result of the conflict, one resigned.

The next week, my secretary walked into my office on a "Do not disturb" day. She said, "I just got off the phone with Helen. She is very upset about a decision the church council made last night. She says we don't care about missions because we are not promoting the Easter Offering. She wants to talk to you."

A flash of anger seized me. I thought, Who does she think she is to question the council. She has no right! I was beginning to understand that she wanted our church to fit the mold of her church back east.

When I returned Helen's call concerning the council meeting, I could not hear a word she was saying. I immediately became defensive and outraged at her suggestion that the church council is not sensitive to missions. I perceived that she would be at my office door with a new challenge each week. She drew a line in the sand; and I crossed it!

My meeting with Bruce ended with a handshake and a smile. My conversation with Helen ended with her yelling at me and slamming her phone down on the receiver. What made the difference? With Bruce, there were plenty of difficult situations, but he was not a difficult person. There is the difference! Difficult situations can be resolved. Difficult people can never be satisfied.

The conflict with Helen escalated in the coming months. She was vocal about her discontent with me and the church. She launched a phone campaign, complaining to whoever would listen. She whispered in the halls and yelled in business meetings. She attacked every authority figure, and she drew blood.

She consumed my schedule. If I wasn't listening to her complain about the church, I was listening to church leaders complain about her. I met with her husband on a couple of occasions to see if we could resolve the problems. He decided that we all needed to sit down together. So we scheduled a meeting.

The meeting was emotional. We confronted the issues and wept. Nothing was resolved. She stressed that we needed to change for her to stay. I wished them Godspeed as I showed her the door. They left the church for good.

In thinking about my conflict with

Helen, I have made some promises to myself about how I will deal with antagonists in the future.

**I won't be paralyzed by negative feelings.** The conflict with Helen seemed never-ending. For weeks I had problems sleeping. The unpleasant conversations whirled through my head night and day. Finally, I had to confront the demons within. I could not let this event hold me hostage. What will I say to her next time I see her? Will her husband be upset with me for speaking so frankly with her? Will they leave the church and go somewhere else? After a time of struggling, I decided that I had beat myself up enough. I needed to get on with my life and enjoy the positive things around me.

**I will stay in control of my time.** Some people in the church I will never want to spend a lot of time with. I need to keep a balance between avoiding and courting those people. I can never decide not to minister to a person, but I can decide not to spend free time with him. I can keep conversations professional, but brief. My schedule is a major consideration. I can control my time by scheduling meetings at my convenience, for set lengths of time, and at a reasonable frequency.

**I will like myself regardless of others' opinions of me.** In the past, I tried to curry favor with the problem person. I thought, if he only knew me, he would like me and would stop causing problems. It never works. Troublesome people are not an irritant because they don't like me. They are troublesome because they don't like themselves. I will focus on my supporters, not on my enemies. For every person who opposes me, there are many more that support me.

**I will act, not react.** For six months, Helen called the shots. She acted; I reacted. Next time I won't wait for the sore to fester. I will confront it quickly and decisively. Confrontation is less painful than being attacked. My passive approach hurt others who were caught in the crossfire.

Now that Helen is gone, all is not peaceful. There will always be difficult ministry situations and difficult people in the church. I pray that the Lord will give the wisdom to know the difference between the two and the strength of character to minister in the midst of difficulty. †

# When My Best Friend Is Grieving

by John Power III  
Chaplain, Winchester, Oreg.

**I** have counseled many people who feel at a loss concerning what to say or do when a loved one or a friend of someone close dies. Hopefully, this will help you feel at ease with your friends and family during the losses of loved ones.

Go to them, not saying too much, for words get in the way of grief.

Go to see them *now*. *Don't wait*. Your visit says to them, "I care"; "I love you"; "I have been touched"; "I want to be with you."

Go to see them and sit with them. Comfort is being present with or alongside the persons who now hurt. "I have come to be with you." That means spending time, crying, and holding.

Go to *visit* them, not to cheer them or try to change their feelings. There may be laughter *and* tears. Be comfortable with both. Don't run away from tears. Tears and joy are both part of our lives.

Go to your friend's home and help by just listening to them tell the story of their loss "200" times. Because the 201st time may help them make sense of their loved one's death. This is how people come to grips with old roles and new roles. One widow said to me, "I suppose I'll cope, all right, but I do not want to be pushed or fussed over. I have a new role. I want the

old one and cannot imagine the next one."

Go to their house, not with promises but in love acting. *Don't ask*, "If there is anything I can do . . ." Find something. Open your eyes and ask, "Can I do the dishes, wash the clothes, iron clothes, make beds, sweep floors, help answer the phone, take messages, watch the children, drive to the store and do some shopping, mow the lawn, etc.?" Your friends or family members may have a day's work just getting out of a chair answering the door and sitting down again. This may be all that they can do for several weeks. So be sensitive. See what needs to be done, and do it with their permission.

Go to their house, especially after the funeral is over. This means during the next week after the burial, after the family has left, and other friends have left. The home is quiet. Memories flood their minds and hearts. Real grief sets in after all the ceremony and people are gone.

Go when your heart says to go to see your friends. Stay as long as your heart says to stay. Help as long as they need your help. Usually your friends will let you know when they are ready to reinvest in the land of the living.

May God bless you as you reach out to love your friends and neighbors. †

# Reaching Inactives: Four Simple Steps That Really Work

**I** was once an inactive church member. Now through the humorous grace of God, I teach clergy and lay leaders how to minister to inactive members instead.

In my lectures I frequently ask, "How many of you are fairly certain you will never drop out of church at some point in the future?" Invariably almost all the hands go up. Everyone thinks, It will never happen to me.

That's what I used to believe too. But it did happen to me, and given the right set of circumstances, anyone can end up an inactive member.

Once gone, whether because of guilt, pain, anger, or shame, many of these individuals cannot make their way back to church under their own power. They need help from their church family to find their way home again.

From personal experience, as well as my work with Kenneth Haugk, author of *Reopening the Back Door*, I have learned four simple steps for reaching inactive members.

The first of these steps is to GREET people. Don't avoid inactive members when you encounter them by chance. Once sensitized to the problem of inactivity, you will notice inactive members everywhere: in stores, at parties, and at community events.

Welcome these opportunities to say hello, and feel free to ask the person how he or she has been. But absolutely *do not* discuss the topic of church unless the individual mentions it first. Simply be warm, cordial, and caring.

On the other hand, perhaps there is a particular person you want to help, but chance hasn't brought you together. If so, then the second step is to MEET. Arrange a convenient time to see the inactive person, to invite the individual to your home for a meal, or to meet for coffee.



by Marilyn D. Brenden

*Schoolteacher, Christian writer and speaker, Silverton, Oreg.*

Do use common-sense social courtesy and not drop in on an inactive member unannounced, particularly if you are a clergyperson or a member of a calling committee. Your unanticipated visit will make the individual feel pressured and on the defensive.

When you do meet with inactive individuals, Haugk advises that you make caring for the person, rather than the inactivity, the focus of your visit. A results-oriented approach that treats inactivity as *the* problem is counterproductive, because inactivity is most frequently an outgrowth of deeper issues.

Therefore, to help the inactive person, you need to get at root problems by listening rather than lecturing. As the inactive person shares his or her story, don't be surprised if the individual expresses strong feelings of anger and hurt. Recognize that strong emotions in an inactive person are like accumulations of garbage that need to be dumped in order to clean out the soul. An empathetic listener can do much to help the inactive person let go of the past.

The next step is to REPEAT. In other words, continue to meet with the inactive person on a regular basis. Underlying the decision to drop out is often the unconscious question, "Does anyone, does the church, care

about me?" If you meet with the inactive person only a time or two and then conclude it would be of no further use to visit, you have confirmed the fear of the inactive individual that no one does care.

But by faithfully continuing to see the person with no pressure on your part for a resumption of church involvement, the person will begin to feel that he or she matters to you, to the church, and to God as well. Your unconditional love becomes a strong magnet that attracts inactive people and renews in them a desire to experience the full fellowship of the congregation once again.

Their return leads to your final step, which is to COMPLETE. Do your whole job. Complete the process. Just because the person has made that first anxious visit back to church, do not conclude that your mission is accomplished. It's difficult for the inactive person to adjust to the changes, to deal with that lost segment of congregational history, and to establish relationships once again.

Until the person has found at least half a dozen friends in the congregation and has become a part of a group within the church, your role must continue. Since this reentry process cannot be rushed faster than the progress of the inactive person's healing, the individual may well need you as a primary friend in the congregation for a year or longer.

"You can be 100% successful in inactive member ministry," Haugk says, and that is true, as we learn to measure the success of our ministry by how effectively we have cared for the person. It is time to put away the unhealthy measuring stick of statistical rates of return and simply make loving these people our aim. You, their faithful, caring friend, and God's unconditional love are the remedies that really work. 

# The Pastor's Price for Church Growth

**F**or two reasons the growth-oriented pastor should *not* accept a small church pastorate.

First, the church may be in a context that has little growth potential. Few communities are over-churched, but some small and/or declining areas may have little or no growth potential. The small core of believers in that church do not need a frustrated go-getter. They need a loving pastor who can help them either maintain or die with dignity. That church needs a pastor who is a shepherd, who is fulfilled through providing pastoral care. If growth is important to you, be sure you know that there is growth potential *before* you accept the call to that local congregation.

Second, the church must never be used as a stepping-stone to "greater things" or as a "proving ground." Jesus did not use people; He served them. My recommendation to those who desire to grow a church, but who are wise enough to know that they have much to learn, is to seek out a position as an associate pastor in a growing church. Be honest about your desire to be a short-term associate, knowing that most associates stay less than three years. Be willing to accept a lower wage scale than most associates receive if this is necessary. I observe that most associates receive a better income than most small church pastors. So accept starting at the salary level that a small church would pay. The young pastor will learn more about growth as an associate in a growing church than as the pastor of a struggling church. If your goal is to learn and then move on after two or three years, seek to become an intentional short-term associate.

Most first-time pastors make so many mistakes in their first pastorates that they feel the need to move after two or three years. Does it not make

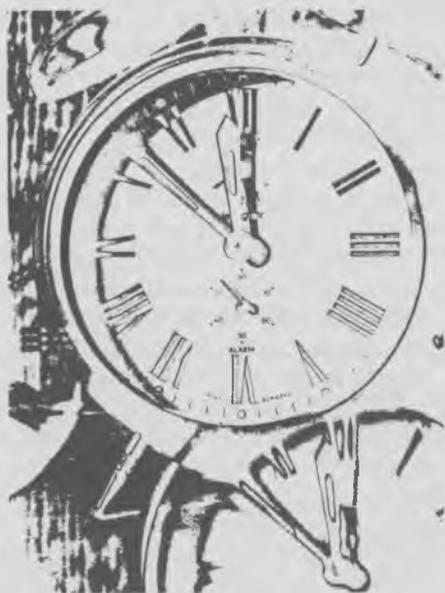


by Kim L. Richardson

Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene,  
Framingham, Mass.

sense to enter your first ministry experience with this understanding and find a place where you can learn and minimize the mistakes?

What about those of us who are called to accept the challenge of turning the small church around? The heart of the price we must pay is *time*. If you expect to accomplish this goal in two or three years, you are being unrealistic. Sullivan's excellent book, *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier*, is accurate in saying that we should seek to reach 300 in three years.<sup>1</sup> These numbers assume a be-



ginning point of over 100 in attendance with a pastor who has already been with the church for a period of time. It is my conviction that a church of 35 to 75 in morning worship attendance can grow to 100 to 150+ over a seven-year period and *maintain* that growth if you, the pastor, will stay with the people. In fact, once you are averaging over 100, you may be able to challenge the people to break the 200 barrier over the next three years as Sullivan suggests.

My observation is that a three-to-five-year pastorate will often bring numerical gains to the small church, but these gains will be lost if there is a pastoral change. In years five to seven or more the assimilation of newer believers and/or necessary structural changes to the church organization are accepted so that gains become long-term, even if a pastoral change occurs. This tendency to fall back to the old ways if we release too soon is illustrated as follows by Maner.

A story is told about old John, who was a cotton farmer like his father and grandfather before him. One day John went to the bank to borrow the money with which to do his planting.

He was told by the banker, "John, the bank can't let you have any more money. You have lost money every year. The mortgage now is more than the farm is worth."

John asked, "What am I going to do? I can't plant without that loan."

"I am sorry," the banker told him, "but the board met and said you would have to get your money from some other source. Go and see what you can do. Stop back by here late this afternoon."

Old John went all over the little town with no success. Late in the afternoon, just before closing time, he went back to the bank and told his sad story.

"John, I'll tell you what we are go-

ing to do. The bank board said that if you will do exactly what we say for the next few years, we will finance you," declared the banker.

Not having much choice, old John agreed. He was told that he would have to plant peanuts and soybeans instead of cotton. The first year was a good year. The second was even better. In about four years John went back to the bank to see how things were coming along.

"John, I have some good news for you," the banker exclaimed. "You are out of debt and on your own."



## The heart of the price we must pay is *time*.



John stood there, hardly able to believe what he was hearing. "You mean I am free of debt and on my own?" he queried. "Thank the Lord; now I can go back to planting cotton."<sup>2</sup>

Schaller writes that the most effective years for leadership in most pastorates are years 5 through 14.<sup>3</sup> Why leave just before you reach your most effective years?

Small churches want lovers for pastors. If you do not take time to love the people and gain their trust, it's over before it begins. Ask yourself, "Why should these people trust me? Have they had a series of short pastorates? Why should I be different? Am I young enough to be their son or daughter? Why should they seek my wisdom? Did the former pastor announce big plans, get the people firmly committed, and then move on? Will I?" Look at yourself from their point of view.

I have observed new pastors coming into new churches with great excitement, only to find a sea of doubting Thomases. Through extraordinary effort, the pastor begins to win the confidence of the people, but he or she is gradually becoming discouraged by their lack of response. Just as

the people are beginning to believe, "This one may be different," the pastor resigns in frustration and disappointment. The people say—mostly to themselves, "We knew it!"

Crandell and Sells argue that the members of small churches are so busy making relational adjustments to new pastors every two or three years that they have no energy for outreach or vision.<sup>4</sup> If this observation is true, then it may be unrealistic to expect the longer-term members to respond to our leadership in less than three years. Put bluntly, we pastors must *prove* our love.

Brief pastorates do *not* grow churches. Long pastorates do not guarantee growth, but very few churches grow without long pastorates.<sup>5</sup>

We pastors tend to blame God when we change churches. We say, "I have enjoyed my ministry here. I thank you for the privilege, but I have received a call to another church. I believe it is God's will for me to accept this call." What we do not say is that we are frustrated by the lack of growth here, that the new church is a little bigger, pays a little more, and seems to have more potential. Generally speaking, we pastors lack patience and persistence. We want instant results. I call it "Vending Machine Mentality." We want to put in the money, pull a lever, and get the desired results. When the "machine" seems to take our coin and gives nothing, we kick, scream, and pound. Some patience and minor adjustments would get much better results.

Think about this question: What if you stayed into years five to seven or more? Remembering that 50% of all Protestant churches are under 75 in morning worship, I submit that by year seven, where you are now would be bigger, pay more, and have more potential than approximately 75% of the churches who might be interested in calling you. I am not just theorizing. This has happened in my own experience. I am convinced that longer pastorates are *one* of the keys to turning the small church around, to building the Kingdom, and to finding fulfillment in our pastoral ministries.

There are other prices to pay. C. Peter Wagner lists six in his article "The Cost of Church Growth."

1. The willingness to work hard.
2. The willingness to supplement inadequate training.
3. The willingness to put leadership on the line.
4. The willingness to share leadership via delegation and involving others in key roles.
5. The willingness to have members who others pastor.
6. The willingness to stick it out.<sup>6</sup>

I agree with the above and others that would be added, such as the willingness to pray and the willingness to function on an inadequate salary. But let's concentrate on Wagner's list.



## The most effective years for leadership in most pastorates are years 5 through 14.



"Sticking it out" and hard work are givens for any pastor who wants to make a difference, no matter the size of the church. Let's look at other aspects.

Supplementing inadequate training is vital. Your formal training may not have prepared you to understand and grow a small church. In fact, good theology and biblical studies, though vital, do not necessarily help us understand how to turn a church around. Many orthodox, deeply committed pastors and churches are going nowhere evangelistically. It is important to read, attend seminars, and possibly extend your education in areas vital to understanding how churches function, how they grow, and how you, the pastor, can lead them forward for God.

The willingness to lead raises the shepherd/rancher or chaplain/leader dichotomy that has been discussed by several authors. Small churches hire chaplain/shepherds who will preach,

pray, and care for them. He is expected to perform duties more than provide vision. But growing churches need rancher/leaders—senior pastors who make sure “duties” are performed by laymen or staff—whose main desire is to broaden the boundaries of the “ranch” and bring more sheep into the fold.



I am convinced  
that longer  
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around.



In my present pastorate I have adopted a rancher approach to ministry, but the tradition of my church is a shepherd tradition. My approach has already been interpreted by some as a lack of caring. Indeed, many laymen *will* resist this approach. But, let's concentrate on the pastor's willingness to share leadership. Ranchers have no problem doing so, but shepherds do. If you are a person who must be personally present to provide ministry, then the growth potential of your church will be limited. Depending on your skills and charisma, your church will peak at 65, 85, 100, 125, or maybe even 150 persons. If you presently average 40, then all of these would be excellent growth records for a 7- to 10-year period. The problem is that you will peak out. You will only be able to care for new sheep by neglecting the old ones; one or the other will soon stray.

If you cannot pay the price of leading by sharing ministry, then do not frustrate yourself. Accept this limitation and seek a means to be evangelistically effective within the limits of your personality. Perhaps you should concentrate on moving churches

from 35 to 75 persons or initiating completely new works. Walrath notes, “Those who minister well and are happy in small churches rarely are as happy or effective when they move to larger churches.”<sup>7</sup>

One more issue concerns accepting leadership. “As a pastor earns leadership rights, there must be a willingness to use that leadership, to *risk* that leadership, to *put it on the line* at times, to *use the power* that has been earned and given. Some want to be loved so much that they fail to act when strong, decisive leadership is demanded.”<sup>8</sup>

Shepherds are trained to love, and they want to be loved. That is all right until we interpret love as being weak-willed. Love can, and at times should, be tough. If you have paid the price of earning the people's trust and respect by sticking with the church through thick and thin, then pick your fights carefully, but be willing to fight.

I remember the frustration of the first two years in my previous pastorate. The church was in debt, attendance was declining, and few were coming to Christ. In the midst of that, I received an invitation to consider a very promising position in the denomination. It took little time or prayer to say no. My ministry had only begun. To leave, despite my desires to do so at times, would have been premature. After more than 10 years, I did leave to go to a far less prestigious call. However, I left behind a healthy, growing congregation as well as other new church plants. This could not have happened without sacrifice and paying the price of time. I do not share the above to evoke pity or appreciation—only to encourage you to pay whatever price God calls you to pay. The victory comes *after* the sacrifice. 

1. Bill M. Sullivan, *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 36.

2. Robert E. Maner, *Making the Small Church Grow* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1982), 92-93.

3. C. Wayne Zunkel, *Growing the Small Church* (Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1982), 49.

4. Ronald K. Grandell and L. Ray Sells, *There's New Life in the Small Congregation!* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1983), 68.

5. Lyle E. Schaller, *Growing Plans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 19.

6. Zunkel, *Growing the Small Church*, 44.

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

8. Zunkel, *Growing the Small Church*, 49.

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# Thirteen Ways to Minister to Visitors to Your Church

by Wanda Vassalo

Freelance writer, Dallas

I glanced over the page again. It certainly said all the right things. Nice words. Words like *love, welcome, family of God, caring*. It was a full-page ad. Not cheap—even at the rate offered to churches.

“Maybe we ought to go there Sunday,” I told my husband, handing him the newspaper. “Sounds OK. Might as well,” he agreed.

After several years of attending the same church week in and week out, it was not easy being an outsider looking for a church home. Just deciding where to look next was a real challenge. We had determined to keep an open mind. That decision led us to all kinds of churches—from large ones to those tiny in size and everything in between, denominational, nondenominational, racially mixed, congregations of a race other than ours, churches in our neighborhood, and on and on.

Sunday morning we eagerly drove into the parking lot. The church owned a beautiful, well-maintained building. Lovely flowers were on the Communion table. The organist played well. The choir, though small, was really quite good. The pastor was an excellent speaker, and his message was timely. We left—resolved never to return again.

“Are you sure that’s the church in the ad?” my husband queried. We still were dutifully wearing our “Visitor” tags removed from the visitor cards we had filled out. Not a single person had spoken to us. One woman almost returned my smile, but several others looked at us coldly as though we were intruders in their church. “They surely wasted their money on that ad,” I pointed out. “I wonder if they could be charged with false advertising. I think that’s what is known as the cold shoulder.” I lapped up the warm, bright sunshine, feeling as if I

had been trapped inside a Deep-freeze the past hour and a half. The next week passed without any response to the visitor’s card we had obediently completed and placed in the offering plate.

One pastor sent us an audiotape, thanking us by name for visiting his church and inviting us back. That was a rather nice, personal touch, since I had a tape recorder handy. But I am not sure I would have gone to the trouble of tracking down a recorder if one had not been readily available. The next thing we heard from that church, though, was an ardent appeal for money. And, several months later, we still are getting dramatic pleas.

One Sunday morning we ventured to go to a rapidly growing church in our area. We arrived early for the second service. We had to stand outside for several minutes; and when we got into the vestibule, the first service had just been dismissed. We were caught in the crush of people making their way into and out of the church simultaneously. Finally inside the church, we wandered up and down the aisles, trying to find two seats together. Some of the people sitting near empty seats seemed to be telling us in no uncertain terms that “Those seats are saved!” Finally we sank into chairs on different rows, feeling as though we had been in the crush of a \$1.00 clearance sale for \$100 items. We decided we just were not up to that kind of confusion.

After visiting another large church, we received a phone call from one of the members. He thanked me for visiting and expressed a genuine interest in us as individuals. He asked if we had any prayer needs and prayed for me over the phone. That was much appreciated. He also asked if we would like to receive the church bulletin so that we would know what was going on at their church.

A Sunday evening solo trek to a medium-sized church proved to be a warm experience. I was greeted at the front door by the pastor; and before I got inside the church, two other people had warmly shaken hands and welcomed me. Two members came over and introduced themselves before the service began; and afterward, several others spoke. I felt at home. I was blessed, and these members made me feel as though my presence was a blessing to them. Here was a church that really had its act together about how to make an outsider feel welcome.

I read a newspaper article or saw an ad about most of the churches we visited. Others I heard about on a Christian radio station’s bulletin board type of program. A few we visited at the suggestion of a friend or just because we had driven by the church several times and wondered what it was like.

We were determined to find the “right church.” But I cannot help but wonder how many others in a like situation and with similar discouraging experiences have given up and added their names to the roster of church dropouts. And what about those frigid congregations and ministers who might have been instrumental in causing their brother and sister to stumble?

Based on my nomadic adventure of being a stranger in the pews of dozens of churches and several years of experience as a church director of communications, here are a baker’s dozen of practical suggestions for conveying to visitors in your church the message of Eph. 2:19, KJV: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

1. *Put yourself in the place of the visitor.*

Realize that person may be new in

the community or briefly in your city. He also may be bruised and hurting or seeking for God one last time before deciding there's no use. Whatever the situation, going to a new place among strangers makes most people feel rather ill at ease and self-conscious. It's almost like going on a blind date: you are risking the unknown—wondering how you are going to like the other person and what your blind date will think of you. Regardless of their reason for coming, your church has a responsibility to demonstrate the love of Christ to visitors and to make them feel welcome.

*2. Position at the front door an outgoing, enthusiastic greeter—one who makes everyone from the first-time attendee to the grouchiest member feel welcome.*

This person should be thoroughly familiar with the congregation and able to spot a visitor immediately. The right man or woman in this spot can convince newcomers that "Hey, we're glad you're here" and make them feel glad they came as well.

*3. Have the greeter give the visitor a visitor's card and request that he or she complete it and hand it to an usher.*

The visitor's card should contain the usual information, such as address, church affiliation, number and ages of children. Also helpful is to ask what prompted the person's visit. The visitor's answer can be useful in determining the effectiveness of different types of advertising approaches.

*4. Have the greeter give the visitor any literature available on the church, such as a brochure or a current newsletter.*

These give the visitor something to do while waiting for the service to begin and provide useful information on the programs and activities of the church. A visitor may see details about the activities of a certain program, such as a drama group or a children's choir, that may spark a special interest for that person or a family member.

*5. Have the usher bring the visitors' cards to the pulpit and greet the visitors (if there are not too many) by name during the announcements.*

Stating where they are from indicates a personal interest in them and may help church members in striking

up a conversation with them after the service.

