



THE

Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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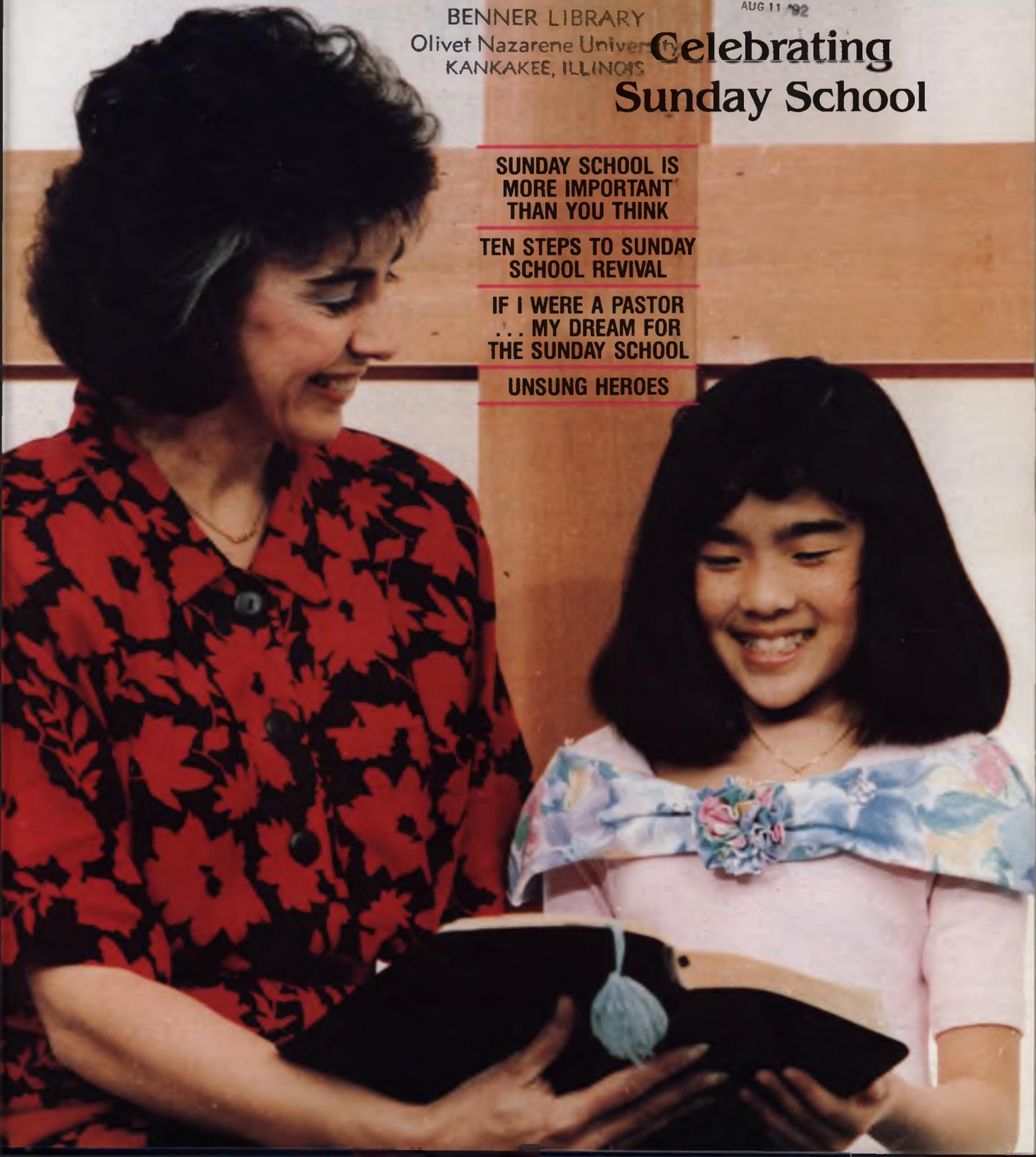
Celebrating Sunday School

SUNDAY SCHOOL IS
MORE IMPORTANT
THAN YOU THINK

TEN STEPS TO SUNDAY
SCHOOL REVIVAL

IF I WERE A PASTOR
... MY DREAM FOR
THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

UN Sung HEROES



*Lord,
Make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born
To eternal life.*

—Francis of Assisi



Sunday School Is More Important than You Think

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

A few decades ago, a national magazine referred to the Sunday School as "The Most Wasted Hour of the Week." That title was wrong then, and it's wrong today. Sunday School is more important than quarterlies and promotional gimmicks. The influence of committed, godly men and women builds a powerful network in which to nurture Christians—new and experienced, young and old.

Even down in our church's furnace room, my Sunday School teacher influenced me toward Jesus. Our pastor's wife, Mrs. Lyle Potter, was a classy lady with a twinkle of joy in her happy eyes. I still remember her in that dimly lit furnace room, with her pupils gathered around her, as a model of Christian womanhood. I can't remember a single lesson, but my whole life has been influenced by a gracious, caring lady with an infectious lilt of laughter who pointed to Jesus.

During the Friday night of our city-wide crusade, Dad and I sat in the balcony of the church. While people sang a beckoning invitation song, Dad asked me if I wanted to accept Jesus as Savior. We walked together down the stairs and down the aisle to the altar of prayer. The first person kneeling beside me was Perry Dunn, my junior high Sunday School teacher. That white-haired gentleman loved me into the kingdom of Christ. We had worked side by side since I was a boy, building our little church with our own hands. I can't remember a single lesson from his quarterly, but his fond memory graces the walls of my inner sanctum. Later, he and his wife showered

friendship on me and my young bride.

I can't remember a single lesson taught by John Hall and his wife, Evelyn, in our Upper Room for high school students. But my spirit was nourished toward spiritual maturity. They loved me—even when it might have been difficult. I kept busy punctuating life with pranks. However, their home opened wide enough to accept me and my ram-bunctious friends. We learned and laughed together. Sunday School was not a single, isolated event, but the beginning of another adventurous week together. Out of love for Jesus, John and Evelyn adopted us as their family. Though separated by many miles and distant years, my affection and gratitude to them remain as bonds of love. My Sunday School teacher's home modeled all that is good and wholesome and Christlike—far beyond the eloquence of his words.

The church where I serve as pastor has been in double sessions for eight years, thus preventing me from going to Sunday School. However, our classes are building a network of strong family ties. The people enjoy lively debate and discussion over the lessons, but those classes form the

basic framework of our local church family. The Sunday School class serves as the point of contact and personal support that people need in an impersonal society. I do not feel we have completed the process of integrating a new family until we have helped them find the fellowship safety-net of a Sunday School class.

Some experts see the Sunday School as a powerful outreach tool. In my context, I see the Sunday School as a vitally necessary family that conserves the converts and builds a circle of caring and sharing ministry. The influences for godly living revealed in the Sunday School shine brightly in a world shadowed by impure peer pressures. The distinct facial features of a thoroughly prepared lesson may fade someday, but the glow of Jesus through sincere Christian men and women will linger until He comes.

Your Sunday School is more important than you think! It may be advantageous to diminish the place of Sunday School, but I suspect you have yet to find something better. Marion Lawrence said, "First I learned to love my teacher, then I learned to love my teacher's Bible, then I learned to love my teacher's Savior." Your Sunday School *is* more important than you think!



If you have any questions or comments regarding the *Preacher's Magazine*, you may reach assistant editor Cindy Osso on Monday through Wednesday and on Friday from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. Pacific time at 509-226-3464.



Editor

Randal E. Denny

Assistant Editor

Cindy Osso

Consulting Editors

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Division of Church Growth
Church of the Nazarene

Wilbur W. Brannon, *Director*
Pastoral Ministries
Church of the Nazarene

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Ten Steps to Sunday School Revival

by Kenneth O. Gangel
Kansas City



Statistics on Sunday School enrollment zoom across the screen like a deranged cursor. For most denominations, attendance has nose-dived. However, in several denominations, Sunday School enrollment has risen. For instance, Southern Baptists show a 6.9 percent increase and the Assemblies of God, 31.9 percent.

With few exceptions, evangelical churches need help to restore Sunday School to its former dynamic and resiliency. According to a Church Data Services study, 78 percent of the evangelicals who attend church also try to attend Sunday School.¹ The pattern of Sunday School as an entry door to the church may well have shifted. But a change in role and structure does not mean anything must be forfeited.

What can we do?

REAFFIRM THE BIBLICAL BASE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The role of theology, according to Anselm of Canterbury, is to declare, deepen, explain, and express the truth of God's Word. Even in evangelical circles professionals argue whether the noun or the adjective should dominate in the name *Christian education*. Much can be learned from the social sciences, but the proper homeroom for Christian education is the theological context of church, Bible college, and seminary. Dr. Michael S. Lawson has noted:

The Holy Spirit, the teacher, and the student gather around the Word of God in Christian teaching. Each contributes uniquely to the process. Paradoxically, the Holy Spirit and the student often operate independently of the teacher. But a Christian teacher needs both students and the Holy Spirit to fulfill his mission.²

LIMIT THE TRADITIONAL MODEL OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

For decades, most Sunday Schools have emphasized classrooms, indoctrination, children, and time constraints. Dr. Wesley Willis, senior vice president at Scripture Press, feels Sunday School declines result from an experience-centered curriculum with heavy-handed centralization of authority and denominational control.³

Warren Hartman's research claims Sunday Schools have five separate audiences with individual expectations: fellowship group, traditional group, study group, social concern group, and multiple-interest group.

Hartman proposes we *match teachers and groups*. For example, the social concerns group attaches an 80 percent value to teachers who love people but only 20 percent to teachers who are biblically well versed. The traditional group prefers the teacher's Bible knowledge to good teaching methods.

Hartman says:

The traditional manner of forming Sunday School classes and as-

signing persons to them on the basis of age, sex, or marital status is called into question. . . . Perhaps other criteria such as teaching style, subject matter, and group life expectation should also be considered.⁴

ADAPT TEACHING PROGRAMS TO CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURES

According to Douglas W. Johnson, life patterns are more enduring than life-styles. The former are based on values and resist the erosion of time. The latter flow with the tides of society. Perhaps we have not made this distinction in evangelical Sunday Schools. Needs change as our society changes.

Meeting people's real needs was the founding vision of the Sunday School. We must pay more attention to those needs and societal changes.

EMPHASIZE LOCAL NEEDS RATHER THAN PRESET PATTERNS

One major difference between the 20th-century church and the 1st-century church is the imitation rather than the initiation of ministry. We have no evidence that any New Testament church patterned itself after another. Now, we assume a method that works well in one location should be copied everywhere. Timothy Arthur Lines reflects on this tendency in his denomination:

Southern Baptists have this replication of programs down to a science. Manuals are provided

which give guidelines as to what a Sunday School should look like, act like, and sound like. . . . Religious educators busy themselves constructing these "standard" organizations.

Denominational Sunday School boards are vital to Sunday School. But we tend to create "success" models and force them on every situation. This relieves the local congregation from the effort and cost of honestly examining community needs. For instance, the contests of the '60s and busing operations of the '70s continue as patterns in many places. These are not negative in themselves. But like other gimmicks tried in Sunday School work, they cloud the essential focus on local need. Again, Lines says,

As soon as the line is crossed where individuals with needs are perceived as potential customers, the total perspective changes. Now the effort is to simplify the process of "selling" the church and its message. Books, manuals, even entire organizations have been developed to standardize and energize the "salespersons." . . . The crudeness and harshness that can overtake the church in the race for quantity is frightening to watch.⁶

Lyle Schaller makes observations that assume the weekly person-hours of building usage may now exceed Sunday morning person-hours by 300 or 400 percent. He emphasizes programs such as mother's day out, AA, divorce recovery, men's prayer breakfast, senior citizens' lunch, and other ministries unrelated to traditional patterns.⁷ Many churches will not see these programs as within the boundaries of ministry. Regardless, parameters must be defined and a mission statement articulated.

FOCUS ON ADULT EDUCATION

In mainline denominations, Christian education has been perceived as a children's ministry. Warren S. Benson claims more than 50 percent of Sunday School attenders are adults. Recognizing this focus is not exclusive to evangelicals. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops stresses, "The continuing education of adults is situated not at the periphery of the church's educational mission but at its center."⁸

INSIST ON LIFELONG LEARNING AND SERVING

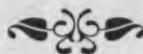
The Church Growth Institute in Lynchburg says, "Sunday School is changing from its image of children only to a balance for children and adults." They emphasize ministry to young adults. However, middle and older adult groups also represent enormous potential for learning and serving.

David O. Moberg of Marquette University writes, "Never before have so many people survived to old age. Never before has retirement been an expected part of life. Never before has there been so much discussion about public policies to meet the income and health needs of old age."

We must be concerned not only about ministry *to* older adults but ministry *by* them. Hartman's words about adult involvement certainly include learning and serving.



Meeting people's real needs was the founding vision of the Sunday School.



Adult Sunday School classes can provide acceptance, relationships, support, and faith nurture. When those needs are met, adults usually become involved in the church. When needs are not met, adults lose interest and often drop out.¹⁰

We must communicate the importance of learning through all the adult years and debunk the myth that serving is not necessary "after I retire" or even when "young people can take over."

DON'T EXPECT THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP: DEAL WITH PRACTICAL LIFE-RELATED ISSUES

In the past we have expected Sunday School to be everything. Yet this was never intended by its founders. The Sunday School is supported by what Robert Lynn called "an ecology

of education." Rather than focusing on what the Sunday School cannot do (developing profound theological scholarship), we must highlight its genius.

Let's follow the New Testament pattern and the history of the Sunday School and offer Bible-centered instruction that relates to real life. Robert Dean stresses: "The goal of the teacher training is not to equip teachers to be professional educators but to encourage them to make Sunday School a time for mutual sharing of faith and love within the context of Bible study."¹¹

ABANDON THE IMPERIAL PASTORATE AND INSIST ON LAY LEADERSHIP

In the past several decades, the field of Christian education has seen professionalization. Churches may staff several pastors in charge of various educational programs. But professional staff come on board to equip lay leadership, not to replace them.

Locke Bowman calls on church staffs to provide an environment in which lay leaders can assume a greater responsibility and voice.

If the clergy and other professionals were to decide that Sunday School needed to be renewed, and if they empowered the laity to devote talent and energy to the task, then nothing could stop the renewal from beginning.¹²

Wayne Jacobson writes of lay leadership:

They might not be as competent, but they are perceived as more credible; they aren't as committed to the program, but their motives can be pure; they aren't as efficient, but they can be more flexible. . . . As we risk the problems in equipping the laity, they'll reap a harvest no team of professionals can match.¹³

Commitment to lay leadership must permeate all the ministries of the church but is most visible and quantifiable in the Sunday School.

SUPPORT ALL WORKERS WITH ADEQUATE TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Public schools have encountered difficulties obtaining qualified teachers. The church faces a similar problem. The Church Data Service bank indicates that only 2 percent of

the respondents claim they are burned out in Christian ministry. Yet only 20 percent will work in the Sunday School.¹⁴ The breakdown probably occurs during the recruitment, training, placement, and evaluation stages. Merton Strommen reports:

leaders doubt the ability of the laity and try to find some substitute.

Most evangelicals agree Sunday School enrollment and attendance are declining. Managing decline is different from managing prosperity and growth. The general pattern moves from excellence to efficiency

Bible-centered instruction relates to real life.

Churches showing high interest in training their teachers gained 1% in enrollment during the two-year study in spite of population decline. Those showing a low interest in training their teachers reported a 31% decline in the enrollment. . . . These activities need to draw a high priority in the future because they are a key to improving our effectiveness in communicating the faith and a key to an effective ministry.¹⁵

Ted Ward discusses the "two common purposes" of Christian education: "*Facilitating spiritual development* (or 'spiritual formation') and encouragement of the gifts of the Spirit *in such ways that the people of God become effective in ministry.*"¹⁶ This suggests the necessity of a high-tech/high-touch approach to training. Personal contact by directors and superintendents will never become a secondary issue. But supporting that high-touch is the necessity to bring in computers to handle enrollment and attendance data, long-range planning, and lesson planning, and to use training videos specifically aimed at the Sunday School.

CALL OUR VOLUNTEERS TO EXCELLENCE

The key to excellence in any Sunday School is the modeling of the professional staff. Senior pastors and educational associates must commit themselves to quality. Understanding between clergy and laity regarding Sunday School is imperative. In some ways Sunday School is like the gospel—simple and clearly understood by those who participate in it. But many senior pastors do not. Such

to economy. Willimon and Wilson, professors at Duke Divinity School, reveal:

When an institution declines, increased emphasis is placed on maintenance and survival. One knowledgeable denominational leader commented, "Our church is in a maintenance mode." When an institution feels threatened, its energies flow into self-preservation. In the church this takes the form of extreme defensiveness of the status quo. Any criticisms or questioning of the organizational procedures or programs evokes a defensive and negative response. Critics are quickly labeled as disloyal troublemakers. When leaders are selected, creativity, courage, and vision are valued less than institutional loyalty. The impression is conveyed that the church is a fragile institution that will suffer irreparable damage if even its most loyal supporters raise any disturbing questions.¹⁷

We need to reverse our church direction—from economy to efficiency and to excellence. Remember, excellence is not perfection. Excellence represents a satisfactory position on the growth scale commensurate with God's gifts and call at any given point in the life of a ministry. That is the goal to which we call our Sunday School teachers and workers.

What role will the Sunday School play in local evangelical congregations over the coming years? Warren Hartman claims, "Sunday School enrollment trends may well be one of the most, if not the most, reliable indicator of church membership trends."¹⁸

The goal of Christian education leadership for the rest of this century is to demonstrate the dynamic of what should be in the life of evangelical Sunday Schools. Timothy Arthur Lines gives us seven options, saying, "The church now has some decisions to make."

1. Does the church want to preserve tradition or evaluate heritage?
2. Does the church want to transmit dogma or cultivate curiosity?
3. Does the church want to dictate morality or facilitate decision making?
4. Does the church want to add proselytes or form disciples?
5. Does the church want to isolate members or mature relationships?
6. Does the church want to replicate programs or construct ministries?
7. Does the church want to perpetuate institutions or realize needs?¹⁹

1. Harold J. Westing, "Christian Education in America: Trends and Issues," *Christian Education Today* (Fall 1988), 7.

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10. Hartman, 55.

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19. Lines, 166.

Unsung Heroes

by Phil Riley
Kansas City



My first recollection of Sunday School was not the organization, the literature, or the classroom—it was the teacher.

I was about four or five years old, in the kindergarten class. Mrs. Kruchinsky was the teacher I first remember. She had a gentle and loving way with all of us live wires. In fact, she would assign various tasks like distributing the small Bible story picture cards, taking the offering, arranging the chairs in a circle for the story, or passing out the take-home papers to keep us involved and busy. Most of all, we knew she enjoyed what she was doing and wanted us to learn about Jesus.

The most memorable moments were the times when she would say, "Children, if you will bow your heads and close your eyes, I will pray with any of you who want Jesus to come into your heart." On more than one occasion she would pray for us individually in that setting

and then explain how Jesus would live in our hearts.

My "faith development" began during those days. Mrs. Kruchinsky, and many other teachers just like her, was the key player in translating Bible truths into the fabric of my life. I would categorize her as an "unsung heroine" among church workers—but an effective servant in the Body of Christ. Her influence lives certainly on through me.

Someone has said, "A person can do a lot if he doesn't care who gets the credit for it."

Thousands of "unsung heroes" make an impact on their worlds without getting publicity and acclaim. These are the Sunday School teachers who faithfully perform their duties each week out of commitment to God and the church. Hours and hours of study, prayer, preparation, and lesson presentations take place around the globe because someone has accepted re-

sponsibility to transfer God's Word to the next generation. In fact, after the study, prayer, preparation, and presentation, these Sunday School teachers continue to teach by example and direct involvement with their pupils.

What motivates people to do this? There is no monetary reward, no gold medals, and, in many places, no one even says, "Thanks." Three reasons are evident:

I. Many individuals teaching Sunday School feel God has called them to teach. The Scriptures indicate that this would be possible: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12).

God still calls people to teach.

My mind goes to a small church in western North Dakota for an example of a teacher who, in my opinion, was "called to teach." The times I visited her church as a district superintendent, I would always attend Mrs. Wallace's adult Sunday School class. The first time I listened to her present the lesson, I knew she had the gift of teaching. Several factors led to that conclusion:

1. She taught with a sense of enjoyment. It's very hard to fake it if



there is no real enjoyment about the assignment. When it is a "calling to fulfill," each week is a new challenge to present God's truth to those who attend.

2. She was well prepared. As the lesson progressed, she presented information from sources other than the teacher's book. Bible commentaries and helps were quoted. Throughout the week, she had searched in other places for a broader understanding of the lesson exposition. She seemed eager to know more about the scriptures printed in the lesson.

3. She taught with God's anointing. Just sitting in her class brought a feeling that God was in attendance also. At times, her own spiritual joy would be evident, and God's blessing would rest upon her. No doubt this lesson had been bathed in prayer all week long. God was honoring those prayers.

God-called teachers result in the Body of Christ (the Church) being edified, or built up. In every local church, probably one or more individuals have invested their lives because God has called them; they do not serve for any public credit.

II. Many individuals teaching Sunday School today love people and desire to help them grow spiritually. Many dedicated Christians fit this category. They are so happy about what Jesus has done in them that they want to serve Him any way they can. When a pastor or Sunday School superintendent asks them about teaching a class, they eagerly respond. Called or not, they want to be servants in God's kingdom. Love and concern radiate from them. What they say about God's Word in their lessons seems to resonate from personal testimony.

Esther is a good example. She grew up in the church and became everybody's friend. She had the type of personality that people enjoyed being around. She always got elected to any office in the church for which she was nominated. She would put her energy into the task at hand with the goal that Christ's Church be built up. Esther was one of those "willing" people, ready to serve in any way needed. She accepted the responsibility of teaching a class with fear and trembling. She knew that she was willing to try,

but it was not easy. The sense of "calling" was not present, but her love to help people motivated her. She served as a Sunday School teacher effectively for the following reasons:

1. She was thankful for the work of Christ in her life and wanted to share it with others. There was never any question about her love for the Lord. Responding to Christ's love, she would accept whatever task was offered as a willing and unworthy servant. Her primary goal was to lead others into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

A great company of people have joined the Sunday School as a result of contests, class activities, individuals, and teachers.

2. She took a personal interest in people with whom she came in contact. Every visitor who came to church would usually meet her before leaving. She always had something positive to say. If they had children, she would attempt to befriend them also.

3. She wanted the church to grow and would do anything to assist in reaching new people. After accepting the Sunday School class, she would study hard, pray much, and visit regularly. Needless to say, this formula produced a growing class. She committed herself to this goal. The love she exhibited to Jesus and others was magnetic.

This group of teachers always carries a burden for their responsibility list. People continue to seek the Lord because these unsung heroes care and pray for them.

III. Many individuals teaching Sunday School today believe in

the Sunday School and long to see it grow.

Dixie had no religious background as a child or teen. Upon completion of high school, she met and married the son of a small-church pastor. For the first time in her life, she was introduced to spiritual things. Through the early years of the marriage, her husband had not faithfully followed his early training. Though they attended church, they continued in their own ways.

Several years and two children later, they moved to a large city. Needing friends, they decided to attend church once again. The people befriended them, and soon they were attending regularly. Dixie enjoyed the Sunday School class because she was learning so many new things.

During a revival service, Dixie gave her heart to Jesus. She became a radiant Christian. Soon, she was eager to get involved. A few months passed, and the Sunday School superintendent approached her about teaching the toddler class. She accepted with enthusiasm. She studied about God's love and also demonstrating it to the children.

Before a year had passed, her neighbor's family began attending and were converted. Now she had a friend to assist her in outreach efforts. Each week, Dixie and Brenda visited in the homes of the children on their responsibility list. Soon, others began attending through their efforts. God used Dixie as a teacher because:

1. She had found Christ and was learning so many new things about Scripture. The church had become her "extended family." As a new Christian, she found much fellowship and love. The church became the focal point of her life, in spite of the fact that her husband did not attend regularly. She could not wait for the regular worship services to come around each week; she and her children were always there early.

2. Because of all the new experiences she was having, she was eager to experience more. When the toddler class had been offered to her, she gladly accepted because it was a way to help her church. Now she would have material to study during the week to be presented on Sunday. By this she grew as a Christian.

Make Heroes Out of Your Teachers

How can you nurture the unsung heroes? Your teachers need pastoral support. Taking some of these simple steps can help your unsung heroes find personal fulfillment and avoid burnout.

1. Make them feel important.

Acknowledge teachers from the pulpit. If you act as if your church cannot survive without these people, your congregation will show the same attitude.

2. Sing their praises.

When a teacher does an outstanding job, congratulate that teacher personally and publicly through the church service, newsletter, and teachers' meetings.

3. Thank your teachers.

As they "pastor" their classes, they extend your church's ministry. Learn to express appreciation. When a volunteer feels his work and sacrifice is appreciated, he'll work diligently.

4. Encourage learning.

Let your teachers know about special programs. For instance, if Youth Specialties hosts a workshop, encourage your youth workers to attend. If a local Bible college offers a beneficial course, encourage your teachers to attend. Offer special workshops at your

church. When a teacher has extended an extra measure of effort, express public congratulations.

5. Don't hoard information.

Let teachers know about special events before the rest of the congregation. They'll feel like "insiders" and will plan their schedules better. If you don't inform teachers, don't be surprised when they aren't enthusiastic or already have something scheduled that night.

Freely share your vision. More often than not, your teachers will support you and will work toward the same goal.

6. Treat them.

Host a special teachers' banquet. Arrange this at a restaurant, or decorate the church and have students prepare and serve the meal. Give lots of awards—both serious and lighthearted (e.g., the teacher who makes the most home visits; the teacher who smiles the most). Provide special entertainment.

7. Offer teacher support.

Encourage teachers to share difficulties through teachers' meetings, department meetings, or a separate teachers' support group. A support group atmosphere gives a teacher reassurance that he is not the only

one to face a problem. This also helps them find solutions easier.