*6. Make sure the visitors get to shake hands and chat with the pastor either before or after the service.*

Everyone wants to get acquainted with the pastor and see what that person is like once he steps out from behind the pulpit.

*7. Send the visitors a personalized letter the following week.*

This can be a form letter that is already run off with the person's name skillfully typed in to match, or if you have a word processor or computer, so much the better. A nice touch is a postscript with a personal word, handwritten by the pastor.

*8. Train a cadre of people to make personal phone calls later that week to get acquainted and to determine the interest of visitors in your church.*

Demonstrate attention without being pushy.

*9. Place the visitors' names on your mailing list for newsletters and special announcements about programs and activities—but not for frantic pleas for money.*

*10. After a person has visited, call on him or her if at all possible, or assign someone to be a special church friend to help determine that person's needs and interests.*

Even though visitors might have a desire to become a part of your fellowship, they often have difficulty in finding their special niche for involvement and service. This is especially true in a large church unless someone takes a personal interest and helps match talents and interests with programs and opportunities available in the church.

We visited one rather large church for about three months. The pastor was always friendly to us. He talked a lot from the pulpit about love and about how special each person was. We made some tentative thrusts at fitting into this church but could not seem to find a comfortable spot. We left. Apparently no one noticed. However, we did receive an invitation to their fund-raising dinner. The lasting message we received was that no one was interested in us as individuals, just our pocketbook.

*11. Stress to the congregation the importance of each member being friendly and welcoming visitors.*

Members all too easily can fall into the habit of talking only among themselves and ignoring the newcomer. Encourage them to not only speak to visitors but to introduce them to other members and include them in their conversational group. Creating a warm atmosphere for strangers will become a reality instead of just a nice idea only when members assume their responsibility in this area. The pastor and other staff members simply cannot do it without the support and participation of the members. Asking members how they would treat Jesus if He walked into a service might be useful in dramatizing the importance of their actions and attitudes. Realizing that we hold in our hands the reputation of our local church and also of Jesus should motivate us to reach out in His love to each person who ventures into our services.

*12. Ask yourself what happens in your church before the service begins and during the first few minutes of your service.*

What kind of atmosphere is created there? This is important when you consider the results of a survey that revealed that the average person who enters the doors of a church decides within the first 12 minutes whether to return. That's before the choir sings the beautiful anthem it has rehearsed for weeks and before the pastor delivers that soul-searching sermon prepared with hours of prayer, study, and meditation. That 12 minutes includes the way the visitor is welcomed (or not welcomed), the aura for worship that person steps into, and the beginning of the service. If 10 minutes of dry, dull announcements are being given at the first of the service "to get them out of the way," maybe they should be condensed, rescheduled, or called attention to in printed form for members to read.

*13. Last, but certainly not least, remember the admonition of Heb. 13:2, KJV—"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."*

Do you want your church to grow and minister to the needs of those God brings your way? Then show concern and give careful, loving attention to every stranger in your midst.

# Pastoring in the Nineties: Can Systems Theory Help?

by Kline Roberts

Associate minister, First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio

**L**eadership in the church has long been a lively concern for both clergy and laity alike. Seminaries have taught future clergy models of leadership based on the "prophetic," "priestly," and "kingly" patterns found in the Scriptures.

An issue with important theological implications has always been whether one looked to Moses or David as an example of good leadership. The Mosaic and Davidic patterns—one based in revelation and prophecy, the other based in theocratic institutional authority—imply very different styles of pastoral leadership.

"Servant leadership," a model patterned after Jesus' example, has received attention in recent years. Other suggested models of clergy leadership include "spiritual director," "pulpit-teen," "pastoral director," "shepherd," and even more recently "CEO" (chief executive officer). Most recently, the feminist perspective has directed us to Esther, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Priscilla as champions of feminine leadership styles in the church. Each of these leadership models have recommendable elements. All of them can be the basis for a ministry with integrity and significance.

What all these models of pastoral leadership fail to offer, however, is an emphasis on leadership process. Instead, most models focus on content—on prescribed roles and self-definitions. This

generalization may be overstated because certainly individuals add their own intuitive emotional sensitivity to their leadership style.

Yet most models of ministry are role-based and role-defined. While the content of ministry roles may vary, the process underlying the interplay of roles within a system is often ignored. When this happens, we are in danger of assuming that we can assign ourselves roles within a system independent of how that system may determine our roles without our conscious awareness.

Fortunately, there is now greater opportunity to focus on leadership process with the advent of family "systems" theory. The work of Murray Bowen and the more recent writ-

ings of Edwin Friedman provide fresh perspectives that enhance older models of pastoral leadership.

Ministry takes place in a context. The context is a system made up of elements that are dynamically related to one another. Regardless of personal style, historical label, or ministerial self-concept, ministers nevertheless operate within an emotional field and participate in an emotional process. This process is related closely to the processes operating in our families of origin that structure connectedness and affect change. Understanding such processes is the work of "family systems theory."

### Five Key Concepts

Friedman suggests that systems theory, as applied to the parish minister, is built upon five key concepts. Once these concepts are understood and appreciated, an entirely new approach to pastoral leadership may be defined and expressed. This new approach has the potential to lead the entire church system toward health and wholeness. It is my belief that an integration of systems theory within pastoral ministry provides the most relevant leadership style for the '90s and beyond.

A basic key concept of family systems theory is the way in which the systems "problem" or "symptom" is defined. The identified patient is the individual (or department) within a system



that has an obvious problem or symptom. A systems approach does not isolate the problematic member from the overall relationship system, but rather views the symptom bearer as part of an overall systemic dysfunction.<sup>1</sup> Friedman, in his book, *Generation to Generation*, states:

When one part of that organism (the human family) is treated in isolation from its interconnections with another, as though the problem were solely its own, fundamental change is not likely. The symptom is apt to recycle, in the same or different form, in the same or a different member.<sup>2</sup>

Often by keeping the focus on the symptom bearer, the family—whether it be nuclear, congregational, or institutional—can deny the very issues that contributed to making one of its members symptomatic. This denial will ultimately harm the entire family.

A second key concept of family systems theory is homeostasis—the tendency of a system to seek a balance point or a point of equilibrium. Homeostasis suggests that relationships strive to perpetuate and maintain the organizing principles of their existence. This focus on systemic balance goes beyond theories based on “character trait” explanations of behavior. Friedman observes:

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## Systems theory offers an entirely new approach to pastoral leadership.

The family model . . . conceptualizes a system's problems in terms of an imbalance that must have occurred in the network of its various relationships, no matter what the nature of the individual personalities.<sup>3</sup>

A third key concept, differentiation of self, refers to the capacity of an individual to define his or her own life

goals and values apart from pressures in the system that push for togetherness. Differentiation of self also implies a capacity to maintain a nonanxious presence in the midst of a system overcome by anxiety. More simply, it means that an individual can take full responsibility for his or her own destiny and emotional well-being, while at the same time maintaining connection with the system.

Murray Bowen formulated a differentiation scale that attempted to measure the ability of individuals to resist a kind of emotional fusion—a state in which there is little differentiation among individuals within a given system. Differentiation of self is a highly relevant concept for ministers who wish to employ a systemic approach to pastoral leadership.

A fourth key concept, the extended family field, reminds us that the emotional processes operating in our family of origin (our original nuclear family plus our extended family members) not only have past significance but also are still operative in the present. It is always possible (and important) to gain a better understanding of such emotional processes and how they influence our responses to immediate and extended family members.

A final key concept, the emotional triangle, describes the tendency for two persons within a system to focus upon a third person (or issue) as a way of stabilizing their own relationship. Friedman elaborates:

Emotional triangles have some very specific rules that they invariably obey. . . . It has been said, “What Peter says about Paul tells you more about Peter than it does about Paul.” In the concept of an emotional triangle, what Peter says to you about his relationship with Paul has to do with his relationship with you.<sup>4</sup>

This review of some basic concepts from family systems theory is not meant to be exhaustive, but it does allow us to formulate and explore new patterns of pastoral leadership.

### Bringing About Change

A crucial part of the burden of leadership in any system is the self-knowledge and discipline to be nonanxious and nonreactive during times of change. When a leader is challenging a system (be it church, synagogue, or

bureaucracy) there is inevitable resistance to the leader's initiatives. To deal with such resistance, it is helpful for the leader to avoid becoming anxious and emotionally reactive. The leader must also stay emotionally connected with others as they seek to establish a new relationship with the leader, and as they adapt to the leader's new goals. Staying connected, then, allows for communication and change and minimizes the occurrence of “emotional cutoffs” (avoidance, isolation, rejection, divorce, etc.).

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## Systems theory builds upon five key concepts.

Leadership based on an understanding of a systems approach starts with the observation that in order to bring about change within a system, one only needs to change oneself. What does this really mean when applied to the church? First it should make us realize that we typically think about leadership in terms of bringing about changes in others—in the church board or in the priorities of the congregation.

The expectation upon the leader is to work hard so that something new and better is brought about. The leader, in this typical common sense approach, acts upon everyone within the church. Unfortunately, this leadership style fails in many ways, and if it does succeed, it has the potential to unleash forces of backlash and negativity—making the price of change excruciatingly high for the people within the system. Power struggles and burnout are the side effects of this approach.

### The Differentiated Leader

Leadership by differentiation proceeds from an opposite premise. Change can be accomplished by becoming more aware of how we define ourselves in regard to our relational system. By taking responsibility for ourselves and our goals, others can be challenged with new priorities without being pressured into acceptance—minimizing tendencies toward resistance and reactivity.

To define oneself and one's goals ever more clearly is not as easy as it may sound. Individuals and those playing special roles in the church will try to pull the leader back into the old balance, which has been established historically. One of the prime instruments for doing this will be "triangling." As the leader challenges the church, individuals (and governing bodies) may try to stabilize their now-changing relationship with the leader. This is often done by creating a crisis meant to force a renewed bonding between leader and followers.

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## In order to bring about change within a system, you only need to change yourself.

An example might be the familiar scenario where the minister challenges a church board by defining himself in a clear and forceful way, establishing new personal goals and priorities that may be in direct contrast to the board's present way of operating. The individuals on the board sense the implications of this shift and realize their relationship with the minister is undergoing change (and therefore is in jeopardy). Suddenly, a financial crisis develops in the church as pledges do not materialize as expected. Perhaps there is a great deal of anxious second-guessing of the leader's goals and style.

A triangle has been created between minister, board, and budget. The crisis has overemphasized everyone's interdependency—"we need each other!" If the leader becomes trapped into assuming responsibility for the budget problems, he or she will be inevitably forced to abandon self-differentiation. The leader will be reeled back into the homeostatic balance of the church.

If, on the other hand, the leader can maintain a position of self-definition and "de-triangle" from the responsibility of fixing the budget, real change will begin. The system will

move toward addressing the crisis, and the board (as well as its individual members) will redefine and reform its relationship with the minister.

The model of leader as challenger and self-definer frees others in the church to legitimately be about the same process in their own emotional lives. It moves everyone away from patterns of dependency and control. It allows everyone to move toward patterns of self-differentiation, independence, and health.

### The Unanxious Leader

Another insight from systems theory further illuminates this new kind of pastoral leadership. As a leader defines his or her own goals and takes responsibility for those goals, resistance and anxiety is aroused in those who would like to define and limit the pastor. Here is an individual they cannot control, and the old relationship with the leader might be lost if there is no emotional hook to ensure its continuity.

The successful leader must develop a style of nonanxiousness in the midst of this anxious reaction by the church. Our own anxious responses to the anxiety of others often leads us to be emotionally reactive. The minister may get angry and fly off the handle with a board member who is being resistant. Such a reaction serves to tie the minister and board member together emotionally.

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## A church "crisis" pulls the leader back into old patterns, bonds, and roles.

Even though the nature of this emotional connection is negative, it is a connection toward which the board member is truly drawn. Such reactive responses in any system cause "negative feedback loops," which paradoxically may be reassuring to individuals at a deep emotional level, but which also serve to keep the entire system in a state of chronic crisis.

Ultimately, this pattern of emotional reactivity leads to sickness and dysfunction rather than toward health and responsibility. Anxious and reactive individuals tend to engage in emotional cutoffs: "If she doesn't like it here, then why doesn't she just leave!" "This church has enough troublemakers already; why don't they go down the street and join there?" or "It's my church, love it or leave it!" Such statements seek emotional distance in order to cope with feelings of stress and anxiety.

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## To lead others toward change, effective leaders must be self-differentiated, nonanxious, and nonreactive.

Emotional cutoffs are often symbolized by expressions referring to geographical distance. A minister who can lead others through change in a system must be able to maximize his or her ability to be nonanxious and nonreactive. Emotional reactivity indicates that we are being hooked into knee-jerk responses that will reinforce the negative feedback loops and perpetuate high anxiety and chronic crisis conditions within the church. This is not successful leadership, no matter how new or noble the leader's goals and ideals may be. But many of us have been taught that a good leader is one who can push any program through the system, no matter what!

The leadership of Jesus gives us an alternative. It also gives us a deeper understanding of the power of a non-anxious presence in the midst of an anxious world. Jesus defined himself and His concerns with clarity, and He allowed others to have their own feelings. He did this in a remarkably nonanxious way, which indicates that He had a very high level of self-differentiation.

### Staying with the Pain

Part of the challenge of leadership

is related to how we as leaders deal with pain. Pain is not as negative an experience as we have often believed. Jesus allowed people to struggle! He knew that if we try to remove pain and struggles from our lives, we only stunt our emotional growth and spiritual development.

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Many of us have been taught that a good leader can push any program through the church—no matter what!

A mature leader can challenge others to stay with the pain and struggle of change, not simply to offer comfort in times of crisis. An example of this approach is demonstrated by Jesus in His encounter with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). A young man approaches Jesus and shares his emotional turmoil. He asks, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17b).

Jesus, before responding to this question, explores the context of the young man's situation. First, He deals with the young man's flattering projection directed at Him: "Why do you call me good?" (v. 18). Then He examines the young man's knowledge of the Jewish law and its expectations. The young man assures Jesus he has kept the commandments since childhood. Jesus' heart is pulled toward this struggling soul striving to reach his highest potential: "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (v. 21a). Nevertheless, He issues a challenge. He says, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor . . . Then come, follow me" (v. 21b). Mark records the unhappy result: "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (v. 22).

Notice what Jesus did not do. He did not assume responsibility for this man's spiritual life. Jesus did not try to fix the problem so that everything

could come out all right. The challenge issued by Christ did not remove the young man's pain. Jesus' challenge forced the young man back to the difficult issue at the heart of his self-definition: Would he be in control of his possessions, or would they be in control of him?

#### Avoiding Triangles

The rich young ruler, in coming to Jesus, attempts to triangle Him. The triangle is between the young man, Jesus, and the young man's salvation. The young man is the troubled part of the triangle. Jesus is placed in the position of an authority, and salvation is the goal toward which the young man says he wants to move. In this triangle, the young man attempts to make Jesus responsible for an answer to his struggle—answers that ultimately must be decided by the young man himself.

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A mature leader can challenge others to stay with the pain and struggle of change, not simply to offer comfort in times of crises.

Jesus de-triangles himself out of this emotional trap—first by rejecting the young man's designation that He is good (and therefore an authority), and then by challenging him to make his own decision vis-a-vis his relationship with his wealth. Jesus does all this and at the same time offers His continued emotional connection ("Come, follow me"). Jesus commits himself to the role of a friend as the young man works his way through his painful transition. Yet, the young man leaves with his dilemma unresolved. Mark says, "He went away sad" (10:22).

#### Christ's Leadership Style

Note that Jesus did not anxiously

call the young man back. Jesus does not assume responsibility for the outcome of this encounter. He makes it clear that He will define and differentiate himself—just as everyone else must—but He will not do the emotional work of others. This is a task we alone must do.

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A crucial burden of leadership is the self-knowledge and discipline to be nonanxious and nonreactive during times of change.

Here, I believe, Jesus has given us an example of "leadership by differentiation." His approach was profound, freeing, and challenging. It has behind it a deep respect for each individual's ability to be responsible for his or her own emotional life. It resists the idea that any of us can be rescuers of anyone else.

The emphasis in all these images is perhaps too somber, however. Yes, there may be a lonely and painful struggle that is part of our self-differentiation. But there is another side that should not be forgotten. Once an individual has dealt with inner issues and resolved them in a clear and powerful statement of self-definition, there is a tremendous inner peace. Self-differentiation frees us from being controlled by forces around us, and we are freed from being trapped into a self-defeating and inappropriate responsibility for others. †

1. Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 20.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 23.

4. *Ibid.*, 36.

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# Firefighter or Fire Lighter?

**T**he fireworks exploded over our heads as we trudged through the woods at the base of the hill. It was the Fourth of July; most of the town had gathered to watch the sky light up with brilliance. I noticed my father, his eyes only watching for falling debris. He continued to walk through the underbrush, the heavy Indian tank strapped to his back. Small pieces of burning debris fell to the ground. Dad would walk over and give them a squirt or two and then continue on his rounds. My dad was a firefighter. His objective was to put out the flame before it could ignite into a potential danger.

I remember another time that I watched my dad at work. It was in the fall of the year. Firemen had gathered on another hill. It was different this time, though. They went about starting fires in the tall grass. It seemed that every evening was consumed with "grass burning"—a chore firemen did not particularly enjoy, but valued. If they did not burn it in a controlled way, perhaps it would be ignited in an uncontrolled situation.

Many years have passed. My dad is retired now. I'm now a grown man, a father of two sons, and a pastor. In some ways Dad and I are alike. I, too, can be either a firefighter or a fire lighter.

As pastors, we have been in explosive situations in which some churches find themselves. It may be a heated debate over a decision or an all-out feud between families. As pastors, we are stuck right in the middle. At times like that, I wish I had Dad's old Indian tank—a squirt here, a squirt there. There is a point in the life of the minister where the pastor serves as a firefighter. The task of extinguishing pride, envy, malice, and hatred falls on the shoulders of God's man. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are



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used to fighting these fires of destruction.

Yet we are also called to be fire lighters. Our preaching should stimulate our hearers to a deeper walk with Jesus. In the process, we must stoke the embers of their souls with the red-hot presence of the Holy Spirit. To those who do not know Jesus, it should introduce an inextinguishable fire of conviction and desire that only the Savior himself can meet.

Many preachers get the two assignments confused. They fight the fires they should be feeding and feed the fires they should be fighting.

Once I heard a piece of advice concerning children: "If they are engaging in inappropriate behavior, address it! Ignoring the behavior will not entice it to depart but will only allow it to grow larger and more obnoxious." Sometimes pastors seem to think that if they ignore the inappropriate behavior of their congregation, that behavior will dissipate on its own. It will not! It grows larger and stronger; sin always does. Put the fire out before it burns down the church, before its smoke invades your lungs and snuffs out the pure, fresh, clean air of the Holy Spirit. Extinguish the flame of hatred, pride, and smugness before the children of the church are overcome by the heat of the fire themselves. Be the firefighter God

called you to be. Douse the flame of sin among your people, but do it gently. Don't kick in an unlocked door. In other words, put out the fire but don't damage the person in the process. Remember that your people are not the authors of evil; Satan is. Love them back to a healthy, God-ignited flame of passion for Jesus. Be gentle; be loving; be Christlike. But be a firefighter.

On the other hand, be the fire lighter. Preach under the anointing inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If you do not normally arrive at the church building early for prayer, do so! If it is not your habit to pray before entering the sanctuary, do so! If you are not accustomed to praying before you begin the sermon, do so! When you preach, preach as if the destiny of your congregation depends upon it! Their eternal lives depend upon the ministry of the flaming pulpit Sunday after Sunday. Be sure, my brother, that when you open your mouth to speak, the words of man are not heard, but the very thoughts from the mind and heart of God are expressed through you. Ask the Holy Spirit to accompany you to the pulpit. Ask Jesus to be present in the sanctuary as you conduct your worship services. Ask God the Father to bless that meeting with His perfect, pleasing will.

Don't expect your people to pray for an outpouring of God's holy fire if you do not! You are their shepherd, leader, and example.

We need to invite God to be unusually present in our churches, to encourage the Lord to do His will, and to submit to His holy guidance.

Are you a firefighter or fire lighter? God calls us to do both. By His precious wisdom may we always discern which is appropriate to the situation. By the power of the Spirit let's extinguish the flames of sin and ignite the fire of holiness. 

# Learn to Say No

by Lola M. Williams

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**I**t is imperative that we learn to say no. Busy people have already mastered the art of getting things done. They must then practice the art of leaving things undone. The wise person learns to eliminate nonessentials.

To paraphrase a well-known quotation by William Shakespeare, "To do or not to do—that is the question." We cannot do everything, no matter how worthy the cause. We must learn to choose. God gives each of us common sense, but it's up to us to use it.

A pastor's wife learned the hard way. She was the mother of seven children. In addition to her duties at home, she taught a Bible class, served as missionary president, directed adult Christian Service Training classes, and functioned as church board secretary. She did both the church office work and the janitorial. In spite of the many hats she wore, she continued to do the heavy entertaining expected of the pastor's lady.

She took on these jobs one at a time because no one else volunteered. Ultimately that proved to be her undoing. After landing in the hospital with a nervous breakdown, she discovered that there were those in the church who could and would take over many of her responsibilities.

While we all have our sphere of influence, none of us is indispensable. If we were to disappear from the face of the earth today, others would rise up and take our place. The world would keep on rotating on its axis. We can't do everything, no matter how much ability we may have. Learning to say no is the key to survival.

Well known in his field of expertise, Everett wielded great influence. He was revered as a man of God and

a leader in his church. A driven man, he couldn't seem to stop. He never even came close to learning the art of saying no. Then something snapped in his mind. He ended up in a sanitarium where he ultimately took his own life.

Others may detect telltale signs in our lives that we're headed for a collapse, but no one else can force us to slow down. It's our decision—and ours alone—to apply the brakes or continue rushing headlong toward the final crash.

While many good causes exist in our world, our community, and our church, we cannot participate in all of them. We must learn to be selective. Trying to play clean-up-officeholder for all the jobs that no one else will do is to court disaster.

Refuse to allow yourself to be bullied, shamed, pushed, cajoled, or flattered into taking on more than you know you can successfully handle. Learn to stand firm and say with conviction, "No. I should not do that."

A lady in one of our pastorates was annoyed with me. Hemlines shot up and she couldn't find a dress that she considered to have a decent length. In a don't-argue-with-me voice she told me, "I'm going to buy some material and have you make my clothes." It was a command—not a polite request.

I said, "I'm sorry, but I don't have time to make clothes for others. With my busy schedule, it's all I can do to squeeze out time to sew for myself and my family."

I did offer to teach her to sew, but she would have none of that. She pouted and told me that I was selfish. I did not relent. I said no and made it stick. However, lest I sound smug, I haven't always had such good control. Like many others, I had to learn

the hard way to say no.

Sometimes we must learn to say no to ourselves. Jim, a busy preacher, rushed from one project to another. He served God with his whole self—or so he thought. He never took a vacation and spent only about four evenings a year at home with his family. He pastored a large and growing congregation. He slept little and seldom took time to eat a proper meal. There was so much to be done for God—no time to lose!

Then one day Jim found himself flat on his back in a hospital bed. The verdict—tuberculosis! The remedy—prolonged bed rest!

Much later, when he recovered and was permitted to take up his duties again, he admitted it had been a dark time in his life. Yet, his enforced rest had many benefits, not all of them physical.

Jim had to run himself into the ground before he took time to really listen to his Maker. When he couldn't go anywhere or conduct church business, he had more time to listen to God. That gave him a deeper Christian walk personally and made him a more effective minister when he was finally pronounced well.

Jim learned to get more rest and take time for regular meals. To their surprise and delight, he also gave more time to his family. In short, Jim learned to say no by pushing himself to the brink.

When we practice the art of saying no to a whirlwind of activities, we see our lives brought into proper focus. We have time for God, family, and even some for ourselves. The bags under our eyes and tired lines around our mouths vanish. We feel a peace within ourselves. We will have learned one important way to smooth the ragged edges of despair. **✠**

# Looking Failure in the Eye

## A Meditation on Psalms 42—43

by Eddie Culbertson

This is not an academic study. I am not trying to analyze the precise meanings of words, phrases, or word pictures. But then, poetry is not intended to be an academic exercise. Rather, poetry expresses feelings, attitudes, impressions, perceptions. Thus, instead of mind-talk, poetry involves soul-talk. In these psalms (42—43), the poetry reflects a personal experience communicated in a manner to encourage others in similar circumstances.

I began working with these psalms before I recognized their relevance to me. I had practiced memorizing whole chapters for a couple of years. Casting about for my next project, I felt attracted to Psalm 42 by its familiar opening couplet. The footnote in my NIV told me that Psalms 42 and 43 probably were originally one psalm. I explored: only 16 verses, 3 of them identical. That seemed an easy objective. I began working on it. In short order, I was quoting the whole work from memory. I continued quoting it as I moved on to memorize another chapter.