8. Offer out-of-church contact.

Occasionally send a brief, simple note of appreciation to each teacher, or call your teachers. Ask if they have any questions or problems. Ask them for prayer requests. Don't recruit ("By the way, can you cook at the men's breakfast next week?") or push any programs. Simply thank them and encourage them.

Make special effort to remember their birthdays and anniversaries.

9. Listen.

Make an extra effort to listen to Sunday School teachers. It's better to let one bend your ear unnecessarily than for them to think you don't care. Don't just pretend; really listen—you might find a great idea or hear good advice.

10. Encourage extracurricular activities.

Occasionally, organize a "teacher's night out." Offer group rates to a sporting event. Have a party. If you can, organize free baby-sitting. The purpose centers on fun and fellowship. As your teachers bond together and become a team, they'll find personal fulfillment and ministry renewal. 

3. Sunday School opened so many new truths to her that she readily joined the ranks as a teacher. As a learner, she had opportunity to learn more before passing it on to the children who attended her class. She wanted her classroom to be full of children to hear about God's love. With Brenda assisting in class visitation, it wasn't long until Brenda, too, was ready to volunteer as a teacher.

In spite of some dismal statistical figures over the past 20 years, not everyone has given up on Sunday

School! A great company of people have joined the Sunday School as a result of contests, class activities, individuals, and teachers. These people are still convinced of the Sunday School's worth and will usually get involved when someone asks. Whether for a short time or long term, they readily respond to "do what I can" when asked. God uses willing people!

We have our heroes—those we admire and look up to and even model after. Ask someone if anyone made an impact on him—especially

a teacher. More than likely, you will hear a familiar story of someone who didn't work for publicity or acclaim, but wanted to serve Jesus. You will hear of an unsung hero who had a great deal to do with that person finding his way to Jesus. Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21, KJV). Only heaven will reveal the treasures earned by these unsung heroes. 

Is Your Congregation a Church at Risk?

by Mark York

Kansas City

Quietly, unrecognized by most pastors, a revolution is occurring in some congregations. It is being carried out by some of the people who are the core of the congregation, the ones who appear most supportive and are among the most dedicated workers in the church. The revolutionaries may even be among the pastor's closest friends. Yet week after week, year after year, they are systematically undermining the Wesleyan-Arminian messages pastors spend much of their time preparing.

Does this sound alarmist? Perhaps, but there is clear evidence that our most precious beliefs are rapidly eroding. One professor of Bible at a theologically Wesleyan church college sees the effects of the revolution in his classroom every year. His students come from strong church families. They are making financial sacrifices to send their sons and daughters to their church-sponsored college. Yet the professor finds that many of the students have little conception of who they are and what their church believes about its most central doctrines.

At the beginning of each semester the professor prints three explanations of Christian holiness on the chalkboard. One is overtly Calvinist, another Keswickian, and the third Wesleyan. Predictably the majority of each class first chooses the Calvinistic interpretation of holiness as the one that most closely reflects



their beliefs. The professor erases the Calvinist statement and asks the class to choose with which of the remaining two statements they most closely agree. To his chagrin these bright, church-steeped students gravitate to the Keswickian explanation.

If the shift was simply based on anecdotes, it might be dismissed or explained away. But there is hard evidence to point to a broad erosion of belief within evangelical Christianity. In 1989 a group of leading evangelical thinkers met to answer the question, "Will our kids recognize our faith?" They were concerned by the findings of James D. Hunter that evangelical Christianity, as a whole, is at risk (Belz).

Who are the revolutionaries that are quietly robbing the church of its most precious beliefs? Usually they are well-intentioned church persons who are theologically naive and do not recognize the discrepancies between what they are teaching and what their church believes. Often they are misguided by some attractive but theologically non-Wesleyan Bible teacher or publication. They are Sunday School teachers, men's and women's group leaders, weekday program workers. They are among the most dedicated people in your church! However, they can *compliment* your sermon on Sunday, and then *contradict* it in their teaching—without even knowing it!

The influence of those who teach theologically incompatible beliefs is strong. The church has recognized their authority to teach by giving them a position. Faithful attenders may receive two or three times more theological instruction from lay teachers than they receive from their pastors. Children are at greatest risk. Since many attend children's church, it is possible that, in some, children very rarely hear a theologi-

cally Wesleyan interpretation of the Bible. It is little wonder that college students, reared in Christian homes and taught in Sunday Schools in holiness churches, do not know what they believe, or, worse, do not believe the central message of their church!

How could this happen? Why are evangelical Christians losing their vision? Hunter identifies "cognitive bargaining" as the process by which evangelical youth seek to be accepted by their surrounding intellectual environment. They adapt beliefs to be more acceptable to those around them.

The apostle Paul recognized the temptation of being conformed to the world in Rom. 12:2, so this is nothing new. Indeed, much of the reason Wesleyan-Arminian churches arose was to counteract this kind of "world-conforming" behavior. Wesleyan and holiness churches historically have striven to be transformed, not conformed, people. Yet as the Bible professor's experience attests, it appears our churches are at risk of dissolving into an amorphous evangelicalism that Hunter has found is conforming more and more to the world.

A partial explanation of this shift in theologically Wesleyan churches may be found in the fact that conservative Christianity is dominated by a Calvinistic worldview or hegemony. As a minority theological perspective, Wesleyanism is constantly under threat of being absorbed by more dominant ideologies. Christian radio and television rarely feature Wesleyan viewpoints. Christian bookstores are filled with publications from theologically non-Wesleyan sources. Michael Apple has observed that any form of hegemony threatens to overwhelm minority perspectives. This is particu-

larly true in education. Apple states, "Education was not a neutral enterprise . . . by the very nature of the institution, the educator was involved, whether he or she was conscious of it or not, in a political act" (p. 1). In education, someone's knowledge is given legitimacy. A non-Wesleyan, evangelical hegemony dominates many of the messages our members receive.

Some people bring a foreign theological perspective with them when they join our churches. Others hear them outside the church: in Christian radio and non-Wesleyan publications. We can do little to avoid these sources of non-Wesleyan theological influence. The real tragedy is that some learn alien theologies in our own Sunday School classes.

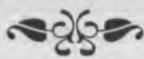
Although the majority of theologically Wesleyan churches use their denominational curriculum, a growing minority are being lured to materials from other sources. Bible bookstores provide convenient access to a wide array of attractively packaged materials from publishers of all theological perspectives. The '80s saw the explosive growth of explicitly generic Christian curriculum publishers. The message for these publishers became secondary to sales. They adopted the strategy of secular curriculum publishers and weeded out as many sources of controversy as possible (Adler). The result is an intellectually and spiritually bland mixture that fails to provide teachers with the guidance they need on such crucial questions as leading people to Christ and what it means to be a Christian. Many churches that would never consider participating in an ecumenical movement sponsored by a council of churches unknowingly buy into an ambiguous, "one size fits all" evangelicalism when they purchase and use a generic curriculum.

The success of the generic publishers has been fueled by a growing consumerism in the church. Church growth experts tell us that people select churches much as they select oranges. Since most lay teachers are theologically untrained, generic publishers appeal to qualities the teachers do understand: color, ease of use, style of art. Being unable to

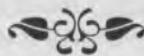
judge the theological soundness of the curriculum, these other values dominate the evaluations of many lay teachers. Unable to see the dangers, they are taken in by the siren song of generic publishers' marketing departments.

Several factors have combined to make the threat from generic publishers more pressing. Recent changes in the publishing industry have made all publishers more aggressive in their marketing. Prestigious book publishers were bought by entertainment conglomerates (Sewall and Cannon, 62). This included some Christian publishers as secular conglomerates seek to cash in on the evangelical Christian market niche. For some generic publishers, profit is a motivation. Finally, publishing costs have risen faster than inflation. This means that sales, prices, or both must be increased.

Theologically Wesleyan denominational publishers have responded to the threats from generics. Their



The revolutionaries are among the most dedicated people in your church!



materials are highly competitive in the quality of educational methodologies, art, color, and other external curriculum features. Certainly church leaders do not want their members to settle for second best in any area. The choice between curriculum, when theology is removed, has been reduced to a matter of taste. Theology must be the deciding factor if the church's beliefs are not to be at risk.

Even the generic publishers realize that it is only a matter of time before churches discover what they have given up when they choose a generic curriculum. To stem the

predictable flight from generics when the consequences are discovered, some have launched projects to Wesleyanize their generic product. Most of these efforts involve modifying a basic generic curriculum to include some Wesleyan terminology and weed out parts that could be offensive. While this strategy might be effective for groups that have risen from the same theological soil, it merely creates a Trojan horse for Wesleyan-Arminian churches. They have a fundamentally different view of the relationship between God and people that cannot be added on to anything else. It must be built into the curriculum. It is unlikely that generic publishers will devote the resources necessary to build a theologically Wesleyan curriculum from the ground up, even though they may label a product "holiness."

Any church is at risk that places its identity and its future in the hands of those who do not share its most basic beliefs. When one purchases a curriculum, one subjects oneself to the teachers of the publisher. Curriculum is designed to plant ideas, mold attitudes, and shape behavior. Can a vibrant, committed, theologically Wesleyan church receive the leadership it needs from a generic publisher? This author thinks not.

Publishing and theology have a special historic connection. Theology has driven publishing, and publishing has impacted the form and content of theology. Mass production of Bibles made a fundamental theological shift possible: the priesthood of the believer. Widespread availability of Bibles and the belief that all persons could be their own priests called for the masses to be able to read. Educational historians trace the foundation of universal, free, public education in the United States to this concern for reading the Bible (Spring, 86).

Publishing disseminated not only Bibles but other theological writings as well. The hymns of Charles Wesley had a profound effect on Calvinism.

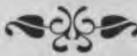
As Wesleyan-Arminian movements formed, the pioneer church leadership recognized the importance of

publishing their message. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, theologically Wesleyan groups organized to publish the message of holiness that was not being addressed by others. Publishing houses paralleled or quickly followed the birth of denominations. The Free Methodist church, started in 1860, founded Light and Life Press in 1886. The Church of the Nazarene was founded in 1908. Its publishing house followed only 4 years later. The Wesleyan Methodist church founded its publishing house in 1843, the year the church was formed. The same is true of the Pilgrim Holiness church, with both the denomination and its publisher being founded in 1922. In 1968, when the Wesleyan Methodists and the Pilgrim Holiness churches merged, Wesley Press was born. The leaders of these churches did not start publishing out of a profit motive. They had something to say that no one else was saying.

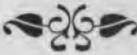
Most theologically Wesleyan churches and pastors recognize the power of printed instructional materials and their relationship to the continuation of the church's message. As a result, they use the specially prepared materials from their denominational publisher that cherishes their heritage and celebrates their beliefs.

However, as more and more lay teachers bring in curriculum they have just "discovered" in a magazine or bookstore, it is difficult for some pastors to take the theological leadership and explain why they resist importing alien material into the church's curriculum.

Lay teachers are not the only ones to recommend curriculum that can place a church's beliefs at risk. Some ministers of Christian education, youth pastors, and children's ministers are lured by generic marketeers. Interdenominational professional meetings for associate ministers are often subsidized by the generic publishers. They use such occasions to showcase their latest wares, often giving away free samples. Sadly, some religious education degrees do not contain the same rigorous theological training required of pastors.



In choosing curriculum, theology must be the deciding factor.



This means their graduates are ill equipped to evaluate curriculum theologically. They fall prey to the same marketing schemes aimed at lay teachers: color, ease of use, and art.

Some professional associate ministers are theologically educated and can adapt material to be consistent with what their church believes. Because they can do this, they incorrectly assume their lay teachers can as well. All paid staff associates feel the pressure to justify their salaries and do something creative, exciting, and innovative. Some select material from another publisher because it helps "justify" their position, unaware that their choice may put their church and its message at risk.

"But my church uses the material from my denominational publishing house! Isn't that enough?" some pastors may object. Certainly it is a crucial first step in ensuring the purity of the message. However, teachers filter printed instructional materials through their own frame of reference. They may subtly change the message without even knowing they are doing it. The "evangelical hegemony" mentioned earlier has robbed many fine church persons of their Wesleyan perspective. Using denominational curriculum is vital, but it takes theological training for teachers to be sensitive to theological issues.

As the theological leader of the local church, pastors are responsible for the messages their churches promote. Ironically, one pastor recently emphatically declared, "Theology doesn't matter!" He exemplified the

current trend to minimize denominational distinctives and promote a "community church image." While this may bring short-term gains, it leads to a long-term identity crisis. Stirring Wesleyan sermons that are, at worst, contradicted or, at best, not supported by the church's educational ministries will soon be lost in the crescendo of other messages.

How at risk is your church? Take a moment to reflect on these questions and decide for yourself.

1. Am I, as a pastor, passionately committed to the historic beliefs and practices of my denomination or connectional church?
2. Does my church use denominationally approved curriculum in all its ministries?
3. Have my teachers and group leaders been thoroughly trained in the beliefs that are central to our church?
4. Has no one requested to use curriculum from other sources (indicating the asker may not be aware of the dangers)?
5. Are your members aware that popular Christian personalities outside your denomination may have significant theological differences with your church?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, give thanks! Your congregation is probably minimally at risk. However, there are armies of salesmen, banks of telemarketers, and a non-Wesleyan dominant evangelicalism that has targeted you and your church. Keeping the risk in check takes commitment and vigilance.

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If I Were a Pastor . . . My Dream for the Sunday School

by Miriam Hall
Kansas City

Most of us have occasionally indulged in *If I were . . .* thinking. It's fun to put ourselves in another's shoes and to dream about what we'd do. For example,

If I had a million dollars, I would . . .

If I were her, I certainly wouldn't . . .

If I had it to do over again, I would . . .

Most of the time, this is unproductive, wishful thinking that leads nowhere. However, it can be a means of dreaming big dreams that lead to big accomplishments.

I'd like to do some *If I were . . .* thinking. I want to imagine I hold a key role in the church—as pastor of a local church. Let me share with you who do serve in this capacity the dreams I'd dream for my Sunday School—if I were a pastor.

Am I merely wasting time, since I will never have the privilege of pastoring a church? Perhaps. However, I pray that many of you will adopt my dream, then make it a reality in your churches.

1. If I were a pastor . . .

I would want my church to have a thriving Sunday School.

Does this seem too obvious? Surprisingly, not all pastors share a strong commitment to Sunday School. Robert J. Dean points out



that attacking the Sunday School has been popular for years in both secular and religious groups. He says, "Some people feel that the faults of the Sunday School are so serious that it has no viable future."¹

In recent years, many churches have shifted their focus from Sunday School to the worship service or other programs. Worship is important and rightly deserves strong emphasis. However, I worry about what will happen if this trend leads us to channel large amounts of creative thinking, prayer, workers, and money away from the Sunday School.

Consider the findings of church growth researchers:

- In the 1978 Gallup study, "The Unchurched American," 74 percent of the *unchurched parents* said they want their children to receive religious instruction. Of those, 75 percent *said they wanted the Sunday School to provide that instruction.*²
- Data from the United Methodist denomination from 1974 to 1984 shows a strong correlation between children's Sunday School enrollment and professions of faith.³
- Studies of Sunday School enrollment and church attendance show that church attendance usually follows the direction of

Sunday School enrollment. Warren J. Hartman concludes, "That consistent sequence suggests that Sunday School enrollment trends may well be one of the most, if not the most reliable indicator of church membership trends."⁴

Many of you have known these facts. So why am I repeating them? Because you hold the key to your church's attitude toward the Sunday School. Christian educator Locke E. Bowman states:

Where the Sunday School, for good or ill, is a "going concern," you can count on it that the church's minister—and especially the "senior minister," in the larger congregation—is 110 percent "for it," encouraging the teachers and lending much personal and moral support. And where a Sunday School is in the death throes, you can ordinarily trace a direct correlation to the lack of clergy support through the years.⁵



If I were a pastor, I would want a strong Sunday School for my church and would communicate that vision to my people. I would also make clear the kind of Sunday School I wanted.

2. If I were a pastor . . .

I'd want my Sunday School to focus on evangelistic outreach.

When I was growing up, Sunday School contests were popular. For years, I thought the two most spiri-



The pastor holds the key to his church's attitude toward Sunday School.



tual colors were red and blue—colors used by our opposing teams. I recall the excitement of seeing red ribbons rise on giant wooden thermometers. One year, the Sunday School superintendent announced weekly contest winners. Then he would cut off a section of the losing captain's necktie.

Those contests took a lot of time—and often focused on the trivial. But they did achieve one result—outreach. Yes, Sister So-and-So always brought her entire extended family, most of whom would not return until the next contest. We also reached several live prospects who began coming, were saved, became active, and attend churches today.

Our Sunday Schools must renew their commitment to outreach. Not to methods that have become outmoded, but to concern for the lost. We need what research analyst George Barna describes in the book *Successful Churches: What They Have in Common*.

These people [in successful churches] . . . acted out of a sense of urgency, hoping to influence others before it was too late. The people in these churches perceived that time is of the essence in ministry. To them, every day that passed represented one less day they have to share Christ with people who need to hear the gospel.⁶

If I were a pastor, I'd want every Sunday School leader to share this concern. I'd want them to feel it so strongly that they would adopt heroic measures to reach the unchurched.

In *Overcoming Barriers to Sunday School Growth*, R. Wayne Jones lists several keys to developing an evangelistic Sunday School. Here is an adapted version of those ideas.

- **Identify the lost.** Have church leaders and members identify unchurched individuals they know. Research by Win Arn shows that 70 to 80 percent of church members first came because a friend or relative invited them.⁷

- **Communicate the urgency of reaching the lost.** As I've grown older, especially since I've become a grandmother, my horror of spiritual lostness has increased. I look at my precious grandsons and think, How could I bear it if they do not give their lives to Christ? Then I realize, each of us must feel this urgency for every lost person. If *we* don't, who will?

- **Help all Sunday School members recognize their responsibility to share Christ.** Jones emphasizes, "Each member of the Sunday School has the responsibility to reach people."⁸

- **Share the gospel with the unchurched.**

- **Teach the Bible evangelistically and give pupils opportunities to respond.** All teachers must view themselves as evangelists.

- **Have leaders and Sunday School members pray for the lost.** What would happen if every Sunday School member regularly prayed for one Sunday School prospect or irregular attender? Would we see more people won to Christ? I believe we would.

3. If I were a pastor . . .

I would affirm and support the Sunday School leaders and teachers.

Howard Hendricks tells about Miss Smith, who applied for a public school teaching position. Mr. Brown, the principal, turned her down because she lacked a master's degree and five years experience. At church, however, Sunday School Superintendent Brown pressured Miss Smith to take a junior high Sunday School class. She demurred, explaining she

had never taught junior highs. This time, Mr. Brown responded, "Don't let that be a barrier. We only require a willing heart."⁹

We laugh at stories about Sunday School teacher recruitment, but it's not funny. Children's directors repeatedly tell me that worker recruitment is their biggest headache. Teachers often accept assignments reluctantly, sometimes out of a sense of duty or guilt. Some don't last a year; more resign after a year; and others drudge along joylessly.

Can we evaluate Sunday School teaching to the level of *privilege, joy, honor, and God-called ministry*? Fortunately, thousands of teachers view their task in this light. Many more would do so if churches would make a few significant changes.

Again, Pastor, *you* hold the key. Your people look to you for a sense of vision. They also sense—and usually adopt—your attitudes toward ministries and workers.

If I were a pastor, I would affirm and support my Sunday School team in these ways:

- **I would emphasize my high regard for Sunday School teachers.** This begins by clearly stating, "We *don't* take 'just anyone.'" Set high standards for commitment and performance. Insist that teachers commit to these standards. One pastor had every teacher sign a commitment pledge. Teachers who did not adhere to these expectations were



Teachers must view themselves as evangelists.



asked to resign. This pastor had a *waiting list* of people wanting to be teachers. Being a teacher in his church was a position of privilege and honor.

Communicating regard for teachers also means thanking them. Most Sunday School teachers spend from 1 to 3 hours a week in lesson preparation, outreach, and socials—besides the weekly class. Many Sunday School teachers work full-time outside the home. If I were a pastor, I'd tell and show the teachers I recognize the sacrifices they made—and honor them for doing so.

• **I would help each volunteer find the right position.** *Discipleship Journal* recently printed a cartoon. It depicted three persons working in the church nursery and showed "mental pictures" of what each would prefer doing. One man saw himself painting the church; a



Set high standards for commitment and performance.



woman envisioned playing a guitar. Only one visualized himself playing with a preschooler.¹⁰

Supporting Sunday School teachers begins by giving teaching assignments to those who feel a call or at least want to explore this option. Barna says,

Successful churches had a different perception of what service is all about. It was not merely assigning warm bodies to undone tasks. It was about enabling people to minister in the name of Christ. It was about helping people to grow in their areas of giftedness, and to become more effective and capable servants of Christ.¹¹

• **I would work with the Sunday School leadership to insure that every teacher received training.** To fail to provide training is to train teachers to fail. Every teacher, no matter how experienced, can benefit from books, courses, or seminars. Those who have never taught benefit most from training under an experienced teacher before going solo.

4. If I were a pastor . . .

I would emphasize children in the Sunday School.

I have marveled as I watched my daughter and grandsons develop. What mystified, yet delighted, me most was to see the mechanisms of the mind unfolding. How does a child develop language? learn to think? understand complex concepts, such as cause and effect? I can't explain these phenomena, but each time I see them occur, I marvel at what God has made possible.

I also realize anew how crucial it is for children to experience God early, when their hearts and minds are receptive to Him. Someone once said, "It is better to build children than to repair men." Robert Raikes, founder of the Sunday School, discovered this principle more than 200 years ago. Raikes's first efforts centered on rehabilitating adults just released from prison. For 25 years, he worked with little lasting success. Finally, he turned his attention to children to see if he could prevent the evils he saw in their parents. From his experiment grew the modern Sunday School.

Today, we face societal conditions that rival Raikes's era. Thousands of children grow up with no knowledge of God or Jesus. The Sunday School must reach these children, teach them God's Word, and lead them to their Savior. If it does not, they will become prime targets for drug pushers, New Age philosophy, or worse.

The Sunday School needs children as much as children need the Sunday School. Again, Barna's study of successful churches showed they viewed ministry to children and youth as a key to their success. Here are three of their reasons:¹²

• **Ministry to children is one way to reach adults.** This was the case in my husband's family. When members of a local church invited the Halls to Sunday School, at first only the children attended. Eventually, however, Herb—my husband—became a Christian at age 22. Before long, his parents started attending, and they, too, were saved. Today, several of his family know the Lord—because the church ministered to children through the Sunday School.

• **Children have a greater potential for conversion.** Plus, United Methodist figures show that 60 to 65 percent of those who join the church by profession of faith come from the Sunday School.¹³

• **Today's children are tomorrow's leaders.** A church that does not reach children may experience future loss of leadership.

I've shared a few of the dreams I'd dream for the Sunday School "if I were a pastor." I know many of you share those dreams and are making them reality. Others may wonder if the Sunday School is really worth

the effort. If that is your question, consider this incident.

More than 70 years ago, three women—Mrs. Semmeral, Mrs. Healy, and Mrs. Hafly—became concerned about children. They started a Sunday School. Soon more than 50 children were attending. Some were quite a handful, but this did not daunt the women. They met the challenge by starting a special class for "unruly boys."

Calling on new families was important to these ladies. One family was particularly resistant. Again, the ladies refused to give up; they faithfully called on that family every week for nearly a year.

Finally the father allowed his son to attend the Sunday School. The little boy loved it, attended regularly, and was ultimately saved.

Who was this family? Their last name was Wiseman, and their boy's name was Neil. When he grew up, he also had a son, named Neil, whom he raised in a Christian home. This son has given his life in service to God as a pastor, as a director at a holiness denomination, as a teacher in a Christian college, and as an author. He's Dr. Neil B. Wiseman, the vice president of academic affairs at Nazarene Bible College.

If I were a pastor, I'd give anything for a Sunday School that took "unruly boys and girls" and turned them into Neil Wisemans. What about you?

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Ministry to Teenagers: Where Do We Go from Here?

by Fred Fullerton

Kansas City



"Have you done your homework?" I can remember my mom and my older sister asking that question as I journeyed through my elementary, junior high, and high school years. I did not especially enjoy this question, but I knew they asked because they cared about me and my development.

In the context of youth ministry, I would like to pose that question to you. Have you done your homework to understand the developmental stages young people pass through and the ministry implications that emerge from such understandings? I ask that question because I know that you care about the young people in your church. I believe that you are committed to their spiritual growth. The information in this excerpt and in the article by Ed Robinson will aid your growing understanding of adolescent development. I believe such data will help inform as decisions are made about youth ministry emphases and the work of the youth Sunday School.

Let's examine two general aspects of ministry to teenagers. The first pertains to the types of activities we might emphasize in ministry to teens. The second aspect concerns a realistic self-examination of both the programs and the individuals related to youth ministry.

Outreach to Teenagers

The research from *Today's Teens: A Generation in Transition* reveals a number of different elements of need and opportunity that might serve as entry points into the lives of teenagers by youth workers.

One aspect relates to building the teenager's *family relationships*.



Most teens desire a closer and deeper relationship with their parents and siblings. How can this be accomplished? One of the most critical roles of a youth worker is to spend time encouraging parents to pursue the relationship with their offspring.

Parents, much more than clergy or church volunteers, can powerfully influence the thoughts and behavior of teenagers. In fact, parents have a much greater impact upon the willingness of a teen to participate in church-related activities and to accept Christ as Savior than any other people or resources.

Parents must also be encouraged to build the self-esteem as well as the relationship with their teenagers by spending meaningful time with them. One myth that youth workers might attack is that of "quality time." Evidence from various studies suggests that quality time is little more than a vacuous cop-out held by parents who are not willing to

sacrifice other desires and pleasures for the sake of personal relationships. Teenagers need to feel the love, acceptance, and attention of their parents. The local church would fulfill a vital service by helping parents devote more time and energy to their relationships with all of their children, including teens.