Then the event came. A tremendous sense of failure swept over me. I saw that the Psalmist had felt exactly what I felt. The events of the Psalmist were not duplicated in my experience, but the feelings ran parallel. Perhaps you are feeling failure right now or know someone who is. Perhaps the Psalmist's process will help you as it helped me.

### Looking Back

Ps. 42:4 gives the clue that the writer is struggling with failure. He remembers. He looks back at past attain-

ments: He "used to go with the multitude." More than that, he used to lead "the procession to the house of God." He was *a* leader in the Temple, if not *the* leader of the whole event.

But that was in the past. We do not know what caused his removal from office. Was it retirement? Long-term infirmity or permanent injury pre-

leader. As sweet as the experience had been, the memory was bitter-sweet—it hurt.

Adding to the hurt was the memory of the celebrations: the "shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng" (v. 4). He looks back. He is standing once again with the other leaders. He looks out over the multitude. He not only sees the throng but also hears their shouts of joy. He is there again—at the pinnacle of his career.

But now it is gone. Anything the future may hold pales in comparison.

### Looking Around

What caused this reversal? Why was he suddenly unwanted? Was he unable to serve? Was he unwelcome where he once had led? The Psalmist does not answer these questions directly, but he leaves some hints.

Twice he mentions men/foes taunting him "all day long" with the question: "Where is your God?" He calls on God to plead his cause "against an ungodly nation" and to rescue him from "deceitful and wicked men."

Had he taken a stand for righteousness only to have unrighteous men plot his removal? Had his honesty and openness collided with the deceit of others? Had he, as leader, pointed the way to greater godliness only to be rebuffed by others who were ungodly? This may have been the case.

Now—after the ungodly had won their way, deceit and wickedness had triumphed—he still heard their voices "all day long" echoing in his mind: "Where is your God? *Where is your God?*"



venting him from serving? Did others plot to have him removed? Some verses suggest this latter. If we have hints, we do not have certainty or details. We do know that it was in the past. He no longer went with the multitude, much less served as a

Along with these foes, the Psalmist twice mentions being “oppressed by the enemy.” It is possible that he speaks of the group of enemies collectively as “the enemy.” But as I walked through this valley, it proved helpful to identify the enemy as the one who works in all ages opposing and oppressing God’s servants.

So the past haunts him, and his foes taunt him about an absentee God.

### Looking In

And where was his God? This removal from leadership leads the Psalmist to encounter deep emotions. He feels “forgotten” and even “rejected” by God. Affirming God as his Stronghold and Rock, he still feels abandoned in his time of need. Doubtless, he had counseled others to find refuge in God in their time of struggle. Now, in his turn to be under fire, he felt alone and unprotected.

He felt cut off from God—unable to find Him. He searches for Him like a deer searching for water. He longs for the day when he can “go and meet with God.” Sorrow and grief overwhelm him, taking away his appetite. Mention of waterfalls and “waves and breakers” suggests that he may have gone into the wilderness—away from everyone else. One thought pounds like a drum in his mind: getting back in touch with God. He has done everything he knows to do. Nothing works.

One verse is repeated three times. In it he identifies the feelings of being “downcast” and “disturbed.” He feels discouraged and troubled. What more can he do? Surely there must be some way he can put the pieces of his life back together—become useful once again. But there seems nothing he can do. Discouragement seems to feed on itself, growing stronger as it does.

Twice he mentions feeling oppressed. He links this with a sense of mourning and once with physical suffering: “My bones suffer mortal agony” (42:10). The sense of failure, of abandonment, of discouragement has become so strong it brings a physical result. His bones dry up; they ache. His agony is all-consuming: physical, spiritual, emotional.

### Looking Up

The Psalmist refuses to deny his

feelings. To the contrary, he names them plainly: “My soul is downcast within me” (42:6). The import of this admission comes with its effect: “therefore I will remember you” (v. 6). Not simply in his discouragement, but significantly *because of* his discouragement, he looks to his God. In the middle of all these negative feelings, he makes a decision. He does not just happen to remember God; he determines to remember Him, to keep Him in his thoughts. He purposely calls to mind the God he loves.

Each time he asks why he is downcast, he responds by telling himself to put his hope in God. At this point, hope is not a feeling but a decision, an act of will. He makes the decision because he is confident that he “will yet praise him.” From the depths of his faith comes the assurance that an “absent God” only *seems* uninvolved. This failure, this time of uselessness, will produce an occasion for praise. He knows he will praise his Savior—here including much more than the Forgiver of sin. This Savior brings well-being to the sufferer.

With this confidence comes his primary request of God (he also asks for vengeance and rescue from his foes): “Send forth your light and your truth” (43:3). In response to the deceit and wickedness of men, he calls for the light and truth of God. To dispel the darkness and disorientation of his discouragement, he needs the light and truth of God. He has been wandering around in a figurative—maybe literal—wilderness. These messengers from God will guide him, lead him back to the mountain of God, back to God’s presence.

### Looking Forward

To come to that mountain, the place where God dwells, indicates coming into His presence. I notice that his need to be recognized as a leader in the assembly has died. In its place rises this desire to enjoy God’s presence. Could it be that the leadership position had become too important? Did he need to die to “love of the limelight”? If so, by the time he ends the psalm, that love has died. All he wants is God.

He fully expects God to answer his prayer: to bring him to the holy mountain, to His dwelling place. With this assurance, he makes certain

plans. He will go to the altar of God. Presumably, this involves making a sacrifice or presenting an offering. Given the tone of these verses (43:3-4), we can assume this to be an act of thanksgiving. He will pour forth praise—not for having his position restored—but for the opportunity of coming into God’s presence. Even though he cannot see His hand at work yet, even though he still feels abandoned and rejected, still he calls God “my joy and my delight.” When finally he comes into God’s presence, he will praise Him with the harp. The Psalmist must have been a skilled harpist. So he offers his special skill as an instrument of praise to God, his Joy and Delight. He makes no plans to reclaim his leadership position. He plans simply to praise God for leading him back to the Divine Presence.

### Conclusion

Friends tell us, “You’re not a failure. Stop dwelling on the past, and look for better days ahead.” Whether we are a failure is not the issue. Sometimes we *feel* like a failure. To deny that feeling postpones the struggle. It compounds the problem. The Psalmist identified the feeling: in the wake of leaving his leadership post, he felt downcast, disturbed. I read this as a feeling of failure.

He felt stung by the victory of his enemies. He suffered physically as a result of his reversal. But, worst of all, he felt separated from God, forgotten, and even rejected. He searched for God. He prayed for God. He longed for God. He had done all he could. Nothing helped.

In the midst of his uselessness and helplessness, he decides. He tells himself to hope in God. He determines that there will yet come reason to praise Him. The downcast feelings continued; they made the decision more important.

With the crucial decision in hand, he plans. He will praise God with all he has: his harp, a thank offering, certainly his voice, probably more. In anticipation, he slips some praise in ahead of time to God, his Joy and his Delight.

He no longer mourns the loss of position. That concern has died. In time, he will come into God’s presence. He will praise. That will be enough. ✠

## When the Witnesses Come Knocking

**W**e had spent three hours in intensive Bible study, cross-referencing scriptures, searching through Greek texts, and lovingly debating and questioning each other's beliefs. As my guests rose to leave, I almost felt sad. Rarely did I have opportunity to share on such a technical and deep level with other religious people. We were mutually energized by our study time and genuinely thankful for being able to share with such a degree of mutual respect for one another and for the Word of God.

New members of our congregation? Unbelievers curious about the Christian faith? No. They were Jehovah's Witnesses. Two weeks earlier they had paid their quarterly visit to my home, a parsonage located on the church property with a large sign depicting the name of our church at the entrance to our driveway. After sharing for about a half hour in the doorway, I noticed we had developed somewhat of a rapport and mutual respect for one another. So I did the unexpected and unheard of: I set up an appointment with them for two weeks later. They must have been thrilled at the opportunity to convert a pastor. I was relieved at having two full weeks to prepare for our time together. I bought and borrowed books, listened to tapes, and studied Scripture well into many nights. I determined to stick to only one topic—the deity of Jesus.

Now, after all those hours of preparation and sharing, they were leaving. The words they spoke to me before they left will always stick with me. They thanked me no less than four times for taking the time to share with them from Scripture what I believed. The elder said, "You don't



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know how many Christians we meet who have no idea what they believe." I wondered how many in our congregation would be able to spar with the Jehovah's Witnesses as I had. I felt guilty because I had to spend two weeks learning to defend a doctrine that is so fundamental to the Christian faith.

In today's church, I'm afraid we have become dangerously lax in our study of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Laymen, and not a few pastors, assume that everyone believes the essentials of Christianity. And those that threaten their beliefs—well, they just slam the door in their faces or hide behind the "I already go to a church" defense. They're afraid to talk to a Jehovah's Witness because they might find out that they don't have any basis for their belief. But Jehovah's Witnesses need Jesus too. If we want to reach them with the gospel, we will have to have a better defense for the deity of Christ than "because the church says so." Their organizational publications are filled with historical facts, Greek studies, and proof texts to support their doctrines. They are encouraged to read and study and run circles around Christians.

However, we can help our people be ready. They can know what they believe and why they believe it if we pastors will take some time to study and to help them develop a line of defense. The goal of the following paragraphs is to offer a concise and conclusive biblical basis for the deity of Jesus Christ for use in equipping your laypeople. They, too, can feel confident in what they believe and be able to share with those ensnared by false doctrine. Study these verses; cut this article out, and reproduce it or teach it to your entire congregation. Every Christian should keep notes such as this in his Bible for those unexpected encounters.

### The Deity of Jesus Christ Defended

"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he [in Septuagint, *egō eimi*, "I am"]. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior" (Isa. 43:10-11).

We believe in one God in three Persons, not three Gods in one. According to Isa. 43:10-11, there is only one God—no God was formed either before or after Jehovah God. Jesus Christ cannot be "a God," for there is only "the God." If Christ, then, can be shown to possess deity and be God, He must be one with Jehovah God—equal in essence and nature, coeternal and coequal. (See 1 Corinthians 8 and Gal. 4:8. Though there are other "gods," they are not by nature God. They are only considered "gods" because of human acclamation.) Notice how often in Scripture Christ is equated with God, even using His covenant name, "I Am" (*egō eimi*).

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23, from Isa. 7:14).

“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be [literally *egō eimi*, “I am”], you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be [*egō eimi*] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me’” (John 8:28).

“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58). Again, *egō eimi*. Jehovah’s Witnesses argue that *egō eimi* is used often without implying deity. But those instances are always followed by qualifiers: I am coming, I am grieved, etc. Jesus made the emphatic statement that “I am,” which expressed His eternity and oneness with God. The Jews certainly understood His implications and sought to stone Him for blasphemy!

“‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God’” (John 10:33).

“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He” (John 13:19). Again, *egō eimi*. Only God experienced the future as if it were present.

“‘I am he’ [*egō eimi*], Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:5-6).

“Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28). Notice that Jesus commends Thomas for finally believing. This declaration states, “o kurios mou kai o theos mou”—“the Lord of me and the God [Jehovah, the one and only God] of me.” If Jesus were in any way less than God, He would have quickly corrected Thomas. Instead, He accepts this title. Jehovah’s Witnesses say that John then clarifies (corrects?) this state-

ment a few verses later by saying Jesus was the Son of God. Sonship is a matter of position, not nature. Being equal with God and being the “Son of God” in position are not mutually exclusive for the Christian. Jehovah’s Witnesses have no defense for Jesus accepting the unique title for God



## They must have been thrilled at the opportunity to convert a pastor.



here: “the God.”

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). This does not mean one person, but one in essence of nature. “One” often carried the understanding of corporate oneness (see Gen. 2:24 where a man and woman become one flesh—not one person, but a corporate oneness). If Jehovah’s Witnesses appeal to other instances where the NIV translates this same word “one” as “one in purpose,” you should point out that you can only be “one” in this sense if you are of the same nature. We cannot be “one in purpose” with an animal or, for that matter, with God in the strictest sense. Jesus could be “one in purpose” with God because He was one with God; they were of the same essence and nature.

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Col. 1:19).

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). There are two Greek words that the *New World Translation* (Jehovah’s Witnesses’ own version) has very obviously confused: *theiotēs* and *theotēs*. A form of *theotēs* (*theotētos*) is used here for “Deity.” This word refers to divine nature, whereas *theiotēs* refers to divine attributes. The *New World Translation* incorrectly translates *theotētos* as “divine quality,” and conversely translates

*theiotēs* in Rom. 1:20 as “godship.” Thayer, who by the way was a Unitarian and personally did not believe in the deity of Jesus, said, “*theot* (deity) differs from *theiot* (divinity) as essence differs from quality or attribute.” Col. 2:9 claims that Jesus is the fullness of the nature or essence of God; He was not merely “godlike.”

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4).

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb. 1:3). Here again we see that while being in nature God, Jesus was a separate person from God the Father. Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that Jesus was only “godlike” and that He reflected God’s character [Greek for “representation”], like we see our reflection in a mirror. But the analogy is to the radiance of God’s glory—Jesus is like the radiance of the sun, which is not a reflection of the sun but inseparable from it. His nature and character proceed from the Father, but neither exists apart from the other. “Character” was the image of a stamp on a coin. The comparison here is with God’s “being”—not His character—of which Jesus was an exact image.

Referring back to Isa. 43:10-11, God is the only Savior. But Titus 1:3-4; 2:10; and 2:13 refer to both God and Jesus as Savior. Is there more than one? Paul uses God and Jesus almost interchangeably because they are one.

“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Compare this with “the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

“I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Isa. 42:8). But consider: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). God gives His glory to Jesus, who is not “another,” but is one with the Father. Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your

God and serve him only” (Luke 4:8). Yet the angels are commanded to worship Christ: “And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’” (Heb. 1:6).

“This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isa. 44:6). See Rev. 1:17; 2:8; and 22:13, where these same words are ascribed to Jesus. Jehovah’s Witnesses deny that 22:13 are the words of Christ. They may argue that Jesus was the first and last only in reference to His resurrection, whereas God is the only true First and Last. Besides the fact that it is doubtful that John would have been told to write down such contradictory statements, which would certainly have been misunderstood, we also know that Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead. There are numerous accounts in the Old Testament and in the Gospels of other persons being raised from the dead prior to Jesus.

“By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear” (Isa. 45:23). Yet at the name of Jesus every knee will bow: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11). How can bowing to Jesus bring glory to the Father except they be one in essence and nature?

“Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13) and “through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1) follow this rule affirmed by Dana and Mantey: When *kai* (“and”) connects two nouns of the same case, if an article precedes the first but not the second,

the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle—it is a further description of the first-named person. Jesus is “the God.”

Here is a note about the meaning of “firstborn” in “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). The word, *prōtokos*, can just as easily be translated “first begetter” or “original bringer forth,” which is in complete harmony with the next verse, which describes Jesus as the Creator of everything. In the *New World Translation*, the word “other,” which does not occur at all in the Greek in this passage, is used over and over to change the meaning of the text. All “other” things were created by Him, etc. *Prōtokos* is indicative of preeminence, not procession. Notice that Manasseh is called the firstborn (Gen. 41:51-52) (same word in Septuagint),

or the only son, but he was uniquely precious.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jehovah’s Witnesses translate “the Word was God” as “the Word was a god,” since no definite article is used with *theos*. The actual Greek construction reads: “God was the Word.” The verb “to be” used here is called an “intransitive verb.” Intransitive verbs always take the predicate nominative instead of an object, which refers back to the subject. Hence *logos* and *theos* are both in the nominative case. Colwell’s Rule states that a definite predicate nominative never takes an article when it precedes the verb. Therefore the statement can just as readily be translated, “the Word was God,” not at all meaning “a god.” Here are some other places no article is used in the Greek

but where the Jehovah’s Witnesses translate *theos* as “a god” instead of God: Matt. 5:9; 6:24; Luke 1:35, 78; 2:40; John 1:6, 12, 13, 18; Rom. 1:7, 17. The Jehovah’s Witnesses base their translation on the fact that it is illogical to assume the Word can be with God

## IF A JEHOVAH’S WITNESS COMES TO YOUR DOOR:

1. Be courteous.
2. Make an appointment for him to come back. That gives you time to prepare or to have someone else join you.
3. Stick to one topic. Focus on the deity of Jesus Christ; it means everything!

and Ephraim replaces him as firstborn (Jer. 31:9)—as the preeminent one. “Firstborn” does not always indicate the first one born, but the preeminent one with the rights of inheritance.

Another note focuses on the meaning of “only begotten” in John 1:18, 3:16, KJV, etc. (translated in NIV as “One and Only”). The word used here is *monogenēs*, which means “unique” or “one of a kind.” It does not mean “only generated.” The LXX (Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates the Hebrew, *yachid*, as *monogenēs*—which is translated as “solitary” in Ps. 68:6, KJV. It is an expression of uniqueness. Isaac is called the “only begotten” son of Abraham (Heb. 11:17, KJV). He was certainly not the oldest

and be God at the same time. But while we believe the Word is God, we also realize that each Member of the Trinity is separate and distinct, hence there is no contradiction. If you get stuck here, go back to Isa. 43:10. There is no God but Jehovah. Christ cannot be “a god.” If He is “a god,” He must be “the God,” since no God was formed either before or after Jehovah.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not just one doctrine among many. It is the essence and foundation of the Christian faith. Our faith is an intelligent faith and it is a defensible faith. It is time for us to get serious about studying and correctly handling the Word of God. You never know when a Jehovah’s Witness will come knocking at your door. ❧

## Protect Your Family Before You Are Disabled

Submitted by the Office of Pensions and Benefits USA of the Church of the Nazarene

**S**tudies indicate that during one's working years (generally prior to age 65), an individual is at a greater risk of becoming disabled than of dying. But most individuals are better insured against the economic consequences of early death than they are against such consequences in the event of disability.

Many denominational pension boards have recognized this need and have made lost income protection available to ministers and full-time church-employed laymen of the denomination. Generally, there are three types of programs that meet such needs.

First, denominational pension plans usually provide an amount for a disability pension once the regular pension has been vested. Often, Social Security determination of disability must be received in order to qualify for this bene-

fit. Check with your pension office for details.

### Long-term Disability Insurance

Many denominations also offer individual long-term disability income protection plans to qualifying individuals. A typical plan provides either a fixed amount or a percent of salary per month. This amount is paid until the end of most disabilities or until age 65, whichever comes first. The benefit amount may or may not be reduced by Social Security or other disability benefit payments. Premiums are paid by either the participant or the local church employer. If paid by the employer, the premiums may qualify as a tax-free employee benefit.

### Temporary Benevolence

Many persons are unaware that, even though there are Social Security disability benefits available to covered workers, those benefits do not begin until after five months of disability.

For qualifying individuals, a few pension boards provide temporary monthly disability assistance, which may pay up to the amount certified by Social Security, less any amount payable from other plans of-

fered by the pension board, for this five-month Social Security waiting period. Funding for this program usually is provided by the denomination.

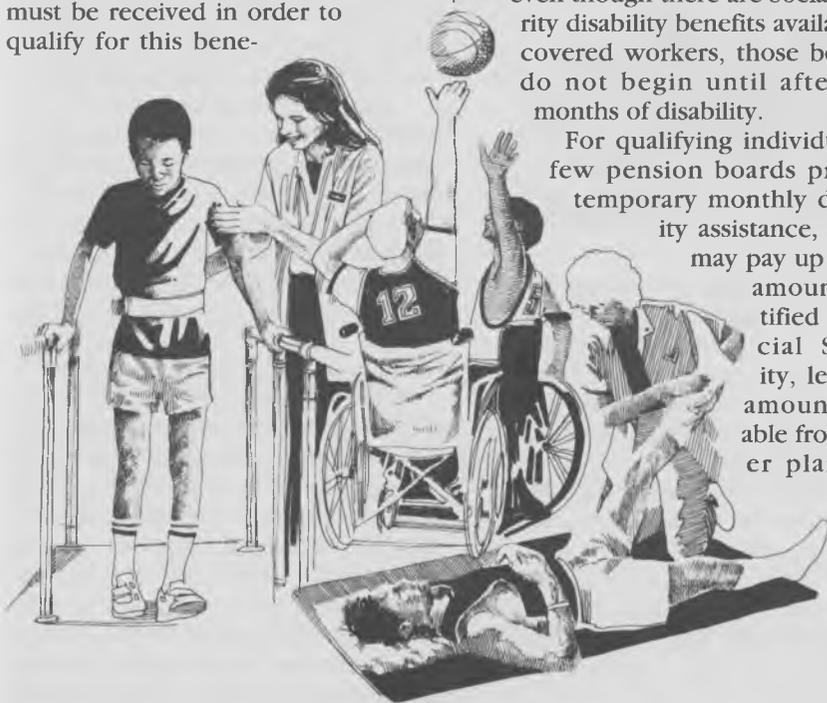
### Social Security

Denominational plans are not intended to take the place of benefits available through Social Security but rather are designed to supplement such benefits. This is why many pension boards caution ministers against exercising inappropriate options not to participate in Social Security. If you wish to find out now what your Social Security benefits might be, the Social Security Administration offers you a free "Personal Earnings and Benefits Estimate Statement." It shows your Social Security earnings history and estimates your future benefits including potential disability benefits.

### Qualifications for Denomination-Sponsored Programs

Although different eligibility requirements may apply to each of the denomination-sponsored plans, there are two qualifications normally required for participation. The first is related to the credential one holds. The second is that some plans require full-time church employment. This usually is defined as being compensated for at least 30 hours per week or as earning full livelihood from church employment. To the extent that staff members meet these requirements, often they too are included in these plans.

If you do not now have adequate resources to provide for your family's financial needs in the event of future disability, request information from your denomination's board of pensions. They usually specialize in such plans in addition to the retirement benefit work they do.



# Starting Revival

**W**hen someone asked British Evangelist Gypsy Smith how to start a revival, he said, "Lock yourself in your room and kneel in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk mark around yourself and ask God to start the revival inside that chalk mark. When He answers your prayer, the revival will be on."

## Revival Is Possible

Revival! The thought of planning for revival was unnerving. This was my first pastorate, and I had no experience in "conducting" revival. I imagined what revival should be, even as I went about the process, but disappointment after the meeting was all that I found. Help was what I needed, and I needed it fast. I had to understand God's definition and requirements for revival before I could experience the possibility of revival.

Revival can be defined as a return. This return is to wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

We must first return to the light of Jesus. He is the Light that exposes and allows us to see ourselves as God sees us. Jesus called himself the Light of the World (John 8:12), and walking with Jesus will produce in us the blessings of revival.

We must return to the center if revival is to come. Sometimes we find ourselves to the far left in a backslidden condition. At other times we are far right, living as supersaints and Holy Joes. A balanced Christian life is one fruit of revival. We will hold to the correct doctrine, while living godly lives. We also will win our friends and neighbors to a saving faith in Jesus Christ (Ps. 51:13).

We must return to our first love, where Jesus reigns as Lord of our lives. The Ephesian church had all the appearance of being in revival, but the people had left their first love (Rev. 2:4). Revival comes as we center our love on Jesus Christ and allow Him to be Lord of all. We need to get



by R. E. Clark

Pastor,  
Livingston, La.

into the position of receiving revival (Isa. 57:15).

## Revival Requires Preparation

"Preacher, don't you think it's about time *we* have a revival?" one of the deacons asked.

"I guess it is," I responded. I knew that he really meant for "me," not "we," to set the time, arrange a speaker, and prepare all the details for the meeting.



It is amazing that so many people only consider revival from a spectator's point of view. They are satisfied with a play-by-play view from the safety of their padded pews.

One of the key ingredients to revival is to restore ownership of the revival effort to the layperson. When I began to implement revival preparation in my church, I taught those involved the privilege of ownership. As they gained ownership, the revival became theirs. They responded by preparing themselves and our church for revival.

Revival preparation may appear difficult today, but we must prepare. God has chosen to include us in His work of revival. In every case, God uses some grace-touched individual to bring some grace-needing person to the Cross. All of this becomes possible when revival comes.

In John 11, we find Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus had the power to call one from the dead, but He chose to command those standing nearby to remove the stone from the door. He could have spoken that stone to dust. Instead, He involved others in the revival of Lazarus.

The church and its leadership must become engaged in the work of training Christians in the "how." We can no longer assume that everyone knows how to do the work of revival. We must return to basics in revival preparation.

Vince Lombardi was the head football coach of the Green Bay Packers for many years. He motivated his men to play every moment of every game to the best of their ability. The Packers were as strong and tough in the last two minutes of the game as they were at the opening kickoff.

What was their secret? Lombardi began each practice session by holding up a football and saying, "This is a football!" Then he drilled his men in the basics of conditioning, blocking, tackling, and playmaking. This thorough training in the basics proved important when the pressure was really on; it kept them from giving up.