A second approach in teenage ministry would be to facilitate the development of meaningful relationships between teenage peers. Despite the tendency to share feelings and dreams with peers, most teenagers still possess a deep-rooted need to be accepted by, and connected to, a wider circle of peers. If bonding does not take place at school, the bonding probably will not happen at all. The Church represents another opportunity for ties to be forged in a positive atmosphere.

The challenge to youth leaders, as they attempt to offer opportunities for relationship building, is to examine the recruiting practices and the

types of activities sponsored to determine if those efforts truly allow for healthy relationships to be developed. In some churches, the youth programs neither provide the types of bond-building opportunities nor are sensitive to the potential that certain activities may have for separating youths or for damaging either their self-image or their public image. All activities ought to be carefully considered prior to integration into the youth program.

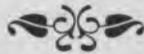
Another valuable service the Church could perform for teenagers would be to introduce them to contemporary Christian music. Some conservative churches might bristle at the notion of helping their teenagers identify rock bands to follow. Today's teens will hear rock and other contemporary music regardless of where they hear it first—at church, on the radio, via MTV, etc. If there is an opportunity to provide them with a sound to which they relate, which embodies lyrics that lift up the name and ministry of Jesus Christ, this is to the advantage of all.

Youth leaders essentially act as gatekeepers for Christian music. Many areas of the world do not offer a Christian radio station. The youth program can introduce teens to Christian music that they will find relevant. While youth leaders may want to exercise discretion in which Christian artists they promote, they can enhance the spiritual development of their charges by communicating with them in the language that teens most readily understand—today's music.

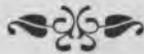
At the same time, every youth program attempting to reach out to and build up the lives of teenagers must step back and assess the assumptions on which the ministry is based. Many teens do not accept the Bible as God's Word. Others do not hold basic beliefs that are a must if further progress is to be made in their personal spiritual growth. Few teenagers maintain any type of thought-out worldview. Those who possess a philosophy of life frequently do not base their views on Christian principles. We can help them understand basic Christian truths in relevant and practical ways. However, we cannot assume that even though they come from a Christian household or have been raised in the

Church they really understand and embrace the basic precepts of the Bible.

One way in which we can reasonably approach teenage ministry is to understand when teens deal with the local church, they evaluate its worth in their lives. Value is not automatically accepted. To convey the reality that the local church does have a message and programs of value, we must convince them of the benefits they will receive from participation in the body.



The call to minister to teens is not one to which many aspire; however, the benefits to the Kingdom are incalculable.



How does this package of benefits get realized? Largely through providing specific, tangible products desirable to teenagers. Relationships with family, peers, and even respected church leaders are beneficial. Another benefit is educational, providing insights into the questions and anxieties that plague teens. For instance, a program should help teens work through sensitive issues such as "Why am I alive?" or "What can I do with my life to make it worthwhile?" These are the types of queries that continually run through the minds of teenagers—and are the very questions to which the Church has substantial answers. If we can help teens work through those questions and find answers that incorporate a spiritual dimension at the core, we have accomplished much.

Tangible benefits can be realized in other ways too. For instance, one teenage segment that we barely reach: below-average students. It appears that most subpar students feel rejected or ignored by the Church. Perhaps it is they who do the ignoring, but the fact remains that they

are not integrated into the life of the Church. How many youth programs recognize that these individuals may require a different type of outreach? It may be a tutoring program that retains their dignity and image. It may require a program geared to reducing the stress levels they feel so acutely. Perhaps it will be related to bridging the wide gulf between the typical underachiever and his parents. Their key is to recognize these individuals as young adults with special needs who may not fit into a mainstream youth program. It might take additional energy and creativity to reach them. Evidence suggests that they are reachable.

Finally, the study argues for a greater concentration upon discipleship activities among teens. Data shows that while effective evangelism does happen among teens, there is a major problem resident within the population of churched teens: a lukewarm attitude toward the Christian faith and the local church.

Other studies by Barna Research have suggested that we tend to lose many young people between the ages of 18 and 23. Why? Because an inadequate job was done in preparing them for the chance to free themselves from the Church. They did not possess a strong enough understanding of the significance and the benefits of being a Christian. Once they encounter a chance to explore other life-style possibilities, they happily pursue those simply because Christianity did not work for them. To literally millions of young adults and teenagers, God is not real; spirituality is "a head game"; church is irrelevant; religion is positive, but not helpful.

Meaningful discipling must take place if teenagers are to grow in their faith. We can appreciate the importance of evangelism and the necessity for continued efforts at bringing the unsaved into an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. But too many youth programs today appear to be guilty of the tragedy vividly described in Matthew 13, where the seed is sown in rocky places and ultimately withers and dies.

Examining Our Mission and Mind-set

Apart from these types of program-

oriented considerations, the study indicates that churches serious about reaching and influencing teenagers must examine what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why they are doing it.

Indeed, we must wonder what is happening in our small churches. The evidence overwhelmingly points out that teenagers affiliated with small congregations will fail to grow spiritually as much as teens associated with larger congregations. The beliefs, the religious activities, the relationships, and even the self-perceptions of teenagers attending a small congregation consistently emerged as less healthy than was the case elsewhere.

Why does this condition exist? Perhaps it is because the small church is under the leadership of a single pastor who tries to minister to both adults and youth but does not have either the time or the gifts to be effective in teen outreach. Perhaps it is because the teen ministries at small churches have so few teenagers that the programs are limited in quality or resources and are not exciting. Maybe the Church relies upon lay leaders who are not truly qualified to be ministering to to-

day's teens. There may be a hundred different reasons why any given small church is failing to adequately reach and nurture teens.

Once a congregation can admit that it is not adequately supporting its teens, what can it do? In some communities, several small churches have banded together in the hope of using their combined numbers and resources to create a more satisfying ministry with impact. In other communities, a small church has invited a parachurch organization (e.g., Youth for Christ, Young Life) to partner with them in developing the youth outreach. Other congregations have simply decided that youth ministry is to be a priority. They will sacrifice whatever it takes to make their programs for young people compelling. Some bodies went the other direction and, determining that teen ministry was neither their strength nor their calling, closed their teen program and encouraged their few teens to join with a thriving teen ministry at a nearby church.

In every instance, though, these churches had to determine what it takes to have a successful teenage ministry and then decide whether or

not they could do it. If they were committed to making it happen, then they had to chart a plan for seeing their aspirations come to pass. It is not simply enough to have a warm adult body responsible for ministry to teens. They need the same quality and professionalism in outreach required by adults.

Regardless of church size or location, teenagers indicate that churches should break free from the cookie-cutter program mentality that hinders so many adult ministries. Every teen program should recognize that the teenagers involved in the program are unique and require a unique ministry. What works in one church may not work anywhere else. The development of a successful youth program will undoubtedly entail:

- a. understanding the needs and backgrounds of the youths involved;
- b. developing firm relationships with both the parents and teens;
- c. providing opportunities for strengthening relationships between the teenagers involved in the program; and
- d. offering opportunities to have

If you ask church growth experts what attracts people to a church, most would say churches grow when people invite their friends or relatives. While this may be true, their studies don't reflect the incredible influence youth ministry has on attracting families to churches.

When *GROUP Magazine* recently surveyed 553 families who attend growing churches across North America, 80 percent said the church's youth ministry was an important reason they joined their current church. In fact, 70 percent said they would have had second thoughts about joining if the church's youth ministry wasn't strong.

The 135 church staff members we surveyed from these churches also recognize the importance of youth ministry. Ninety-eight percent of church staff said they believe youth ministry contributes to church growth.

How important is your church's youth ministry in your decision to join this church?

Very important	59%
Somewhat important	21%
Not very important	11%
Not important at all	9%

If your church didn't have a strong youth ministry program, would you have second thoughts about joining?

Yes	70%
No	29%
Maybe	1%

The Youth Ministry Attraction

Once families join a church, youth ministry remains a key factor in their satisfaction with the church. In fact, almost all families (94 percent) surveyed say youth ministry is "very important" or "somewhat important" in their continuing involvement in the church.

Growing churches are capitalizing on youth ministry because

they know four out of five families say youth ministry is an important reason they join the church.

And once families join a church, most say they stay or leave depending on what happens with the youth ministry. Many say the condition of the youth ministry indicates the growth or maturity level of the church—and indicates the church's priorities.

If a youth ministry falls apart or folds, many families say they start hunting for another church. Some even say they'll change denominations if they have to in order to attend a church with an active, healthy youth ministry.

And youth ministry remains important to seasoned churchgoers as well. Sixty-nine percent of those who've attended their church for 10 or more years agree that youth ministry is important, even though their children may be grown.

From *Youth Ministry EXECU-GRAM*, Fall 1989 issue. © 1989 by Group Publishing.

fun, in a positive and upbeat environment, in which the ultimate purpose—growing in Christ—is clear.

Even among teenagers, the youth minister must *earn* the right to be heard. Often, we assume that as a minister of the gospel, or as the representative of a church, we automatically have a platform for exhortation. To the typical teen, a youth pastor is an oddity: interested in people years younger than themselves, connected with an institution that seems void of relevance, and intent upon having some vaguely defined impact upon the teen. Until the youth pastor earns the right to proclaim the gospel, the chances of making a positive impact are slim.

How can that right be earned? By working through an existing network of relationships to befriend the teenager. By living a life that is so clearly fun, exciting, and different that the teen wants to know how he can copy that life-style. By offering attractive benefits to anyone who is interested (relational, educational, etc.) with no strings attached. Should a relationship then develop, the youth minister must be transparent, open, and accessible as the needs of the teenager dictate.

A Noble Calling

Those who have heard the call to minister to teenagers, as a vocation or as a personal ministry focus, truly have a special calling. It is neither an easy ministry nor one that results in immediate and clear paybacks. Indeed, it is not a calling to which many aspire nor one of which many are jealous.

The long-term benefits, though, for the Kingdom and for the individuals touched through that ministry, are incalculable. Please know that while this research has underscored the desperate state of affairs within today's teenage population, and that the Church is not the first place to which teens will turn for help or insight, it has also demonstrated that with skillful and prayerful leadership by those set on ministering to teens, society's future can be shaped through the lives of today's teenagers in a manner that will bring glory and honor to God's name. 

From the report *Today's Teenagers: A Generation in Transition*. Copyright 1991 by Barna Research Group, Glendale, Calif.

Thirty-five years ago Lois LeBar described poor teaching. Today students write similar observations about Sunday School classes. Teaching "routine instead of life" is common today. While one can find examples of vibrant, life-changing Bible teaching, too many students are still being "starved with biblical facts."

Today, another problem is becoming more common in our churches. A good number of church educators are rejecting the mere transmission of Bible knowledge, tired of "routine instead of life," but they overreact, using the entire class time to reflect on life experiences. They have given up on teaching the content of the Bible. Dull "second sermons" in Sunday School are being replaced with shared life experiences divorced from the Word of God. Both extremes are dangerous. The first teaches Bible content as an end, and the second teaches personal application without biblical foundations. Teaching biblical content is necessary, but not sufficient for promoting spiritual growth. Likewise, reflecting on life experiences is necessary, but not sufficient for promoting spiritual growth. A dynamic interaction between the two is essential.

LeBar does not deny that "All truth is God's truth."¹ She is saying that secular educational philosophers don't give a central place to the Word and the Spirit. We can learn much about human development and about the teaching-learning process from secular systems. While these are helpful, they will never be sufficient for a Christian philosophy of education. Christian educators often swing from one educational fad to another without reflecting on theological principles underlying the trend. Because biblical foundations are lacking, teachers are subtly influenced by secular philosophies, which are below the level of theological awareness. Even in evangelical churches, behavioristic methods are often used to motivate children to sit still or learn Bible verses. Values clarification techniques, which assume that values are relative, are used unknow-

ingly in some evangelical churches to help pupils understand their values. While such methods may at times be appropriate, they must never be used unreflectively. There is an urgent need today for Christian educators to get "back to the basics" of biblical foundations in education.

In order to renew Christian education, we need to rethink the meaning of teaching. Too often we think of teaching as telling. LeBar emphasizes the need for a small, intimate group and for overt interaction. Most Bible teaching today lacks intentional interaction between the life needs of the learner and the living and powerful Word of God. We may be fooled into thinking that if we use the most up-to-date "high-tech" methods such as computers, videos, or overhead projectors, we then have vital, life-changing teaching. Small, intimate groups that stimulate meaningful interaction between absolute truth and the problems of life are as old as Jesus' teaching methods and as up-to-date as the latest methodology.

The church around the world is facing a critical need for leaders/disciple-makers who are able to teach and to stimulate spiritual growth. In parts of the world where the church is growing rapidly, hundreds of thousands of lay and professional teachers are needed to continue the process of making disciples. If vital spiritually minded leaders are not developed, the church will slip into lukewarmness. In parts of the world where there are few Christians, there is the need for disciple-makers who can teach the good news in the context of another culture. The local church is the primary developer of leaders for all walks of life. What can the church do to better develop people who will lead consistent Christian lives as businesspersons, professionals, or skilled laborers? 

1. Lois LeBar has been criticized for believing that truth is found only in Scripture. But in chapter 7, page 235, she says, "All truth is God's truth, whether found in Scripture, nature, or experience, and these sources of truth never clash if the false has not been mixed with the true."

From the book *Education That Is Christian*, by Lois LeBar and James E. Plueddemann, Ph.D. © 1989 by Scripture Press Publications.

Adolescent Spiritual Development

by Ed Robinson
Kansas City

As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He issued a call to disciples to "follow me." That call has not diminished. We must take that call seriously by helping adolescents fulfill Christ's imperative invitation.

Effective youth ministry must consider the way youth think and feel in order to enhance spiritual growth. We must treat adolescents the way they are instead of the way we think they should be. Such a change in perspective requires adults involved in youth ministry to closely look at the adolescent.

The Nature of Adolescence

Adolescence is described as a period of time from the early teens to the early 20s—a transition from childhood to adulthood. Puberty usually marks the initiation into adolescence. The acceptance of personal responsibilities in an adult role usually signifies the end of the transition.

It is more important to develop a proper attitude concerning adolescence. There are a variety of views concerning the nature of adolescence. G. Stanley Hall, a noted psychologist at the turn of the century, pioneered the study of adolescence and called it a period of "storm and stress." Anna Freud has referred to the period of adolescence as an in-



terruption in the peaceful growth process. Others, mostly parents, have wished adolescence could be a period of hibernation rather than a time of rapid growth and change.

Must we see adolescence so negatively? Looking at the negative aspects of the adolescent's development inhibits our ministry. We need to view adolescence as a natural part of the human journey with distinctive, but not abnormal, characteristics. When the period of life called youth is viewed positively, adults can enhance ministry and encourage spiritual growth by viewing their role as opportunistic rather than compensatory.

The early period of youth is characterized by puberty and its physical changes. Early youth begin to develop new thinking processes. Interpersonal relationships become important. As the ego develops, moods vary.

In middle adolescence, the teen pursues the quest for self-understanding. That understanding takes on a special dimension in the emerging sexual person. Peer relationships become extremely important as a means of input for identity and experimenting with a variety of expressions of identity. As the thinking process continues to develop, the adolescent notices a larger world and struggles constructively with the formation of ideals.

In later adolescence, the pragmatism of entering the adult world occupies the mind and feelings. Youth must face the choices of college, careers, marriage, and social adult roles.

But what of religious development in this context? How does spiritual development fit into adolescent development? In secular literature, little is written about the religious domain. Joseph Adelson, a noted student of adolescence, has stated that virtually nothing is known about the religious experiences of youth. This statement isn't surprising because we don't expect a secularist to know much about the nature of a spiritual experience. Yet, we should be surprised that we ministry professionals know very little about the spiritual development of adolescence.

We might contend that we cannot empirically know about the phenomenon of spiritual development, since it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. This statement is true, but it is not all of the truth. Spiritual growth, or development, is both a transcendent and an immanent process. God works both supernaturally and naturally to bring growth in His children. While we cannot understand the depths of His supernatural work, we can study His natural work by examining the way adolescents think, feel, and act concerning spiritual ideas and experiences.

There are many ways to look at religious development. Let's look at three approaches: how adolescents view religion; how adolescents view the formation and development of faith; and how other areas of adolescent development inform spiritual development.

Adolescents' View of Religion

In a recent poll, Gallup and Poling determined that youth have a growing sensitivity toward spiritual values and religious activity. Yet, the poll also indicated that the sensitivity was highly personal in nature and not directly related to institutional religion (i.e., the church).



Only 25 percent of the youth surveyed indicated any degree of confidence in the church. While many youth attend church and religious activities, the primary influence toward spiritual matters doesn't seem to come from organized churches.

Some would contend that rebellion against organized religion is natural in adolescent development. I do not accept such a position, knowing many youth who are not checking out of the system. However, we must not dismiss the transition happening with adolescents concerning the role of the church in their lives. Often the rebellion against the church, parents, and family is an attempt to establish one's own sense of spiritual values. That rebellion can result in abandoning faith, but it can also result in a deepening of faith.

Ministry Implications

Whether this lack of confidence is from inadequate ministry by churches or simply the adolescent expressing a need for a sense of autonomous value, many youth struggle to find balance between their own value systems and the value systems of the church.

We must recognize that struggle and maintain a consistent community that provides a model of integrity to the adolescent. Their questioning of institutional values and practices should not threaten our ministries or the theological and ethical principles of our churches.

Adolescence—a natural part of the human journey.

We must recognize the questioning for what it is: an attempt to establish some personal values. To panic by placing greater control on thought processes and insisting on a blind allegiance is to miss the opportunity for the internalizing of faith and runs the risk of driving youth further away.

Faith Development

In recent years, we've seen literature related to faith development.

This literature has helped describe *how, what, and why* people believe as they do.

Particularly applied to adolescence, faith development is concerned how youth process faith concepts, relate to faith community, internalize faith, and relate their faith to daily life.

Because the adolescent mind and heart is fertile for change, commitment, and maturation, the junior and senior high years are critical for evangelism and life-changing commitments.

Implications for Ministry

In considering the faith development of adolescents, we must be concerned about the way youth think and feel about faith experiences. We must be open to hear what they say about their religious experience. Asking questions can help us perceive adolescent thought patterns. We must not be afraid to ask about their views of God, Christ, the Christian life, and life's complexities.

We must be careful not to reduce faith to a creed or knowledge base. Faith involves knowing, but it also includes trusting, committing, being, and doing. It is a drastic mistake to think that youth have faith if they can recite the Articles of Faith. Neither can we assume that youth have faith if they can perform at all the religious functions of the church—worship, Sunday School, Bible study, camp, etc. Faith is relational and must include a commitment of lifestyle to the authority of Christ.

Youth must have an adequate picture of their own faith community. We need not apologize for who we are as a church, hoping that our youth will stay with us anyway. Instead, we must present a strong picture of our heritage, our doctrine, and our vision. Though adolescents are searching for a personal expression of faith, much of that expression develops in the context of the spiritual community. We need a strong witness of what that community is like.

A curricular focus must be consistent with the developmental levels of adolescents. We should not keep our interaction concerning spiritual matters simplistic and fear the challenge of encouraging spiritual development. Yet, we must be aware

that some terms of commitment to Christ are premature for their developmental levels. Only a keen awareness of the faith level can provide the means for knowing what balance to achieve.

Life-related experiences in curricular studies and in group activities

Rebellion is often an attempt to establish a personal sense of spiritual values.

are essential in development of faith. If faith is to be lived in the daily experience of adolescent life, it must be taught and practiced there as well.

Finally, the faith process must be focused on the reality of biblical truth and in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. A truth-centered basis for faith is essential for our faith to have meaning. As Christian ministers involved with youth, we must have a continual commitment to the biblical revelation.

An Integrated View of Spiritual Development

A commitment to pastoral ministry with youth requires a thorough knowledge of the development of all human experience. Too often we compartmentalize the domains of experience so as to deny any inter-relatedness. But we know from the example of Scripture's concern for the physical, emotional, social, moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth of man that we cannot separate human development into five or six neatly packaged components. An interdependence must be acknowledged and understood. God created the whole person and purposed that ministry be for and through the whole person. The command to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and one's neighbor as oneself, is a clear statement of the principle.

So how does the view of the domains of adolescent development inform the process of spiritual development? By looking at five areas of development, some important issues emerge in our task of enhancing the process of spiritual growth in youth.

Physical Development

Adolescence is a time of rapid physical growth. While many phys-

An adolescent's questioning of institutional values should not be viewed as a threat.

ical changes occur, foremost is the sexual development initiated in puberty. With a heightened awareness of their own sexuality, youth face a variety of struggles that pertain specifically to spiritual growth. The biological trigger of puberty, which signals sexual thoughts, drives, and activity, can cause great spiritual struggles for the adolescent endeavoring to live the "holy life," which is misconceived to be sexless.

Sexual thought life can have some drastic implications for spiritual development. We need a sense of honesty with adolescents about the reality of that thought process and the inner strength God provides. We need to offer healthy, biblical expressions of sexuality while supporting spiritual commitments adolescents make in this area. Many adolescents have doubted the reality of their conversion because of a sexual thought deemed evil. We must understand this adolescent phenomenon and strive to help youth understand it.

Much of adolescent self-perception is linked to outward appearance. With rapid changes in physical appearance, we must offer an alternative source of esteem beyond the physical.

Intellectual Development

Extensive research has shown that

patterns of thinking change as people mature. A great transition in thinking patterns happens during adolescence.

The adolescents begin to consider the meaning of faith, ethics, commitment, love, and personal accountability. They rethink values and beliefs that they had previously accepted on their parents' or church's word. It is a time of questioning and doubting—not so much to adopt a new value system as much as to make the once-external values personal. In this light, ministers must not evade the hard questions. They should even encourage youth to voice their questions and doubts.

Moral and Value Development

Often moral and value development have been viewed as synonymous with spiritual development. While these areas are related, some distinctions can be made. Morality is an important part of spirituality, but not the whole of it.

Much of the work of moral development has come from the efforts of Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg makes no pretense for Christian applications of his work. However, an analogy can be drawn concerning the truth source of moral reasoning in spiritual development being from selfish, to external, to internalized principle in which the external "rule-orientation" is personalized in life-style.

In dealing with value development, William Perry cites a movement within adolescence from a mind-set where everything is either right or wrong, good or bad, to a relativism in which no absolutes exist, to a place of commitment in certain selected absolutes. While this explanation is highly simplified, Perry's perspective is informative for the formation of values in adolescence.

In youth ministry, we must recognize the reasoning by which adolescents make moral decisions and establish values. We cannot assume they will make all the right choices simply because we have told them what to choose. We must be aware of their developing reasoning process. We often state that we want our youth to live principled lives of holiness. Do we understand how they arrive at that level both supernaturally and naturally? In forming values, we must not be satisfied

with a black-and-white view of life. And we must not overreact to the presence of relativism that is a testing of values and a step toward a position of commitment in value development. If Perry's progression is correct, a degree of relativism may be necessary if mature commitment is to be a reality.

Identity Development

Identity has long been a key word in adolescent development. Erikson emphasizes identity formation as a key developmental task of adolescence. Inherent in that task is an understanding of one's selfhood. Several factors precipitate this: the development of abstract thought, allowing one to look at his experience objectively; the necessity of dealing with one's history and future possibilities; and the need to accept new roles in society as one joins an adult world.

Some relational factors characterize the formation of identity. The adolescent must separate himself from parents. Though this separation is not physical, it is real. Often the adversarial relationship is simply a manifestation of the youth's attempt to establish independence. Often in this setting, the peer group perceptions become central in shaping personality. For many who do not successfully establish an autonomous identity, parents are simply traded for another authority group (e.g., peers, gangs, religious cults).

Another key factor in identity formation is the centrality of occupa-

The adolescent mind is fertile for change, commitment, and maturation.

tional choices and aspirations. While we do not expect adolescents to have a fully planned future, this does occupy much of their efforts. Here is an opportunity for adults to help youth develop a vocational

value system that rises above narcissism and self-fulfillment. The youth need a theology of vocation that focuses upon the utilization of God-given skill.

Most importantly, the formation of identity needs a unifying factor. That unifying factor for the Christian is Christ. There is a need in the human spirit to have some cohesive element to explain experience, to provide meaning and purpose. As youth strive to discover personal identity, a deepening relationship with Christ must be the foundation for that formation. There is no greater foundation for esteem than in the reality that one is unified with the very Source of value and truth.

Social Development

Robert Selman has set forth a scheme of development for social perspective. The scheme involves a movement from a lack of awareness of anything other than one's own experience to a full awareness of the world. Selman cites the adolescent's ability to view life from a third-person perspective as unique. As this ability grows, other cultures and

ideologies can be understood and considered. It allows a fresh vision of the plight of others and gives practical meaning to Matthew 25, in which Jesus calls for compassion for others. This factor, combined with the idealism of developing values, can allow youth ministry to take on some very dynamic activities of evangelistic mission and social compassion.

Spiritual Development

Adolescent religious development is not simple. Yet, the professional youth minister cannot afford to run away from the complexity by reducing all spirituality to simplistic formulas or refusing to investigate the whole nature of adolescent life.

Five factors seem important:

1. We must remember that each adolescent is a unique creation of God. Each individual's experience will be uniquely expressed.

2. Much of adolescent spiritual development is relational. In the quest for spiritual development, attention must be given to the interpersonal relationships of youth on the peer, family, church, civic, and divine levels. Nothing can enhance

spiritual growth as much as a healthy spiritual community where Christian values are proclaimed and modeled.

3. Adolescence is a time of rapid change. We must not overreact to changes in physical appearance, thought processes, identity experimentation, values, and relationships. Amid these changes, consistency from leadership is essential.

4. Adolescence is a time of reflection. Either we can discourage reflective thought by heightening the position of authority from without, or we may encourage reflection with the continual emphasis on the internalization of the truth of God's revealed Word.

5. Finally, adolescent spiritual development is integrative by nature. It involves all of life. While there is an undeniably transcendent mystery of spiritual birth and growth, there is also a natural immanent development enhanced as the adolescent develops a Christ-centered focus in which body, mind, identity, and relationships grow in unity under the Lordship of Christ. Christ then becomes the Means and the End of holistic spiritual endeavor.