When Christians are trained how to do the work of revival preparation, they will not be so ready to give up. We must see that we are in this "game" until the end. Then we will hear the words of the Father, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

An integral part of preparation is accountability. If revival planning is to be successful, there must be some

level of accountability. It is best if the church member working on the revival committee is accountable to his fellow church members.

Sometimes under the guise of grace, we believe that we are not accountable to anyone. The Bible is clear on accountability (Ezekiel 33). When this ingredient is missing, people become slack in following through. This does not mean that revival should place a burden upon those involved. The work is completed by making accountability a part of the process.

Mark 14:3-9 relates the account of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus. Jesus responded that she had done this unto His burying. After His crucifixion, we find the women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, but they found that He had risen from the dead. Because Mary had taken the opportunity to anoint Jesus at this supper, she was the only one with the privilege of anointing Him at all. She had finished her work *when* she should have. We see then how important it is, not only to do the work of revival or to know how to do it, but also to know when this work should be accomplished and to be accountable in the completion of it.

#### Revival Is for People

"We have a lot of sick folks this

week," I explained to the evangelist.

A pastor friend asked, "How did the revival meeting go last week?"

"You know how those ball games affect attendance," was my only reply.

These answers were flimsy excuses because I really did not have the solution. Embarrassment had brought me to the point of almost giving up on revival. I blushed often. I tired of explaining to the evangelist and to the church why so few people were attending our revivals. I longed to see our building packed with people—people with God on their minds and a desire in their hearts for revival.

People really want revival (Ps. 85:6). Christians need to involve other people in revival. Revival is possible only when we allow people to participate in all aspects of the work.

The people of Nehemiah's day had a mind to work (Neh. 2:18; 4:6, KJV). It only takes one person with a mind and heart set on seeing revival. That person will get others involved. Sooner than you can say, "Amazing grace!" revival lights will be burning brighter than ever.

On a gloomy day in 1857, a New York City man, Jeremiah Lanphier, scanned the morning newspaper. He read that the depression gripping the nation was causing fear and panic

among the people. Factories were stopping production, and unemployment affected thousands.

Although not a big industrialist, Lanphier had one important distinction. He had great faith in God! Concerned with the grim economic situation, he sent a note to all his business acquaintances, telling them that each day at noon there would be a prayer meeting held in his office. With high hopes, he arranged 20 chairs in a circle. But the first day no one came. All alone he prayed fervently that God would cause a change in him and in America. A few friends joined him the second day. It was not long before people occupied all 20 chairs.

A short time later similar gatherings started on Wall Street, Williams Street, and finally on Broadway. Like wildfire, the movement spread to many parts of the country, affecting the moral tone and spiritual life of the nation. Some historians say that this effort of united prayer and faith was an integral part of the improvement in the economy that soon followed.

People need more than another meeting to attend. People long for a Spirit-led, heart-changing revival. Are you ready for revival? Draw that circle around yourself today and ask God to begin revival inside your circle!

## Interim Pastors (continued from page 1)

of 17 years. His special opportunity for ministry included making preparation for the next incoming pastor.

"Intentional interim" ministry did not just come off the press. Long ago John the Baptist expressed the intention of interim pastors: "That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become

less" (John 3:29-30). That magnanimous spirit helps to bridge the gap over troubled waters, to bring healing to bereaved congregations, and to lay the groundwork for building up the Church of Jesus Christ.

If anybody asks—and nobody does—how long an interim ministry should extend, I suggest a month for

each year the predecessor served that congregation. Intentional interim ministry has much to offer a growing congregation and a dynamic denomination serving the generations to come. In a few years I hope to enlist.

(For further information write: Network, 916 S. Rolling Rd., P.O. Box 21251, Baltimore, MD 21128, U.S.A.)

## Christian Holiness (continued from page 19)

Living Christian holiness in such a way as to intensify our pluralistic world's hunger for it will call for our modeling *agapē* and purity, for finding in interpersonal relationships, in the expression of sanctified anger and ambition, in our mutual respect for the ministries God has assigned to us and other leaders the holy balance He intends, and for us to be delivered

from our blind spots to the point of bringing our respective cultures under the judgment of Christ.

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1. I am drawing in part on two previous presentations. The first one was a paper on "The Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition: Renewing a Renewal Movement," which I presented at the church leaders' conference of the Wesleyan/Holiness Study Project supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts at Asbury Theological Seminary, February 1-3, 1990. The second

presentation was in the Malcolm R. Robertson Lectureship on Holy Living at Azusa Pacific University's C. P. Haggard School of Theology, September 30—October 1, 1991, and particularly my third lecture on "The Holiness of Proclamation."

2. George G. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 23.

3. Lewis is quoted in Bruce Larson, *Ask Me to Dance* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1972), 10-11, and in turn in Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People*, 68.

4. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (Reprint; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978-79), 12:57.

# Today's Books for Today's Preachers



## **A WOMAN'S PLACE? LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH**

by C. S. Cowles,  
Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City,  
1993 (PA083-411-464X)

C. S. Cowles is a professor of preaching and biblical literature at Northwest Nazarene College. He has authored *Family Journey into Joy* and has written for numerous publications, including the *Preacher's Magazine*. In this new book, Cowles challenges the church to take a new look at a controversial issue: "We have reached a crisis point in the Wesleyan-Arminian holiness tradition. We are in danger of losing a major dimension of our spiritual and social heritage. We have allowed a strident fundamentalist and traditionalist force in our contemporary church world, which perpetuates the scandal of blatant sexist discrimination against women, to intimidate us and squeeze us into its narrow mold."

Some readers may be surprised at the author's assertion that the modern feminist movement had its roots in evangelical and holiness revivals of the last two centuries. He also takes issue with those who blame today's societal ills on the feminist movement.

Cowles discusses in detail the biblical texts that are used to prohibit women from serving in leadership roles in both the church and home. He shows how male-biased translation and interpretation have altered the original meaning of these scriptures.

The author looks back at church history and wonders what today's church and missionary organization would be like if courageous women had not been deeply involved in the

work. He looks to the future and wonders what could happen if the great potential of God-called and Spirit-filled women is unleashed.

Cowles places the responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of all local, district, and general church leaders. He challenges "male guardians of the 'sacred flame' of gospel preaching" to "die out to their own lust for power and dominance" and to confront "a deeply entrenched discriminatory patriarchal system."

Only the open-minded will read this book.

Only the brave will be moved to action.

—Karen K. Hiner

## **JUST PEACEMAKING: TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACEMAKING**

by Glenn Stassen,  
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/  
John Knox Press, 1992  
(PA066-425-2982)

This book title is attractively and perhaps deliberately ambiguous. Does "just" here mean "only" or "equitable"? Maybe both but definitely the latter, for it inseparably links the projects of peace and justice. In doing so, the book is impressively experiential, strikingly biblical, cogently rational, and invitingly practical.

In applying the message of the book to the state of the world in its post-cold war setting, it is freshly contemporary. The mind-boggling series of events epitomized by the removal of the Berlin wall is referred to by the author as "the Turning" in which "everything is new." His presence and participation in this facet of the

event that was Germany's is narrated in an impressive but modest way. His hands-on involvement serves to reinforce the scholarly credentials and approach Stassen brings to his task.

In a strikingly biblical way, this professor of Christian ethics at Louisville's Southern Baptist Theological Seminary scrutinizes the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 12 for a scriptural basis for just peacemaking. The book's subtitle captures it succinctly. "Transforming initiatives" is a term that Stassen has tirelessly popularized in years of writing, speaking, and promoting peace. He finds in each part of the Sermon on the Mount a three-fold pattern that includes statements of traditional piety, how these have served as a mechanism of bondage, and how transforming initiatives can be taken to free us from this bondage in our thrust toward peacemaking. *Just Peacemaking* is practical without being programmatic. For example, he delineates the task of just peacemaking into 7 steps. Seeing our enslaving bondages as addictive, he also relates the 12 steps of recovery to this bondage. Yet such steps in both instances are to be creatively and dynamically, rather than mechanically, applied.

As for the justice undergirding the peacemaking enterprise, he especially emphasizes human rights, to which he devotes 2 of his 10 chapters, one to the Christian origin of human rights and another to the concrete acts of the Children's Defense Fund. Stassen sees his schema of just peacemaking as being flexible enough to transcend the distinction between pacifism and just war theory and actually demonstrates this in his closing chapter.

—W. Clyde Tilley

# Picture Windows for Preaching

### Domestic Violence

American society harbors an epidemic that infects over a million homes every year: domestic violence. As many as 15 million adult women have been victims of battery, rape, and other forms of physical and sexual assault in the home. Each year a million or more women will be added to that total. Each year an estimated 4 million children are victimized by abuse and neglect. Nearly a million elderly persons—most of them women—are abused or neglected.

Dr. Koop comments:

The consequences of battering are enormous: loss of self-esteem, inability to work productively and to care for children, psychiatric problems, alcohol and drug dependence. Studies have shown that battered women are four to five times more likely than nonbattered women to require psychiatric treatment. . . . Moreover, studies have shown that women who are abused are eight times more likely to abuse their children than women who are not abused. Then abused children often become abusers. We must break this vicious cycle.

—C. Everett Koop, *Koop* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 377.

### Frustration

Chuck Swindoll points out that life gets complicated, and we find ourselves in dilemmas on a regular basis. He states that many people get into the gray areas of life. He illustrates his point with Charles Schulz's famous "Peanuts" cartoon.

Lucy is philosophizing and Charlie Brown is listening intently. As usual, Lucy has the floor, delivering one of



by Derl G. Keefer

Pastor,  
Three Rivers, Mich.

her dogmatic lectures, while Charlie is the audience. "Charlie Brown," she begins, "life is a lot like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they're going. Others place it to see where they've been. And some so they can see where they are at the present."

Charlie sighs, "I can't even get mine unfolded!"

Many of us understand Charlie's problem because we can identify with him. Life's dilemmas leave us frustrated, unsettled, and scared.

—Charles Swindoll, *Laugh Again* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 63.

### Spiritually Dead

Lloyd Ogilvie observed that the problem of being spiritually dead is that seldom do we recognize it in ourselves. Think how often we exclaim, "That's really living!" about lifeless popularity, prosperity, and human power.

Ogilvie relates a humorous story about two gravediggers who are responsible for digging the largest grave they had ever been told to dig. The dimensions of the grave were 6 feet wide and 15 feet long!

As they grumbled and complained

about digging such a deep and wide grave, they questioned as to what kind of casket would go into it. Just as they finished shoveling, a hearse drove up carrying the casket, funeral director, and the attendants. No one else attended including family or friends.

The gravediggers were bewildered why they had been told to dig such a large grave for such a small casket. Suddenly, a trailer truck for transporting cars pulled up beside the grave. Fastened securely to the transporter was a magnificent, gigantic, gold-plated Rolls Royce.

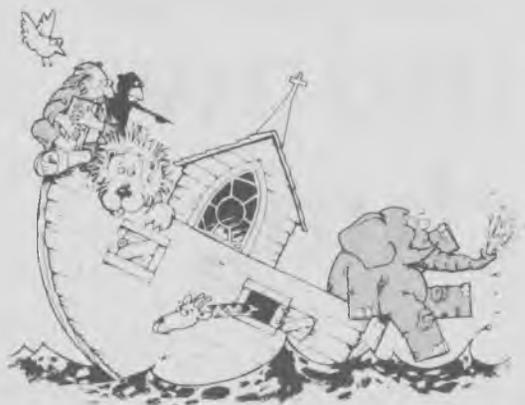
The gravediggers' surprise turned to downright astonishment as the funeral attendants placed the casket next to the Rolls Royce, opened the lid, and slid the fully embalmed, neatly dressed corpse out and put him on the driver's side of the car behind the wheel. The funeral director came over to the corpse and wrapped his cold, dead fingers around the steering wheel and then molded his lifeless, expressionless mouth into a big smile. His finishing touch was to open the corpse's eyes, which looked out on the world with a blank stare.

As the door was shut, the crane swung into position and hooked its metal cable to the top of the car. It carried the dead man and his gold Rolls Royce to the grave and lowered it all to the bottom with a gentle thud!

One of the gravediggers glanced at the other, looked at the Rolls Royce, and blurted out, "Man, that's living!"

Are we going through life with a blank look, motionless hands, a dead heart, and with a lot of meaningless glitter, thinking that we are living?

—Lloyd Ogilvie, *Enjoying God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 65.



**I**t's been a quiet week in Backwater, Ark., my hometown. A quiet and somewhat depressing week as I contemplate the General Assembly just past.

General Assembly conjures up images of import and destiny. There is something almost scriptural about going to "the general assembly of the firstborn." Tens of thousands, flowing like a mighty river, making the long quadrennial pilgrimage in anticipation of great services, thrilling music, outstanding preaching, momentous decisions hammered out in scintillating debate, and seeing old friends. It is homecoming on a global scale.

Most exciting is the expectation of change, beginning with the election of new general superintendents. While speculation and predictions abound, anything can happen. Even the lowliest of preachers takes courage in the remembrance of that fabled Assembly when, after receiving only one vote on the first ballot, an ex-missionary came out of nowhere to go over the top: from relative obscurity to the general superintendency in one giant leap.

Alas, it was not to be for me. I wasn't elected general superintendent. I didn't even get one vote. There was still a faint hope that destiny would strike, however, for General Assemblies always precipitate many personnel changes. It appears, however, that the ripple effect doesn't reach to Backwater.

Speaking of friends, I stumbled into many of them. Some greeted me as "Mike," others as "Fred," or just plain "How ya doin', ol' buddy? How's Cheryl? Oh yes, of course it's Martha. How's things in California? Oh, that's

## The Post Assembly Blues

right, you're in Arkansas now." All the while their busy

eyes would be glancing over my shoulders or flitting about from side to side, checking out the passing crowd for someone more interesting or more important to whom to talk. "Let's have lunch," they would say.

"How about today?" I would ask.

"Would love to," they would toss back over their shoulder as they hurried away, "but I'm already committed."

I was barred entrance to the arena's ground-floor door that, inadvertently, I tried to enter. I did not notice the sign, "Delegates and Officials Only." But wait a minute, I thought: How about my decades of faithful pastoral service? My unfailing payment of budgets and support of the leadership? Sorry: no badge, no entrance. I was shut out of the inner sanctum sanctorum—an exile in my own church.

The hotel misplaced our reservation. I arrived on time to my college's alumni breakfast, but one day late. I was in the bathroom when the convener of a Rural Pastors' Renewal Seminar called on me to pray. My car was towed from an expired parking meter, costing an afternoon and \$95.00 to get it released. Some may have left General Assembly elated; I left deflated.

And then it happened: like a bolt out of the blue, like the dawn breaking after a long winter's night, like a refreshing rain after a drought. It was Thursday, I believe, when the parsonage doorbell rang. A postal employee handed me a package marked PRIORITY MAIL. Not first class stuffed impersonally in a mailbox but PRIORITY MAIL, hand-delivered by a high official of the United States government. "Priority," according to Webster, means "in first place, of superior

rank, holding a privileged position."

With trembling hands, weak knees, and sweaty palms, I received this precious package into my hands as manna from heaven. My mind raced with possibilities: perhaps the General Board, in its organizational meeting following General Assembly, had decided to add a seventh general superintendent to relieve the pressure on the other six, and they had chosen me. Or perhaps it was an invitation to serve as pastor of one of the super-churches vacated by the newly elected generals, complete with handwritten notes from board members pleading with me to come.

Manfully I resisted the urge to tear into the kitchen, grab a knife, and rip the package open. One should not betray too much excitement when destiny beckons. One should act as if accustomed to greatness. One does not rush at such times but moves with cool deliberation. And so I poured myself another cup of coffee, got out the scissors, and was careful to snip along the dotted line so as not to damage its precious contents.

I cut along the dotted line as casually as if I spent my days and nights opening PRIORITY MAIL. My hand trembled not. It worked the scissors with measured skill, with the cool command of a brain surgeon. Gently, I turned the package on end. I shook it. Out fell underwear. UNDERWEAR? That's right: underwear! Not new but used underwear: my underwear left behind at our daughter's house.

My very own daughter, in whom my soul delights—my daughter sends me underwear by PRIORITY MAIL! I can't believe it!

One must always be hopeful, I guess, but wary of illusions.

And that's the news from Backwater, Ark., where the church is good, where the people are strong, and where folks accept me as their pastor, "warts and all." ✠

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# WORSHIP

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# PREACHING

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# HELPS

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John Hay, Jr.

## June/July/August 1994

Prepared by John Hay, Jr.

### INTRODUCTION

Several things are on my mind as I prepare these sermons for summer months.

1. I am mindful that it is immediately following the celebration of Pentecost. I'm on a campaign to raise to a higher level the awareness, appreciation, and celebration of this third great "divine exclamation point" of the Christian faith! Advent and Easter are adorned with careful planning and traditions. However, Pentecost often slides past in the shadows without hardly a notice. It would seem that the holiness churches would see Pentecost Day as a grand opportunity to highlight the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. I have tried to do this in these sermons, most of which are post-Pentecost sermons built on texts from Acts.

2. I am mindful that I am an urban pastor of an inner-city congregation. Instead of trying to hide this fact, I have chosen to let it flavor the sermons with illustrations and perspective from the heart of the city and its issues. The issues include outward-bound witness, challenging prejudice, working with "dismissed people," holding the community of faith together amid a variety of strains, learning to draw from the resources of the Spirit for the church. I have found Acts a rich resource for urban ministry, which demands a metropolitan perspective.

In this vein, I have grown as an urban pastor to appreciate the whole city and to develop a global perspective. I used to stand in the inner city and bad-mouth all those people who abandoned it. However, I have learned through my years as pastor of Shepherd Community Church of the Nazarene to draw the circle of the city much larger. The city stands as a whole. What happens in one part affects the other parts. We are interconnected with needs and resources, inside and out. This fact has contributed to a growing appreciation for the global church and its variety of needs. I hope this comes through in these sermons.

3. I am mindful that worship patterns may not translate very well. Each congregation has its own way of worshiping, its own traditions. I gained resources as others have shared on these pages what they are learning and expressing. In that spirit, I offer the pattern and expressions of worship that have shaped the community of faith called Shepherd Community.

# PENTECOST'S PURPOSE

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 1:1-11

June 5, 1994

## INTRO:

What was the purpose of Pentecost? It's worth stopping at this divine exclamation point long enough to take a second look.

Pentecost gets poor billing compared to Christmas and Easter. Briefly and mildly celebrated, too quickly we move beyond this third great celebration in the church and on to other things. Maybe that's because we're too fuzzy on the purpose of Pentecost.

The Gospel According to Luke contained the beginning of the story. It told the story about "all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1, emphasis added). Luke told of a full Gospel but did not give the end of the story. The Book of Luke demanded a sequel.

Luke pens The Acts of the Apostles to tell of all that Jesus *continued* to do and teach—through His Church. It's a never-ending story.

However, the story told in Acts could not have occurred without the Holy Spirit. The lived-out gospel cannot occur today without the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

That's the purpose of Pentecost. Pentecost celebrates the Holy Spirit, imparted to condition and empower the Church to continue and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world—to make the life of Jesus real and presently transforming.

Let's reflect on how the Spirit given at Pentecost affirms and makes possible that purpose.

## I. Jesus Commissions His Followers to Extend His Ministry in the World by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)

A. Jesus' several commissions for His followers were contingent upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

The familiar commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) would occur in the power of the Holy Spirit. John records the declaration that Jesus' followers would "do even greater things" than Jesus—with the help of the Holy Spirit (14:12). Jesus tells the disciples on the Mount of Ascension: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Before we go into all the world, we must have the Holy Spirit in us.

B. The task of communicating Jesus to the world is completely overwhelming without the help of the Holy Spirit.

ILLUS. I used to think, naively, that if the Great Commission rested on the likes of me, it would be done! I know better now. The world is bigger than I ever imagined. The entrenchment of evil is deep. My best energies and gifts are limited. Now when I think that the witness of Christ in the world rests on the shoulders of the likes of me, I all but despair. Not by ourselves or in ourselves, but

by and in the Holy Spirit will the witness of Christ in our corners of the world be effective.

ILLUS. I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Billy Graham in a "Prime Time Live" television interview declare: "I feel like a failure" in regard to the evangelization of the world in his lifetime. I spoke back to the television set: "Billy," I retorted, "it's not just up to you. Regardless of how you feel, through you the Holy Spirit has touched millions of people for Jesus."

Truly, there is nothing more pitiful than our attempts to live and proclaim the Good News on our own. In that condition, we are not to despair or abandon the task, but to be stirred to prayer and to seek the Spirit's promised assistance. He who commissions us also promises to empower us.

## II. Jesus Promises His Followers That They Will Receive the Holy Spirit for the Work of Extending His Ministry (Acts 1:8)

A. More than techniques and methods, the followers of Jesus need the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and in them to extend the work and witness of Jesus.

The disciples had been schooled in the ways of Jesus for three years. They had been discipled to be disciples. Methodology would be no problem. The problem arises at the absence of the personal presence and power of the Savior. If Jesus could not be with them physically, how could they carry on as He desired that they would? He gave His answer in the promise to come to them, to be ever present to them, by His Holy Spirit.

ILLUS. I look at the "how to" books I have read that now sit on my shelves. I thumb through magazine articles promising that "if only" certain techniques are used, the church will succeed. The variety of methods and marketing are rivaled by what one would find in most any business trade magazine. I wonder to myself, Is this really what Jesus had in mind when He commissioned us to go and make disciples? If so, then He was nothing more than the world's greatest marketing catalyst. If not, there is a dimension to witness and church extension that supersedes the best of strategies.

B. The Spirit gives form, shape, and animation to the purposes and intentions of Jesus.

In part, the reason for the promise of the Holy Spirit stems from the fact that believers could not, on their own, lift the ministry of Jesus from historic memory into living action. It was one thing to have the memory of Jesus' words and actions etched in their minds. It was another matter to bring the purposes and actions of Jesus into the center of a disciple's consciousness and live them out as one's very own mission.

Jesus declares this to be part of the work of the Holy

Spirit who would come to them. The Spirit would infuse the disciples with Jesus' presence and give shape to their expanding witness in the world. To use a phrase coined by Henri Nouwen, they would become "living reminders" of Jesus.

### III. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit Conditions and Empowers Believers to Extend Jesus' Ministry

A. Pentecost testifies to the conditioning, empowering work of the Holy Spirit in believers.

True to what Jesus indicated the Father had promised and true to His own promise, the believers who were together on the Day of Pentecost received the Holy Spirit. What they experienced conditioned them for the task of continuing and extending the ministry of Jesus.

ILLUS. *Conditioning* is a word used to describe adapting, modifying, or molding. It can mean "to modify so that an act or response previously associated with one stimulus becomes associated with another" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed.). Certainly the impact of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and being filled with the Holy Spirit brought about such a conditioning in the disciples. The Holy Spirit conditioned the disciples to embody the ministry of Jesus both on that day and for the days to come.

The believers present at Pentecost were not only conditioned for service but empowered for it. True to Jesus' promise, they received power to speak boldly, compellingly, and passionately of their crucified, risen, and ascended Savior.

B. Pentecostal grace continues to condition and empower believers for the work of extending Jesus' ministry today.

The remainder of Acts bears out that Pentecost initiated a great beginning, but only the beginning of the continuing work of Jesus in and through the Church. The history of the Church bears out that the ministry continued generation upon generation.

Pentecostal grace is accessible today to condition and empower believers to be Jesus' hands extended in our world. The Holy Spirit desires to make us, no less than the Spirit-enlivened and Spirit-animated disciples at Pentecost, adequate to the unique challenges of expressing Jesus' love and extending His reach today.

#### CONCLUSION:

Those who find in Jesus forgiveness and grace are called to witness of Him and His love in the world.

How could we not witness? We were lost and are found. We were dead and are alive. We've been forgiven of unpayable debt. We've been set free from sin. We've been given a new lease on life. We've found meaning where life was meaningless. We've found a company of pilgrims to share the journey. We've been given the hope of heaven. As Peter put it: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Yet how shall we ever witness? We are no different than the first fitful followers who, after three years of companionship, denied and abandoned Jesus. We are no

different than the band of believers who cowered in an upper room for fear of persecution. If we have not already cast shadow on the purity of our witness, then we fail to declare it with vigor and abandon. How shall the ministry of Jesus continue and extend through people like us?

The purpose of Pentecost is to condition and to empower the Church in continuing and extending the ministry of Jesus Christ. Let it begin with you; let it begin with me. Then let the Church be the Church!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"  
 Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
 Call to Worship Isa. 32:12-17  
 Spiritual Song "Let There Be an Anointing of the Spirit"  
 Responsive Scripture John 14:15-18, 26-27; Acts 2:1-4  
 Song "The Comforter Has Come"  
 Spiritual Song "Spirit of the Living God"  
 Prayer together at the open altar  
 Receiving the offerings  
 Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
 Ministry in music (solo, duet, or small group)  
 Sermon Text Acts 1:1-11  
 Sermon "PENTECOST'S PURPOSE"  
 Song "Stand Up for Jesus"  
 Spiritual Song "People of God"  
 Benediction

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Greeting One Another*

Invite the congregation to turn and look at one another as they sing "I Love You with the Love of the Lord." It is a song sung to one another, not to God. It recognizes the face of Jesus in each other. At the conclusion of the song, encourage a few moments for further interpersonal greetings. The pastor can lead by example in these moments of hospitality, momentarily leaving the platform to greet congregants during this time.

##### *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*

It is worth it to me to convey to the congregation the variety of music forms we utilize in worship. I recall Paul's encouragement to the church at Colossae: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you . . . admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (3:16). It may be stretching it a bit to delineate these as distinct forms, but it is important to me to note what songs are "scripture in music" (psalms), which are theologically structured (hymns), and gospel songs, which are more emotively responsive (spiritual songs). It helps me stay balanced and to offer balance in the service of leading the church in worship.

##### *Benediction*

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (Rev. 1:5-6).

# WHAT KIND OF SPIRIT CAME AT PENTECOST?

by John Hay, Jr.

John 16:7-15

June 12, 1994

## INTRO:

What kind of Spirit came at Pentecost? I raise this question since just because people talk about "spirit" doesn't guarantee we're talking "*Holy Spirit*."

A. The kind of spirit was a problem in the Early Church.

The Early Church dealt with that issue. A lot of spiritual people gathered around—within and outside the church, people who felt something moving within them, who needed to feel "the Spirit" in order to feel like they were spiritual. Significant conflicts in the Early Church revolved around the "kind of spirit" issues, as Acts and several of Paul's letters bear out.

This issue figured in on the Day of Pentecost. Were these followers of Jesus just enthusiasts? Were they simply highly emotional people? After all, that's how they started out. It was said of them: "They have had too much wine" (Acts 2:13). In response, Peter began to clarify the kind of Spirit that had come at Pentecost.

B. "What kind of spirit?" is an issue today.

A lot of "spiritual" people gather around today—within and outside the church. "Spiritualities" proliferate. Mormons talk about a "burning in the heart" in a way that strikes close to holiness testimonies. Others think the evidence of the Spirit is speaking in unknown tongues; that without tongues-speaking one is clearly *not* in the Spirit. Some associate the Spirit primarily with spirited music; others with quietness.

Everybody seems to claim the Spirit. It's the spiritual trump card that is played when believers are not feeling "in sync," or when we don't understand. Or when we're dry, or down, or out.

What are we saying when we say "Spirit"?

If we can identify the kind of Spirit that came at Pentecost, we can go a long way to understanding how to discern and live by that genuine Spirit.

While people "feel the Spirit" in many ways, a survey of some of the primary New Testament references to the promise and coming of the Holy Spirit turn up only a handful of scriptural verifications. John 16:5-16, recording Jesus' description of the work of the Holy Spirit, stands as one of those primary references upon which we draw.

## I. The Kind of Spirit That Came at Pentecost Is the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13; also 14:17)

Jesus described the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. The Spirit *of* truth guides believers *into* all truth (John 16:13). Defining and revealing truth, the Holy Spirit makes truth the measure of authentic living.

This is one of the characteristics that distinguishes the Holy Spirit from other spirits that play to and deal in denial and cover-up as a mode of operation. Others offer

opinion and pander to popular perspective; the Spirit reveals truth, awkward and ill-fitting as it may seem to the modern mind-set.

The spirit of the age (*zeitgeist*) calls into question objective truth in the world; the Holy Spirit makes truth the standard measure of life as God created it. Another spirit says: "This is what is right for me." The Holy Spirit declares: "This is the way it is!"

Paul described the spirit of the age as "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). The Holy Spirit makes real in the lives of disciples what Jesus promised: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). This kind of Spirit came at Pentecost.

## II. The Kind of Spirit That Came at Pentecost Is the Spirit of Conviction (John 16:8-11)

Jesus described the Holy Spirit as the One who brings conviction to bear upon people. The Holy Spirit not only reveals truth but also actively takes the truth and measures it next to us. That's the source of genuine conviction.

ILLUS. I think of the story of Cinderella's glass slipper. That slipper represents the truth. Everyone is measured next to it. It doesn't stretch; it doesn't bend; it doesn't lie. Pretenders will be revealed by its transparent witness. It will also reveal the person to whom it genuinely belongs.

Conviction is nothing other than the inner realization of who we are and what we have done in light of what God defines as the truth. The Holy Spirit fosters that inner realization in us, moving us to respond to the truth.

Truth says: "This is the way it is." Conviction says: "This is the way it is with you in regard to the truth." If I am pure in regard to the truth, the Spirit positively assures me of righteousness. If I am in violation of the truth, the Spirit negatively convicts me of sin, producing guilt. Guilt leads me to confession, forgiveness, and freedom (see 1 John 1:5-10).

Unfortunately, conviction has been both overplayed and underplayed. On the one hand, false conviction can be heaped upon overly sensitive people by those who are anxious to precipitate in them a spiritual crisis. On the other hand, it has been all but explained away by those who see guilt as detrimental to emotional health. Both distort the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

However, the Holy Spirit continues to faithfully convict persons of genuine sin and genuine righteousness. The Spirit that convicted sinners by the truth of Peter's testimony on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37) still shines the light of truth into hearts and minds. May the revelation of our facades, brokenness, hurt, and/or sin bring us more and more into the healing truth of Jesus' love.

### III. The Kind of Spirit That Came at Pentecost Is the Spirit of Comfort and Counsel (John 16:7; also John 14:16)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of comfort and counsel.

Some Bible interpreters and expositors wish to emphasize more either the comfort or the counsel dimension of the "Paraclete." Nothing is lost by making room for the fullest breadth of meaning in the term John records Jesus as applying to the Holy Spirit. "Paraclete" describes the Holy Spirit as our Comforter for our hurt or struggles and our Counselor when we're deciding or wavering.

Perhaps greater than the Comforter/Counselor emphasis is the incredible realization that by the Spirit, God is very present to us in our stresses, at our crossroads, through our troubles, on our journeys. The kind of loving, guiding presence Jesus gave to His disciples in person, the Spirit given at Pentecost will be to those who live by faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit will not leave us or lead us astray. The Spirit knows what we need and is faithful to comfort and counsel, abiding with us as would Jesus himself.

### IV. The Kind of Spirit That Came at Pentecost Is the Spirit of Power (Acts 1:8)

If truth, conviction, and comfort/counsel describe the *mending* work of the Spirit, power describes the *establishing* and *extending* work of the Spirit.

The Spirit gives power to wavering, cowering disciples—power to stand and power to hold to the path of Christ. Powerfully the Spirit cleanses the heart and endues it with holy love. That same Spirit gives power to stand and understand, power to live and power to die, power to endure to the end.

The Pentecostal Spirit is an outgoing Spirit, infusing believers with power for witness through self-forgetful service and the testimony, in word and deed, of the faithfulness of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit's power in believers would enable them to be Jesus' witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### V. The Kind of Spirit That Came at Pentecost Is the Spirit of Love (Rom. 5:5)

Paul declares that what God pours into our hearts by the Spirit is nothing other than love (Rom. 5:5). Perhaps nothing more distinguishes the Spirit of Pentecost than the character of love. The Spirit who reveals truth and brings conviction also bears it with love. In this Spirit, believers are able to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), which makes their witness powerful and effective.

Other spirits of religion place great emphasis upon meticulous law keeping, or impressive emotional or physical manifestations, or secret knowledge. The Holy Spirit in the believer is manifested, first and foremost, by love.

The manifold fruit of the Spirit began with love. Love is the greatest gift of the Spirit. Jesus made clear that the mark of His sanctified Church would be its expressed love for one another and for the world.

ILLUS. According to Clarence Kinzler, love is the distinguishing center of Christian witness in an increasingly pluralistic society. Kinzler is district superintendent of the Northern California District, Church of the Nazarene, including the San Francisco Bay area—an area in which over 200 languages are spoken, where religions proliferate, where alternative lifestyles are flaunted. Kinzler declares that love by the Holy Spirit, above all else, is and will be the winning aspect of holiness in the marketplace of religions.

### CONCLUSION:

Next time people start talking about the "spirit," don't assume they are talking "Holy Spirit." It's worth considering the nature and characteristics of the Spirit that came at Pentecost in light of the "spirit in everything" or unbiblical manifestations cropping up here and there.

The Holy Spirit is distinguished from all rivals. That Spirit will bring forth His distinguishing fruit in all those who make room for Him in their hearts and lives.

What kind of spirit are you talking about? Let the Holy Spirit speak His truth, His conviction, His help, His power, and His love to you today.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together	
Spiritual Song	"O Come, Let Us Worship Him Together"
Spiritual Song	"Lord, We Praise You"
Responsive Scripture	Eph. 4:1-7, 11-13
Hymn	"Holy, Holy, Holy"
Psalm	"Glorify Thy Name"
Hymn	"Near to the Heart of God"
Prayer together at the open altar	
Reprise Chorus of	"Near to the Heart of God"
Receiving the offerings	
Doxology sung as offerings are presented	
Ministry in music	
Sermon Text	John 16:7-15
Sermon	"WHAT KIND OF SPIRIT CAME AT PENTECOST?"
Spiritual Song	"Spirit of the Living God"
Personal responses and prayer	
"Yes, Lord, Yes"	
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offering Sentence

"Having received from the Lord's hand substance for our lives, and given freely of our means for the work of ministry, let us present the tithes and offerings to the Lord for blessing, honor, and glory. And let us lift our praise in doxology together."

##### Benediction

"May we, in the same Spirit who calls us, claims us, names us, and graces us, go forth to serve one another, our neighbors, and our world in Jesus' name. Amen."

# BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT

by John Hay, Jr.  
Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37  
June 19, 1994

## INTRO:

ILLUS. Every now and then my mother gets out scrapbooks full of photo snapshots to show my children what I was like as a child. They laugh as she tells stories on me. I look at those old photographs, and though they don't tell the whole story, they bring back many memories I have lived through. Funny thing, too, is that snapshots don't lie. There we are—captured in weird haircuts, clothing styles, and time-bound activities.

Snapshots out of the past don't tell the whole story, but they give a glimpse of what the past was like. To a limited but real extent, snapshots let us relive past times.

Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37 are such "snapshots" of the early days of the Church. The first lets us know how the Church formed its life in the days immediately following Pentecost. The second reveals something of the community of the Spirit's sense of stewardship and common life. Together, the two passages create a cameo of the Church after Pentecost.

We know what it was like *before* Pentecost: powerless apostles, denying disciples, fearful flock, a hopeful handful hidden in an upper room.

And we know what it was like *on the Day of Pentecost*. The disciples were beside themselves with joy, praise, love, and boldness. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowing with powerful witness. Like people raised from the dead, they took the city by storm that day.

But what was it like the day after Pentecost? And the next? A week later? In the months that followed? Would the revival last? Would the Holy Spirit *in* them as individuals and *upon* their life together as a fellowship sustain them as a distinctly Christian movement and influence in the world?

No doubt the emotional high subsided. However, the power and presence of the Spirit persisted. There was a lasting change because of Pentecost. The Spirit-filled believers lived differently. They valued and treated people differently. Their attitudes and outlooks changed. The issues of life about which they were concerned changed. And they *kept on being changed* by the Holy Spirit in them and among them. We see this in these two snapshots.

What we observe in this ancient community of the Spirit helps us distinguish characteristics that will guide us as we foster such communities of the Spirit today.

## I. We Observe a Community of the Spirit

Look at what was happening in the Early Church. We can observe the following actions or outlooks:

A. They persisted in maintaining a fourfold devotion (2:42). The believers committed themselves to continue to give faithful attention to "the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

B. The aspect of the miraculous was present (2:43).

C. One in heart and mind, they shared their possessions commonly and compassionately (2:44-45; 4:32-37).

D. They gave praise to God and enjoyed the favor of all the people (2:47).

E. People were drawn to their fellowship and then to their faith. It isn't often observed, but it is noteworthy that the public evidence of dynamic of fellowship drew people to the Church first. It was a magnetic fellowship. Only after describing the Church's life together does Acts record that people are being saved. I conjecture that they must have wondered what the source of such outgoing love and care and miracles was all about. Coming near, they would hear the testimonies, the Scripture being taught, and Jesus Christ proclaimed—and then be saved.

## II. We Distinguish a Community of the Spirit

The Church described in these cameos helps us distinguish some characteristics of a community of the Spirit from other organizations or associations.

Certainly, a community of the Spirit is *not* like any other organization or association of people, such as a society, fraternity, union, or country club. Instead, as a holiness church membership induction ritual states so eloquently, "We believe that in the Church of Jesus Christ there exists a fellowship that cannot otherwise be known."

The church is *not* a social agency or political interest group or rescue mission. It is not even a Christian softball league umpired by a well-known lay Christian! Parachurch activity does not and cannot substitute for the Body of Christ, which finds expression in local communities of faith.

I can identify, at minimum, five distinguishing characteristics of a community of the Spirit:

A. A community of the Spirit evidences a yieldedness to God and anticipates grace.

As I think of the believers gathering before Pentecost during those days of extended prayer and conference, I imagine that the time included much self-emptying and yielding to God and to one another. They did so in anticipation of God's promise. After Pentecost, the believers continued to yield themselves to God and to one another.

Emptiness is a prerequisite to community. Some things need to be drained off and let go. Emptying ourselves of our presuppositions, our striving for position and power, and our frustrations creates a readiness to receive the Spirit. Yieldedness to God creates the room necessary for the Spirit to work positively and in ever new ways in community.

B. Individual and corporate seeking for the fullness of the Spirit is ongoing in a community of the Spirit.

Seeking the fullness of the Spirit is an ongoing attitude and action of the Church described in Acts. This beckons to the church today to seek the Spirit's fullness both at an individual and corporate level.

The community together will only be as powerful as the individual alone on his or her knees before God. The corporate witness and power of the church may be limited by febleness and emptiness of individual Christians.

The call of the church comes at two levels. First, we are called for personal purity and holiness by the fullness of the Spirit. Second, we are called for corporate righteousness arising from fullness and acted out prophetically in the world.

C. A community of the Spirit evidences a readiness to learn, teach, listen, and share the Good News.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (2:42). In the Spirit, there is a grace of being ready to listen and learn and explore the height and depth of the Good News that runs counter to preestablished prescriptions or patterns. We are invited to set aside our worldly certainties and redraw our maps based on an ongoing exploration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. There is sensitivity to fellowship and hospitality in a community of the Spirit.

The Spirit instills in the church a sensitivity to one another that creates room for hospitality and inclusiveness. Hospitality is, at root, "making room." This is not a program of fellowship, but a Spirit-led readiness to listen, to care, to respond, to help, to suffer together, and to include the heretofore excluded.

ILLUS. While fellowship is natural, it must be encouraged. Often networks in the church grow old and ingrown without participants knowing it. I challenge our church groups in planning activities to plan them with "five 'I's' for harvest": invite, include, inspire, innovate, integrate.

Integration of new persons into the fellowship and expanding the base of the fellowship are perhaps two of the most attractive and prophetic characteristics of a community of the Spirit.

E. A community of the Spirit responds to felt and requested life needs of believers and the larger community.

Upon seeing or hearing of need, the community of the Spirit is moved to compassion, just like its Lord. Responding in a timely, wise manner to real and perceived needs, when they are expressed, is an expression of holy love.

We have much to recover if we take this portion of the Church's original snapshot images seriously. We embrace other aspects so readily. However, are we ever so moved with compassion for others that we sell our second home? Do we readily take what is so-called

ours and give to God as use for those in need? This seems so exceptional, but it is not the exception according to the biblical view. Rather, it is to be the normal way of responding and growing as a community of the Spirit.

### III. We Become a Community of the Spirit

How we become a community of the Spirit today has already been implied. It doesn't just happen, nor is it to be presumed that every church is becoming a community of the Spirit in the sense that Acts describes it. Spirit community is intentional. It can't be created, but fostered, nurtured.

It begins as it began, with individual yieldedness and corporate seeking the fullness of the Spirit. It begins with you; it does not end with you. It involves a corporate melting and willingness of believers to be, in and by the Holy Spirit, the hands and feet of Jesus today. The promise of the Early Church's snapshot of life together is good news in an isolating, pecking-order world. People who are looking for a genuine sense of belonging, to be valued as persons—named and known and needed—are looking at the church.

These are critical days for the Church in the world—and for our church in this community. May we become what we've been called to become—a distinguished community of the Spirit. May the world's snapshot of us find in us a striking likeness of the snapshot at which we looked.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"The Family of God"  
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
Psalm 100  
Psalm "I Will Enter His Gates with Thanksgiving"  
Psalm "Sacrifice of Praise"  
Spiritual Song "Praise You, Father, Bless You, Jesus"  
Scripture Eph. 2:14-22  
Hymn "The Church's One Foundation"  
Spiritual Song "Gentle Shepherd"  
Prayer together at the open altar  
Receiving the offerings  
Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
Sermon Text Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37  
Sermon "BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT"  
Spiritual Song "Make Us One, Lord Jesus"  
Moments of personal response  
Spiritual Song "Bless God"  
Benediction

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Sentence

As ushers process to receive the offerings, read Ps. 116:12, 14. "How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? . . . I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."

# THE PRAYING COMMUNITY

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 4:23-31

June 26, 1994

## INTRO:

One of the things I remember about the church of my childhood was its emphasis on prayer. Prayer meetings were just that: meetings for *prayer*. Most of the time it seemed too loud and long, but I was impressed that if the church was to be the church, it would be about prayer—first and foremost. I have since come to appreciate the church as the praying community.

ILLUS. A year before I became pastor of an inner-city church, a friend was showing me through the old building. It was in terrible condition—peeling paint, musty smell, and run-down. As we walked through, I heard strange noises coming from the sanctuary. I peered in to find eight women kneeling at the altar praying fervently for the salvation of people and revival in the church. I decided that the church's physical condition would be taken care of by its spiritual condition if those prayers were answered.

Beyond any physical condition, the spiritual challenges facing the church are great. Consider our efforts: We help people but see little progress. We work hard and burn low. I can't help but think that, whenever the church is engaging in redemptive care and seeking to be faithful to God and yet is thwarted, the breakthrough we long for must come through prayer. We must become a praying community.

The Early Church described in the Acts of the Apostles shows a Church that refused to be thwarted by intimidation or crisis. Instead, they learned to become a praying community. As they did, they experienced spiritual breakthrough that unleashed the power of the Spirit in the Church.

If Acts gives a pattern for the Church in its life and action, what does it indicate to us about the place of prayer in the life of today's community of faith?

## I. Prayer Is the First Act of the Spirit-Seeking Church (Acts 1:14)

A. When we pray for one another and when we pray for spiritual breakthrough, we engage in the most basic act of the Christian life.

After Jesus' ascension, His apostles and the company who followed Jesus engaged in prayer as the first and continuous act of the Church. Before the first word was spoken, the first sermon preached, the first act of compassion shared, the first decision made, they prayed.

I am becoming convinced that prayer is the most basic act of ministry. It is not something to which we resort after our intellectual and emotional efforts are spent. It is not something we do in addition to acts of evangelism and compassion. It is the most basic act of ministry. Without it, ministry is not ministry in the name and power of Christ.

B. As the Church's priority, prayer orients us to God.

I speculate that during those pre-Pentecost days of extended prayer together, the disciples' orientation changed from self to God. We are overly self-conscious. Our point of reference is ourselves. But prayer orients us to God.

ILLUS. In his best-selling book *The Body*, Charles Colson indicates this is one of the great problems in the Church today: "What the church needs most desperately is holy fear. The passion to please God more than the culture and community in which we spend these few short years."

There is no more direct and intimate way to kindle the passion to please God than by fervent, childlike prayer.

## II. Prayer Is a Primary Means of Sustaining Dynamic Life in the Church (Acts 2:42)

A. Prayer not only orients us to God but also enlivens the spiritual vitality of the church.

Acts does not indicate that prayer is the *only* action of ministry. However, this verse indicates that prayer is a necessary exercise to which we devote ourselves, and that by it the church is enlivened. Prayer brings an extraordinary sense to some rather ordinary activities—like eating, fellowship, and teaching.

B. Prayer is the lifeline to continuing power and wisdom for the church.

While we rightly associate prayer with great spiritual breakthrough, it is also a daily lifeline for the church. Like blood continuously bringing oxygen and power to the muscles, prayer is the lifeline to continuing the basic power and wisdom needed for daily decision-making. Prayer helps us work through the challenges and changes in the life of the faith community.

## III. Prayer Brings Overcoming Grace and Boldness to Speak the Name of Jesus in the Face of Opposition (Acts 4:23-31)

A. When the Early Church was confronted with threats, they had the wisdom to turn fears into prayer.

Peter and John are released from prison after having been threatened severely by the Sanhedrin for healing and preaching in Jesus' name. While Peter retorts that he couldn't help but speak about what he had seen and heard (4:20), nonetheless, the subsequent reaction of the Church makes it clear the threats were not lost on them.

They were intimidated. Intimidated, but not paralyzed. Luke tells us that when the Church heard the story from Peter and John, "they raised their voices together in prayer to God" (4:24). Having earlier established a pattern of the priority of prayer, believers readily turned to prayer in a crisis that threatened their witness.

B. Fears turned to prayers result in spiritual victory.

Instead of wallowing in fear and doubt when faced with threats of being silenced or by sheer intimidation, we can pray. The Psalmists give overwhelming testimony that fears turned to prayer turn into spiritual victory for the righteous.

In Acts, the believers take their case to God. They recall His faithfulness and their identity in Him. They lay out their predicament and ask for His intervention for continuing witness.

After they pray, the place is shaken, they are filled with the Spirit, and they speak the Word of God boldly (v. 31). Spiritual breakthrough!

## CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. Very early in my urban pastoral ministry, I observed that prayer—at a level I had not really engaged in before—would be necessary if the church was to stem the tide of evil that sweeps over the city. The temptations and vulnerabilities are great. The entrenchment of the enemy is deep. If the tide is to be turned, the church must become a praying community, engaging in prayer as the most basic act of ministry.

What more radical act of faith can the community of Jesus Christ offer the world than the act of prayer? It stems the inward fears that would paralyze the church, and it breaks over into boldness that drives back the darkness. Prayer moves the church from defensive maintenance to active engagement of the powers that would stifle or undo God's plans. May we become a praying community.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"  
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
Ps. 105:1-4  
Hymn "To God Be the Glory"  
Psalm "Glorify Thy Name"  
Scripture Col. 3:1-4, 12-17  
Hymn "He Hideth My Soul"  
Ministry in Music "Hiding Place Medley"  
(from *Only to Him* by Brooklyn Tabernacle Singers)  
Prayer together  
Receiving the offerings  
Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
Ministry in music  
Sermon Text Acts 4:23-31  
Sermon "THE PRAYING COMMUNITY"  
"Let Us Pray" from the Lillenas musical *Follow Me*  
Invitation of the congregation to the altar for prayer  
Spiritual Song "Lord, Be Glorified"  
Benediction

## Creative Worship Ideas

### *Hospitality and Life Together Concerns*

An argument could be made that announcements should be relegated to the bulletin. Once the act of worship commences, certainly announcements are out of place for me. These gathering moments from Sunday School to worship are transitional by nature. I assist the congregation to move from individual conversations, small-group settings, and perhaps the frustrations of getting the children out of the car, to become a congregation at one in these opening moments.

In a brief but varied number of ways we greet one another, encourage visitors to complete a guest card, highlight the day's other worship services, celebrate something from the past week, make special recognitions, note special opportunities to serve, resource, or reach out during the week, and invite ministry leaders to occasionally share information regarding youth, missions, Sunday School, the compassionate ministry, etc. I consider these issues not simply announcements, but vital concerns that nurture and foster our "Life Together" beyond the act of public worship. I have been inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's little book by that title. I plan this time carefully and selectively. It must not be rambling or haphazard. I conclude it with a call to enter the Lord's presence with praise.

### *Special Music in Worship*

"Special music" can be special or a disastrous drain on a focused service of worship. I try to do everything within my responsible range to encourage that solos, duets, or small groups will offer music that has been prayerfully selected, thoughtfully rehearsed, and gracefully shared. We work with a quarterly music schedule. Guidelines and suggestions for preparation, along with a letter of appreciation from me, are included in this mailing. I select the morning worship musicians. If I have a sermon or service for which I have a specific song in mind, and considering the openness of the person who is scheduled, I will often ask the person to sing it. Likewise, choral music should augment the focus of worship for the day. I invite those who will offer "ministry in music" to join the worship leaders for our weekly before-service meeting of instruction and prayer.