"BEHOLD HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHERN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY."

Demythologizing Adult Ministry in the Church

by C. Ferris Jordan



Significant progress in reaching the adult religious education challenge is hindered by the existence of myths about adult ministry. Myths are inaccurate statements assumed to be true by some, but actually are false. The myths are perpetuated sometimes by church staff ministers, sometimes by denominational leaders, and sometimes by laypersons. These beliefs hinder innovation and interfere with the search for viable alternatives in the effort to upgrade the quality of adult ministry.

MYTHS ABOUT ADULTS

Adulthood Is a Plateau Period

Growth and development are obvious in childhood and youth. From one year to another, one can see progress in physical development. Stages in cognitive development are readily identified. By contrast, change in adulthood appears to occur more slowly and subtly. For these reasons, observers gave birth to the myth that the most dynamic years in life are the first 17. They are followed by a longer, less-eventful span called adulthood, according to the myth.

Recent findings in life-span studies have revealed the error of the plateau theory. To be sure, preschool, childhood, and youth years are filled with changes. However, the 18th year does not mark the arrival of a plateau of maturity on which change is either inconsequential or nonexistent. Researchers now know that adulthood, including the late years, offers potential for growth and development. It is marked by stages, challenges, disasters, and triumphs. The crises faced and the solutions discovered in adulthood often produce progress as dramatic and far-reaching as some of the advance made in the younger years.

To accept the plateau myth is to fail to take ministry to adults seriously. It is to conclude that the adult years make fewer demands upon a person and offer little opportunity for the church. On the other hand, to understand that adulthood is synonymous with flux, challenge, and potential for growth or decline, is to find stimulation to provide an adult ministry that seeks to meet personal needs and offers resources to help adults enjoy the quality of life Jesus offers.

Adults Have Had Their Day

With life's greatest challenge behind them, adults can move through life with little difficulty, according to this view. It is falsely assumed that the religious education experiences of childhood have equipped persons adequately for the adult years.

In many quarters, Sunday School has been a children's movement. Even in those quarters in which adult religious education provision has been made, the effort has been minimal and the organization inadequate compared with offerings for younger persons.

Wherever adulthood is perceived to be the dynamic segment of life that it really is, adult programs are vital and are sustained by an appropriate proportion of the church's resources. Adults are considered as a viable part of the outreach, teaching, and worship ministries of the

congregation. When adulthood is properly understood, adults will be viewed as persons in life's prime time, not as individuals whose opportunities have passed.

Adults Are All Alike

A third myth assumes that adults are a homogeneous group not requiring grouping grading decisions. From this point of view, a closely graded grouping plan is necessary for preschoolers, children, and youth to accommodate their very distinct life stages. However, according to this myth, all adults are alike and can be grouped without regard to age, sex, or other factors with only negligible negative impact upon religious education efforts.

Truthfully, adults' interests and circumstances vary widely. Some are married, but many are single; some are parents and/or grandparents, others are childless; some are affluent, others are poverty-stricken, and most are between; some are employed in professions, many are clerical employees, some are in management-level positions, and others have jobs regarded as necessary but menial. Educationally, adults range from the illiterate to those with terminal degrees.

Adult interests are also varied and closely correlate with adults' ages and the numerous developmental stages. The most effective religious education efforts are directed toward adults' interests, needs, and problems. A learning leader will best capture the interest and need-related teachable moments when adults are grouped by similar life stages.

Linking adults' readiness to learn with the needs of the various developmental stages does not eliminate the possibility of and need for intergenerational experiences in adult education. Sharing across generation

lines about life's choices and challenges is valuable. However, if all learning settings are provided without regard to grouping that brings together adults of similar age and interest, churches may miss their best opportunities to focus Bible study on life's transitions.

Adults Will Not Change

Perhaps one of the most devastating myths is the belief that adults will not change. Because some adults have been reluctant to change and because of the commonly held notion that aging always brings a conservative stance that discourages change, many have concluded that adults are hopelessly set in their own ways. This myth squelches all incentive to provide stimulating learning experiences.

Tragically, those who adhere to this myth fail to recognize that adults constantly deal with change in their lives. That reality has great implications for adult Christian education.

Elaine Dickson studied change and concluded that the elements associated with change may be expressed in this formula: $A+B+C > D = \text{change}$.¹ The symbols in the formula may be translated as follows:

- A—Significant level of dissatisfaction with things as they are
- B—Awareness of a better condition
- C—Knowledge of first steps toward the better alternative
- >—Greater than
- D—Cost of the change

Dickson suggests that when adults' significant dissatisfaction with their present condition is added to an awareness of a better condition plus



Adulthood offers potential for growth and development.



the initial steps toward that improvement to produce a sum that is greater than the cost of the change, they will likely opt for the change.

Leaders in adult education who use educational experiences to heighten the dissatisfaction level and to increase awareness of a better condition will find adults amenable to change. Those who seek to impose change without proper preparation will discover that adults will resent and resist the change. Leading adults to desire and accept change requires time and patience.

Adults Are Poor Prospects for the Church

Adults are so hard to reach that they are unlikely prospects for the church. So goes another myth that hinders aggressive outreach to adults. Because most Christians were converted when they were older children, many observers have concluded that adults are so difficult to reach that outreach efforts should be directed toward the younger generations. In a day when four out of five prospects for most churches are adults, and in a time when adults represent a greater proportion of the population of the United States than at any other time in her history, the facts that contradict this myth need to be brought to light.

The preponderance of persons converted at a young age who are present in most Christian audiences does magnify the receptivity of the young to the gospel. However, the small number of people who indicate conversion in the adult years does not bespeak an unwillingness of adults to receive the gospel so much as it serves to indicate the failure of the church to give high priority to adult outreach.

Churches that annually report a good evangelistic harvest are congregations that usually give serious attention to unreached adults and report a high percentage of adults in the persons added to their membership.

Leaders in adult ministry who create a climate in which points of receptivity to the gospel are likely to flourish will discover that the adult outreach field is white unto harvest.

MYTHS ABOUT ADULTS AS LEARNERS

Aging Has a Negative Effect upon Learning

According to popular perception, a decline in capacity to learn is an-

ticipated as persons grow older. "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" is a common reaction to adult learning. However, scientific research reveals that aging per se is no deterrent to learning. In fact, studies have shown that senior adults have an advantage over their younger counterparts in learning situations that require ability to grasp ideas and concepts, make judgments, and relate new insights to concepts previously held. This knowledge is especially important for the Christian and Christian educators because these are the abilities believers need most for continued growth in personal discipleship.

Speed in learning does decline with age. This is due partially to physiological changes and in part to psychological reasons. The assumption that decline in speed of learning was synonymous with decline in capacity for learning was based on timed intelligence tests. Once adults were no longer required to take tests measuring their speed, their capacity for learning was shown to have changed very little between ages 20 and 60.

The challenge confronting churches is to address the interests and life needs that motivate adults, to feature learning methodology appropriate for adult learners, and to offer opportunities for adults to learn in the midst of life's complex issues and pressured schedules. Given the motivation, method, and opportunity, adults will learn.

Adults Are Not Interested in Learning

Leaders in adult religious education plagued with static or declining participation are likely to be victimized by this myth. But much evidence exists to prove that adults not only are interested in learning but also are engaged in learning activities.

Adults do not have an aversion to learning. Informal learning is the pursuit of many adults as they read books, develop a new hobby, or accept the challenge of the do-it-yourself society. Formal educational programs for adults have led them to enroll in night classes that range from bookkeeping to real estate to aerobics. The number of older students enrolled in colleges and universities is steadily growing.

Adult interest and participation in learning may be viewed from still another perspective. Learning is change and the process of life requires continuing change. This fact implies continuous learning. Adults are always learning, then, whether they are enrolled in a course or not.

Adults are interested in learning. Churches can capture that interest when they offer learning opportunities that relate to adults' social roles and aid them in their quest for answers to life's perplexing questions.

Adults Learn Best by Listening

Still another myth is that adults learn best by listening. This false idea has given rise to teachers who teach solely or primarily by lecturing. Based on this myth, adults have conditioned themselves to be relatively passive in adult learning experiences in church. They often feel threatened by any effort to encourage a more active level of participation.

Listening is never enough. Understanding must also occur. Understanding is enhanced when adult learners ask questions; interact with the teacher and fellow learners; and engage in learning activities that



Leading adults to desire and accept change requires time and patience.



stimulate commitment, including follow-through projects, and encourage assimilation into daily practice.

Adults Will Not Respond to a Variety of Learning Activities

Introducing a variety of learning activities that require responses will pose a hindrance to their learning. Here is another myth about adults as learners.

The facts are that many adults have had limited experience with a variety of learning activities and will be reluctant to participate in

them. However, when teachers are willing to meet learners where they are and to introduce new teaching methods gradually and patiently, most adults not only will cooperate but also will profit from the learning experiences.

Teaching as stimulation of inquiry should be preferred over teaching as telling if adults are to learn how to think independently. Skills in learning and thinking are essential for adults to be equipped adequately for the demands of lifelong learning. Moreover, if learning were only cognitive, perhaps the myth would be less damaging to adult education. But learning must affect the whole person. Learning that is most lasting has cognitive, affective, volitional, and behavioral aspects, and the effective leader will get adults involved at all those levels.

The use of a variety of teaching-learning methods will encourage adult learners to think, to do problem solving and self-evaluation, to express their feelings, and to deal with conflicting ideas that may be expressed by participants in the learning experience. Wise leaders will not try to introduce all these approaches overnight, but neither will they deprive people of the best avenues to learning.

Adults Will Tolerate Poor Teaching

A final myth is that adults will tolerate poor teaching. In many cases, teachers of adults in the church have been selected after the best teachers have been assigned to younger learners on the assumption that adult learners do not require as much creativity and preparation on the part of teachers as do their younger counterparts. To be sure, some of the more church-oriented adults will come faithfully no matter who the teachers are and what approaches are used. However, even they are learning at a minimal level and eventually may demonstrate their disapproval by an increasingly infrequent attendance pattern. The less church-minded adult will continue to be uninvolved in religious education until the quality of teaching improves.

The quality of the teacher and the teaching do make a difference to adults. Educator Frank C. Pearce described the ideal teacher of adults as

people-oriented, more interested in people than things, more interested in individuality than conformity, more interested in finding solutions than in following rules. The teacher must have understanding, flexibility, patience, humor, practicality, creativity, and preparation.²



The quality of the teacher and the teaching do make a difference to adults.



Participation in adult education will increase when more attention is given to the enlistment and training of teachers who love their subject, care about the learners, and guide the learning experiences skillfully.

SUMMARY

Contemporary churches that are growing and displaying vitality in other ways have strong adult religious education programs. Reaching and teaching adults are essential for every church, for adults set the pace, determine the tone of the congregation, provide the needed leadership and financial resources, and shape the quality of family life present in the homes of the membership. Quality religious education for adults will go a long way toward guaranteeing that a church is in the best position to do the best possible job with persons of all age-groups.

Churches are being hindered by myths about adults, about adults as learners, and about adult organization and ministry. When churches can abandon these untruths and half-truths, they will be able to meet the challenges of the great adult frontier.

1. Elaine Dickson, *Say No, Say Yes to Change* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982).

2. William A. Draves, *How to Teach Adults* (Manhattan, Kans.: Learning Resources Network, 1984), 17.

"Demythologizing Adult Ministry in the Church," by C. Ferris Jordan, from *A Church Ministering to Adults* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986). All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Adult Sunday School: Same Words, Different Tune

by Randy Cloud

Kansas City

Everybody ought to go to Sunday School," the old song goes. When it comes to our children and teens, we sing this familiar refrain with gusto. However, the jury has been out when it comes to singing the praises of the adult Sunday School. Many churches over the past decade have experienced a decline in numbers and, more importantly, a lack of interest in adult Sunday School. Some have seen a recent resurgence. But the questions remain: Why has adult Sunday School suffered from this negative identity? Why have many adults voted with their feet against the adult Sunday School as a viable source for spiritual growth? Is adult Sunday School truly essential to today's church or is it an outdated relic of days past?

It is interesting to ask the average adult why he chooses or does not choose to attend Sunday School. This question, posed to truthful adult Sunday Schoolers, will result in a variety of responses ranging from, "It's a good habit," and "I'm a loyal church supporter," to "I enjoy seeing my friends," and "I want to study the Bible."

The question behind these questions centers on the issue of purpose. What is it that adult Sunday School hopes to accomplish?

Most Christian education textbooks contain a familiar diagram that illustrates how we typically understand the purpose of Sunday School. Three interlocking circles each highlight one of the following headings: Bible study, fellowship, outreach. The symmetry of the circles implies the necessary balance between purposes. However, many Sunday Schools spend little or no time planning how to implement these various purposes. Frustration, decreased involvement, and slowed

spiritual growth all may be symptoms of an adult Sunday School program that lacks a clarity of vision and destination.

One group of adults alerted their Christian education committee of the desire to start a new class committed to a verse-by-verse study of the Bible. With this purpose, the class began enthusiastically. A few months later this class disbanded. The problem? While the class had started with the stated purpose of intentional Bible study, class member accounts showed that most of each session was spent in fellowship. The anticipated purpose for this class did not match the actual purpose, with the predictable outcome of frustration. Both Bible study and fellowship were legitimate purposes for this class. How they were combined was the area where tensions and misunderstanding could flourish.

Taking the three traditional purposes of the adult Sunday School—Bible study, fellowship, and outreach—we will explore some of the central issues found in each of these three areas. Perhaps we will gain new and renewed perspective on how adult Sunday School can and should be vital to a growing church.

Curriculum—The "What" of Sunday School

The question of curriculum will open discussion on the first of our three circles of purpose—Bible study. Unfortunately, the concept of "curriculum" for many denotes a sense of rigidity, a lack of creativity, to the extent that even the word *curriculum* is avoided. When we speak of curriculum, we simply have in mind a plan for the content of the Sunday School session. The very definition of the word *plan* brings with it such qualifiers as organization, development, coordination. Our hope is that each adult class could claim to have a curriculum by

which they proceed. But this may be a dangerous assumption.

Most would agree that the Bible is the most appropriate text for the Sunday School. We give high value to study and understanding of the Word by the individual Christian. And the Sunday School is perhaps the most ideal setting for this examination of God's Word.

However, simply stating that the Bible is "our class's curriculum" does not answer the question of organization. Creating a responsible curriculum plan not only will move beyond simply identifying the content to be studied but also will address the questions of scope (What topics specifically will we cover?) and sequence (In what order will we study these topics?).

Adult Sunday School classes are notorious for a lack of forward curriculum planning. In many classes, the selection of the next quarter's materials is done either automatically, without real thought, or haphazardly, allowing either teacher or class members to select curriculum based on the interest or supposed needs of the class. Few classes consider the bigger picture of curriculum planning, much to their own detriment.

Of course, for many, simply purchasing and following the curriculum plan and project offered through their denominational offices is one way to ensure a coherent curriculum plan. The many strengths of following a denominational curriculum plan are clear. There has been thought and planning done by trusted and



representative experts as the curriculum has been designed. A scope and sequence is offered that is reasonable and usable. However, simply following a denominational plan without some degree of local consideration may not at times be the most effective course of study. The simple fact, freely admitted by denominational curriculum designers, is that this kind of master plan cannot predict the unique teachable moments that will present themselves to any given local church. There may be times when alternate curriculum options will be more appropriate to meet the specific needs

Is adult Sunday School essential to today's church?

of individual adult classes. However, this kind of curriculum evaluation can only happen after a careful needs assessment of the adult membership. Good curriculum planning not only demands a knowledge of what needs to be studied but also calls for a knowledge of the student.

Part of this investigation of the adult student will require a consideration of what it means simply to be an adult. Over the years, much research has been done in child and adolescent developmental psychology, allowing us to better target curriculum to the needs of the developing child/teen. Little work was done, however, in the adult area. Many considered adulthood as a plateau of maturity, where little or no change would or could take place. Recent studies have revealed that instead of seeing the adult years as a static time of life, adults do change and develop throughout life. Realizing that adults can change should make a difference in the way we approach curriculum planning. Anticipating spiritual growth will be a significant first step for many adult programs.

For those classes or churches who choose to move away from a denom-

inational curriculum plan, there seems to be the immediate advantage of a perspective that is potentially attuned to the specific needs of the adult membership it serves. However, this advantage is often lost or outweighed by those who take on the responsibility for curriculum planning without having a proper foundation. Those churches who choose to "write their own" curriculum often run the risk of shortsighted planning. Curriculum planning must be, by definition, a multi-year endeavor. Simply analyzing and meeting present felt needs is not enough. There must be a breadth and depth to this planning. Overlooking certain biblical topics or sections of the Bible because they do not make for "good marketing" may fill class rosters but may leave the student uneducated in vital areas of God's Word. Further, not looking far enough ahead in curriculum design easily leads to either duplication or omission or both down the road, especially as leadership changes through the years bring with it new points of emphasis.

Those adult programs that choose to use an eclectic approach to curriculum planning, picking and choosing what appears to be best from a variety of sources and publishers, may run a greater risk than those who choose to do their own. Curriculum evaluation is not an automatic skill. Frequently, such items as packaging, color, format, and other cosmetic factors determine whether a curriculum will be used, and other more essential factors such as educational philosophy, teaching methodology, and theological stance are ignored. However, it is these more subtle factors that can permeate detrimentally our adult Sunday School classes. For instance, in evaluating a nondenominational curriculum, it is not enough to say that the content does not appear to contradict our Wesleyan theology. The further question is, "What has not been said? What Wesleyan emphases have not been included?" This so-called null curriculum is only one area where lack of careful consideration can leave our adult classes in a muddled theological pool where assimilation of non-Wesleyan positions can and does easily happen.

The bottom line is this: we hope, pray, and plan for our adults to be mature in Christ. We feel this only happens as adults are given opportunity to encounter the Word and are given the tools to open its truths for themselves. So many of our adults are biblically illiterate, unable to read, understand, and apply the powerful Word of God for themselves.

I remember well a rather eccentric couple at my home church who, having walked into a Sunday School class, made a surprising discovery. As a passage for the hour was given, no one had trouble hearing the loud whisper that announced, "Mother, we brought the dictionary with us again!" Unfortunately, for far too many of our adults, the Bible may have just as much day-to-day value as the dictionary does. Our goal is to reverse this alarming trend, using the adult Sunday School as one of our primary resources.

Community—the "How" of Sunday School

The second of the purpose statements for Sunday School involves the area of fellowship. This area invariably rates as the number one reason adults offer when asked why they come to class. With this in mind, it is reasonable that planning and organization again be present when considering the fellowship dimension of the adult class.

Fellowship is the number one reason adults cite for attending Sunday School.

Two keys are important to note at this point. First, learning, change, and maturity do not happen best when we concentrate our attention only on the content of the curriculum. Change does not happen as we study our quarterlies; it happens as we study life. Remaining in the cognitive realm of learning may be in-

teresting intellectually, but a healthy curriculum plan realizes that learning must happen within the affective and behavioral aspects of our lives as well. We are whole people; learning must be targeted toward the whole person.

Second, learning happens best within the context of a community. In the Body of Christ we grow and learn as we listen and dialogue with other Christians. Through the lives of other growing Christians, we begin to see our own growth progress and goals in new light. We gain strength from each other, we sometimes rebuke each other, and, most important of all, we listen to each other. Other Christians form the sounding board that we often need as we make the decisions of life.

One way to look at the issue of community is to ask, How do we create a "comfortable" Sunday School class? Here we use the word *comfortable* to describe a setting that is secure, safe, homelike, and where relationships are primary.

What can we do to instill a comfortable environment in our classes? Here are a few ideas offered from a teacher's view:

Class Greeters: A comfortable class begins the moment a student steps into the class. By stationing individuals at the door whose primary responsibility is to greet those who come, you begin to create a climate that says clearly, "You are important"; "You are among friends"; "You are welcome."

Respect the Views of Your Students: The wide variety of students you have will insure a wide variety of opinions on any given topic. Often these diverse views find their way into your classroom discussion. While you will not agree with all you hear from your students, an attitude that respects an honest and sincere response, no matter how "wrong," will encourage that student to continue to interact and to seek truth.

Encourage Dialogue: A common frustration of Sunday School teachers is, "I can't get my class to talk!" While this may seem to be true, there is one topic about which every person will always have something to say. The topic? Themselves! Most of us are more than willing to talk about our family, our job, and our latest operation to all who will lis-

ten. Sunday School needs to be a place where we talk about ourselves. Every time we teach we should give opportunity for a bridge to be built from life to the Word of God and back to life.

Model Vulnerability: A teacher who shows his class that he is sometimes weak, that he does not always have the answers, that he is, in fact, growing, will encourage them to become vulnerable. In turn, they shall gain from the interchange of other vulnerable adults. The term "teacher" is probably a poor job description of what a good class leader should do. A better job description might be that of "colearner."

Sunday School for adults was never intended to be an end in itself.

Confidentiality: A class that invites individuals to become vulnerable must emphasize a spirit of confidentiality. Trust and support will be quickly discounted if gossip and irresponsibility become guests in our class.

Know Your Students: A comfortable class assumes that relationships are being built in other settings outside the classroom. The teacher who does not "know his audience" is at a severe disadvantage in building a comfortable environment.

Right Thinking vs. Right Answers: Too often class sessions have as their goal the arrival at a proper conclusion, a "right answer." While we believe that God's Word gives guidance about how we should live, the way we arrive at these life principles has to be as important as the life principles themselves. Life is too diverse for us to hope to give a right answer for every situation that might come into our students' lives. Emphasizing an understanding of the Word that

allows them to think through how and why they will respond to life's situations encourages mature decision making and personalized faith.

Context—the "Why" of Sunday School

Three brief comments will conclude our discussion on the purpose of Sunday School. These comments have to do with the third of our purposes identified earlier—outreach. Sunday School for adults was never intended to be an end in itself. While much of our Sunday School setting is inwardly directed, our goal has always been balanced by outwardly directed action.

Personal Reflection—Life is busy; a cliché that is also true. Life is so busy for most of us that time for genuine reflection and consideration of life's ultimate issues is seldom found. The adult Sunday School should have as one of its goals the opportunity for adults to stop and think—about their own life goals, vocation, relationships with family and community, and their relationship to God.

Growth in Spiritual Maturity—As adults consider seriously the ultimate issues of life, the challenge of the Sunday School will be to help adults grow in their knowledge of the Word, in their understanding of the Christian life, and in their desire and ability to live Christlike in an unchristlike world. Some have said the Bible is primarily written to an adult audience. Its guidance toward maturity can most effectively be enacted only within an adult context. This is a goal we most actively pursue.

Outreach—Finally we reach the climactic goal statement for the Sunday School. Having left our Sunday School classes with a desire to grow, the Christian stands ready to reach out beyond himself, both within the Body of Christ and beyond. We are ultimately called to give witness to that which we believe, that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. To the extent that the adult Sunday School will be an effective evangelistic force in our churches will depend largely on our understanding of the dynamic between the inward and outward expressions of the Sunday School.

What They Are Saying About Our Preaching

A Dialogue About Pulpit Ministry
Between Church Members and Pastors

by Wesley Tracy

Editor, "Herald of Holiness"

Church members don't do all the listening when it comes to preaching. We preachers do a lot of listening for feedback to our pulpit ministry. So turn up your hearing aid; here it comes! Here's what they are saying about the preaching we do.

Survey on Preaching

Wilbur Brannon of Pastoral Ministries and Wesley Tracy, editor of the *Herald of Holiness*, created a questionnaire that was distributed by the Church Growth Division's Listening Post research team. The survey was sent to 600 randomly selected church members and pastors from around the U.S.A. The tabulation of the responses reveals a tremendous vote of confidence for the preaching of Nazarene ministers. Nazarenes appreciate good preaching—and to hear them tell it, they are getting it.

The questionnaire probed 30 aspects of preaching. Respondents were asked to evaluate the preaching they hear on each of the 30 aspects on a Likert scale of 5 to 1. That is, the highest score possible was 5.0, the lowest possible 1.0. On this scale, the laity gave the clergy an overall score of 4.27!

Table 1 charts the way the laypersons and the pastors ranked the 30 aspects of preaching. Keep in mind that the church members were rating the preaching they hear and that the pastors were rating the preaching they do. A cursory examination of Table 1 shows that laity and clergy make similar "high" rankings on such items as "grounded in the Bible," "proclaims the love of God for sinners," "distinct-

ly Christian," and "comes from the very heart and soul of the preacher."

Both groups also agree in general about some other items, giving them lower rankings in the preaching they hear or do. They both agree that most of the preaching they hear and do takes more than 25 minutes, that evangelistic appeal is weak, that Nazarene preaching does little in the area of helping to understand the Christian view of social issues, and that preaching on holiness ranks in the bottom one-third of what really goes on in our pulpits.

Nazarenes appreciate good preaching—and to hear them tell it, they are getting it.

Table 1 also shows that in some areas pastors believe they are doing better than what is perceived by the laity. For example, pastors think they are doing a much better job of applying the Bible and Christian doctrine to everyday life than the laypersons give them credit for (turn up that hearing aid). Closely related to this is the item that probes whether or not preaching "explains and interprets the Bible, making it more understandable." Here again, pastors rank themselves higher than the people do. Pastors also rate their calling for a specific response in

a sermon higher than the laymen do. Pastors report being deeply touched by their preaching (rank 14), while the laymen rank this factor no higher than 25th. When it comes to keeping sermons "fresh, creative, and not boringly repetitive," the pastors rank themselves much higher than the church members do.

Note also that there are several areas in which the people rank the preachers' performance higher than the pastors themselves do. These factors include avoiding "Christianese and theological jargon," "use of proper English," "intellectual respectability," "good communication skills," and sermons that are "relevant to the times."

When you arrange the church members' responses by clustering them in categories, you discover that our people say we are doing best in the category pertaining to Sermon Content and Structure. They rank our Style and Delivery second, and they rated us lowest in the areas of Application and Effectiveness (see Table 2). Pastors ranked their own preaching in the very same sequence.