### *Offertory Sentence*

"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him" (1 Chron. 16:29).

### *Benediction*

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

# FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT—AGAIN!

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 4:18-31

July 3, 1994

## INTRO:

A theological quandary is brewing in Acts 4:31. It goes to the heart of what we think about the work of God in our hearts. It challenges the assumption that believers are only *once* filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke records that the believers were filled *again* with the Holy Spirit. They had been filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Now, Luke tells us, they are again “filled with the Holy Spirit.” They *had been filled* with the Spirit; now they are *filled again*. What’s going on here? Is this theologically correct? What does it say to us about God’s Spirit at work in us and in the Church?

Let’s examine the text and draw together some observations to make way for the full range of God’s work in our lives. It would seem that God, who initially fills us with the Holy Spirit, is also faithful to renew us by the Holy Spirit.

## I. God Filled “Spirit-filled” Believers in the Church’s First Crisis (Acts 3:1—4:23)

The story of the text begins to bring our quandary into focus.

Followers of Jesus who had been filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost are causing a stir in Jerusalem. People are drawn to their magnetic fellowship. Sick people are being healed. Persons in need are being assisted. The Good News is spoken boldly.

Peter and John heal a man begging alms at the Temple. Peter preaches to those who saw it happen and gives credit to Jesus. He calls upon them to “repent . . . and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus” (3:19-20).

In reaction, the same people who conspired to crucify Jesus seize Peter and John and put them in jail. The next day they threaten the disciples to speak no longer in the name of Jesus. However, Peter declares, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:20).

After further threats, Peter and John are released. They return to the Church and tell the believers all that has happened and of the threats made against them. What would they do? *This is the first major crisis in the Church*. Will the threats silence the Church? Will it dampen their spirits? Will they “proceed with caution”?

Luke tells us their response: “When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God” (4:24). They took their burden to the Lord. They submitted their fears and their predicament to God.

In response to their prayer, they were “filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly” (4:31).

What’s going on here? God, who had initially filled the believers with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, now fills them

again in response to the present challenge of faith and witness.

## II. God Fills the Spirit-filled Church Again and Again

This wouldn’t be the last time “Spirit-filled” believers would again be filled with the Spirit. Acts records enough times that “Spirit-filled” believers receive a fresh filling with the same Spirit that we begin to see this is *not the exception, but an expectation* in the life of faith.

The apostle Paul encouraged believers to keep on being “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) as a matter of continual renewal and fullness of the Spirit.

Perhaps Acts 4:31 presents a different kind of Spirit fullness than took place at Pentecost. An argument could be that there is “one baptism but many fillings with the Spirit.” Perhaps God purifies and possesses us in sanctifying fullness, then fills that sanctified vessel again and again as we extend and expend ourselves in sacred service.

Yet Acts 4:31 does not describe believers being “filled with the Spirit” to any lesser degree or less consequentially than at Pentecost. The infilling may be different in purpose but not in substance or degree.

ILLUS. I noticed a large, coal-fueled power generating station on Lake Charlevoix in northern Michigan as our family vacationed there last summer. I learned that all the area depends on the electricity that the station generates. The station depends on coal to keep its boilers turning great generators.

Twice each year a Great Lakes tanker, loaded down with coal, makes its way across Lake Michigan and through a narrow channel into Lake Charlevoix. Slowly, yet powerfully, the lumbering hulk of a ship makes its way to the power station and unloads the coal—literally filling the station with coal to provide power for the people. The power is already on, but the fresh supply of coal refuels the station for new power for a new time.

For the consecrated and Spirit-filled person, the power is already on. Already one has submitted his or her life completely to Jesus. Already Jesus is Lord and is ruling one’s life by the Spirit. The power is on. Yet refueling is necessary. God faithfully gives us a new touch of His Spirit in a timely way.

## III. Why Is Renewal by the Spirit Necessary?

Why do believers need to be filled with the Spirit again?

A. Believers need to be filled with the Spirit again for five reasons.

1. *Because our passion for God dies down*. Sometimes it burns dangerously low. Our life in Christ is cultivated by rekindling the flame of romance again and again.

2. *Because wavering in our faith can become an entrenched pattern into which we too easily settle.* Too often we find ourselves reeling from one storm after another. We mistakenly think this is the normal Christian life.

3. *Because old, defeated enemies of our souls rise up to challenge us again.* Old fears can revive. Settled issues reappear in a new form.

4. *Because the world's seductive temptations and deceiving priorities bombard us.*

5. *Because Satan may try to rob us of the joy of following Jesus.* We focus on the suffering, the sacrifice, the tribulations, the forms, the urgency, so that we are drained of that distinctly Christian gift: joy.

B. In addition, spiritual renewal corrects these three faulty ways of thinking:

1. *That "once you've got it, you've got it; that's it; don't expect anything more; and don't waste it."*

2. *That "if you lose the edge off your Spirit-filled life, you've got to go back to square one and start from the beginning."*

3. *That everything after you've been initially filled with the Spirit comes by human effort, by trying harder, by sheer cross-bearing fortitude.*

ILLUS. One of my greatest temptations as a pastor comes from the pressure to "make it happen" for the church and for me as a believer. Repeatedly I am seduced into thinking that we can—that I can—somehow, by sheer effort and trying harder and working longer, make renewal and growth occur. I think like this: "If we're low, then lift it. If we're slow, then push harder. We can make the church all that it can be by whipping it into shape." Then I slip into an "if only" mode of thinking and acting. When the tide ebbs low in the church, you'd be amazed at all the advice I get! Some of it's good advice. We get hooked into the same mode—human effort in the name of the Spirit. I confess. That's the way I sometimes think and act in regard to my personal spiritual life and growth. How about you?

I listen to Paul's counsel to the Galatians with new attention: "After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (3:3). Frankly, I get weary of driving to make things happen. People get tired of being pushed. There is a better way. At the end of my stubbornness and frustration, I resort to it. I finally stop and cry out: "O God, renew us! Renew me! It is not by our strength and not by our might, but by Your Spirit."

#### IV. God Faithfully Renews the Church That He Loves

A. My confession comes so readily because there is good news for the church: *God will be faithful to renew the church that He loves.*

The Word of the Lord spoken in other contexts but with related emphasis offers solemn encouragement for the church: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1). "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).

B. Here's good news for families: *God will be faithful to deal lovingly and healingly with you and your household.*

ILLUS, Six opinions and six wills, each one growing older and stronger and more pronounced by the day, make me more fearful than ever—as a spouse and as a parent. There's so much at stake! I have got to come to grips with the fact that I cannot save my family. I am not going to do everything right. Yet, God will be faithful to deal lovingly and healingly with me and my household.

C. There's good news for the beleaguered individual believer today: *God will be faithful to restore and renew you.* He knows right where you are. He will restore you. He will help you. He will direct you.

What is up to us? Is there anything we can do to be renewed by the Spirit?

1. *Stop trying to "make things happen" in your spiritual life.* Before the call to "take up your cross," Jesus said, "Deny yourself."

2. *Start baring your heart to God—right now.* The Church in Acts 4 set the pattern for us when our times of crisis come: don't look down; look up. Give yourself to God. Pray, "Not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42, KJV).

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"	
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together	
Ps. 100:4-5	
Psalm	"Come into His Presence"
Psalm	"Blessed Be the Name of the Lord"
Spiritual Song	"Worthy, You Are Worthy"
Scripture	Isa. 40:6-8, 12-14, 25-31
Hymn	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
Gospel Song	"My Jesus, I Love Thee" (vv. 1 and 2)
Prayer together at the open altar	
Spiritual Song	"In His Time"
Receiving the offerings	
Doxology sung as offerings are presented	
Sermon Text	Acts 4:18-31
Sermon	"FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT—AGAIN!"
Gospel Song	"Fill Me Now"
Invitation and prayer	
Spiritual Song	"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
Benediction	2 Cor. 13:14

# WHEN CONFLICT COMES TO CHURCH

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 4:32—5:11

July 10, 1994

## INTRO:

Usually we find our fellowship in the church to be comforting, refreshing, and strengthening. We quickly affirm that there exists “in the Church of Jesus Christ . . . fellowship as cannot otherwise be known” (*Manual*, ¶801).

Then we discover, amid the nicety, companionship, and repeated singing of “The Bond of Love,” a rather odd reality—conflict. Conflict throws us. It befuddles us. We can’t seem to reconcile its existence in the church. What are we supposed to do about it?

Of all places that we desire to be free of conflict, it is in the church.

ILLUS. I, for one, have lived much of life to this point with the idea that, somehow, the church just ought to be free of—and exempt from—conflict. There’s enough conflict coming from *outside* the church; it shouldn’t be *inside* the church, I reasoned. I need the church to be a place and an association in which I live that is *not* a place of struggle or tension or stress. Or, so I thought. Often my response to conflict in the church has been to *deny it*, or try to *root it out*, or *ignore it* in the hope that it will just go away. I have since been disillusioned—literally disabused of the illusion that the church is or will be free of conflict this side of heaven.

Of all places, the church is a place of conflict, as Luke demonstrates in Acts 5, 6, and 11.

A. Acts 4 demonstrates that the church is not exempt from conflict. Though not exempted from conflict, the church can be a place and association of profound struggle or tension.

I’m glad the writers of the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles didn’t hide from us the fact of conflict in the Church. No sooner does Luke tell us that “the believers were one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32) than he breaks into the story of a few who were *not*—like Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11).

Conflict among Christians in the Church gets all the more complicated because we tend to throw implications of each other’s spirituality into the mix. “If she walked closer to the Lord, she’d see things differently.”

B. Acts verifies that conflict is not bad just because it is conflict.

Reading Acts, we discover that the forthright way in which the Church confronted and dealt with its conflicts verifies that conflict is not inherently evil. Rather than “demonizing” every person who conflicted with them, it was viewed as an opportunity to be redemptive and reconciling.

C. Acts teaches us how the Early Church resolved its conflicts. Since I want to see conflict resolved in the church today, it interests me how the Early Church addressed its inner conflicts. Are there key responses to

conflict that the Church made that can help us resolve conflict in our fellowship? What patterns or perspectives can we observe that will help us prevent or tear down barriers that would divide?

A survey of Acts uncovers several responses for handling conflict when it comes to church:

## I. Personal Disarmament by the Fullness of the Spirit Is Key to Our Readiness to Deal Effectively with Conflict (See Acts 2:1-4)

The text doesn’t explicitly say that believers were disarmed when the Holy Spirit filled them. Their actions following this event make it clear that the Holy Spirit’s filling had disarmed them of internal turmoil that had previously caused so much conflict among them.

Conflict resolution in the church begins with personal disarmament, with laying down our weapons and being filled with God’s love. Without personal disarmament, we simply put a bandage over festering wounds.

Some people are cocked and ready to “go off.” Others are blind to the devastating negative impact their undisciplined ambition or self-righteousness make on the community of faith. Both evidence the fruit of an unsundered self.

James describes the impossibility of unsundered persons getting along in the church: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want” (4:1-2). What is the remedy for inner turmoil causing outward conflict? He writes, “Submit yourselves, then to God” (v. 7).

ILLUS. E. Stanley Jones used to say that in conflict we discover more about ourselves than we do about others. He points to the level of self-defensiveness as a telltale measure of the self that is surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If we’re really surrendered to Him, what are we protecting? Why is our identity so much at stake if we are hiding in Him?

Only the Holy Spirit can disarm us. Beyond disarmament, the Spirit instills in us a love that lifts our perspective, attitude, and outlook to a Christ-conformed level. Inner conflict settled and Jesus’ peace ruling in our hearts, we begin to live out what the apostle Paul commended: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). We will never know the possibilities that grace can accomplish if our hearts remain unsundered.

## II. Making the Gospel Our Goal Helps Keep Us from Getting Bugged Down in Nonessential Issues (See Acts 6:2)

The church should focus on the Good News—in the power of the Spirit making real and effective the life and testimony of Jesus Christ. We reduce conflict and hasten

resolution when we keep this in focus and move in that direction.

### III. The Holy Spirit Brings the Truth to Light—in His Time (See Acts 5:1-11)

Ananias and Sapphira's story reminds us that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to uphold and to expose truth. He is the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Be assured that every falsehood will be brought to light, exposed.

On the other hand, their story reminds us that the Holy Spirit defines and convicts—not us. He brings the truth to light in His own time, in His own way.

If you want to reduce conflict in the church and bring release and freedom into your own life, tell the truth; don't lie. If you grieve over the fallout of another's falsehood, commit your concern to God in prayer. He will vindicate you and His Church—in His time, in His way.

### IV. Creative Organizing and Sharing of Responsibility Can Reduce Conflict Among Believers (See Acts 6:1-7)

The church that responds readily to growing pains by creatively organizing will be living out the pattern of Acts. In response to the problem of food distribution and perceived inequities, the church established the order of stewards. The church cared for the immediate problem, shared the responsibility with more of the church, and anticipated the resolution of further potential problems.

ILLUS. When I became the pastor of Shepherd Community, an incredible friction existed between the Sunday School teachers and those trying to foster a daily compassionate ministry using the same facilities. I discovered that one of the rudimentary sources of the conflict was that the teachers came to their rooms on Sunday only to find their crayons and papers missing. From that issue, all kinds of bad feelings and negative conclusions were being drawn. In response, we purchased locking file cabinets in which supplies could be kept intact for each room—one for the Sunday School and one for the compassionate ministry. The conflict subsided, and we set a precedent that both church and compassionate ministry could share the same facility if we sought to respect one another and find solutions in an organized way.

### V. Two or More Heads Are Better than One When It Comes to Resolving Conflict (See Acts 11:1-18)

There is no better example for today's Church than the Early Church bringing its conflicts to the table to hear out a situation, to let the principals testify, to pray for the Spirit's direction, and to move out together in agreement.

It is our confidence as Christians that His Spirit will help us come to terms with one another and to act redemptively and reconcilingly if we bring our conflicts to the table in a spirit of humility and yieldedness. When we do, we will find that the outcomes can be greater than we ever imagined.

### CONCLUSION:

We cannot deny the fact sometimes—and perhaps more often than we want to admit—conflict comes to church. Conflict begs the question: How shall we respond?

The Spirit of Jesus enables us to handle conflict. The Spirit has a special interest in conflict in the church and among brothers and sisters in Christ. We need not suppress or deny conflict. We can confront conflict in the Spirit of Jesus in the hope and confidence that God's love will find a way. If the church is not a place where conflict can be resolved, then where is?

I am convinced that, as we have individually been reconciled to God and as we have put aside our hostility and offenses and have found peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation to one another and in a world of conflict.

Let it begin with me; let it begin with you. Let our yieldedness to the Spirit of Jesus and to one another bring resolution to our conflicts as a sign to the world that, truly, "We are one in the bond of love."

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"The Lord Is in This Place"  
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
Ps. 63:1-5  
Hymn "When Morning Gilds the Skies"  
Scripture Song "Praise the Name of Jesus"  
Responsive Scripture (insert) 2 Tim. 1:6-14  
Gospel Song "I Know Whom I Have Believed"  
Spiritual Song "I Give All My Worship to You"  
Praying together at the open altar  
Reprise "Not My Will, but Thine" (chorus only)  
Receiving the offerings  
Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
Sermon Text Acts 4:32—5:11  
Sermon "WHEN CONFLICT COMES TO CHURCH"  
Moments of personal response and prayer  
"Bind Us Together"  
Benediction

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Less Talk, More Action*

I am discovering that the less I talk, comment, expound, or digress between actions or movements of the worship service, the more heightened is the experience for everyone. If we listen to ourselves, we really sound like worship "disc jockeys": "That was Sister Sally Sue, singing 'We Shall Behold Him!' Yes, we *shall* behold Him! What a day that will be! Now, let's ask the ushers to come forward and we'll—." As a "commentator," it is a discipline for me to keep quiet, to let the song or prayer or offering or praise speak for itself.

# GROWING PAINS

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 6:1-7

July 17, 1994

## INTRO:

Acts witnesses to a growing Church. We read, wide-eyed and openmouthed, of exponential growth: about 3,000 baptized in one day (Acts 2:41); new converts *daily* (v. 47); “More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (5:14). Church growth marches on through each unfolding chapter.

No wonder we often hear of calls for the church to “get back to first-century Christianity.” Before we break out sandals and togas, we must understand that the Early Church had problems too. No cursory reading of Acts or any of Paul’s letters would fail to impress upon us that we’re dealing with a problem-laden Church.

Our desire, rather, should be to have the *power* and *understanding* and *willingness* to work through problems like our New Testament forebears. We have that capacity, too, by the Holy Spirit. The same life-giving Spirit has moved and worked in the life of the Church from that day to this.

The problems of the Church described in Acts were due, in large part, to its growth. As it reached more and more people from wider and wider backgrounds and cultural orientations, problems compounded.

As God causes churches to grow today, and as believers actively obey the commission we have received, there will be problems—growing pains. That’s a guarantee!

## I. Problems Arise in the Unique Context of Christian Ministry Expansion (v. 1)

### A. Problems surface in the context of *koinōnia*.

Before a problem existed, there was *koinonia*, that unique blessing of the Spirit bringing together in Christian fellowship persons who otherwise would not be together. We call it “community” and declare that, whoever we are, wherever we come from, we belong to one another because we belong to Jesus. The context of *koinonia* breeds its own kind of challenges.

### B. Problems formulate in the process of ministry expansion.

Growth creates problems: “the number of disciples was increasing.” In response, the process of attempting to do that which had not otherwise been attempted brought problems to the surface. The Church attempted to offer compassionate care in the form of a daily food pantry. It was the response of care instilled by the Spirit of God among them. They hadn’t done it before, and they weren’t prepared for the heavy demand it took on the apostles’ time nor for the kind of problems that it surfaced.

ILLUS. The compassionate ministry at Shepherd Community in Indianapolis began with a Thanksgiving dinner for inner-city neighbors in 1985. It created a groundswell of re-

sponse, both from the neighbors ready to receive food and clothing and from excited volunteers eager to help. In the months and years since, the greatest source of creative ministry—as well as potential conflict—came in the way these two groups interacted. We had to keep in focus the real needs of neighbors and keep in check the “let us do for you” mentality of volunteers. We hadn’t expected that would consume so much emotional energy, but it did.

When the Church attempts to be the Church empowered by the Spirit, it will often find itself in unexplored territory, attempting to respond to needs in ways not thought of before. How often we attempt great things for God because we discover great faith in God. We must be aware that our “creative” ministry expansion efforts may create or bring to the surface problems that we must be willing to address in that same Spirit. In Acts 6, a question of fairness in the daily distribution of food caused a problem to surface—something the Church had never before attempted.

C. The problem reveals older underlying problems and vulnerabilities. What presented itself as a problem of uneven food distribution revealed itself to be fueled by underlying fears and prejudicial suspicions. The “presenting problem” revealed an older, deeper set of problems. In fact, there is often a problem beyond “the problem.”

In this case, the Church’s unforeseen problem was twofold: (1) how to deal with old, ingrained prejudices, and (2) how to organize for effective care of the diverse groups that were becoming a part of the Body of Christ. The essential issue presented itself: How do we handle greater and greater diversity in a way that maintains and upholds the unity and vitality of the church in the Spirit?

## II. Problems Threaten the Continuance of *Koinonia* (v. 1)

The Church that had experienced the unique presence of the Spirit, bringing together people who would not otherwise be together, now begins to deal with the longer-term issues of holding it all together.

The goods that were being brought in Acts 4:32-37 had created a food pantry ministry that, in turn, not only fed people but also created friction among those to whom it intended to “minister.” Greek-speaking Jews complained that their widows were being neglected by the Aramaic-speaking Jews in the daily distribution.

As things settled in, old conflicts and fears between the Aramaic-speaking Jews and the Greek-speaking Jews surfaced. The two groups literally spoke different languages and came from different cultural backgrounds. Hebrews and Hellenists had been in a religious tug-of-war for generations. Put one in charge of the other, and you’ve got a problem.

At root, a problem of religious prejudice resurfaced. The Aramaic-speaking Jews somehow felt more holy than their "compromising" Grecian counterparts. In response, the Grecian Jews felt vulnerable to being slighted and became suspicious of the other group.

Was the charge well-founded? Was there innocent oversight in zealotry to take care of one's own color and creed? Was it fear? Whatever, it was no time to choose sides or to get sidetracked. The intangible unity of the Spirit (koinonia) in the church was at stake.

### III. Problems Challenge the Definition of Ministry Roles (v. 2)

A. The issue of food distribution and the emotional energy that it began to consume made a wake-up call for the Twelve, the apostles.

This developing situation demanded a response. The Twelve had preached the Word. People had responded. They had started a new ministry to be faithful to those who came into the Church. Now the second line of ministry was beginning to drain off what they perceived to be their first calling—"prayer and the ministry of the word" (v. 4).

B. The time had come for strategic planning.

The apostles called the Church together to discuss the structural problem. The apostles recognize that their gifts and roles of ministry are being compromised by the time and energy consumed from "wait[ing] on tables." At the same time, they recognize that waiting tables is an important and necessary ministry.

ILLUS. The compassionate ministry of Shepherd Community started out with the director doing everything from building food shelves and running to pick up used clothing to helping people get their electricity turned back on. In short order, it began to be clear that this was not the best use of the director's time nor in line with the nature of his gifts and ministry. Since then, the roles of the director, board, staff, and volunteers have evolved by careful consideration and prayer toward more finely tuned and beneficial ministry roles. The way we begin isn't necessarily the way to proceed.

C. Clarifying ministry roles doesn't put one group above another.

The apostles were not "too good to do menial labor." Their ministry was unique—they were a one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-repeated group. As eyewitnesses who had been with Jesus, their primary task was to witness to what they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears—the ministry of the Word. Those who could "wait on tables" would do so as a distinguished ministry.

### IV. Problems Addressed Create New Opportunities for Ministry and Expansion (vv. 3-6)

A. Ministry clarification created new roles and calls to ministry.

The apostles, having clarified their roles, and seeing the ongoing need for good organization and fair treatment of all, propose that the matter of waiting on tables be elevated to a place of appointed ministry. The church agrees wholeheartedly.

ILLUS. In response to the growing number of volunteers and the need for reducing conflict between them and neighbors being served in the compassionate ministry at Shepherd Community, we eventually dedicated a staff person to recruit, equip, place, and encourage compassionate ministry volunteers. Now over 100 volunteers extend ministry to many people each week.

B. Definition and qualifications for new ministry are valuable.

They decided to establish criteria for this new ministry. The volunteers must be (1) "from among you," (2) "of good reputation" (NASB), (3) "full of the Spirit," and (4) "full of . . . wisdom."

The office of the ministry would be that of *deacon*, meaning "to serve." The word would later be applied to officers in the Church.

### V. Problems Addressed Create Effective Results (v. 7)

Growing pains of the church, if effectively addressed, can result in growth spurts. "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (v. 7).

### CONCLUSION:

The problems that are presented to us in ministry are many. In each of them stands a hidden opportunity for personal, ministerial, or church growth.

Don't let your growing pains stop you. A spurt of growth may be just ahead.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
 Ps. 89:1-2  
 Psalm "I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord"  
 Hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King"  
 Scripture Isa. 43:1-7, 11, 18-21  
 Hymn "How Great Thou Art"  
 Spiritual Song "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"  
 Prayer together at the open altar  
 Receive the offerings  
 Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
 Sermon Text Acts 6:1-7  
 Spiritual Song "Open Our Eyes, Lord"  
 Sermon "GROWING PAINS"  
 Gospel Song "His Way with Thee"  
 Moments of personal response  
 Gospel Song "Make Me a Blessing" (v. 1 only)  
 Benediction

# MOVE FROM PREJUDICE TO EMBRACING

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 10:9-23

July 24, 1994

## INTRO:

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost calls for continued celebration. The infilling and indwelling Holy Spirit makes all the difference in the life of the believer and in the life of the Church.

More than a one-day spiritual splash, the Day of Pentecost was the beginning of a movement that would ultimately transform untold millions of people. No single event could do that; only the continued working of the Holy Spirit could accomplish it.

Before untold millions would be touched, the Holy Spirit moved upon that first generation to continue to challenge and expand its limiting comfort zones. We can broadly observe the following movements of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church following Pentecost. These, too, need to be celebrated and embraced.

## I. We See the Movement from Peace to Disturbance

The Holy Spirit demonstrated that, along with fullness, His work would bring disturbance in believers whenever provincialism hindered God's Word.

God's action after Pentecost made it clear that He is not interested in simply relieving believers' distress and balancing disequilibrium. There is something greater than balance, poise, and placid peace. That "something greater" includes *righteousness*, justice, and love in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God and the will of God being done are greater than feeling good about having the loose ends of life neatly tied down.

It seemed that things were going along smoothly in the Church. Even amid persecution, the number of believers continued to grow. They enjoyed everyone's favor. The Church was a happy household.

It *was*, that is, until God indicated that the household, which included so many, had excluded a lot more. The household of faith, as yet, did not include Gentiles. In order to include Gentiles, God had to disturb Jewish Christians to get them to deal with their deep-seated prejudices.

ILLUS. The banner on *The Daily Oklahoman* newspaper reads: "To comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." The Holy Spirit comes as Comforter for the afflicted. He comes, also, to disturb and afflict the comfortable.

It happens first with Philip, who is led to baptize an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). We see Peter shaken to the core of his traditionalism in order to open him up to share the Good News with Cornelius' household (10:9-23). Paul's insistence upon including Gentile Christians without Jewish law observance produces several disturbing church councils.

That work of disturbance is no less at work and necessary for the Church of Jesus Christ today. If the Church is to be the Church, the Good News is ever going to be

Good News to *all people*. If it will have the ring of truth about it, prejudices must be challenged at every level.

We cannot afford to exclude anyone whom God has included.

## II. We See the Movement from Social Problem to Spiritual Issue

The Holy Spirit moved the believers to see that prejudice was not simply a social problem, but a spiritual issue.

Someone might piously wonder, "What place does a sermon on prejudice have in the church, even in a holiness church? What does it have to do with the gospel of full salvation? Isn't prejudice only a social problem?"

Our survey of Acts makes clear that prejudice is not first of all a social problem. Prejudice is first of all a *spiritual* issue.

The movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church described in Acts makes clear that perceived social problems were really spiritual issues. Prejudice affected not only those who were on the receiving end of the gospel but also those who were the bearers of it. Bearers of the gospel are challenged to deal with prejudice at a spiritual level.

Prejudice, "prejudging," clearly expresses inward fear, even hate. Prejudice manifests a heart deficient of the fullness of love. It points to the need for a deeper work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person or community of faith. Prejudice remains a spiritual problem. As a spiritual problem, when it is recognized, it calls for repentance and change. As Fannie Lou Hamer said, "Ain't no such thing as I can hate anybody and hope to see God's face."

Sadly, sometimes religion has been used to uphold prejudices. This was one of the challenges in Acts, as circumcision and kosher laws threatened to bar Gentiles from the Church. It was so for slavery in 19th-century America. It is so in parts of the world today.

ILLUS. For generations the political system of apartheid in South Africa has denied the right to vote and other basic human rights to the black majority in that country controlled by the white minority. Several years ago, Tom Nees noted that the evil apartheid system of politics would collapse like a house of cards if the *religious rationale* for racism were exposed as false.

ILLUS. Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared: "It's interesting: When the white folks came, we had the land and they had the Bibles. And they asked us to bow our heads and pray, and we did. And when we looked up, they had the land and we had the Bibles." Even for a person or people oppressed by prejudice, the good news is that *whoever has the Bible has the hope of liberation from oppression*, the promise of justice and restoration, and the power of love on their side.

Prejudice is not limited to race. Other, more subtle forms of prejudice infect the lives of many: poverty, sex, religion, ethnocentrism, denomination, class, education, etc. Whenever our biases blatantly infringe upon the lives of innocent others, we're dealing with the spiritual problem of prejudice.

When we engage in acts and attitudes of prejudice after having embraced the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, we can count on the Holy Spirit to challenge us sooner than later.

### III. We See Movement from Dislocation to a New Perspective and Embracing

The Holy Spirit brings to disturbed, dislocated, but obedient believers a new perspective and a new opportunity for the gospel.

The Holy Spirit settled upon the Church with a cleansing, heartwarming presence. The Holy Spirit, intending to see Jesus' ministry through to completion, disturbed the comfortable and challenged the sinful prejudices that limited the gospel. True to the way of Jesus and the intent of the Father, the Holy Spirit brought to those who would be obedient to His discipline a new way of seeing. Revisioning, reframing our perspectives about our once-held prejudices is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Philip saw an Ethiopian eunuch included in the Kingdom. Peter discovers, astonishingly, that God is pleased to grant unto the Gentiles the same baptism that the Jewish believers had received. The Jerusalem church, upon hearing Paul's testimony and of his willingness to send offerings back to them, gives its blessing to the Gentile mission, free of legalistic stipulations. As prejudices are challenged and defeated, the gospel begins to spread in exponential dimensions.

Beyond disturbance and new perspective, the Church was called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to embrace persons whom they could not tolerate a generation earlier.

We will find the same to be true today. The Holy Spirit finds open and obedient believers a source of healing for communities and nations.

ILLUS. The much-read and respected holiness teacher and writer of the late 1800s in America, Phoebe Palmer, said, "Pentecost laid the ax at the root of social injustice." She included race prejudice as one of the roots of social injustice to which Pentecost dealt a deathblow.

Thank God that Phoebe Palmer and several other of our holiness forebears saw the *social implications of a personal Pentecost*. The Holiness Movement was at the forefront in the drive to abolish slavery in America. Like John Wesley, they began to understand that "there is no holiness but social holiness."

### CONCLUSION:

If prejudice had been resolved completely in the Early Church, how different history might have been written. Each person and community in every generation of the Church in every culture has had to grapple with deep-seated prejudices.

The Holy Spirit faithfully continues the movement we

trace in Acts—the movement from prejudice to disturbance to embracing. The Holy Spirit faithfully afflicts the comfortable. The question remains: are we open and responsive to His gentle proddings to lay aside prejudice for the sake of the gospel?

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"  
 Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
 Ps. 103:1-11, 20-22  
 Psalm "Bless His Holy Name"  
 Psalm "Let Everything That Has Breath Praise the Lord"  
 Scripture Eph. 1:3-8, 13-14, 17-23  
 Gospel Song "My Wonderful Lord"  
 Psalm "God Is My Refuge"  
 Prayer together at the open altar  
 Moments of encouragement  
 Receiving the offerings  
 Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
 Sermon Text Acts 10:9-23  
 Gospel Song "Wonderful Words of Life" (v. 1 only)  
 Sermon "MOVE FROM PREJUDICE TO EMBRACING"  
 Hymn "Jesus Calls Us"  
 Moments of personal response  
 Chorus "Yes, Lord, Yes"  
 Benediction

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Moments of Encouragement

Occasionally, we take time to openly encourage one another in the service as an act of worship. I place it following prayer and before receiving the offering because it is an act empowered by prayer and is a gift given to another person. During the Life Together concerns, I remind the congregation that there will be this opportunity later in the service so that they can collect their thoughts about persons they would like to encourage.

After prayer, I read Heb. 10:23-25 and then invite persons to stand, turn to the person they wish to encourage, and briefly speak words of encouragement to them. It is usually a very moving expression of Christian care.

At the conclusion, I ask everyone to turn to someone else, look them in the eye, and declare: "Be encouraged!" This does wonders for morale and is a genuine expression of worship.

#### Offertory Sentence

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Mal. 3:10).

#### Benediction

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26).

# PETER'S STORY: HOW TO OVERCOME PREJUDICE

by John Hay, Jr.

Acts 10—11

July 31, 1994

## INTRO:

The believers at Pentecost knew they were being called to something radically different from business as usual. They could not have known that, as a result of Pentecost, they would experience challenges and changes in their perceptions and faith that would dramatically reshape their world.

Their first clue might have been Peter's bold proclamation from the prophet Joel: "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Acts 2:18). Previously, religious practice had been primarily the domain of men. Now the doors were thrown open to women in a way that would impinge on even Paul's sense of openness. That was just the beginning.

Nothing shaped the Church in those days so much as Peter being divinely called to proclaim the Good News to Cornelius' Gentile household. That encounter crossed barriers and made clear that the Holy Spirit was doing a much broader, deeper work than first imagined. It drove home the reality of the complete dismantling of the old prejudicial systems and the creation of a new spiritual and social reality in Christ's way.

Beyond the sheer drama of Peter's story—from house-top vision to council testimony—at another level we observe God's way of breaking prejudice and opening His children's minds and hearts to embrace the previously unembraceable.

## I. Notice the Task of Telling Peter's Story

A. Peter receives a startling vision of "unkosher" food, which he is commanded to eat.

Peter's turn from the prejudice so typical of his day begins with a dramatic rooftop vision. One might wonder why such a dramatic encounter would be necessary.

ILLUS. Flannery O'Connor, the Southern writer whose story characters were fierce, grotesque, and often haunted by fundamentalist religion, was once asked why she cast characters as she did. Her response: "To the almost blind, you draw figures that are large and startling."

God startles Peter out of his near blindness with a before-dinner daydream of a tablecloth full of all the animals he considers inedible due to Jewish kosher laws. Hungry Peter is upset because it's not the kind of food he'd ever think of eating; it was banned by his religion and shunned by his culture.

But there it is! And above it is a voice, as if from God, commanding: "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). It's an unbelievable juxtaposition of God's voice calling Peter to do the heretofore unthinkable.

B. As Peter protests the command to eat the unkosher food, representatives sent from a Gentile—Cornelius—call at the house.

Peter reacts to the Lord's command, as if to correct God: "Surely not, Lord!" (10:14). Myron Augsburger puts it this way: "If you say 'Lord,' you can't say 'Surely not'; and if you say 'Surely not,' you cannot say 'Lord.'" Peter's response—even in the face of God—highlights the strong religious and cultural taboo this represented.

God was preparing Peter to receive and share the Good News with people whom he had excluded but whom God had included.

As Peter scratches his head in wonder, Cornelius' Gentile representatives stop at the gate and ask for Peter. The Holy Spirit prompts Peter to receive them and later go with them. "Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (v. 20), says the Spirit.

C. Arriving at Cornelius' house, Peter shares what he has learned from his rooftop experience.

Peter, no longer saying, "Surely not," consents to go with Cornelius' men and arrives at the centurion's Caesarean house two days later. The house is full of Gentiles. Yet, against Jewish law and custom, Peter enters on the basis of what he learned in the vision.

Referring to his oddly Jewish presence in a Gentile household, Peter declares, "God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean" (10:28). Peter got the point: the vision had shown meat; Peter accurately computed it to be about people—particularly Gentile people.

He passes "phase one" of the inclusion test and proceeds to "phase two."

D. Upon hearing Cornelius' testimony, Peter discovers that God's "no favoritism" commitment includes the Good News of Jesus Christ preached to Gentiles.

Cornelius has his own vision to share (10:30-33), a vision that indicates to Peter that God is clearly directing him to break new ground and preach the Good News to Gentiles.

Peter responds to Cornelius' testimony: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (vv. 34-35). "Phase two" accomplished, Peter moves on to "phase three."

Peter then proceeds to preach Jesus Christ to the gathered Gentiles. As he preaches, the Holy Spirit comes on all who hear the message (v. 44). It astonishes Peter's Jewish companions that it is not an inferior experience, but one quite similar to what the Jewish believers had experienced some time earlier.

Peter wades in deeper, suggesting what might have been the obvious next step, had it not been such a barrier-breaking context: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (v. 47). With no objec-

tions voiced, the Spirit-filled Gentiles are baptized.

The rest is history. From this point on, the focus of Acts shifts from Jewish Christians at Jerusalem to Gentiles coming into God's fold from all over the Roman world. Peter's "conversion" stands as a critical change point in the outgoing mission of the Church of Jesus Christ.

## II. Notice the Task of Implying Peter's Story

Acts' account of the spread of the gospel to Gentiles places Peter's breakthrough on prejudice at its center. Given that, it is worth noting several points implied in Peter's story.

A. It is worth noting that Peter did not break through prejudice on his own; God took the initiative.

When it comes to salvation, God draws the circle of concern much larger than our culturally conditioned experience of religion usually does.

God takes the initiative when the actions or inactivity of Christians impinge upon the reception of the Good News by believers. Sometimes, as in Peter's case, God's voice seems so radical that we think it must be mistaken.

B. It is worth noting that Peter did not break through prejudice all at once.

Peter's was a graduating conversion. First, he must deal with his resistance to God's command for him to do what he had never done before. Second, he must be confronted with the issue of not calling something unclean that God has declared clean. Third, he breaks through his warped sense of God's favoritism. The first three issues behind him, the coast is clear to take the risk of preaching the Good News to Gentiles. The fifth movement is the ultimate symbolic act of inclusiveness—baptism.

Breakthrough on prejudice is not overnight. It occurs step by God-guided step.

C. It is also worth noting that while God took the initiative with Peter, he responded in a reflective, risk-taking way.

Peter might have clung to his "Surely not, Lord!" posture. He might have refused to greet or to go with Cornelius' representatives. Instead, Peter recognized the voice in his vision to be the voice of God. As radical as the command seemed, he considered it. He reflected upon it. He grappled with it. When the visitors arrived, his reflection made it possible for him to consent to go with them—even at the risk of reputation.

There may be many breakthroughs that God desires to lead us through for the sake of getting the Good News to others. Does God find listening, reflective disciples?

## III. Notice the Task of Applying Peter's Story

Peter's story plays into our stories. God's startling command and subsequent revelations to Peter about the

cleanness of persons he would otherwise consider unclean probes close to us. Consider:

A. God takes the initiative with us too.

God calls you and me beyond our comfort zones when it comes to the gospel. He will not let us remain long aloof from or over against persons or people or groups that He desires to include in His redeemed family. God will not let us exclude anyone whom He has included.

God's call may come to us, like it did to Peter, as confrontation. Have you ever thought that the Word of God was mistaken? Did He speak with such clarity in opposition to your presumption and entrenched way of thinking that you just could not accept it? What do you do when that happens? Do you excuse the disturbing prompting on a half-baked sermon or preacher? Do you hope the nagging question will go away? Be careful how you respond the next time God challenges your comfort zones.

B. God moves us step-by-step away from prejudice and toward embracing. God will not ask you to do what you cannot do. Step by step, you can be changed and will change in regard to prejudice. We need not fear the steps we take if God moves us.

C. We cooperate with God when we reflect seriously and act courageously in regard to difficult challenges such as prejudice.

Peter sets our example in this regard. Can we take his pattern into our own way of responding to God's challenges? Can we take the risk of grappling seriously with fresh instruction from the Lord? Dare we act—or not act—on the basis of God's revelation?

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"Brothers, Come; Sisters, Come"

Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together

Psalm 8

Psalm

"How Majestic Is Thy Name"

Spiritual Song

"Majesty"

Spiritual Song

"O Come Let Us Adore Him"

Scripture

Heb. 10:19-23

Gospel Song

"The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power"

Psalm

"O the Blood of Jesus"

Spiritual Song

"Cares Chorus"

Prayer together at the open altar

Receiving the offerings

Doxology sung as offerings are presented

Ministry in music

Sermon

"PETER'S STORY:  
HOW TO OVERCOME PREJUDICE"

Acts 10—11

Gospel Song

"I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go"

Benediction

# GOD'S NEW WAY TO REVIVAL

by John Hay, Jr.

Isaiah 58

Aug. 7, 1994

## INTRO:

How often I have heard believers say to each other, "We need revival," or, "We're having a revival." I receive mailers from churches announcing revival services. I get letters from preachers who want to come and "hold a revival" in our church.

What do we mean when we say "revival"? When we say or pray for revival, what image do we hold before our mind's eye?

Is revival a week of services? Is revival inspirational gospel music and preaching by somebody who preached the same package of sermons to another crowd last week? Is revival feeling good and getting all excited? Is revival feeling more religious? Will certain things happen to trigger in one's mind: "Ah, now that's a revival"? We conjure up in our minds certain things that are supposed to "happen" so that we will know that "revival" has come.

No one longs to see an outpouring of God's transforming love in the Church more than I. No one more than I longs to see unbelievers saved and believers filled with the Spirit and living in the Spirit, to see genuine enthusiastic service and anticipation or worship; to see holiness lived out in terms of challenging the Mammon spirit of materialism that runs rampant in the Church; or to cry out to see divine love get ahold of hearts infected with racial prejudice and personal bitterness.

I am convinced that some of our old perceptions of revival are stifling the Spirit of revival at work among us. We stand in the way of revival when we impose our self-righteousness and personal convictions on others. Some of us use "revival" as an escape from dealing with our conflicts in a spirit of reconciliation. For some, revival is an "if only" illusion.

The Church must be challenged by the Word of God to let go of some long-held perceptions about "revival" for the sake of revival among us. I am convinced there is a "new way" of revival that is actually ancient and waiting to be apprehended.

What is God's "new way" to revival? Isaiah 58 shows us the possibility.

## I. As a Form, "Revivals" Do Not Produce an Essential Change in Life (vv. 1-5)

A. Old Testament "fast" is the ancestor to our idea of "revival."

The Old Testament fast was a time of spiritual dedication, demonstrating a genuine desire for God. People were proud of their tradition, which had served them in the past. They scheduled at least one every year. Like us, the house of Jacob called for a fast every time things got tough or threatening.

The only problem was that the fast had become a mere form: motions to go through, formulas to follow.

Nothing is worse than a good means of grace degenerating into a hollow form. Fasting had become that; revivals often have become that.

## B. Why had the fast become a fruitless form?

The people of Judah appear to be sincere in their seeking. They seem puzzled by God's indifference to their religious display. "Why have we fasted . . . and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" (v. 3). It sounds so similar to our day.

Why, indeed, had fasting, once a source of spiritual renewal, become meaningless? In verses 3-4, God, who desires to give His grace fully to those who sincerely seek him, declares three reasons:

1. "On the day of your fasting, you do as you please."
2. You "exploit all your workers." They had lost the necessary connection between spirituality and right relationship or social justice. They had separated religion from life, righteousness from justice.
3. "Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife." They were no different after the fast than before it. The event, for all its intents and purposes, made no difference.

To God's dismay, it is clear they misunderstood the point of the fast entirely. Do we misunderstand the point of revival in the same way? It seems we want to schedule the services, bring in the speakers, pray the prayers, and—"presto"—revival!

## II. For the Sake of Revival, God Declares Its Radical Conditions (vv. 6-7)

Please understand: God is a God who desires that people who call upon Him receive blessing. Apparently nothing is *more offensive* to God than for people to come near to Him with their mouths, but withhold from Him the substance of their lives (see Amos 5:21-24).

God eagerly shows the way to revival. God readily counsels us if we are willing to listen and obey. God reveals His chosen kind of revival to the people of Judah in the rest of the chapter.

A. Deal with oppression and injustice at a structural level (v. 6).

At once, God calls for radical change in "the way things are done around here." He calls for them to "loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke" (v. 6).

What does justice have to do with religion and revival? Justice resides at the heart of God. Righteousness and justice are two sides of the same coin (see Rom. 3:25ff.). We tend to think of justice as someone getting what they deserve, but the broader biblical description of injustice is that of an oppressed person denied fairness.

Evangelism is "preaching grace and doing justice," according to Harvie Conn. Like two oars of a boat, both are necessary aspects of being "Good News people." The Good News has as much to do with expressing the kingdom of God through our relationships and business patterns as it does saying, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."

ILLUS. I see the words "Trust Jesus" spray-painted on signs and sidewalks all over town. I call it "evandalism." I wish the inspired evandalists would find a better expression of their witness. Just "trust Jesus" belies the shallowness of our concept of evangelism.

On the side of a building down the street from our inner-city church, someone has painted a slash over the "Trust Jesus" graffiti. Painted beside it are the sad words: "I tried." Without doing justice, the just "trust Jesus" stuff fails.

Among other things, this verse cautions us to not overspiritualize the Bible. Isaiah 58 is talking about real injustice, real oppression, really evil systems that need dismantling. It's as much this-worldly stuff as Jesus addressed in His inaugural statement in Luke 4:18-21. The Bible has more to say about life here and now than it does about heaven by and by. It is totally inconsistent to lay it on the line on other "standards for holy living" issues and then tiptoe around the larger justice issues.

Justice lies at the heart of revival in the land. Unless patterns and structures that oppress people are not redemptively addressed and dramatically changed, there will be no revival in the land, in the community, in the church.

B. Extend compassion to those who evidence real need (v. 7).

God extends His conditions for revival: "To share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood" (v. 7). In a word: compassion. It doesn't mean "special" actions but compassion as a way of seeing. It means withholding judgment, responding with your heart, and leaving the results to God.

"Do you mean revival is connected with compassion?" That's what the Bible says. It's also been the experience of the church, from John Wesley and the Methodist revival to Phineas Bresee and the early Nazarenes. Revival spawned compassion and a concern for justice, which in turn fueled revival and the realization of holiness in life.

### III. The Fruit of God's Way to Revival Will Be True Righteousness (vv. 8-14)

Isaiah teaches us a way of revival that is reversed from what we now practice. Instead of putting our resources

into the forms of revival, we are called to put our resources into actions of justice and compassion. Then there shall be showers of blessings.

Listen to the clearly described order: "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, *then* your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (vv. 9-10, emphasis added).

Isaiah repeats the word "then" four times in verses 8-10 to emphasize the right order. Justice and compassion first; "then you will call, and the Lord will answer" (v. 9). First . . . then.

### CONCLUSION:

I hold two images of revival before my mind's eye. One is of frying pan revivals. They are quick, hot, spattering, and brief. The other image is of a boiling pot of spiritual renewal. It is deep, slow, persistent, sometimes silent, yet thoroughly cleansing, continual, and boiling over. It doesn't cool quickly. I prefer the boiling pot to the frying pan.

Could it be that revival is less about a form and more about a spirit of daily yieldedness to God, a readiness to obey Him today? Could it be that it is less about services and more about living out God's commands at both personal and social justice levels? Could it be that it is less about fantastic and more about anticipation in faith of what God desires to do, and a thankfulness for what He is doing? Could it be that while we pray for revival, we also must act for revival, challenging our attitudes, our policies, our patterns of living?

Perhaps our hunger for righteousness should supersede our desire to have a spiritual spurt. When it does, God is ready to bless.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"Come into His Presence Singing 'Alleluia'"	
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together	
Isa. 55:1-3, 6-7	
Hymn	"Come, We That Love the Lord"
Psalm	"Praise the Name of Jesus"
Scripture	2 Chron. 7:13-14
Gospel Song	"Revive Us Again"
Gospel Song	"Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"
Prayer together at the open altar	
Receiving the offerings	
Doxology sung as offerings are presented	
Sermon Text	Isaiah 58
Sermon	"GOD'S NEW WAY TO REVIVAL"
Gospel Song	"Take My Life, and Let It Be"
Invitation and prayer	
Spiritual Song	"Lord, Be Glorified"
Benediction	

# DISMISSED PEOPLE

by John Hay, Jr.

Luke 4:18-19

Aug. 14, 1994

## INTRO:

If you watch closely, you can observe an alarming thing about human nature.

The thing to notice is how readily people dismiss other people.

We overlook them, look beyond them, look around them, refuse to look at them as they are, or just never see them. Or, seeing them, we dismiss them as nonessential or unnecessary.

Those of us who seek to follow the way of Jesus Christ have much to learn about ourselves in regard to dismissed people. Have we stopped to consider how deeply dismissing people affects us all? Have we taken into full account the response and call of Jesus Christ to dismissed persons? Could it be that our salvation, both here and hereafter, is wrapped up in how we respond to the stranger, the outcast, the foreigner—any of “those” people who invade our private spaces, interrupt our personal agendas, and unsettle our comfort zones?

## I. We Dismiss People

A. We routinely and readily dismiss people.

I don't like to think of myself as a dismissing person, as a discriminating person. Nor do I like to think of my friends, or country, or fellow humanity as dismissers of people; nor of the church in which I serve. However, I am convinced we all, on a day-to-day basis, engage in acts of dismissal and prejudging.

ILLUS. Recently, I asked a friend about her nephew, an artist, a man I knew to be emotionally fragile and a concern of my friend's family for several years. I simply asked, “How is he doing?” I was not at all prepared for what I heard. “Sam is so messed up,” she said. “He is a basket case. He can't even hold a job. You should see his paintings! They're so out of it. It's like his insides exploded on the canvas. What a waste of talent!”

It's astonishing that we dismiss people so easily. As if, with a wave of a hand, a person could be swept away. As if to say, “You don't matter.”

B. We dismiss people categorically.

If people fall into one of our stereotyped categories, they are subject to being dismissed: old, poor, dumb, homeless, mentally ill, AIDS-infected, yuppie, middle class. A past president of the United States unfairly dismissed everyone receiving welfare assistance as “a faceless mass waiting for a handout.”

C. We can dismiss people more subtly.

We can be subtle and “socially acceptable” in dismissal. Consider: a flashing glance, an avoiding turn of the head, silent aggression.

D. We, too, can feel dismissed.

Surely, we ourselves feel dismissed in one way or another, at one time or another. We bear the heavy

weight of dismissal of our person, our ideas, our efforts, or our concerns. The basic human need for significance and belonging is denied. In a competitive world looking for finished and marketable products, sometimes our good ideas or significant thoughts seem to be swept aside, insignificant, dismissed.