The Benefits of Preaching

Seeing the 4.27 score, one of the researchers observed that maybe the church members have low expecta-



**TABLE 1: THIRTY ASPECTS OF PREACHING,
GRADED AND RANKED BY LAITY AND PASTORS**

Sentence Stem: (laity) The preaching I hear: Sentence Stem: (pastors) I believe my preaching:	Score by Laity on 5 to 1 Scale	Rank by Laity	Score by Pastors on 5 to 1 Scale	Rank by Pastors
Is soundly grounded in the Bible	4.73	1	4.89	1
Clearly proclaims the love of God for sinners	4.56	2	4.61	3
Is distinctly Christian, focusing primarily on Jesus Christ	4.54	3	4.60	4
Employs everyday language and not "Christianese" or theological jargon	4.49	4	4.40	11
Comes from the very heart and soul of the preacher	4.48	5	4.57	5
Is such that I would be happy to invite my neighbor to hear	4.47	6	4.62	2
Is characterized by proper use of the English language	4.46	7	4.26	16
Give evidence that the preacher has worked hard on the sermon	4.45	8	4.08	22
Can be called part of worship	4.43	9	4.55	6
Makes me a better Christian	4.41	10	4.53	7
Represents good, scholarly thought—is intellectually respectable	4.404	11	4.22	18-19
Explains and interprets the Bible, making it more understandable	4.403	12	4.52	8
Faithfully deals with sin, judgment, and redemption	4.376	13	4.46	10
Is direct and personal communication	4.372	14	4.35	12
Reveals that the preacher has good communication skills	4.36	15	4.00	25
Is logical and "makes sense"	4.35	16	4.34	13
Applies the Bible and Christian doctrine to everyday life	4.32	17	4.49	9
Makes Christian beliefs easier to understand	4.316	18	4.27	14-15
Is relevant to the times	4.310	19	3.52	30
Emphasizes holiness, or entire sanctification	4.24	20	4.04	24
Holds attention	4.18	21	4.06	23
Makes the Bible more interesting and more useful	4.14	22	4.19	20
Inspires me to give my time and energy in Christian service	4.09	23	3.82	27
Calls for a response—that is, challenges us to do something specific	4.08	24	4.23	17
Touches my heart and soul	4.07	25	4.27	14-15
Challenges people to seek salvation, has evangelistic appeal	4.05	26	3.85	26
Helps me with my own personal and family life	3.95	27	4.18	21
Helps me understand the Christian view of the great social issues of our time (poverty, abortion, etc.)	3.76	28	3.66	29
Is fresh, creative, and not boringly repetitive	3.75	29	4.22	18-19
Takes less than 25 minutes of the Sunday service	3.70	30	3.72	28
Overall Average	4.279		4.25	

tion levels for preaching. This does not seem to be the case, however, when you look at Part II of the survey. There, the church members were asked about the benefits of preaching that they themselves had experienced. Eleven items were listed that called for a response on a sliding Likert scale: Never, Once, Two or Three Times, Several Times, Many Times. Some 90 percent of the laypersons declared that God had used a sermon "Many Times" or "Several Times" to help them "respond to God in worship from the heart." About 85 percent said that preaching had helped them understand God's Word, and about 82 percent found new hope in a time of despair "Many Times" or "Several Times" through a sermon. See Table 2 for the rest of this story. Note that clergy report profound results in their own experiences.

Moving from the general benefits they had experienced from sermons, we asked the respondents to write a brief account of the one occasion when "preaching made the most profound difference in your life." Of the 181 lay respondents, 104 took time to write an account of the time that a sermon had a life-changing result for them. Some 41 percent told us of how they "got saved" or "accepted Christ" after a sermon. Some even remembered the preacher's name who delivered the sermon through which the hand of God reached out to them in saving grace. Two who were mentioned were Uncle Bud Robinson and Dick Howard. One woman wrote poignantly about how a revival sermon convinced her that "I should not

Table 2: Church Member Responses Arranged by Category

Question	Score 5 to 1 Scale	Rank in Category	Overall Rank	Score for Category
SERMON CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION				
1. Grounded in Bible	4.73	1	1	4.38
2. Explains Bible	4.403	6	12	
5. Logical, makes sense	4.35	8	16	
7. Distinctly Christian, focuses on Christ	4.54	3	3	
8. Emphasizes holiness, sanctification	4.24	9	20	
9. Scholarly, intellectually respectable	4.404	5	11	
15. Evidence of thorough preparation	4.45	4	8	
26. Proclaims God's love for sinners	4.56	2	2	
27. Deals with sin, judgment, redemption	4.376	7	13	
30. Fresh, creative	3.75	10	29	
STYLE AND DELIVERY				
4. Direct and personal	4.372	4	14	4.23
6. Makes beliefs easier to understand	4.316	6	18	
14. Proper English	4.46	3	7	
18. Reveals good communication skills	4.36	5	15	
19. Holds attention	4.18	7	21	
22. Everyday language, not "Christianese"	4.49	1	4	
28. 25 minutes or less	3.70	9	30	
29. Comes from the heart and soul of the preacher	4.48	2	5	
30. Fresh and creative	3.75	8	29	
APPLICATION AND EFFECTIVENESS				
2. Makes Bible more understandable	4.403	3	12	4.14
10. Touches my heart and soul	4.07	7	25	
11. Challenges people to seek Christ	4.05	8	26	
12. Calls for a specific response	4.08	6	24	
17. Makes Bible more useful	4.14	4	22	
20. Helps with family problems	3.95	9	27	
21. Christian view of social issues	3.76	10	28	
23. Happy to invite my neighbor to hear it	4.47	1	6	
24. Makes me a better Christian	4.41	2	10	
25. Inspires me to Christian service	4.09	5	23	

Table 3. Benefits of Preaching

<i>Has God ever used a sermon or preaching service to . . .</i>	Percentage of Laity Marking "Many" or "Several" Times	Percentage of Pastors Marking "Many" or "Several" Times
1. Help you respond to God in worship from the heart?	89.9%	93.7%
2. Help you understand a Bible passage?	84.8	94.5
3. Give you hope in a time of despair?	81.8	94.1
4. Motivate you to acts of Christian service?	81.8	94.1
5. Bring you new light to walk in?	78.7	95.7
6. Increase your financial support for Christ's kingdom?	68.2	79.2
7. Give you insight into family problems?	66.7	79.4
8. Help you make a tough decision?	63.6	80.8
9. Convince you to make some wrong or misunderstanding right?	45.4	62.5
10. Call you to seek entire sanctification?	36.5	41.2
11. Bring you to repent and seek salvation?	31.5	44.0

wait until my husband became a Christian before I made . . . a commitment.”

About 25 percent of the laypersons responding wrote brief accounts of how they received sanctifying grace as the result of a sermon. One responded to a “Red Sea (conversion)—Canaan land (sanctification) sermon.” Another was led to “completely yield all . . . to the Holy Spirit” after listening to Lenny Wischart preach a series of sermons on holiness. Another cited “my pastor’s call to entire sanctification . . . a call to give myself away to God.”

The one most profound difference preaching made on 18 percent of the respondents came in the form of a “life-changing insight.” One person wrote about how the preaching of M. Kimber Moulton and Norman Oke “changed my view of God—and my view of me.” Life-changing insights sprang also from the preaching of William Greathouse, Earl Lee, Cliff Fisher, Gordon Wetmore, and Eugene Stowe, according to the respondents. See Table 4 for a summary of these matters.

Some Changes Are in Order

In spite of the overall great report card that the church members gave us Nazarene preachers, they were very quick to tell us that some changes are in order. One of the reasons for including open-ended questions in a survey like this is to give respondents the opportunity to raise issues that the framers of the survey did not think of or did not think important. The church members were asked to finish this sentence stem: “If I could change one thing about most of the preaching I hear, it would be . . .”

Exactly 111 lay respondents took time to write out 130 changes they would eagerly vote for. The runaway winner in the “change one thing” contest was SHORTER SERMONS. One respondent moaned “preachers just keep on until people turn them off.” Another chimed, “The pastor doesn’t realize that 20 minutes is sufficient.” Another reverent respondent noted that preaching involves a divine interaction between God and the preacher and that persons like her should not meddle with such things. Then, in parentheses, she cautiously added, “Maybe if it didn’t take so long.”

The second most frequently requested change called for more atten-

Table 4: Profound Difference Responses

Response	Times Cited	Percentage Making This Response
Christian conversion	43	41.3%
Entire sanctification	26	24.9
Life-changing insight	19	18.2
Assistance in the spiritual/devotional life	12	11.5
General help through the years	12	11.5
Help solve marriage/family problems	7	6.7
Decision making	6	5.7
Preaching never made a profound difference	6	5.7
Times of illness, grief, death	6	5.7
Depression and personal trials	5	4.8
Other	4	3.8

Table 5: If I Could Change One Thing About the Preaching I Hear . . .

CATEGORY	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
STYLE AND DELIVERY	50	45.0%
1. Sermons too long	17	15.3
2. More simplicity	5	4.5
3. Fewer stories and illustrations	5	4.5
4. More illustrations	4	3.6
5. More spontaneous, less formal	4	3.6
6. More formal, less spontaneous	3	2.7
7. More expository	3	2.7
8. Less cheap emotion	2	1.8
9. More and longer sermons	2	1.8
10. Bolder, down the line on judgment/wrath	2	1.8
11. Too loud, too scolding	2	1.8
SERMON CONTENT	33	29.7%
1. More biblically based	6	5.4
2. More holiness doctrine	6	5.4
3. More evangelistic sermons	5	4.5
4. More expository preaching	4	3.6
5. More of God’s love	4	3.6
6. More intellectual, weighty content	3	2.7
7. Less Bible detail	3	2.7
8. Less holiness doctrine	1	.9
APPLICATION	16	14.4
1. Address practical problems of today	8	7.2
2. Evangelistic appeal	5	4.5
3. Christian service	3	2.7

tion to the "practical problems of today and the Christian way of dealing with them." Tied for third were two "content concerns"—more biblically based preaching and more holiness doctrine. Fourth place attracted these concerns: more evangelistic sermons, more simplicity, and fewer (that's right, fewer) stories and illustrations. If the researchers had put the call for more expository preaching and the votes for more biblically based preaching together as one, the "Bible" category would have been the second-ranking concern behind "Shorter, please."

Table 5 charts the church members' responses by category. They want the most changes in the area of Style and Delivery. Then comes Sermon Content and Organization, followed by Application. The pastors, polled about what they would like to change in their own preaching, cited the same category sequence. Table 6 displays the "Top Ten" most-sought-after-changes by both church members and pastors. One item that surfaces here is that the second-most-desired change on the part of pastors was "More time for sermon preparation." There was not a syllable, not

Table 6: What Pastors and Church Members Most Want to Change About Preaching

PASTORS

1. Improve delivery
2. More time for sermon preparation
3. More and better illustrations
4. Shorter sermons
5. Better application to practical problems
- 6-7. More passion, unction, urgency
- 6-7. Produce life response
8. Evangelistic appeal
9. More/better education and Bible knowledge
10. Preach with more compassion and love

CHURCH MEMBERS

1. Shorter sermons
2. Better application to practical problems
3. More biblically based
4. More holiness doctrine
5. Evangelistic appeal
6. Simplicity
7. Fewer stories and illustrations
8. More spontaneous, less formal
9. Hear more of God's love
10. More expository preaching

the slightest hint in any layperson response that showed any awareness of this vital need of pastors. Now there's a point for dialogue.

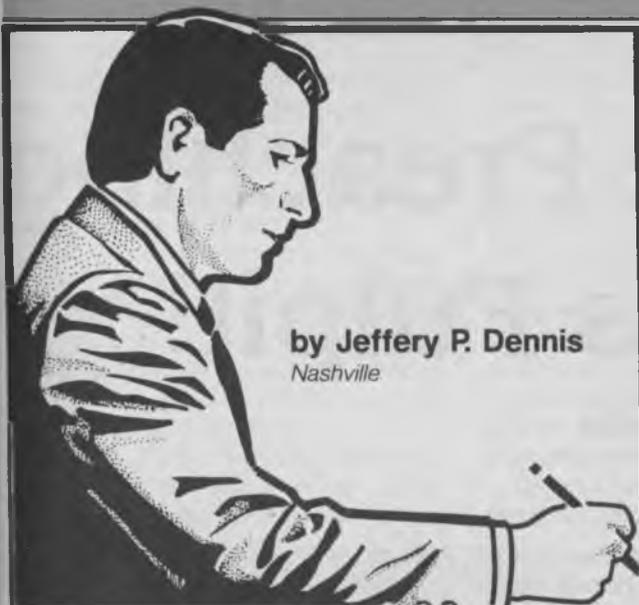
Five pastors out of 259 reported that their preaching was fine and that they, therefore, could think of nothing

in their pulpit ministry that needed improvement!

And, here's the good news: 21.6 percent of the lay respondents said they like their pastor's preaching so well that they wanted to "change nothing." What a breath of fresh air!



"THEY HAVEN'T GOTTEN AWAY FROM IT ALL. THEY BROUGHT IT WITH THEM!"



by Jeffery P. Dennis
Nashville

Avoiding Anti-Semitism in Sermon Preparation and Delivery

In the past, Christians had inexcusable records of intolerance for their Jewish neighbors. As Martin Luther was breaking away from the Roman Catholic church, he expanded upon its traditional anti-Semitism: the 1516 tract, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, was considered excessive by both Catholics and Lutherans of the time. It wasn't until 1753 that a literary work, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, hinted that some Jews might *not* be murderous devils.

During the past few decades, leaders of many Christian denominations have attempted to repair the breach between Christianity and Judaism, but anti-Semitic remarks are still heard with some frequency, even from pulpits. It is important that every Christian minister exercise special care in sermon preparation and delivery, not only to avoid inadvertently legitimizing anti-Semitic opinions or beliefs in the congregation but also to work toward inter-faith dialogue. Surprisingly, many Christians believe that all Jews are Orthodox or come from Eastern Europe; some even believe that Judaism is a sect of Christianity. Many Jews, on the other hand, feel that Christians all worship the Virgin Mary, or that Christianity arose with the sole purpose of persecuting Jews. Through understanding comes tolerance, and finally, perhaps, dialogue.

The following suggestions on sermon preparation and delivery can defuse statements that could potentially reinforce anti-Semitism present in the congregation.

Old Testament

Whenever possible, use the term "Hebrew Bible" instead of "Old Testament." Obviously this is not always possible or even advisable. You cannot say, "Turn in your Hebrew Bible to Isaiah 6:8," for instance. The Hebrew Bible does differ in some respects from the Christian Old Testament, but constant reference to the document as the "Old Testament" implies that it exists merely as preparation for the New, instead of being a vital, living document in both Jewish and Christian traditions.

When researching a text from the Hebrew Bible, keep both Jewish and Christian commentaries available. Jewish interpretations of a passage of Scripture may differ considerably from Christian interpretations, but they will nevertheless prove illuminating and thought-provoking.

When preaching on a text from the Hebrew Bible, use both Christian and Jewish sources for illustrations. Between about A.D. 100 and 1200, volumes of *midrashim*, or illustrative stories, were compiled for nearly every verse of the Hebrew Bible, but especially for the Torah. These provide fascinating glimpses into the way biblical passages were applied to everyday life. Many are told with such dry wit and humor that they will enliven any sermon.

Do not imply that the constant backsliding and loss of faith suffered by the children of Israel in the Torah is a general characteristic of Jewish individuals or Judaism as a religion. When you need a contrast between backsliding and steadfast faith, use

as illustrations some of the Jews of the Middle Ages who chose to die rather than to give up their faith.

Avoid the compulsion to transform characters from the Hebrew Bible into Christians. For some reason, Daniel seems particularly prone to such a transformation. Emphasize that Solomon, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Esther all practiced forms of Judaism not much different from that practiced by Orthodox Jews in the United States today.

New Testament

The messianic ideal of Judaism is often subjected to criticism from Christian pulpits. Actually, the concept of *messiah* never played the central role in Jewish eschatology that it does in Christianity. It has been more or less abandoned by modern Judaism. A comparison of the Jewish expectation (a secular ruler) and the Christian Messiah (a divine Savior) to the unavoidable detriment of the former is misleading.

Emphasize the fact that the disapproval and criticism that the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, heaps upon "the Jews" is
(Continued on page 50)



Evangelistic Preaching in Today's Pulpit



by Kenneth Orr

Duarte, Calif.

In the church today, expository preaching is in. Evangelistic preaching is out. Gospel sermons, we hear, are for the evangelism crusade and shallow churches. Many Christians (and their preachers) think the Sunday sermon should be full of meat, Greek word meanings, and heavy application to growing saints.

Is this the apostolic pattern? Does the church's history show this to be an effective route for the holiness of the church? Must a meaty sermon leave the plain gospel message out in the cold?

There is another way. Evangelistic preaching can and should be normal fare in the Christian pulpit. It can happen without breeding immaturity or staying with "the elementary teachings about Christ" (Heb. 6:1).

A popular speaker recently gave his testimony as he began his address before a major missions conference. He had become a Christian at a missionary conference, he explained, many years before.

"To this day," he told the audience, "I do not understand it. Do you know what that missions speaker preached before those missions-minded people? He preached an evangelistic sermon!"



The people in the audience gasped and tittered. Why would a man preach the gospel to a group of obviously converted people at a missions conference? Surely a motivational or sensational sermon would have been more practical and helpful. Perhaps he had not been able to prepare well enough beforehand and took one of the sermons he had used on the mission field to convert people to Christ.

There is another explanation for evangelistic preaching at a missions conference. The gospel taught and preached has tremendous power to do great good in Christians.

What better motivation? What better inspiration? What better application of the need for world evangelism than a strong message on the love of God in Christ exalting the Redeemer of sinners?

While we have few examples of weekly pulpit ministry in the Early Church, the nature of the Epistles suggests that Early Church preaching was full of practical teaching with constant reflection on the basic message of the cross of Christ and salvation in Jesus' name.

Practical Christian living was never isolated from the powerful presentation of the saving power of Christ.

What is evangelistic preaching? Many people think of it as a gospel outline retold ad nauseum with new illustrations. You are a sinner; Jesus is the Savior; faith is the key that opens the door; and, presto! you are saved.

Yet preachers would do well to look closer at the Bible and to study the sermons of great evangelistic pastors who preached the gospel regularly in their pulpits. Many of

them used one of their services each week for gospel proclamation.

Four elements of evangelistic preaching will be found.

First, evangelistic preaching in the Christian pulpit will include teaching basic Christianity. Thorough exposition of Scripture and instruction in Bible doctrine build on basic tenets such as heaven and hell, sin and salvation, the Cross and the Resurrection, faith and repentance.

Charles Spurgeon, a great evangelistic preacher who also taught basic Christianity from his pulpit, said to his students, "Brethren, first and above all things, keep to plain evangelical doctrines."¹

Paul said of his work in Ephesus, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, RSV).

The preacher need not abandon expository preaching to evangelize in the pulpit. The great truths found in the course of expository preaching lend themselves to gospel emphasis. For instance, when teaching about humility, the apostle Paul focused on the humility of Christ to give us one of the most blessed gospel testimonies in Scripture (Phil. 2:1-11). When he was exhorting on the subject of stewardship to the Corinthians, the gospel was powerfully declared in the words, "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9, RSV).

The apostle John had much to say about loving one another, a great evangelical teaching. Yet he could not teach this subject without the evangelical message of the love of God in Christ. He said, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because

he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16, KJV).

Unless our expository preaching and exhortation are flavored with the glorious gospel, we are no more than lecturers and moralists. Let us teach and exhort with an eye to the saving power of Christ.

The second element of evangelistic preaching is the proclamation of the person and work of Christ the Lord. With John the Baptist, we say, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, RSV).

The eloquent Puritan John Flavel emphasized the fact that the excellency of a sermon lies in the simple

duplicated in all our pulpit ministries: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2, KJV).

The third element of consistent pulpit evangelism is the demonstration of the reasonableness of faith and the futility of human effort. People have tried to help themselves by urban renewal, education, morality, and legislation. Nothing has solved their basic problems. The only hope is faith in Jesus Christ. Pulpit evangelism from Sunday to Sunday will proclaim this hope.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, late preacher of Westminster Chapel in

who often looked to hypothetical developments that were supposed to take place in the future. People expected their problems to dissolve, he explained, when these dreams came to pass. And so they were willing to put their hopes in these futile expectations.

Naturally, this point has a modern application. Dr. Lloyd-Jones argues convincingly that people today are no different. They dream of a time when science or psychology or technology will tackle life's perplexities. Many people have hung their faith on some future development. Yet these dreams have failed again and again.⁴ What a tremendous opportunity to point to Christ as the One who alone will give eternal life and hope in such a world as ours.

The apostle Peter said, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15, KJV). If this is true for all Christians, it must certainly be the case in the Christian pulpit.

With sober words, Isaac Watts said, "Let the awful and important thought of souls being saved by my preaching, or left to perish and be condemned to hell by my negligence, I say, let this awful and tremendous thought dwell ever upon your spirit."⁵

Finally, evangelistic preaching has always included an invitation to receive Christ. The method of inviting people has varied, but the call to come to the Fountain of Life has always been present.

The 20th-century method of calling people to the front of the church, or having an "altar call," is questioned by some as being meritorious (or at least implying merit). On the other hand, critics of this method have often failed to consider alternative ways of inviting people to Christ.

If a preacher has a problem with one method, let him get another. The invitation, however, is not optional for the biblical preacher.

In preaching, the Holy Spirit prepares the people to respond. The Bible says, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:8, KJV). The apostle quotes from Deuteronomy, where
(Continued on page 46)



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The gospel taught and preached has tremendous power to do great good in Christians.

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discoveries of Jesus and making life applications of the message.

A theological professor advised a student who had preached a trial sermon in the seminary, "Young man, an educated pagan could write just as good a sermon as that!"²

Evaluate preaching by this condition: could a pagan repeat the sermon just as easily? Is there anything about Jesus? Does the message present a Person or simply ideas?

Perhaps more than anyone in the past 100 years, the evangelical Anglican preacher and pastor, J. C. Ryle, has modeled evangelistic preaching. His sermons, no matter what the subject matter, reflected Christ. Read his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* to see how thoroughly he preached Christ.³ He did not preach about Christ. He preached Christ.

The great apostle's testimony of his ministry in Corinth should be

London, used to insist on preaching evangelistically at least once each Sunday. He chose the evening service, which was, in his day, the better-attended meeting.

Though a great Bible teacher and author of commentaries on Romans and Ephesians, he saw himself primarily as an evangelist. In the early years of his ministry, he would write out in full one of his sermons every week. Since he felt the evangelistic sermon was the harder of the two kinds of preaching he practiced, he wrote those sermons. Many are preserved for us today.

In his book *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon*, Dr. Lloyd-Jones excels at this aspect of demonstrating the reasonableness of the Christian faith. For example, in a sermon on John 3:19, titled "Man's Fundamental Trouble," he shows the fallacy that kept men from Christ in Jesus' day.

He tells of people in Christ's day

Evangelistic Music in Worship

Part 1

by Daniel Steele

Leawood, Kans.

How many times have you said, or heard said, in reference to an evangelistic-style song in a morning worship service, "That's just not a Sunday morning song!" Is it possible to use evangelistic music appropriately in Sunday morning worship? I believe it is when the objective of the service is evangelistic.

It is fairly universally acknowledged that persons who need Christian conversion are more likely to attend Sunday morning worship than Sunday evening, Wednesday, or even revival services. Because of this, pastors frequently preach evangelistic sermons and give invitations for decision, but they are afraid to let go of the traditional "Sunday morning hymns."

On the other hand, some churches have "thrown the baby out with the bath." Failing to recognize evangelistic value in traditional forms of worship, and not understanding how important the texts of some of the standard "Sunday morning hymns" are for laying a theological foundation for evangelism, they simply turn the Sunday morning service



into a generic brand (Sunday evening) evangelistic service.

Typical evangelistic-style services are rooted in the 19th-century camp meeting and revival traditions. They are simple, folksy, entertaining, structured for everything to lead to the sermon, more emotionally lively and intense. They are focused on giving the individual an urgent challenge to immediately and instantaneously give up his life of sin and trust Christ as his Savior, or die to self and devote his life to Christ as sanctifying Lord.

Such services will always be needed, but we need other types of services as well. The spiritual life of the church is sustained and enhanced by a richer, more full-orbed worship event that can have a variety of objectives, all of which can and should be life-transforming and God-exalting. We cannot truly worship God without being changed, as Isaiah was (chap. 6).

A full-orbed (Sunday morning) worship service can have a specifically evangelistic objective. Certainly the Wesleyan open invitation for anyone who wants to commit to Christ while participating in the Lord's Supper harmonizes with this. Such a service can be carefully planned with full intention of giving opportunity for nonbelievers to make a commitment to Christ. The music of such a service can enhance that objective.

For a worship service to be evangelistic, it should have a clear mes-



sage with appeal to the mind. There should be the communication of truth to the intellect. Dr. Don Hustad says it needs a "specific message of God's purpose and provision of salvation in Christ." This would be true not only of the sermon or other spoken ingredients but also of the music.

For a worship service to be evangelistic, it also needs an appeal to the will, our power of choice. There is no conversion without response, decision, action, and change. One cannot be passive and be transformed. In personal evangelism, the prospect is engaged and involved in dialogue. Public evangelism also must have involvement by the person if the prospect is to transfer his trust from self to Jesus for salvation. A worship service involving congregational participation facilitates this process. For a successful evangelistic appeal, the worship service should give opportunity for participants to respond, especially following the sermon.

One of the strongest elements of appeal in a service with an evangelistic emphasis is emotion. Dr. Robert Webber writes, "The point of contact in human personality that builds the bridge between this world and the next is not the mind, but the heart." There is a personal, experiential emphasis. Expressions of subjective feelings are encouraged. There is an accent on personal relationships. Sin is an interruption of relationships. Conversion is a res-

toration of a relationship with God. Music is one of our most powerful forces for expressing or stirring human emotions. It can "stir the troops" or "soothe the savage beast." Unless touched emotionally, people do not change.