## II. People Are Dismissed for Several Reasons

Why are people dismissed?

A. People are bound to be dismissed because, in a consumer economy, people are valued for their purchasing power.

Those who have little money or who don't matter to a particular industry are considered “marginal” or unrelated and irrelevant.

B. People are dismissed because we don't think they can be fixed.

If we don't think deeply seated personal and social issues can be effectively addressed, then we dismiss—wholesale—entire segments of our local and world populations.

C. We dismiss people when we *misdefine* them.

The only way we can dismiss people is by misdefining them. As long as Christians simply go along with a primarily economic or humanistic assessment of human life, we will dismiss people.

## III. Jesus Recognized Dismissal and Responded to It (Luke 4:18-19)

A. Jesus recognized that many people had been misdefined and dismissed, and He gave His life in ministry to dismissed persons.

B. Jesus will call His followers to account for how they responded to dismissed persons.

According to Matt. 25:31-46, the Son of Man's *last* public statement will call all people to account for identity with and response to the dismissed, in which He identifies himself: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

## IV. People Cannot Be Dismissed Because the Cost Is Too High

A. Jesus seemed to be making the point that needs to be made today: while it is common to dismiss people, people cannot be dismissed. Not for their sake, nor for our sake.

ILLUS. The number of homeless, mentally ill, illiterate, crime-recorded children living in poverty in the world is staggering. But they are not going away because we get tired of hearing about them on the six o'clock news.

Dismissal seems to be an attempt to deny the sins and injustices that pervade our world; an attempt to sweep

under the carpet the glaring needs that we feel overwhelm us. Dismissed people are symptomatic of a death-driven society.

B. The economic and social cost of dismissing people comes high.

Incarceration and so-called rehabilitation runs 20-1 over preventive costs. Yet there is little funding for preventive care; the money is used to build bigger prisons.

Dismiss a person today, and you will deal with her or him again at a deeper, more troublesome level.

C. The spiritual and personal cost of dismissing people comes high.

Aside from national and economic costs of dismissing people, there is a personal cost. In dismissing people, we dismiss a part of ourselves. When we turn away from a person, we turn away from ourselves. When we alienate a person, we become alienated from ourselves to a greater degree. Sociologist Parker Palmer, to whom I am indebted for this insight, makes the following observation: "By turning away from 'the least of these' we reinforce our fear that someday we will find ourselves in their place—and that others will turn away from us. . . . We retreat from the stranger because we want to avoid that awful knowledge of our world—and of our place in it. And as we do so, we create another self-fulfilling prophecy: as we avoid the stranger to avoid being reminded of our own isolation, we create a world in which our isolation deepens" (*The Company of Strangers*, 66).

## V. By Addressing Dismissed Persons, We Minister to Jesus and Recover a Part of Ourselves (Matt. 25:40)

A. Dismissed persons have a saving role in our lives.

The Old and New Testaments are rich with imagery of the saving role of the stranger for the people of God. The writer of Hebrews counseled: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (13:2).

B. There is a surprise gift when we respond to the dismissed persons.

Here is the surprise gift of compassion—when we withhold judgment and respond with our heart to the stranger, we receive infinitely more than we can give. Persons we would otherwise dismiss bear keys to opening up and recovering our fearful, hidden self.

C. The point of addressing dismissed persons is the point of identity.

We must remember that Jesus did not merely point to or stoop to relieve the dismissed, but identified himself with the sick, the prisoner, the stranger: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

ILLUS. Michael Card, a contemporary Christian musician with a graduate degree in biblical literature, submits his lyrics to the scrutiny of the religion faculty of Vanderbilt

University. He tells in his concerts how he wrote the song "In His Distressing Disguise." Washing dishes at an inner-city mission in Nashville, Card looked out from the kitchen into the dining area and saw a momentary vision. A mission volunteer and a homeless man were talking to each other. To Card's eyes—just for a moment—it appeared as if the mission worker became Jesus to the homeless man. At the same time, it appeared as if the homeless man became Jesus to the mission volunteer. That is the solidarity, that is the identity Jesus invites us to embody.

## CONCLUSION:

As I wake up to the fact of the many dismissed people who surround me, and to the wholesale dismissal that runs literally unchecked at every level of society, I am stunned; stunned, but not paralyzed.

Because of the grace of God, there is a way to respond. Here is the place I begin—and this is the place I challenge you to begin: with repentance. Repentance for dismissing people! Repentance for overlooking and closing our eyes in dismissal! Repentance for silently going along with a society that, in its sickness, expends people like junk cars!

Then, to quote John the Baptist, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). Begin to name people and know their stories. Though they may not be numbered in statistics of governments or churches, in Christ they have a name and are beloved to us. Begin to offer hospitality, which is making room for the stranger in our midst. Allow Jesus to be the Bridge between us as mutual strangers. In His love become friends. Begin to make your personal and spiritual resources—whatever they may be—available in redeeming embrace of the dismissed.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

"I Love You with the Love of the Lord"  
Hospitality and Information for Our Life Together  
"Brothers, Come" from the musical *Follow Me*  
Ps. 95:1-2, 6-7  
"Let Us Pray" from the Lillenas musical *Follow Me*  
Responsive Scripture 1 John 3:1-3, 16, 21-24  
Gospel Song "Such Love"  
"O, How He Loves You and Me"  
Prayer together at the open altar  
"Lord, Be Glorified"  
Receiving the offerings  
Doxology sung as offerings are presented  
Ministry in music  
Luke 4:14-21  
Gospel Song "Open My Eyes, That I May See"  
(vv. 1 and 4)  
Sermon "DISMISSED PEOPLE"  
"People Need the Lord"  
Moments of personal response  
"Freely, Freely"  
Benediction

# TRIPTIK®: A COMMUNION REFLECTION

by John Hay, Jr.

Luke 22:14-30

Aug. 21, 1994

## INTRO:

One of the strongest images of the Old and New Testaments is that of the journey. The backbone of the Old Testament is Israel's Exodus trek from Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In the New Testament, we sojourn with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, ultimately along the Via Dolorosa. We travel with Paul around Asia Minor and to Rome. We learn along the way to see our own lives as a journey of faith with Jesus being formed in us all along the way.

ILLUS. When I was a child, our family took an annual vacation to Florida. Before we set out, my parents would go to the automobile club and get a TripTik for the journey. The TripTik was a handy little chart that gave details of the roadway and noted points of interest for every 100-mile section of the trip, from origination to destination. When you completed one section of the trip, you flipped the chart to reveal the next 100-mile segment. I haven't seen one in years. Parker Palmer suggests that a TripTik is an apropos image of the Christian journey, an unfolding panorama, segment by segment, from origin to destiny.

If the spiritual life is conceived as a journey, then perhaps it is helpful to think of it in TripTik-like segments.

### A. The first segment of the TripTik is Eden.

The first page of the TripTik for the spiritual journey would be Eden. There we see the world as God created it—perfect, untainted, wonderful. Hold the original image in your mind's eye and embrace it as it was intended to be: good.

### B. The last segment of the TripTik is the new heaven and new earth.

The destination is revealed as we turn to the last page of the TripTik. It's an incredible segment, leading us along a way in which all is restored, renewed, and whole.

### C. The middle segments of the TripTik are time in the world.

In between the origination and destination are the unfolding sections of time, where we live in reality, in the world, with one another.

The middle pages of the TripTik are sometimes mundane, sometimes frightful, sometimes calling for great courage, sometimes demanding sheer perseverance amid tedium.

Palmer suggests that at the center of the TripTik, the middle page, is the image of the Last Supper. Most of us have in our mind's eye the Leonardo da Vinci painting of the Last Supper. The disciples gather around a table with Jesus at the center.

We focus on those disciples, and we find it amazing how different they are. When you consider the people who gather at the table of Jesus, the amazing thing is that *nobody laughs* and *nobody leaves*.

It is worth considering their diversity, what holds them in place, and with what promise Jesus' disciples continue to gather at His table. In it, we find encouragement and strength for our own segment of the journey.

## I. There Is Incredible Diversity Among Jesus' Disciples

### A. There was diversity among the Twelve.

The disciples came from an otherwise incompatible assortment of backgrounds.

#### 1. *Simon Peter was the rockiest one.*

Jesus named Simon "Peter," meaning "rock." D. Elton Trueblood makes the point that it must have been a joke among the disciples, and his name mocked him. Rather, he was "rocky." A fisherman by trade, bold in word, timid in action, along with all the others, Peter would deny his association with Jesus.

#### 2. *James and John were called "the Sons of Thunder."*

James and John were sons of Zebedee and of an aggressive mother seeking her sons' promotion.

#### 3. *Thomas was the doubter.*

Known as Didymus, meaning "the twin," Thomas was the dismal doubter. He couldn't believe Jesus was resurrected unless He touched Him.

#### 4. *Matthew was a tax collector.*

Also known as Levi, Matthew must have been the suspect one among the disciples. Tax collectors were on about the lowest rung on the Jewish social ladder.

#### 5. *Simon was a Zealot.*

Simon might well have been a prior member of the Jewish political faction that was determined to overthrow Roman rule by force.

#### 6. *Judas Iscariot was the treasurer.*

Judas the treasurer became Judas the betrayer. Even Judas was slow to leave the table of the Lord.

The stories of the rest of the Twelve round out a wild assortment of unlikely people upon which to begin a worldwide movement.

### B. There is great diversity among disciples today.

In reality, the picture of the disciples is a portrait of the church—of you and me and our fellowship together.

We are diverse. We are different. We have our own idiosyncracies. We clash from time to time in our ideas of how things should be.

## II. There Is a Unifying Factor for Jesus' Disciples

### A. Jesus' love, acceptance, and forgiveness held His disciples fast.

Why did the Twelve continue to follow Jesus? When others had fallen away or rejected Jesus' teaching, what drew these unlikely persons to Him? Even Judas stayed until the very last possible moment.

What was it that caused them to become, ultimately, an indivisible community of faith—a living dynamo for the spread of the Good News?

Simply: the common bond, the unifying factor was Jesus. Jesus had a way of holding them together by His love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Jesus met them—each one at his point of need. He called them, in their uniqueness and brokenness, to follow Him. And, because He saw them for their value and purpose, instead of their apparent misunderstanding and selfish ambitions, He cared for and loved the Twelve.

**B. Jesus reaffirms His transcending love at the Last Supper.**

I think Jesus reaffirmed His love, acceptance, and forgiveness for the Twelve that Last Supper evening as, one by one, He washed their dirty feet.

As He serves in washing feet, Jesus sees beyond the surface of that rough-hewn stone in Simon a *petros*—a rock, a solid, precious stone. Peter finds in Jesus forgiveness, direction, and, finally, stability and power.

Jesus sees beyond the skepticism of Thomas and wills for him a great, unshakable faith.

Jesus shows special care for the traitor, Judas Iscariot, as He takes his feet and washes them ever so carefully. Judas—even on the night that he would betray Jesus—receives fresh evidence that he is loved, accepted, and potentially forgiven.

That night, one by one, they found in Jesus renewed ability to be themselves. They found in Jesus the permission to set aside the identities imposed on them by their culture. With Him, they could be true to themselves. They could be transparent with one another. They could be open to God in Jesus Christ.

**C. Jesus is the unifying factor for the Church.**

Like they, we all are coming from different places. We have had our own history of pain and heartache and trouble. We're finding in Jesus the love, acceptance, and forgiveness for which we long. Because of His love, we can learn to dwell together in love. We belong to one another because we belong to Jesus.

We find a special place together at the Lord's table. It is symbolic of the fact that Jesus is our Host and our common bond. We are truly one at one table with the Lord.

### III. The Last Supper Holds a Present Promise for Us

**A. The disciples stay at the table, beckoning us to remain there too.**

We find them reclining together at the supper table, focused on the One who had reached out to touch

them in so many ways. Now He speaks to them of final things, of departure, of separation. They've come so far; will it now end? Does it end here?

Nobody leaves the table (except Judas). They stay. Why? Because of Jesus.

There is present promise for us in their staying at the table. If that diverse group could hang together with Jesus, surely we can. As long as Jesus is Host, the table beckons us. Our expectations differ, and some hopes go unfulfilled, but our Host holds us fast.

**B. Staying at the table, the disciples receive precious promises.**

As the Eleven remain and share what would be their last meal together before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, they receive some promises, which are passed on to us.

1. *They receive the promise of a kingdom.*

Jesus declares to them, "I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me" (Luke 22:29).

2. *They receive the promise of another, greater supper together.*

Conferral of a kingdom carries with it the hope of another, greater meal together. "So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom," Jesus says (Luke 22:30).

3. *They receive the promise of shared reign with Jesus.*

Those who suffer with and for Him will reign with Him.

### CONCLUSION:

The journey we travel takes what seems to be a lot of wild turns. Sometimes it may seem like an out-of-control roller coaster. Sometimes it's like a peaceful float on a deep river. But be assured life, even life in Christ, will take you to the limit, tear at your heart, and strain at the capacities even grace makes possible.

We'll share much of that journey together. But Jesus is with us every segment of the journey. He is the TripTik. He is the Way, the road we travel. He is our Guide. He is the Host. So let's enjoy the ride.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Information for Our Life Together	
Congregational music	
Scripture	1 Pet. 1:3-9
Special music	
Prayer together at the open altar	
Receiving the offerings	
Sermon Text	Luke 22:14-39
Sermon	"TRIPTIK: A COMMUNION REFLECTION"
Sharing the Lord's Supper together	
Spiritual Song	"Because He Lives"
Benediction	

# CROSSING THE LINES

by John Hay, Jr.

John 4:1-26

Aug. 28, 1994

## INTRO:

Have you considered the geographic dimensions of witness that Jesus gave His disciples on the Mount of Ascension? He gathered His little band around Him and told them that they would receive power to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It would be like ripples refracting out from a drop into a pool of water. The story of the Early Church moves precisely in that direction—from Jerusalem to Rome, where the gospel is preached unhindered.

## I. God Calls Us to Cross the Lines (v. 4)

A. God called Jesus to go through Samaria.

The familiar story of Jesus' encounter with "the woman at the well" is the setting for a much-overlooked ministry hallmark. On His way from Judea north to Galilee, John's Gospel simply says of Jesus that "he had to go through Samaria" (4:4). That's the understatement of the year.

It must be understood this was not the path a Jew would normally travel. Jews generally *avoided* Samaria on their way north from Judea to Galilee. To avoid these people, Jews would rather bypass Samaria by walking up the east side of the Jordan River, which took six days, rather than cut through Samaria, even though this was a mere three-day trek.

So, did Jesus *have* to go through Samaria? Certainly there was a more acceptable Jewish way. Did Jesus *have* to go through Samaria? The same "had to" word is used in John 3:14: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man *must* [had to] be lifted up" (emphasis added). "Had to," in this sense, means *it was God's will or intention*.

Apparently, Jesus had to go through Samaria to experience and fulfill God's intention for Him. It was as if Jesus' work would be incomplete without crossing the line into Samaria.

B. God's way calls us to go through our contemporary Samaritans.

The servant is not greater than his or her Master. We are Jesus' witnesses in our contemporary Samaritans.

What does it mean for us to go through Samaria today? For American Christians it may mean, essentially, to get off the bypass.

ILLUS. We are accustomed to driving the interstate bypasses that skirt us around most cities of this nation. While these bypasses whisk us speedily around the city to our ultimate destination, they also avoid the modern-day Samaritans. If we are going to go through Samaria today, we have to, literally, get off the bypasses and begin to drive through the city. As we go through the so-called rough sections, the "Lock your doors, children" corners,

the dirty and run-down areas, the seemingly strange parts of the city, we begin to see and feel our modern-day Samaritans.

1. For some people, the call to Samaria is to move more sensitively and compassionately as they daily cross the lines.

2. For others, it means taking time to think beyond the immediate circumstances and concerns of our own lives, to think and act as comprehensively and inclusively in our witness as we do in our work and academics. The challenge of crossing the lines means drawing a bigger circle of concern, making the concerns of those who live on the other side our own.

3. For still others, dramatic change is needed, when it is a matter of dealing directly with prejudice of poverty or of race.

ILLUS. Only those who have avoided the city and its racial tension, poverty problems, and spiritual suffering would be alarmed at the outbreak of violence in Los Angeles in April 1992. People seemed to be shocked that so much anguish and destruction could be unleashed so quickly. They have chosen not to care for, or acquaint themselves with, Samaria. Chosen ignorance or avoidance of such glaring spiritual dilemmas can be as much a manifestation of prejudice as blatant name-calling.

How many times does God call us to move out of our defined circles in little ways and we quench it, resist it, or become more entrenched?

What is the call? To move beyond our closed circles and into our Samaritans. We can avoid the other side only so long. We've got to go through Samaria.

## II. God Calls Us to Take Down Barriers (vv. 5-19)

What's the purpose of crossing the lines? It is to take down barriers.

A. Jesus takes down barriers with the Samaritan woman.

He lays aside the usual stereotypes and asks her for a drink.

ILLUS. It's amazing what happens in a crisis. When there's an accident at the corner, no one stops to ask who's who. When a child is stuck in a well, no one asks if she is worthy or what her religion is. When water floods communities in Missouri, no one stops to play theological games. They see others in need and respond. Those in crisis don't hesitate to cry out for help, nor do they refuse assistance. *It is often out of our own real sense of need that we reach out to others.*

The context indicates that Jesus was really tired and really thirsty. In His need, He reaches out to the Samaritan woman.

The real issue, however, is this: *on what terms are*

*they going to meet?* Will it be the usual paternalism? Will Jesus play the role of the morally superior Jewish male? Will she play the role of the immoral and degraded and slavish Samaritan female?

Jesus broke through the barriers of culture, of religion, of class, of sex in His encounter with the Samaritan woman that day. In a larger sense, His whole life and death was about destroying barriers. Paul would write of Jesus that "he . . . has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:14-16).

B. Like Jesus, we are called to take down barriers.

As we get off the bypass, we are called to take down the barriers that divide us from our Samaritans. Jesus invites us to stop, get off of our high horse, and talk straight to our neighbors—not as objects of our evangelistic efforts, but as people in need of grace as we ourselves are.

We can learn to talk with each other in such a way that strips the role playing and reinforcement of negative stereotypes. We can learn to talk *with* each other—not at, over, around, or about each other—but *with* each other.

Most likely, you and I will be the ones to initiate the dialogue. When you do, get ready to be challenged and changed.

ILLUS. The Neighborhood Center of Shepherd Community was created to be a place of hospitality where the barriers of hostility that divide people can be broken. Room is made for simple Christian hospitality where homeless and housed inner-city neighbors can drop in for coffee and conversation. We are as strange to the homeless as they are to us. When we take time to talk and listen, some of the strangeness goes away. We discover some amazingly common ground. It happens time and again. Those who volunteer as hosts and greeters testify that their own stereotypes and fears soon go out the window as strangers become friends by the fact of Christian contact.

### III. God Calls Us to Build Bridges (vv. 20-24)

Jesus took down the barriers so that He could build a bridge. Not the interstate type, but the bridge of friendship and grace that make it possible to move from fear to faith, from down-and-out to up-and-over, from hopelessness to a new life.

A. Jesus builds a bridge of faith for the Samaritan woman.

It is fascinating how Jesus builds the bridge for this Samaritan woman. The turning point comes when Jesus tells her that she and her people are accepted on the basis of truth and spirit, rather than on preference, race, and heritage.

All her life she'd heard from the Jews that Jerusalem was the only legitimate place of worship, that only Jews had the entree card to God. Jesus builds a bridge to a woman who doesn't think she's worth it, who had resigned herself to a third-class, Grade B existence.

"A time is coming," Jesus says, "and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (v. 23).

In a sentence, Jesus moves the point of worship from a Jewish location in regional Jerusalem to an international location anyplace in the world—on Mount Gerizim, at a well near the town of Sychar, or in your backyard or kitchen.

B. Jesus builds a bridge to all the world, including you and me.

What a bridge! Jesus' declaration changes His encounter with a Samaritan woman from an exceptional and isolated cross-cultural experience into a time- and culture-transcending spiritual invitation. Now the water's for all. All are on common ground—truth and spirit. Equal access! Jesus is an equal opportunity living water Supplier.

### CONCLUSION:

Jesus invites us to join Him, even represent Him, in His barrier-breaking, bridge-building witness in a world of Samaritans. There are hurting, hoping, excluded people needing to feel a loving presence, to be affirmed by genuine concern, and to be touched by heavenly grace. Many have accepted society's assessments of them—be it a bloated sense of importance or a subservient and permanent underclass. Jesus is saying, "That doesn't matter. What matters is spirit and truth. I've included you."

Do you hear the call to cross the lines? Will you go—not necessarily around the world, but across the community? Will you, in Jesus' name and for His sake, begin to take down whatever barriers divide you from your Samaritan? Will you, as Jesus by His Spirit leads you, build a bridge of grace? May God help us witness in our Samarias today.

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Special music  
Prayer together at the open altar  
Receiving the offerings  
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Sermon Text  
Sermon  
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John. 4:1-26  
"CROSSING THE LINES"

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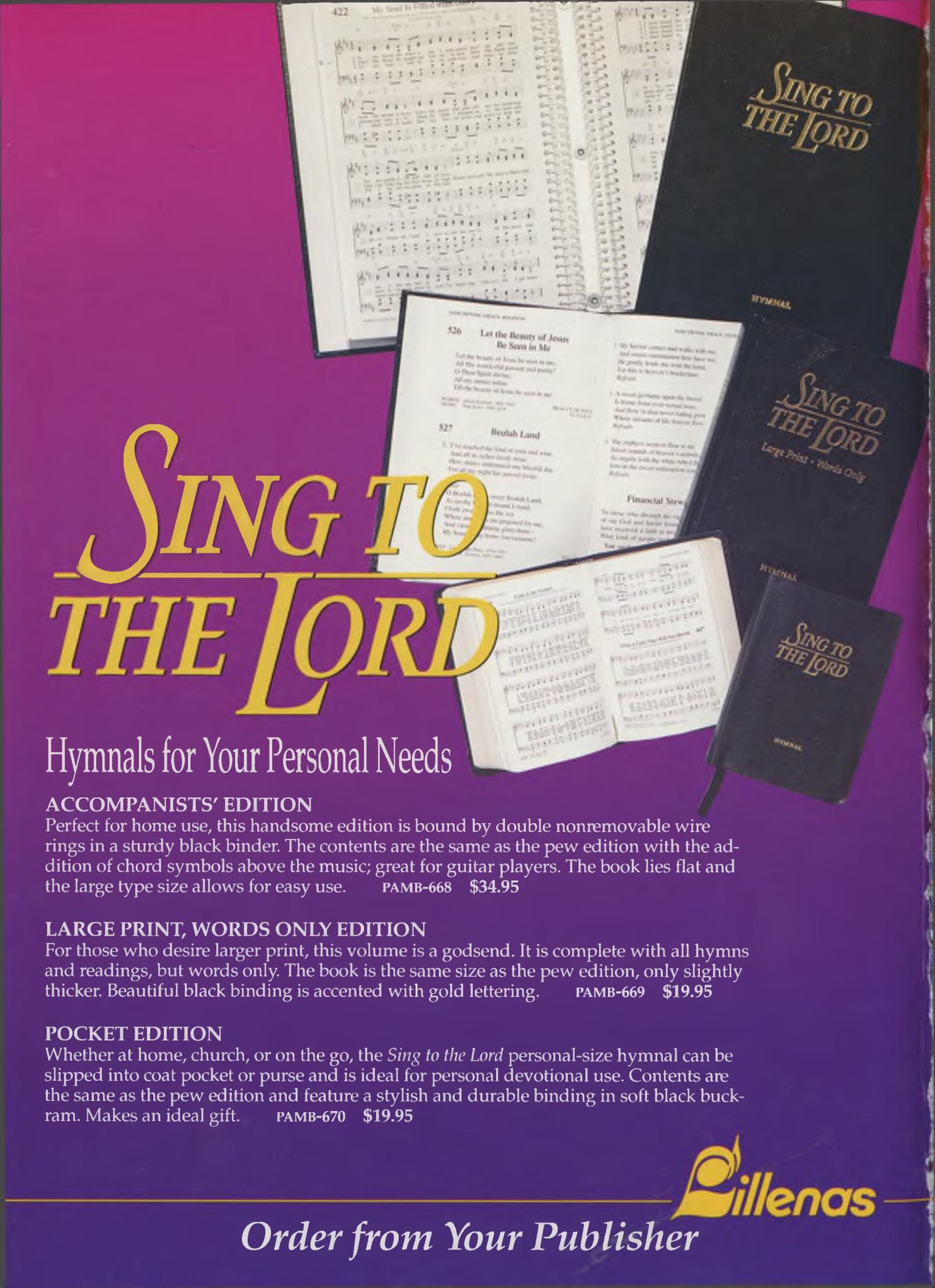
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