The Word of God should dominate a worship service, but music can take over. Music can run wild emotionally, leading to a truncated evangelism in which people have an "exciting experience" but no real transformation, lots of fizz but no substance. Or, music can be handled so poorly as to create stress and embarrassment. It can teach errant theology, misguiding both believer and nonbeliever. It can create a circus atmosphere, which leads to spectatorism; or it can create deadness and boredom, which lead to passiveness in the congregation rather than participation and responsiveness. Music can be either creative or lethal for evangelism in worship.

If there is danger of music disrupting or destroying our evangelistic intention, what should we avoid and what should we seek?

For a worship service to be evangelistic, we don't have to use all "evangelistic" music. Some music may be classified as preevangelistic. It is used to appeal to the prospect's love of music or may express some aspect of the believer's life that would not relate directly to salvation but would make the Christian life attractive. The range of possibilities is limitless. Not all "gospel" music is evangelistic, nor is all evangelistic music of the "gospel" style. Standard gospel, Southern gospel, black gospel, contemporary gospel, country gospel, traditional hymns, folk songs, ballads, classical anthems, and arias are all styles that can be used as part of the worship service to contribute indirectly to the evangelistic objective.

Consider the qualities of specifically evangelistic music that can be used in a worship service. First, good evangelistic music should be *incarnational*. It should demonstrate a message that God accommodates himself to man by a creative Holy Spirit. Throughout history, the Church has taken the music of a secular society, changed the lyrics to a gospel message, and made it a bridge for the nonbeliever to cross

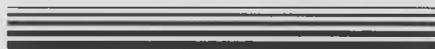
over into the kingdom of God. Musical interest and taste in our world is very broad; therefore, to reach our world, we need to be diverse in the music we offer as a medium for the gospel.

The music needs to be *genuine*. It should be an authentic representation of the persons singing it. It should be our style, appropriate to our level of ability, and true to our own experience. To be used effectively by the Holy Spirit, it needs to express spiritual reality.

Spontaneity is another essential quality of evangelistic music. Spontaneous means it is irrepressible. Natural to us, it doesn't have to be contrived or forced. There is both planned and impromptu spontaneity. Spontaneity gives the feeling of warmth to a service. It suggests a freedom to be ourselves and to respond instinctively. Great hymns such as "How Great Thou Art!" and "To God Be the Glory" are sung spontaneously by most of our con-



Music is a powerful force for expressing human emotion.



gregations. Choruses encourage spontaneity because of their simplicity.

Another quality of evangelistic songs is that their lyrics communicate the *kerygma*. They have something specific to say about the gospel of God's love, our lostness and estrangement from Him. His provision for our redemption, and His invitation for us to come to Him. It may be a hymn such as "And Can It Be?" or "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood," or a choral number such as "In the Name of the Lord," by Sandi Patti and Doug Holck, or a solo such as "O Glorious Love," by John Peterson. Whatever the style, its text should help lay a theological

foundation for the evangelistic sermon.

Again, evangelistic music is *experience* music. It is a witness to what we have personally lived. It communicates a testimony from our hearts. The message often expresses the internal process of conversion. The majority of evangelistic songs share a spiritual experience. There are choruses, such as "Jesus Sets Me Absolutely Free"; standard gospel songs, such as "It Is Truly Wonderful"; choral pieces, such as "Forgiven," written by David Meece and arranged by J. Daniel Smith; and solos, such as "God Did a Wonderful Thing for Me."

Experience music touches the heart because it comes from the heart. Part of the emotional appeal is the recall of significant memories. Sometimes an old song will remind a backslider of a day when he was close to God. Or it may be something he remembers from childhood that was sung at home or in Sunday School. Except for the occasional evangelistic event beamed to a very young crowd, we can't afford to ignore evangelistic songs from the past, such as "It's Real," "Rock of Ages," and "At the Cross."

Evangelistic music is often *confessional*, recalling past failure or suggesting present need. For example, there is the chorus, "Come, Holy Spirit, I Need You"; the choral work by Harlan Moore, arranged by Dick Bolks, "Restore the Joy"; the congregational song, "Cleanse Me"; or the beautiful contemporary solo sung by Steve Green, "People Need the Lord," which suggests both the need of others and ourselves.

Evangelistic music is an invitation or an *appeal* to the nonbeliever to accept Christ or to the believer to seek entire sanctification. There is "It Is No Secret," "Rise and Be Healed," "Come Just as You Are," "Ho, Everyone That Is Thirsty," "Let Jesus Come into Your Heart," and the contemporary song by Jon Mohr, "You Want To . . . Now Will You?"

Having identified some characteristics of specifically evangelistic music, we now acknowledge that at its best, evangelistic music cannot guarantee evangelistic results, but how we plan can either enhance or inhibit the potential effectiveness.



You Make a Difference

by C. Neil Strait
Grand Rapids, Mich.



I read a story of an elderly man who was walking along the beach in the early morning hours, picking up starfish and throwing them into the ocean. A young man asked him what he was doing. He answered, "The stranded starfish will die in the morning sun if left on the beach."

The young man responded, "The beach extends for hundreds of miles, and there are millions of starfish. How can what you are doing make any difference?"

The elderly man threw a starfish into the ocean and simply said, "It makes a difference to that one" (W. Raymond McClung, "Making a Difference," in *Sunrise Devotions*, vol. 2 [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991], 42).

You and I need to remember that everything we do makes a difference, in some way, to someone. In the heat of the battle, when our critics have multiplied and the troops seem arrayed against us, we need to consider how we respond. For, while our response will matter very little to our critics, it matters a great deal to those who believe in us.



There are times when our task will overwhelm us, when just the sheer volume of "things to do" will drain us of energy and deplete our resources. It is then we are tempted to ask, "What difference does it make?" And, honestly, many of the tasks may not make much difference at all. But, if some task makes a little difference in just one life, then a little difference makes all the difference in the world.

What pastor/preacher has not gone from the pulpit and had his moments of doubt about his preaching making any difference at all? But the occasions when affirmations come of a word spoken at the right time, a bit of light that shines through the preaching moment, or a challenge that lifts life confirm that preaching

does make a difference. No, preaching will not make a difference in everyone's life, but it will make a difference for someone. The individual differences validate preaching and send us back to our study to pray and search for yet another word from the Lord.

Pastor, be encouraged! Your preaching does make a difference.

Or, consider the times when negative voices remind you of opposition, or failure, or even petty grievances. At times, one is tempted to ask, "What difference does it all make?" To the negative voices, maybe not much. But a person always has a greater ministry than one realizes. What you do, how you do it, and the reasons you do it will inspire and help many. Your ministry, at its worst, will make a difference in someone's life and future. That thought needs to serve us when we have our backs to the wall and our future is blurred.

Most of us will be involved in ministries where we are making a difference in lives one at a time, rather than to scores and hundreds of people. Did Jesus not remind us that "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10)?

Pastor, be encouraged! Your ministry is making a difference! It is making a difference to someone, even when you see no confirmation nor hear any words affirming it. It is our confidence as we yield our ministry to Christ!

BEYOND BELIEF



Unforgettable Jane Edna Hill

by Rev. Edward Victor Hill

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On the day before we were to wed, Jane Edna Coruthers took my hand and rushed me into the back yard of her parents' home in Prairie View, Texas. All summer long Texas farmers had vainly prayed for rain. The sunbaked earth was dry and cracked. Crops were scorched. Lawns were dead brown.

"Come on, Edward," she said, looking over her shoulder with a smile. "See how the pampas is going to bloom for us!"

Since childhood, Jane had dreamed of an outdoor wedding in a field of flowers. She had planted a large clump of pampas grass in her parents' yard, confident that one day she would say her vows beneath its regal, white plumes. Now our marriage ceremony was just a day away, but Jane's eyes sparkled with hope as she stood before the dry, withered stems.

"Any moment," she said, taking a tightly rolled pod in her hand, "They're going to open!"

Dr. John Milton Coruthers, Jane's father, walked up behind us. A distinguished professor of agriculture at Prairie View College, he could tell you scientifically why that sun-parched clump of pampas would not bloom for Jane's wedding. But he simply smiled—he was too wise to question his daughter's faith.

At about noon the next day, August 29, 1955, lightning suddenly flashed and thunder pealed in the distance. I stood shock-silent, staring at the sky as black clouds boiled up and tiny drops of rain stirred the dust at our feet. Jane laughed and lifted up her hands in praise. "We plant the seed," she whispered, "but God makes it grow."

I don't know when Jane first read that ancient Biblical promise, but it shaped her life. She believed, with

all her heart, that she and God together could do almost anything.

Three hours later, the summer storm stopped. As Jane and I pledged our sacred vows, the majestic pampas flowers waved above us in the breeze.

Seeds of Love. In the years that followed, while I pastored first in Houston and then at the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church of Los Angeles, Jane always tended her gardens. No back-yard plot was too rocky or dry for her to plant, weed and prune.

And no human heart was too hard, no body too worn for her to cultivate. With an invitation to lunch or a gesture to sit beside her in the pastor's pew, with a late-night phone call or a word of encouragement, Jane—we all called her "Baby"—planted seeds of love in all of us.

One cold fall evening soon after our marriage, I returned to our little home and opened the door to a blaze of burning candles. Baby hugged me and announced, "We've been married six months, and I thought we'd eat by candlelight."

I discovered candles burning in the kitchen and bedroom. When I tried to flick on the bathroom lights, I understood the reason for our romantic meal. I found Jane in the kitchen, and she began to cry.

"They turned off our electricity," she said, reaching out to hug me, knowing how terrible I would feel. In college Jane had been courted by heirs of the rich and famous, but she had chosen me, a poor Baptist preacher. Now I couldn't even pay the light bill.

"You work so hard," she said, holding me tight. "With or without money, I love you and I respect your calling. Wherever we are together, we are rich."

Jane's candlelight dinner was just another way of tending her garden. Since she worked as a nurse, church-choir member, Sunday-school teacher, volunteer counselor and community leader, it wasn't just family that she nurtured.

Mark Chiles was 15 years old when he met "Aunt Jane," his new Sunday-school teacher. Because he stuttered, some parishioners assumed he was retarded. He sat in the back row, hoping no one would notice him.

But Jane noticed. She listened intently to him and discovered that he was quite bright. She invited him to sit with her in church, a place of honor in our congregation. She helped him with his speech therapy, and when he was selected for the Job Corps, she slipped him a little money to get him through the long, hot summer in South Dakota.

In December 1989, as one of our young-adult ministers, the boy who once hid in the last pew of the Mount Zion Church preached from its pulpit. "I looked out at the congregation," Mark told me, "and I could almost hear Auntie Jane whisper, 'You can do it, Mark. You can do it.'"

"No Bomb." Joe Jackson was another young life that Jane tended. "God has a dream for your life, boy," she told the 13-year-old, getting down on her knees and grasping Joe's thin shoulders. "And I am going to see that God's dream for you comes true."

Jane's love took root in him and grew. In an area where drugs and gangs abounded, Joe never became involved. Today he is a policeman and a member of our church.

Baby's toughness saved a lot of people from grief—including me. When members of a militant group called to threaten my life for my outspoken stand against them, Jane got

the call. Though most of her ancestors were African slaves, Baby was part American Indian. She told the surprised militants what might happen to them if they "got this tough Indian lady on the warpath."

When one late-night caller said I didn't have long to live, Jane was concerned a bomb might have been planted in my car. Rather than disturb me, she simply got up early to test the car herself. "Don't worry," she said when I found her in the garage. "There was no bomb."

Kitchen Face-Off. In 1986, every Thursday morning at 6:30, Jane and our son, Edward II, joined other volunteers serving breakfast to hundreds of transients and neighbors at the soup kitchen we founded, The Lord's Kitchen. We always asked the hungry patrons their names and tried to greet each one courteously. But one huge middle-aged woman on her first visit refused to cooperate.

"I'm Pippi Longstocking," she snapped. Her voice echoed about the room, and no one dared challenge her. Her face was dirty and scarred, her clothes were torn, and she swaggered like a drunk.

"I'm Snow White," she answered the second day. On Wednesday she was "Ronald Reagan," and on Thursday, Jane's day on duty, she growled, "I'm Jesus Christ. Don't mess with me!"

The woman was used to getting her own way. She just hadn't reckoned on Baby. "Listen, sweetheart," my wife replied firmly, "your name isn't Jesus Christ. I happen to know that man personally, and he doesn't look anything like you."

The room grew silent. Even the cooks and dishwashers stopped to see what would happen as the bag lady just stared at Jane with angry, flashing eyes. Suddenly, the woman balled her callused hands into fists.

"You are a good person," Jane said quietly. "These people may think you're mean or dangerous, but I know you're not."

My son got ready to dive under the table and pull his mother after him. Nobody in The Lord's Kitchen could believe that the pastor's wife would confront this she-mountain.

"You're angry," Jane continued evenly. "Life has been unfair to you. But you're not the only person suf-

fering in this place. So why don't you wipe that frown off your face, use this towel to wash yourself in the bathroom, and come back here and sit beside me. I'll pour us an extra cup of coffee and we'll talk."

Suddenly that tough-looking woman began to cry.

"My name is Elizabeth," she whispered, collapsing like a frightened child into my wife's arms.

"And my name is Jane," Baby answered, holding her new friend for a moment while everybody—cooks, dishwashers and patrons alike—applauded and wiped away their tears.

Elizabeth regularly spent Thursday mornings with Jane at The Lord's Kitchen. Jane never told me what they talked about, but the scowl on Elizabeth's face gave way to a smile.

"Baby's Bad Boys." While I was busy helping organize the civil-rights movement, Baby avoided the spotlight to care for her ever-growing family. She sent cards to encourage friends and strangers. She telephoned to pass on words of comfort to those reeling from the horrors of brutality. She prayed without ceasing for everyone on her list. She never made the headlines, but none of the "important folks" I've known, the famous, the leaders, could outshine my own dear Jane Edna Hill.

Then, in 1985, Baby developed a nasty cough. Microscopic cancers were growing in her lungs. The family prayed, cried and watched helplessly as our beloved wife and mother became weaker each day.

From the intensive chemotherapy treatment Baby suffered a severe and constant pain in her left shoulder. Yet she continued to work for "Baby's bad boys," as she called the young men she had taken under her wing.

On October 28, 1987, her courageous battle ended, and Jane Edna Coruthers Hill went home to be with the Lord. On the day we buried her, 3,000 mourners came to the church, black and white together.

I sat on the platform looking down at that great congregation who had come to say good-bye to Baby. "Don't cry for me, Edward," Jane had told me just before she died. "Look how many seeds we've planted together and how many flowers are already in bloom."

In that huge crowd were hundreds of people whose lives had been touched by her simple faithfulness. And scattered among them I could see dozens of "Baby's bad boys." Once they had faced addiction, prison terms and violent death. Now they stood there with tears streaming down their faces, reaching out to touch the casket of the woman who had helped them live. Twelve of them insisted on carrying Baby's casket through the grieving throng.

On a cold, drizzling morning after Baby passed away, I was hurrying to my car and noticed a young woman and her baby bundled in rags. They were trying to sleep on the pavement.

As I stood blinking back the rain, trying to focus on that dirty pile of rags, I felt Jane standing with me. "Look, Edward," she would have said, rushing to the mother and child.

Jane would know what I was thinking. How hard we had tried and how often we had failed to make a dent in the desperate needs of our neighborhood alone. But kneeling beside that cold and hungry little family, Jane would have insisted that we try again.

"We just plant the seed. . . ." Her voice echoed in my heart.

I could see Jane picking up the baby and leading the homeless, teen-age mother to refuge. There would be no discussion. The girl and her child were in need. There was nothing more to say.

As I helped the young mother and her baby into my car, I suddenly knew there was something more God and Jane would have me do. The congregation had raised money to replace our cramped church with a new, larger building. Instead, we would have to provide a home for women and infants who need food and temporary shelter.

When I told the people of Mount Zion the story of that young woman and her child and proposed the shelter, the congregation lifted their hands in praise to God. The vote was unanimous.

Called The Jane Edna Hill Home for Women and Infants, it will be a garden to tend fragile roots so young flowers can blossom into life.

"Thank you, heavenly Father," I hear Jane say. "We planted the seeds, but you have made them grow." 

Today's Books for Today's Preachers



PREACHING IN THE SPIRIT

by Dennis F. Kinlaw

Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press
1985, PA031-075-0911, \$7.95

Dr. Dennis Kinlaw's book *Preaching in the Spirit* is one that I regret not having read sooner. It brings the reader face-to-face with basic issues of homiletics. In the Preface, Kinlaw eases the tension of homiletical preaching by reminding us that God chooses to use us in the pulpit. He emphasizes that preaching in the Spirit requires constant contact and deep appreciation for the Sacred Scriptures. He illustrates what he calls "Attachment by Detachment," where the minister must be attached to God in such a manner that nothing separates him from His fellowship. All other attachments should be secondary and contingent to our ministry of the Word.

Kinlaw calls to task the philosophy of modern individualism and its failure to have a basis for preaching. He noted that the New Testament authors wrote with the assurance that Christian ministry is always in the context of togetherness. Isolation is forbidden. His compelling account of God calling Abraham to pray for Lot and his family relates clearly that God provides full fellowship in the framework of preaching. We begin and end with God in preaching. Anything short of this leads to unfruitfulness. Moving deeper into this understanding, Kinlaw illustrates that Jesus appeared to the Eleven while they were discussing Him. Christ transforms our preaching.

Prayer assures us that we are building together with God as we preach the Word. Prayer opens the heart of the minister as he stands to proclaim the Word of God. It gives the minister a sensitivity to the

needs of the congregation. Kinlaw shares that homiletics must have the "law of the second witness." This principle means that God is the First Witness to the hearing ears of His Word. The minister, through the work of the Spirit of God, brings the Word as the second witness. This means that no hearer listens first to the preacher, but to God, and is assisted by the minister of the Word. This concept will help readers in their struggles with sermon preparation. God is there first.

This book concludes with a chapter on "Being with Jesus" and how the method of reaching the world through preaching today is the same as the method used by Christ as He worked to please His Father. Preachers stand in Jesus' stead and declare the unsearchable riches of Christ to a world that desperately needs a Savior. By reading this book, one will have an opportunity to see anew the tremendous value of preaching God's Word from a heart filled with the Spirit and a realization that Christ is there to assist in all the vicissitudes of life. You will find yourself reading this inspiring book through as one would hear a sermon in its entirety. Read it in one sitting if you can!

—Montford L. Neal

WHAT'S A NICE GOD LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

by Wesley Tracy

Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press
of Kansas City, 1990
PA083-411-3716, \$5.95

Writing from actual preaching script, Dr. Wesley Tracy, editor of the *Herald of Holiness*, presents for the reader a series of profoundly written messages about characters rarely preached from the pulpit today. Tracy

draws the reader into the flux and flow of the event. His gifted approach to the content and pointed illustrations makes each message have an exciting personality all its own. He explains difficult passages with the greatest of literary ease. "What's a Nice God like You Doing in a Place (where Abram should have been walking through the pieces of covenant sacrifice) like This?" demonstrates the crafty use of surprise shared by the skillful and artistic writing that is a hallmark of the author.

"Come Running with a Bucket" relates a message from the most overlooked possible texts: "the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 1:1, 17, 21). The author gets the reader's attention and holds it throughout this fast- and fact-paced material. Four women from the genealogy are showcased as living witnesses to the marvelous grace of God in Christ for every person needing salvation. Personal and practical lessons are drawn from the characters illustrated. Serious questions allow the reader to comprehend deeply the theological thinking expressed by the message. Some suggestive notes on what the message can mean to the reader is provided with a clincher poem climaxing an exciting spiritual trek in biblical thought.

For exciting sermons that provide tremendous examples of hope for the hopeless, and love for the unloving, this book reaches deep into the loving heart of God and shines waves of sunlight. Ministers and laypersons alike will find this book unequivocally takes its focus upon persons needing a reason to look to God for help in time of great need. It succeeds in making one aware that God cares for you no matter what has happened to you.

him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). He has promised to lead us to a city, the New Jerusalem, where we shall never hunger or thirst again (Rev. 7:16). Jesus Christ is our *salvation* and *satisfaction*. (Quote "Satisfied" gospel song.)

By use of a repeating refrain, the Psalmist informs them and us of the appropriate "response of the redeemed": "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unending love and his wonderful deeds for men" (v. 8). The Psalmist echoes this refrain after each description of divine deliverance (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

In a recent interview, popular singer and composer Lionel Ritchie was asked, "What is the first step in writing a hit song?"

"The first step," said Ritchie, "is to come up with a repeating refrain, a phrase, a 'hook' that reaches out and grabs you!"

Here, the Psalmist has introduced us to the refrain.

The walk down memory lane continues as the Psalmist recalls God's redemptive work for:

II. Those Confined in Prison (vv. 10-16)

The picture here is one of gloom and doom—prisoners in chains. The darkness and dominion described here were the result of rebellion against the words of God (v. 11). To reject God's guidance is to invite misery into our lives. To obey God is to experience light and liberty. Again, they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them.

Satan purposes to *blind* us and *bind* us. Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). But Christ came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners . . . to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

We certainly can't be proud of the fact that for years blacks were enslaved and mistreated in our country. On August 1, 1834, 700,000 British colonial slaves were set free. Churches and chapels were open throughout the colonies as the slaves crowded into them on the evening of July 31. As the hour of midnight approached, they fell upon their knees and awaited the moment hushed in silent prayer. When midnight came, they sprang to their feet, and the celebration began. The chains were broken, and

the slaves were free at last. On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln in the historic Emancipation Proclamation declared that all slaves in America should be set free, bringing joy to the captives. However, the greatest pronouncement concerning freedom ever to fall on human ears came not from Lincoln but from Jesus Christ, who declared, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36, KJV).

As strange as it may sound, we are freed from sin only as we are bound to Jesus Christ. *There is a freedom that's slavery*, brought about by rebellion. *There is a slavery that's freedom*, brought about by obedience. Absolute freedom remains a myth. Every one of us is bound either to sin or to the Savior. Paul alludes to this in his letter to the Romans: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to

◇

Songs of thanksgiving praise God in response to His deliverance.

◇

obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

The only logical response from the redeemed captives is thanksgiving to our divine Deliverer, the loving Liberator. So the Psalmist repeats the refrain, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unending love and his wonderful deeds for men" (v. 15). (Quote or sing "I'm Free," Gaither's gospel song.)

The redeemed include those who were lost in desert places, those who were confined in prison, and the Psalmist adds:

III. Those Who Suffered Sickness (vv. 17-22)

According to v. 17, some experienced suffering due to their sin and rebellion. They are termed "fools"

here. Fools are not those who are ignorant but those who are morally perverse. It is foolish to live for today with little or no thought of tomorrow.

Sin is fun—but only for a season. Satan's seductive method lures us by the glamour and gaiety of sin, blinding us to its consequences. The "booze business" spends millions to market its products in attractive wrappings (men enjoying the scenic outdoors, suggesting, "It doesn't get any better than this"; romantic candlelight dinners made "perfect" by just the right wine; and now a cute canine named Spuds McKenzie shows all the "party animals" how to really have fun). All of that sounds innocent. Hidden, however, are those whose lives have been devastated by alcohol and drugs. Here's the kind of thing Satan wouldn't want us to see, a poem expressing the emotional turmoil of an 11-year-old whose family was wrecked by alcoholism:

*Life can be bitter
Like a cold winter day.
Your head with ideas,
But with nothing to say.
Life can be cruel,
Straying with guilt,
Struggling with sorrow,
Till conscience is built.
Coming and going without a heed,
Life can be bitter, bitter indeed.*

Hollywood highlights the "pleasure" of sexual sins but veils the children who cry themselves to sleep at night, the sexually transmitted diseases, and the guilt-related anxiety. Beware the master deceiver. Sin has its consequences. "Don't bite the apple 'til you check for worms!" If you are bent on having a fling, don't forget it carries a sting.

Throughout history, some people have traced sickness to sin. All suffering does not result from sin. Good people are subject to sickness, disease, and accidents. The righteous, the redeemed do not find themselves immune to suffering. What shall we do when we experience pain? Cry out to the Lord for deliverance. He speaks His word and *heals*.

Let me address the issue of healing. Obviously God cares about our physical being, for Jesus "put a face on God" and "healed many who had various diseases" (Mark 1:34). Even

the casual reader of the New Testament recognizes the high priority that Jesus placed on healing: "Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sickness" (Luke 5:15). But we're perplexed when our cries for healing go unheeded. Our problem lies in the fact that we tend to view healing as only the instantaneous, miraculous restoration of health. Healing is much broader than that. It encompasses God's enablement of the medical profession; it involves the psychological and emotional coping with physical pain; it ultimately means divine deliverance to the Holy City, where "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev. 21:4).

We, therefore, join the choir of the redeemed who sing thanksgiving to Him for healing. Perhaps by now the repeating refrain has "hooked" you: "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and

his wonderful deeds for men" (v. 21). (Quote or sing "Rise and Be Healed")

The fourth and final group described here are:

IV. Those Who Experienced Chaotic Storms (vv. 23-32)

The sea, in ancient literature, represented chaos, unrest, even the forces of evil. Biblical writers frequently drew on the imagery of water, the seas, the deep (e.g., Red Sea, Leviathan sea monster). Here the Psalmist tells of those seafaring merchants who had been delivered from a tempestuous sea by the storm, and guided them to their haven.

Jesus demonstrated power over the seas himself. He astonished His disciples by walking on the water (Mark 6:48) and stilling a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8:24). Because of His redemptive work on the Cross, we received the promise of an inheritance in the New Jerusalem,

where, John says, "there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1, KJV).

Are you in a storm today? Storms can be *frightful*. We disciples are usually *fearful*. But remember, God is *faithful*. (Quote or sing "Peace in the Midst of the Storm.")

Rejoice: "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men" (v. 31). Let this repeating refrain be stamped on your minds.

Conclusion: These refrains suggest that the psalm was used antiphonally in worship. Each section deals with a distinct reason for gratitude, and possibly the worshipers shared in the singing of that section most appropriate to their own situation. He has brought salvation, liberation, healing, and peace. As we read together the psalm, would you stand during the section that means most to you today and repeat the refrain with me. 

Evangelistic Preaching in Today's Pulpit

(Continued from page 37)

the point is the obvious, plain commands of God within the hearing of all the Israelites in the wilderness. When the gospel is delivered in the power of the Spirit, grace is present and ready to be received. An invitation should be given.

An invitation to receive Christ, though, is not something that happens after the sermon is over. It could and should happen then, of course. Yet the invitation is inherent in the gospel message itself.

An example is found in John 8. Jesus is defending His authority to the Jews, and He speaks of the purpose of His coming. The section ends with a fascinating result: "As he spake these words, many believed on him" (v. 30, KJV). He did not give a closing invitation, but the invitation was so entwined in the message that while Jesus was speaking, many were putting their faith in Him.

We dare not preach the good news of Jesus as Savior without this evangelistic thrust that invites men and women, boys and girls to come and drink from the Fountain. The "Come, all you who are thirsty" of

Isaiah 55 must be in the very heart of all preachers who understand God's call to proclaim the gospel.

These, then, are the four ingredients of historical evangelistic preaching: teaching basic Christianity, proclaiming Jesus as the Savior and Lord, arguing the reasonableness of faith in Christ, and inviting people to come to Christ.

Recently the need to preach the gospel regularly came home to me. A man in his 60s who had attended church for years and who had made a profession of faith before the church leaders came to my office. His wife had recently suffered a stroke, and the Lord was using the pain of this illness to work on his heart. He was driving to a distant part of town when the Holy Spirit's conviction was so strong that he turned his car around and came straight to see me.

He had heard the gospel preached again and again in recent years. He knew that he had missed the forgiveness of sins and salvation in Christ promised in the Bible. After a brief conversation, he bowed his head and received Christ.

The gospel preaching from the pulpit week after week was used by God to bring this man to the Savior.

People in the pew need to hear the glorious gospel preached regularly. Not only does the nonprofessing guest need it, but our children need it, nominal Christians need it, backsliders need it, weak believers need it, and growing disciples need it.

There is nothing that so stimulates, encourages, warms the heart, and lights a fire in the heart as the powerful declaration of the saving love of Jesus through pulpit evangelism.

Evangelistic preaching is not just for the crusade. It needs reviving in Christian pulpits of our day if there is to be a revival in our land. 

1. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 76.

2. Henry C. Fish, *Power in the Pulpit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust), 6.

3. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1976).

4. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Evangelistic Preaching at Aberavon* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust), 1983), 65 f.

5. Isaac Watts, *An Exhortation to Ministers* (Swengel, Pa.: Reiner Publications, 1970), 38.

Where Was God When My Son Was Killed?

by Morris Chalfant

Bourbonnais, Ill.



Since the dawn of civilization, people have had to face hardships and suffering. They have had to cope with floods, storms, drought, plagues of insects, misunderstandings, and misfortune. People have been stricken down with illness, accidents, calamity, and death.

On November 1, 1990, the *Kankakee Daily Journal* front page said, "Olivet students in fatal wreck: 1 dead, 10 injured, 3 of those critical."

The hardest question a minister ever has to face is "Why did God let this happen?" "This" may be the death of a child, the lingering agony of a cancer patient, the capricious destruction of a tornado, the mute suffering of an animal, the wanton act of a depraved criminal. Suffering arises from any tragedy that arouses in a human heart a sudden stab of self-pity or compassion.

Inability to find a satisfactory answer to the great "Why?" is the chief cause of religious doubt. Millions of people have become practical atheists, if not professing atheists, because they have found it impossible to believe that a loving and omnipotent God could cause or allow so much pain and evil.

Compelled by indescribable pain and loneliness, Jesus lifted up His face to the heavens and flung His "Why" against the darkness: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, KJV).

His cry was not a piece of play-acting. It was the cry of a tortured soul who, in one terrible moment, experienced the concentrated anguish and despair of mankind. The

cry of Jesus matched the darkness that hung over the earth, for it was the cry of the lonely, heartbroken Man passing through the dark night of suffering. In the Scriptures, there is no verse more difficult to explain. But Jesus was never closer to the suffering heart of humanity than when He uttered this cry.

Suffering is one of life's inevitable experiences. No one escapes it. No one permanently evades it. Pain is as personal and inevitable as death.

What does a person do when life caves in? How does one go on living when the world as he has known it comes to an end? When life, happy and meaningful, has jolted to a stop. And pain—gripping, throbbing, searing pain—burns like fire in the bones and flesh. A sob seeps up from the soul, and every cell of his brain cries out: "I can't go on! I just can't go on!"

The midnight of the soul does come. It came to George B. Lieberman one night when the train on which he rode jumped the tracks and rolled down an embankment. From that night on, the rabbi knew pain—real pain. His legs were crushed. Then followed the long, lonely, pain-filled hours and days and months when, added to the physical pain, came the mental anguish of believing his ministry was at an end. Here is what he said about pain: "There are two ways to conquer pain: either we can try to escape it, or we can try to make it useful. . . . Pain is a cruel master. But can it not be a teacher?"

Dorothy Dix, the Ann Landers of a generation ago, wrote for newspaper audiences of some 30 million. She

told how soon after she was married at 18, her husband developed a serious illness. With no means of support, she had to get a job to provide for both of them, which she did for the remaining 35 years of her husband's life.

During those hard, early days, many of her would-be friends urged her to get a divorce. She indignantly refused: "I could not tell others to be strong if I myself did not have the strength to endure. My mother taught me to speak the truth, to fear God, and to remember that gentle folks don't whine."

The noted columnist was able to understand other people's problems better because of what she herself was called on to endure.

Cardinal Mercier, following the bombing of his cathedral, the destruction of his books, and the slaying of some of his students in cold blood, wrote, "Suffering accepted and used will give you a serenity which may well prove the most exquisite fruit of your life."

Long ago on a high hill, three men were hanged on similar crosses. They suffered the same pain. The same thing happened to all three, even though they were so different in the quality of their lives and char-

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The Delight of the Struggling Church

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Windham, Maine

My family and I have pastored a small congregation in the heart of New England for almost 10 years. Over the years we have discovered the romance of the struggling church.

Financially, it has been difficult continually. With only about 50 in worship on Sunday mornings, church income is low. Nevertheless, my family has faced up to the challenge to "make do." Consequently, the laity have taken on responsibilities not thought of in more affluent congregations.

For instance, laypersons donate paper supplies to the church, including paper cups and plates, hand towels, facial tissue, and toilet paper. They also provide juice for the Communion as well as gasoline for the lawn mower and salt in winter for the icy porch and driveway. The children's volunteer music director provides whatever materials are used in singing with the children. A week never goes by that someone does not put a fresh box of white candles in the sanctuary for the candleabra.

Until recently, we used sample materials of Sunday School supplies for our Christian education classes. We got these from a variety of interdenominational publishing houses. When one class had finished with the items, they were frequently recycled for the next group of boys and girls.

Last year the roof started to leak.



We collected enough money to get half the roof covered, and soon we will collect more funds for the second half. Naturally, the labor was supplied by men from the congregation. The women provided the lunches on workdays.

Of course, all maintenance work on the church property is volunteered by laity. This includes cleaning the building, building repairs, and upkeep of the lawn. One of the families shares its electric shrub cutter with the church, and another shares its carpet cleaning machine.

The only paid staff person is the pastor; and he is bivocational. The organist and pianist as well as all soloists give their talents gladly.

Usually each winter there is an extra appeal made for heating funds in order to pay the oil bills. No one complains. The people are committed. Ninety-five percent of them tithe as well as give sacrificial love offerings besides.

The heat is turned up only a few hours before group gatherings in the church building. Care is taken to see that the thermostats are turned down and lights are turned off upon leaving the building.

When it comes to cleaning supplies—soaps, wax, cleansers, mops, brooms, etc.—the people supply them. They pick up a few extra items for the church when doing their weekly shopping.

Obviously, there is no petty cash fund nor a church savings account or endowments. What comes in the weekly offerings is what pays the local church bills. Most of the parishioners are blue collar workers. No one is wealthy.

Besides the local expenses, the congregation is asked to contribute to the denomination on both the district and general levels. Token amounts are paid on each. Presently

we are in communication with the denominational headquarters to request a study of contributions made by the struggling congregation, asking that they be reduced to a more realistic amount.

Nevertheless, with the weekly crunch financially, the local people reach out with glad hearts. Each year they prepare several boxes of food supplies for a medical center in Washim, India. They also give largely to the two primary missions appeals annually from the denomination.

Every week, the local church provides a noon fellowship meal—casseroles, salads, desserts, beverages—for anyone, without cost. Consequently, when there are visitors to morning worship, they are invited to remain for lunch.

The congregation also oversees a free clothing center in the church downstairs. This community service has been in operation for nine years. Items are made available to the church and nonchurch; no questions are ever asked of anyone receiving clothing.

On the first Sunday afternoon of each month, the local worshippers travel to a neighborhood convalescent home to conduct a hymn sing for the residents. At holiday time, our people prepare and distribute small gifts to those at the home.

In the foyer of the church one of the parishioners mans a Christian bookstore. Bibles, devotional books, study aids, stationery, gift items, and the like are on display.

This congregation was founded in 1943. It has had a difficult history; nevertheless, it has survived. But more important, it has remained one of the countless clusters of vibrant believers. Its worshippers are not morose or ingrown. They are dedicated

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The Preretirement Years: Emotional Preparation

by Dennis Apple

Olathe, Kans.

As you approach retirement age, you will probably check out your pension plans, tax-sheltered annuities, and other anticipated retirement income. However, you may give very little attention to the emotional preparations you need to make in order to insure a successful retirement. If you have not made these necessary emotional preparations, you could be in for big trouble.

For over 15 years I have served as a senior adult minister and have been positioned to observe both laymen and clergy as they make the transition from "active" to "retired." Those who look ahead and prepare themselves enter retirement with little or no problem. Others are tremendously shocked and surprised at the changes retirement brings to them, and they are the ones who suffer greatly. Someone aptly has said that mountain climbing is a very dangerous sport, but that climbing down the mountain is even more dangerous. Retirement, for the unprepared, can be very dangerous. However, it can also be the most rewarding time in your life.

Let's look at some statistics. In 1900 life expectancy in the United States was about 47 for a man and 51 for a woman. Only 10 percent of the population reached "middle age." Today the average is 74 for men and 78 for women. People reaching their 65th birthday this year can expect to live, on average, 15 more years. Fortunately, this increased longevity does not mean those last years must be endured in bad health or senility. Today's 70-year-olds often resemble yesterday's 40-year-olds—quite a different

picture from "Whistler's mother," who epitomized old age a century ago and was only 44 when she sat for that famous painting!

One of the big shocks for which you must prepare is the change in your role from pastor to pastor emeritus or retired pastor. When you retire, you move suddenly from pastor to retired pastor; from pulpit to pew; from a ringing telephone to silence; from sermon preparation to sermon listening; from chairman of the board to church member. These are not easy transitions. In fact, such drastic changes can be dangerous.

Pitfalls of Retirement

What are some of the pitfalls of retirement? What dangers lurk ahead? Two pitfalls seem to stand out.

1. Moving away from a community in which you have given a portion of your life in ministry often is a heart-wrenching experience. However, if you move into another pastorate, the pain of leaving friends is eased somewhat by the new relationships. When you retire, you leave a familiar church and community where you have filled a well-established role to become part of a new church and community where you are virtually unknown and where there is no waiting, well-defined role for you to fill. Soon, you can come to feel as if you are in exile.

Oh sure, it is great to travel, see the kids and grandkids, play a few rounds of golf, and read that book without the interruption of the phone. But after a while, you miss not being needed anymore. The fishing, golf, and free time all begin to lose their appeal. In short, you begin

to miss some of the pressure points, and you wish again for the times when people "needed you."

2. Another danger is the severing of ties from district and general church offices. While some of you grudgingly fulfill district and general church office responsibilities, others of you enjoy them and are saddened when you must hand in your letter of resignation.

Strategies for Retirement

What can you do when you suddenly find yourself headed for retirement and must face these dangers?

1. Church. If you move to a new area, you must realize that you now have the option to be involved as much as you wish. You control the degree of your involvement. Many ministers take a part-time staff position at a local church or do supply preaching. Others give their services as chaplain or counselor at a local hospital. Many district church leaders wisely use retired elders to teach special courses or help tutor ministers who are taking the home study courses.

2. Family. Retirement can be the time when the family ties can be strengthened. Perhaps the pressures of full-time ministry have taken their toll. Now, you have the opportunity to spend much more time with your companion and enjoy the fruit of your years in "ministry memories." Also, you have more time to spend with grandchildren.

3. Travel. Still another positive thing about retirement is the opportunity for travel. Older adults are traveling as never before. Someone anonymously penned the following poem that describes grandmothers who are no longer sitting in their rocking chairs.

*In the dim and distant past,
When life's tempo wasn't fast,
Grandma used to rock and knit,
Crochet, tat, and baby-sit.
When the kids were in a jam,
They could always count on
"Gram";
In the age of gracious living,
Grandma was the gal for giving.
Grandma now is in the gym,
Exercising to keep slim;
She's off touring with the bunch,
Taking clients out to lunch.*

*Driving north to ski or curl,
All her days are in a whirl;
Nothing seems to stop or block
her,
Now that Grandma's off her
rocker!**

4. Study. Keep your mind alive and growing. Every minister, out of necessity, reads a lot. He is compelled to read if he would feed his flock adequately. However, in retirement you now have the opportunity to read for your own interest and pleasure rather than reading through the "sermon lens." I know of one retired minister who has a great interest in any material written about Paul. In fact, he has made an agreement with a church college library in which they will send him one book a month on the subject of Paul.

At last check he had read over 20 books on the subject.

Other options are open to help keep your mind stimulated and growing. Consider taking a course at a nearby college or university. You may be surprised to discover the low-cost tuitions available to older adults. Still another educational opportunity is the elder-hostel program. Started in 1978, it combines travel with a week-long educational experience at a college or university. For more information on the subject, write:

Elder Hostel
100 Boylston St.
Boston, MA 02116

5. Hobby. Another way to enjoy retirement is to invest more time in your hobby. Perhaps it's time to dust

off the stamp books or get out that can of Indian-head nickels you have been saving back. Or, maybe you have always had an interest in ham radio but didn't have time to learn the theory or Morse code. Now is the time to rejuvenate those old interests in hobbies or to start a new one.

To be sure, retirement will be very different. Your ability to retire successfully will be tied directly to your ability to handle change. One can bemoan retirement, live in the past, and mournfully long for the "good old days"; or one can look for new opportunities of serving in this new chapter of life.

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Avoiding Anti-Semitism

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meant for the hypocritical, self-serving, and immoral segments of the Jewish population, not for Jews as a social or ethnic category or Judaism as a religion.

The sect of the Pharisees, which lasted for only a few centuries, is often portrayed as representative of the legalism of contemporary or modern Judaism. Take a few moments to mention the strong spiritual, even mystical, temperament of Judaism from the Book of Enoch through the medieval cabalists and up to modern Hasidic theologians, such as Martin Buber.

Deal carefully with the fact that Judaism as a religion does not accept the deity of Christ. Do not imply that this rejection is somehow an ethnic or racial trait or unique to Judaism. All non-Christian religions by definition reject the deity of Christ: this may seem obvious to the profes-

sional theologian, but it is less so to the average layman, who may never come into contact with members of any non-Christian group except Jews.

Good Friday and Easter have traditionally been occasions of the strongest and most blatantly anti-Semitic sermons. During the Middle Ages, passion plays often functioned as opportunities for Christian townspeople to become enraged and abuse the local Jewish community. Secular officials often forbade Jews from leaving the ghettos on Good Friday, for their own protection. While it may not seem necessary to rebuff the old accusation that Jews as a group are responsible for the death of Jesus, this accusation still crops up from time to time, usually in the diluted form that Jews are somehow opposed to Christian ideals and institutions. Choose your

words carefully in sermons on these days.

Paul bases his theology to a great extent on an opposition of law and faith. The dichotomy between Judaism (law) and Christianity (faith) is, however, false; an interest in spiritual matters has been characteristic of many Jewish sects, and overt carnality has been rampant during several periods of Christian history. Instead of saying, "Judaism," say, "Some sects of Judaism" or "First-century Judaism." Avoid using any references to *groups* at all by saying, "People bound by the law."

Of course, the minister does not need to carefully scrutinize every word he says at the pulpit. An increased sensitivity to how expressions may be—and are—misconstrued, together with an increased use of the rich tradition of Jewish theology and spirituality, is sufficient.

The Delight of the Struggling Church

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Christians who, in this contemporary world of religious confusion, remain loyal to the gospel.

The people remain faithful to Sunday and Wednesday Bible studies as well as weekly worship. They can be counted upon to carry out their duties in music, ushering, Sunday

School teaching, meal preparation, and volunteer labor. Then they add to all of that their consistent tithes and offerings.

There is an encouraging sense of church family—unity in love—among all the people, from little tots to the elderly. Therefore, when

we gather, we feel the splendor of being the people of God. In this we find our satisfaction. We may be a small, struggling congregation, but we love God, each other, and those about us. Above all else, we know that we are doing our part in the kingdom of God.



The Hang-up of Self-pity

by Raymond C. Kratzer

Yakima, Wash.

The words of God to Joshua, following the death of Moses, contain timeless truth relevant to every minister today. This able leader faced baffling problems that would cause most of us to tremble with apprehension. One sees the humanity of Joshua as he returned from Moses' funeral. He viewed the Promised Land and, no doubt, remembered his visit there 40 years earlier. He remembered the faith and courage he possessed at that time. Now in retrospect, he recalled the rebellious, cowardly people who could not be persuaded by such a dynamic leader as Moses to take possession of the land of Canaan, notwithstanding the tremendous miracles God had wrought among them. What could Joshua hope to do with them?

Before him the Jordan River loomed as a threat during its flood tide. He pondered his assignment as the appointed leader in Moses' place. His knees no doubt were shaking. His hands were sweaty, and his heart pounded a tattoo of fear. Then he heard God speak: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9, KJV).

The call of God loomed before him; suddenly his backbone stiffened. Spiritual power surged through every part of him. Indecision was over. Fear and self-pity were denied an audience as he commanded the people to "pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land" (v. 11,

KJV). The rest of the story is splashed with the radiant colors of victory and conquest. Joshua had unloosed himself from the hang-up of self-pity and left this barbed deterrent behind him.

This saga is a parable for the minister of God today. The setting may be different, but the details are basically the same. A pastor is constantly faced with foreboding circumstances, in and out of his church. Too much introspection may cause him to become inoculated with the virus of self-pity. If his charge is small, he is threatened with inadequate leadership, insufficient funds, poor facilities, and a dim prospect for growth.

Before him lies the potential for growth in the hundreds of unsaved people in his community. But between him and them the "Jordan River" of uncertainties threatens to destroy his attempts to conquer them for Christ. He has so few to marshal as an army of conquest because of the size of his congregation. He is tempted to mark time, hoping for a miracle, but doing little to make it happen. Unfortunately, this delay causes him to succumb to self-pity, which, in turn, becomes a hang-up that thwarts all progress.

If one targets on the problems rather than the promises, he is headed for a stalemate. Regardless of the size of his church, or its apparent strength, if a pastor is not careful, he will find something about which to complain. If dwelt upon too long, this blue note becomes a dirge that will infiltrate every area of his life and ultimately affect his entire congregation.

In every church there is a broad gamut of personalities. Some are phlegmatic, some are enthusiastic, and some are in-between. Our job is to marshal all of our forces and challenge them to the highest and best that God has for them. It isn't easy, but "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26, KJV).

Progress eludes us if we succumb to self-pity. It's so easy to look at another church or pastor and think, How fortunate to be in such grand circumstances. We think that if we just had a chance like that, we could really turn the world upside down. However, it is entirely possible that if we knew the facts, we would discover that he has burdens to bear that almost crush him at times. But, in his refusal to complain or to pity himself, he has an aura of power and victory that wipes out defeat and discouragement.

General Wainright, following his release from prison after the war in the Far East, was asked what held him steady during those long months as a prisoner of war. He replied that his refusal to succumb to self-pity saved him.

God has given us the ability to be the masters of our circumstances through the power of His Holy Spirit. We do not need to be stymied



on the hang-up of self-pity in the work of the Lord.

Illustrations everywhere challenge us to rejoice in spite of circumstances. The little canary bird singing in his cage is confined in limited surroundings. Yet he sings. Possibly as he looks out the window and sees other birds flying, he pities them. He thinks how they must hustle for their food while his is brought to him every day. When winter snows come and cold winds howl, he feels sorry for the other birds because he is so comfortable and warm.

If God can so care for the birds, whether in a small environment or vast open spaces, and keep them happy through it all, He is certainly able to satisfy us in whatever assignment He places us.

Victory for any church and pastor involves the growth and development of his people. When progress is being made, there comes a natural degree of satisfaction and joy. When these factors are absent, there is a tendency to be dismayed or discouraged. Such feelings are not abnormal or unacceptable unless they persist. They should motivate us to prayer, and faith, and to the God who has promised to "supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, KJV).

If progress and growth are delayed too long, it is wise to search for causes. In the pursuit of hindrances that block the flow of God's power and grace, it may be that you will chance upon a sharp snag called "hang-up of self-pity." If removed, marvelous things will begin to hap-

pen. It is amazing how the attitude of a leader can change the outlook of scores of other people.

When I was a teenager, our pastor resigned because of deep family problems. His children had gone with the world and had broken his heart. He couldn't get on top of this hurt and blamed his leadership in the home for the loss of his family. He was defeated, discouraged, and unable to function adequately in serving our church. The people loved him and prayed for him, but he was unable to completely "cast [his] burden upon the Lord" (Ps. 55:22, KJV) and allow this experience to be a stepping-stone through which new insights could have changed the whole picture.

He resigned a few months before district assembly time. Budgets were unpaid, church bills were far behind, and people were discouraged. The attitude of a defeated pastor, although a good man, had infiltrated the entire church.

The new pastor came with a sense of optimism and assurance. He looked at the whole situation and emphasized the promises of God. There was no sign of defeat in his voice or manner. He analyzed the problem and formulated a plan; and, to the amazement of all, the church rallied, raised necessary money to pay all bills, and surged forward to amazing growth.

The same God who assured Joshua that He would be with him is alive today. While here on earth, He promised to be with us "always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20, KJV). He is able to change your perspective from "self" to "Savior." He is able to save not only from the penalty of sin, and from the power of sin, but also from the corrosive influence of anxious care and discouraging circumstances.

Jesus said: "Lift up your eyes, and look" (John 4:35, KJV). There is opportunity, there is conquest, there is territory to be possessed! There are latent talents to be utilized, successful methods to be adopted, and dreams to be realized.

God is saying, "As I was with Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Gideon, and Paul, so will I be with you. Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed. Go in and possess the land; it's yours."

Where Was God When My Son Was Killed?

(Continued from page 47)

acters. The important observation is that the effects of their suffering were not the same. Suffering hardened, coarsened, and embittered one of them. He went from this world with a curse upon his lips. The second was softened and made penitent by his suffering. He left this world with a prayer for forgiveness upon his lips. The third Man, who hung upon the central Cross, by His suffering was made a Savior. One thief begged for His forgiveness. Hardened soldiers at the foot of the Cross were softened and confessed that truly this Man was the Son of God. The same suffering came to all three, but the effects were different. Why? The answer is that what suffering does to you depends upon what you choose to do with it.

The story is told of Mark Twain and William Howells coming out of church one morning to find that it was raining hard. They stood for a while, watching it pour down. Howells finally said, "Do you think it will ever stop?"

Twain answered, "It always has."

No matter how hard trouble rains down on you, or for how long, a letup will come, the sun will shine again, and your heart will rejoice. God will see to that—if you trust Him.

Trust Him, then! Trust God in a troubled time—when minds and hearts and homes and cities and nations are being torn to pieces by troubles of every kind. Whoever you are, and wherever you are in this troubled world, call upon Him. Trust for His deliverance, for it will surely come. He has promised it. In troubled times like these, God is able.

"Where was God when my son was killed?" An angry father demanded an answer from the pastor who came to comfort him.

The pastor simply replied:

"In the same place where He was when His Son was killed."

It was a wise reply to a difficult question. Why is there suffering in this world? Why do the innocent seem to suffer while the guilty go free?

The answers to these age-old questions do not lie at the end of a philosophical argument. No philosopher can heal the agony or explain the mystery of suffering. Only God can do that. **God's greatest answer to suffering is found on the Cross outside Jerusalem when His Son died for the sins of the world.**

Longevity in the Pastorate



by **Croft M. Pentz**
Union, N.J.

To stay or not to stay—this age-old question faces thousands of pastors yearly. Some have made hasty decisions to leave, only to hurt their ministry and God's work.

Few pastors overstay in a church. Most leave too quickly. No firm figures are available, but it is estimated that the average term of a pastorate is about three years.

Recently several church board members, discussing this subject, posed some pertinent questions:

"How do pastors expect the laymen to know God's will for their lives when it is apparent they don't know God's will for their own lives?"

"Do you think it is God's will to change pastors every three years?"

There are exceptions when a certain pastor's ministry is needed for only a short term. But generally a minister can accomplish little in a few years. It often takes that much time to get adjusted to the community, people, and culture of the area. Rarely do you find a successful, growing church without a pastor of long tenure.

Having spent 28 years in the same pastorate, plus observing and speaking to other pastors with long years of service in one church, I've learned some requirements for a long tenure as pastor.

Preaching

One minister remarked after pastoring three years, "I have to leave; I'm running out of sermons." It is ap-

parent he did not use the Bible as his Sourcebook!

The pastor with a good pulpit ministry can remain long at the same church. People will drive a distance to hear someone expound on God's Word week by week.

It is easier to be a promoter than a preacher. It is easier to use gimmicks and giveaways to get a crowd than to preach the gospel. Effective preaching will mean a daily disciplined study of God's Word. That will be the number one priority.

A good Bible preacher will spend as much time on his Sunday night sermons as he does on the Sunday morning message. When he is well prepared, the people will listen. There will be lasting results.

Some ministers have been in the same pastorate 40 years, preaching four times each week. They haven't run out of sermon material!

Leadership

The pastor is called by God not only to preach but also to lead. He doesn't force people to follow; he inspires them.

For people to follow, the leader must know where he is going and how to get there. He must have certain goals. People will not follow an uncertain leader or one who doesn't inspire confidence.

Evangelist D. L. Moody said, "It is better to train 10 people to work than to do the work of 10 people." The true leader will know how to delegate responsibility.

Great minds are not born—they are made! With the God-given calling and authority, the pastor must work at knowing how to lead people.

Patience

Patience is a necessary requirement. An impatient pastor loses the respect of his people and community.

Impatience shows a lack of maturity. Since the pastor is in the spotlight, his lack of patience is evident to people. After all, he is the leader. He is called of God. He should set the example.

He must be patient when misunderstood and criticized. Jesus was perfect, and He was misunderstood. As we represent Him, we can expect criticism as well. The more aggressive the pastor is, the more he is misunderstood. Some of the worst criticism will come from the religious world.

He must be patient in solving problems and not run from them. Some churches have deep-seated problems because when difficulties arose, the pastor resigned instead of settling them.



He must be patient when there is a lack of growth. In most churches there is a time of growth, a time of leveling off, and sometimes a time when people move. God wants us to be patient in sowing the seed. He will bring the results.

Vision

The pastor needs a fourfold vision, which should be renewed often.

1. *Vision of God.* God is holy; He demands holiness and wants His servants to preach it often.

2. *Vision of self.* We should see ourselves as God sees us; see ourselves as utterly hopeless and helpless without God; see that any success is not in our abilities but in God working in and through us.

3. *Vision of Calvary.* We need to see Jesus upon the Cross, feeling His agony, realizing the price He paid for our salvation.

4. *Vision of the lost.* Constantly we must see lost people—those in our city, county, state, nation, and world. With such a vision, one will not be content with only the success of his church.

As the pastor maintains this fourfold vision, he will pass it on to those to whom he ministers each week.

Prayer

The pastor needs a daily quiet time of prayer and also a continuing attitude of prayer. Such praying helps him remain in God's will.

One pastor said in jest, "While I was praying about God's will to leave, my wife was packing." Humorous but true.

Paul, the greatest of all preachers, said when he met the Lord: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6, KJV). Jesus made this prayer: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Ethics

Regardless of a pastor's ability to preach, counsel, build, organize, or win the lost, without proper ethics he will not remain long at the same church. Neither will his ministry be effective.

1. *Honesty.* Always be honest. Keep your word. Say what you mean; mean what you say. Any type of dishonesty can cause a lack of respect among the people.

Don't use the church as a means to get personal discounts. Don't take advantage of the businessman who gives discounts to the church and expect personal favors from him.

2. *Confidence.* When someone confides in you, keep that confidence. There is no reason to share it—not even with your wife.

3. *Finances.* Always pay your bills on time. If you have difficulty in meeting a payment, make proper arrangements with your creditors. Some ministers have run up big bills, then left the area, bringing disgrace to God's work. Live within your means. Learn how to handle credit cards.

4. *Opposite sex.* Always maintain the proper relationship with the opposite sex. So many fall prey to Satan in this area.

No one's ministry can be any greater than his ethics. Poor ethics negates all the good qualities, causing a minister to leave the pastorate

Rarely do you find a successful, growing church without a pastor of long tenure.

before he has fulfilled God's will in that area.

Enthusiasm

It is easier to sell a product if an enthusiastic approach is used. The pastor must be a salesman. He must be positive.

The special building program, missionary support, or any project for advancement can be sold to the people if presented properly with enthusiasm.

History shows how impossibilities became possible through the most unlikely people. David could slay Goliath because he had not only faith but also enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm creates a climate for faith. Faith causes the spiritual tide to rise. Miracles result as faith rises in the lives of people.

Public Relations

Some pastors need special training in public relations. They never seem to get along with people.

Will Rogers said, "I never met a man I didn't like." With the proper relations, the pastor can say, "I've never met a person I couldn't get along with."

God didn't call the pastor to change everyone into his image or to expect everyone to agree with his plans. Thank God, not all people are "yes people"! If so, tragedy would set in. The pastor would become a dictator.

The pastor must learn how to handle everyone in his way. He must learn to be flexible and willing to make adjustments—unless principle is involved.

A veteran pastor said, "About 95 percent of a pastor's problems are caused by himself." How true! Don't make an issue over something unimportant.

Proper Mate

Often a pastor with little talent and ability has risen to the top because of a wife who encouraged, helped, and inspired him.

But how often a man with talent, ability, and personality has failed because his wife lacked a spirit of sacrifice, dedication, and acceptance of God's will.

Some pastors have had to move to keep peace with a mate who wanted to live close to her home or just got tired of living at the same place.

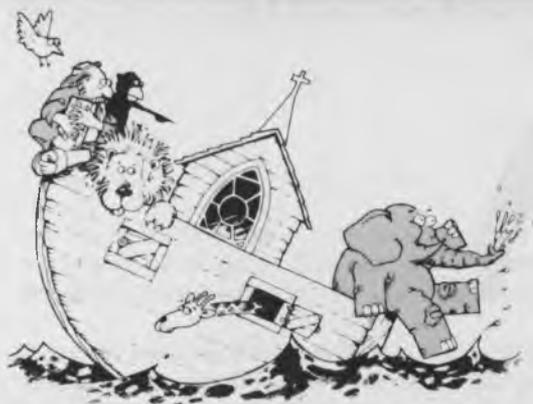
Imagine the sorrow that awaits the mate who always wanted her way instead of God's will for her husband and God's work.

On the other hand, what a future reward that dedicated wife will receive if she has faithfully contributed to the success of God's servant, and thus of God's work.

Summary

Never resign your church on Monday morning. Never resign when tired. Never resign quickly. Think it through. Pray it through. With hard work, new converts, and a spirit of revival, you will have a new church.

A long-term pastorate will require daily discipline, daily dedication, and daily determination. The rewards are too numerous to mention. The respect of the members, community, and fellow pastors will be most fulfilling. Above all, seeing the results of one's labor and having the assurance of being in God's will are rewards beyond compare.



You Need a Gossip Queen

Sharon always knew everything going on in the church. Most of the time she knew it before I did. I assumed that since I was a wonderfully caring shepherd, all my flock would come to me with their hurts and concerns. I assumed I would be the first to hear about members in the hospital. I assumed people would tell me that their husbands, wives, and children missed church because they were sick—and not because they didn't get out of bed in time. I assumed that couples with marital problems would call me, admit they needed help, and seek my wise counsel.

I assumed wrong. Often I didn't know my members were in the hospital until the hospital called me. I didn't know they were sick until they had almost recovered. However, at least one person in the church knew. Sharon knew. Sharon always knew what was going on.

I soon discovered that our church was not the only one where the pastor was often left in the dark. My friend Harley told me that his first church was the same way. He had been the new pastor for only a couple of months when one of his elderly charter members became ill and died. Harley's first knowledge of the entire incident came when he was asked to preside over the funeral service. By then, it was obviously too late to comfort the departed. Instead of the church members being blessed by Harley's words of comfort at the funeral, they asked, "Where was our pastor when Brother So-and-so fell ill?"

My friend Harley could have used someone like Sharon in his church. Perhaps I should have loaned her to him for the first few months of his pastorate. Nevertheless, once I discovered Sharon's unique talent for information collection, I asked her

to help me do a better job as pastor of the church.

"Sharon," I said, "for some reason you always know what's going on in this church before I do. When you hear something I need to know, can you tell me, please? It would make my job a lot easier. Could you be our official church gossip queen?"

"I don't think I appreciate the title," she said, blushing. "But I'll do what I can."

And she did. I almost never missed anyone that needed me in that church again. From what I hear, she is still on the job, working diligently for the new pastor. I still get news about that church, sometimes before their own members do. Sharon calls or writes and sends the information.

I needed a gossip queen. Harley needed a gossip queen. *You* need a gossip queen. Actually, you already *have* one. Every church has a certain core of necessary people, I have discovered. I have never been in a church, for example, that didn't have at least one elderly lady who can accurately guess the gender of babies developing in the wombs of the church's expectant mothers. Every church has a sound man with an impaired sense of hearing, or a cameraman with weak eyes, or a music leader who is partially tone deaf. And every church has a gossip queen. You *have* one; you may not have discovered her yet. Or, you have discovered her and haven't asked for her help yet. You should ask.

You must, of course, be selective as to the information you want your church gossip queen to give you. True gossip you don't need, shouldn't hear, and shouldn't ask for. As a matter of fact, the gossip queen shouldn't dig for material like that, anyway—for your benefit or hers. More than once, the apostle Paul

told us to avoid gossip and gossipers. True gossip can destroy a church. However, information on who is ill, who is in the hospital, who has gotten hurt, and who has gotten their emotions stepped on is *not* gossip. It is information every pastor needs. And he needs it as soon as he can get it.

Sometimes Sharon told me things I had already learned from others. When that occurred, I thanked her and asked her to keep up the good work.

I have tried to analyze what qualities produce a truly effective church gossip queen for use in my ministerial assignments farther down the road. First, I believe that ladies, and even a few men, with this talent are good listeners. It may be too simplistic, but it seems like those who are paid to speak well and often are not really as good at listening to *others* speak as they believe they are. Quite often, I find myself formulating a response to a question before the question itself has been finished. Gossip queens, conversely, listen more than they talk. Second, good gossip queens are safe to talk to. People trust them with information, knowing it will be delivered accurately, honestly, and discreetly. And third, a good gossip queen is normally a good Christian. Possessing information-gathering talents without the Christian graces to analyze them could make for a truly unfortunate problem. Such an individual would become a storage bin of useless information. Or worse, she would be the feared church gossip. Only the love of Christ tempers this talent and renders it useful to the Body of Christ.

An official church gossip queen can make your job easier. You already have one. The question is this: will you utilize that talent for more efficient ministry?



WORSHIP

& PREACHING

HELPS

Editor's Note:

The brevity of this submitted material is the work of the author under unexpected life changes, not the result of editorial deletions.

September/October/November 1992

Prepared by Stan Toler

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Proverbs is a very practical book. In brief statements Solomon and other writers share maxims, stories, and inspired precepts dealing with life's problems.

The timeless truths of Proverbs will contrast both sides of life for your congregation. From this series you will be able to teach about pride and humility, slothfulness and diligence, poverty and riches, life and death.

The key word in Proverbs is *wisdom*. What is wisdom? It is the power to live life abundantly! The Book of Proverbs will provide detailed instructions for God's people to face real-life issues.

Someone has said, "Reading a proverb takes only a few seconds; applying a proverb could take a lifetime!" May these sermon ideas challenge you to share Christ more effectively through the timeless truths of Proverbs!



Stan Toler

THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 1

September 6, 1992

INTRO:

The key word of Proverbs is *wisdom*. Wisdom is the power that God gives us to live skillfully in the real world. Wisdom is the power to live right in an ungodly world.

The Proverbs have helped me develop a philosophy-of-life statement. Through the knowledge of Scripture, I am able to face everyday problems and to trust Christ to give me the wisdom to apply these truths to the holiness life-style.

The material in each division of Proverbs represents practical theology for the growing Christian. In chapter 1, the key verse to be studied is verse 1. Scholars usually emphasize verse 7 as the "motto of the book."

I. Knowledge Is a Powerful Tool

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (v. 7).

A. Knowledge is the key to understanding life's issues.

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Because God exists, we sincerely believe in Him. To believe in Him is to gain understanding.

B. Knowledge is the key to developing faith.

Knowledge inspires faith. All finite minds need to know about God. God's Word contains His redeeming purpose for mankind.

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

The fear of the Lord produces knowledge, knowledge inspires faith, and faith embraces salvation, for the promise is sure: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord **will** be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

ILLUS. On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made history. Their motorized vehicle defied the law of gravity and flew through the air. The idea wasn't new. Years before the Wright brothers got off the ground at Kitty Hawk, N.C., mathematicians and scientists had proven that flight was possible. But many people who read those facts couldn't believe that flying would ever become a reality. The Wright brothers believed the facts and mathematical formulas. They built the first flying machine. When it became airborne, they demonstrated that you have to trust in the facts and act on them if you want results. The same holds true for our Christian lives. We can know a lot of facts about Jesus Christ, but unless we trust and obey, they do us no good.

II. Knowledge Must Be Used Properly

When Solomon speaks of fear, he is implying a relationship with God. In light of the New Testament, rela-

tionship with God is only possible through our Lord Jesus Christ: "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

How may we apply the knowledge of God?

A. By turning from sin: "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19).

ILLUS. London held its breath in June 1987. While working on a building site, a construction foreman thought his workers had hit a cast-iron pipe while using a pile driver. After picking up and then dropping the huge object, they realized the pipe looked like a bomb. It was—a 2,200-pound World War II bomb, one of the largest the Germans dropped during the blitz, which killed more than 15,000 Londoners. After evacuating the area, a 10-man bomb disposal unit worked 18 hours before deactivating the seven-foot device.

Unconfessed sin, like an unexploded bomb, can rest in the heart of an individual—or in a church. Unless it's deactivated through forgiveness, it can detonate and cause great damage.

B. By fearing God: "The Lord confides in those who fear him" (Ps. 25:14).

C. By giving your life to Christ.

If you want to be connected to the Source of all power, knowledge, and wisdom, you must trust God!

III. Too Much Knowledge Can Present Problems

"Fools despise wisdom and discipline" (v. 7).

A fool does not want to know the truth.

A. A fool suppresses the truth (v. 7).

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Rom. 1:18-19).

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good" (Ps. 14:1).

B. A fool hates the truth (v. 7).

According to Paul, such individuals change the truth of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25).

CONCLUSION:

The wise receive the truth and tell the truth! "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

ILLUS. After William Carey was well established in his pioneer missionary work in India, his supporters in England sent a printer to assist him. Soon the two men were turning out portions of the Bible for distribution. Carey had spent many years learning the language so that

he could produce the Scriptures in the local dialect. He had also prepared dictionaries and grammars for the use of his successors. One day while Carey was away, a fire broke out and completely destroyed the building, the presses, many Bibles, and the precious manuscripts, dictionaries, and grammars. When he returned and was told of the tragic loss, he showed no sign of despair or impatience. Instead, he knelt and thanked God that he still had the strength to do the work over again. He started immediately, not wasting a moment in self-pity. Before his death, he had duplicated and even improved on his earlier achievements.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests
 Song "Come, Christians, Join to Sing"
 Scripture Rom. 15:14

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "To God Be the Glory"
 Hymn "I Am Thine, O Lord"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "Not My Will, but Thine"
 Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings
 Special Music "I Am"
 Message "THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction
 Choral Benediction "Go in His Name"

Creative Worship Ideas

Offering Thought

Let your teens receive the offering today.

Offertory Prayer

Father, You have given so much to us. We now give back to You. Take these gifts and sanctify them to build Your kingdom.

Benediction

"Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped" (Ps. 28:6-7).



" THAT MUST BE QUITE A SERMON YOU'RE WORKING ON, REVEREND. ! "

WISDOM FROM GOD

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 2

September 13, 1992

INTRO:

Since the sin of Adam, mankind has been separated at times from the wisdom of God. Often it is hard for us to understand, interpret, and deal with the issues that life presents.

We need the wisdom of God to cope with problems of life. To understand the wisdom issue, we must think about:

I. Wisdom Is a Gift to Every Believer from God

James shares his interpretation of this gift: "Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (3:15-17).

A. God gives us spiritual wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

The word "lack" means "destitute." When we realize our shortcomings and call on His name, we receive His wisdom! "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

B. God gives us adequate wisdom. Refer again to James 1:5.

Wisdom is the gift God pours out upon His children. James points out that God gives His wisdom to our lack or need. He stands ready to meet our every need.

II. Every Christian Needs More Wisdom

A. We must accept wisdom from God. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you" (v. 1).

Refer back to Prov. 1:7.

B. We must use the wisdom of God to fight sin. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11).

C. We must apply the wisdom of God: "turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding" (v. 2).

Key idea in the original text is "to sharpen the ear" and to "respect" or give "regard" to what God is saying.

Applying wisdom is the whole purpose of seeking God's wisdom. The pressures and problems of life are too great for us. Without His wisdom, we cannot cope! But, as we apply our hearts to the principles of the gos-

pel, we can relate to whatever life brings to us. We need wisdom to

—know how to face layoffs, pay cuts, etc.

—know how to cope with death

III. God's Wisdom Benefits Every Believer

"Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless" (vv. 5-7).

IV. Seeking Wisdom Brings Positive Results to the Believer

A. Christ is the Way to all truth.

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:6).

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked" (Luke 4:22).

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

B. Christ provided for our salvation on Calvary's cross (v. 7). The message of verse 7 contains the thought of our salvation: "And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Only the Scriptures reveal saving grace: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

ILLUS. William Wilberforce was discouraged one night in the early 1790s after defeat in his 10-year battle against the slave trade in England. Tired and frustrated, he opened his Bible and began to leaf through it. A small piece of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written by John Wesley shortly before his death. Wilberforce read it again: "Unless the divine power has raised you up . . . I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that [abominable practice of slavery], which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might."

Wilberforce did keep going and, just before he died in 1833, the House of Commons passed the bill abolishing slavery in England.

C. Christ has provided for our protection through His shed blood (v. 7).

"Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5).

ILLUS. In 1977 Frank Tanana was struggling. He was a young major league pitcher with a sore shoulder. His promising career in baseball was in trouble. His "anything goes" life-style threatened his very existence. He told one reporter, "My contract goes through 1981. I'll be lucky to be alive then—let alone pitching."

Then he saw someone who made a difference—John Werhas, the chaplain for the California Angels. "He cared for people," Frank recalls. "He had something special about him." That "something special" was a personal relationship with Jesus that had changed his life. It wasn't long before Frank had accepted Christ as his Savior. Now, years later, Frank is still pitching—and demonstrating by his life and testimony that Jesus has transformed his life.

CONCLUSION:

Let us seek the gift of wisdom and seek the knowledge of God in all of its fullness.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	
Welcome and Greeting of Guests	
Song	"Come, Let Us Sing"
Scripture	Ps. 122:1
WORSHIP IN SONG	
Hymn	"Blessed Assurance"
Hymn	"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"
Special Music	
PRAYER TIME	
Prayer Chorus	"Come, Holy Spirit"
Pastoral Prayer	
SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES	
Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"Come, Thou Almighty King"
Message	"WISDOM FROM GOD"
SERVICE CONCLUDES	
Prayer of Benediction	
Choral Benediction	"For Thine Is the Kingdom"

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

"The Lord's Prayer" in unison

Moments of Welcome

Open the service with a time of greeting and fellowship. Sing "The Family of God."

Offertory Scripture

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Rom. 13:14).

Benediction

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—from violent men you save me" (2 Sam. 22:2-3).



"I'M SORRY THE REVEREND CAN'T COME RIGHT NOW. HE'S OUT WALLOWING IN THE GUTTER."

TRUST IN THE LORD

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 3

September 20, 1992

INTRO:

Robert Fulghum, in his delightful essay *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, writes:

Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but, there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life . . . learn some and think some and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.

Be aware of wonder.¹

The wisdom of Robert Fulghum is insightful and useful. It's even worthy of sharing with our sons and daughters. But as wise and useful as Fulghum's writings are, and the wit and wisdom of countless philosophers, teachers, theologians, and commonsense thinkers, none exceeds the simple yet comprehensive wisdom found in Christian Scripture in the Book of Proverbs.

No other writings provide a chart and compass so complete as the Proverbs.

"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (vv. 1-6).

These words have been the chart and compass of countless Christians throughout the centuries, for they tell what is meant by the life of faith. In essence it is a life determined by the law of faith.

The Scriptures inform us:

—"The just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38, KJV).

—"We walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7, KJV).

—"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23, KJV).

—Faith is defined in the Bible as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, KJV).

Man was created to trust God. Proverbs 3 provides us with three practical observations.

I. Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart (v. 5)

In Hebrew psychology, the heart is not so much the seat of the emotions as that of the intellect and will. The invitation to trust involves surrender of the will.

It's interesting that we are often quick to trust in another finite mortal and lay our very lives and future in their hands while spurning an infinite Creator God. And we do it daily almost without thought. We trust our lives to people we scarcely know.

ILLUS. Pilots, taxicab drivers, surgeons, dentists . . .

Recently I saw a list of tips in choosing a dentist you can trust.

"Never trust a dentist . . .

who wears dentures

who has hairy knuckles

whose drill is driven by a system of pulleys connected to three mice on a treadmill

who sends you a Christmas card and then bills you for it

who chews tobacco and spits it in the sink

who uses the suction hose to empty your pockets."

This dentist notwithstanding, we do place a lot of trust in others. We are just as prone to trust in ourselves and thwart the efforts of God to grow great in our lives. However, we are reminded, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

The devil has his proverbs, as well as does Solomon. Among the devil's proverbs there is none perhaps more common or more destructive than the lie that he is perpetuating in our Western world. It goes something like this:

Trust in the deity of self. Whatever your mind can conceive you can achieve. You have every right to boast in every achievement because you are your own master.

But I am here to remind you that there is no peace of mind, no personal satisfaction, no experience of true joy and fulfillment in this human condition apart from a trusting relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Thus, this invitation to personal trust involves surrender of your will to God. God expects total allegiance, without any reservations. We are to trust in the Lord with all our heart. The Savior gave His lifeblood to redeem us. Can we do anything less than trust Him?

II. Lean Not unto Your Own Understanding (v. 5)

Although Solomon was specifically addressing the young in this passage, the message can be applied universally.

One of the greatest difficulties in life is the decentralizing of the object of our faith from self to Christ. The Scripture warns: "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1, KJV). Sudden reverses overtake the most pros-

perous; men and women considered brilliant by earth's standard are caught in incredible blunders, much to the delight of those who had previously lauded their wisdom.

The truth that we do not know what a day may bring forth seems to give a most disheartening view of human life. If we are not in a trusting relationship with God, we have the burden of directing our own way. However, if we are in a trusting relationship with Him, even though the path is dark and gloomy, we can walk it with courage if we feel that we have our Father and Savior with us. The Psalmist found it so long ago: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (23:4, KJV).

III. In All Your Ways Acknowledge Him, and He Will Make Your Paths Straight

Some translations say, "He will direct your paths" (v. 6, NBV).

There are 2 key words—"acknowledge" and "direct." The word in the Hebrew for "acknowledge," in the context of verse 6, involves the act of being face-to-face with the eternal God. It implies that to know God truly, to have a full sight of God before you, is something more than mere head knowledge.

The second word is "direct." The idea behind this word is that of making a way plain. The same term is used in Isa. 40:3: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."

How wonderful to know that the Christian life is a guided life. God has never intended that we should grope in the darkness or lose our way.

"He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. 23:3).

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

CONCLUSION:

There is only one way—the faith way!

Keep these commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

ILLUS. When the wife of missionary Adoniram Judson told him that a newspaper article likened him to some of the apostles, Judson replied, "I do not want to be like a Paul . . . or any mere man. I want to be like Christ. . . . I want to follow Him only, copy His teachings, drink in

His Spirit, [and] place my feet in His footprints. . . . Oh, to be more like Christ!"

In view of all He has done for us, this should be the testimony of everyone who knows Jesus as Savior.

May Jesus be the Object of our love, the Joy of our lives, and the One whom we aspire to be like. May He be our whole purpose for living.

1. Robert Fulghum. *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (New York: Random House, 1988), 6, 9.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP	
Welcome and Greeting of Guests	
Song	"All People of God"
Prayer of Invocation	
WORSHIP IN SONG	
Hymn	"How Firm a Foundation"
Hymn	"Trust and Obey"
Special Music	
PRAYER TIME	
Prayer Chorus	"We Come"
Pastoral Prayer	
SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES	
Tithes and Offerings	
Dedication of Babies	
Special Music	"Under His Wings"
Message	"TRUST IN THE LORD"
SERVICE CONCLUDES	
Prayer of Benediction	
Choral Benediction	"Singing I Go"

Creative Worship Ideas

Dedication of Infants

This would be a good day to dedicate babies. Be sure to have pictures made, fill out certificates for the children, and purchase a child's Bible with their names imprinted.

Invocation

"The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne" (Ps. 97:1-2).

Offertory Thought

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name" (Ps. 100:4).

Pastoral Prayer

Move your open altar time and have a family open altar at the end of the service.

Pontius' Puddle



A FATHER'S INSTRUCTIONS

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 4

September 27, 1992

INTRO:

Proverbs 4 contains words of instructions from a Father who loved wisdom. He shared three basic messages with His sons.

I. The Father Shared His Instructions on Wisdom with His Sons (vv. 1-9)

Step One: Pause to listen and learn from God about wisdom.

"Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding" (v. 1).

Step Two: Place a great value on your religious heritage.

"When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, 'Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live'" (vv. 3-4).

Never underestimate the impact of devout parents on the lives of their children!

ILLUS. The conversion of Ty Cobb near the end of his life made quite an impact. That all-time great, the Georgia Peach, played 3,033 games, for 12 years led the American League in batting averages, and for 4 of those years batted over .400. Yet on his deathbed, July 17, 1961, he said, "You tell the boys I'm sorry it was the last half of the ninth that I came to know Christ. I wish it had taken place in the first half of the first."

Step Three: Take advantage of every learning opportunity.

Education is important! Reading and listening are important! Study the Scripture!

Step Four: Be willing to pay the price for wisdom.

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (vv. 6-7).

II. The Father Explains to His Sons the Difference Between Right and Wrong (vv. 10-19)

Step One: Spiritual discernment is a must.

The holiness life-style explained (vv. 10-13).

"Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many" (v. 10).

"I will guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths" (v. 11).

"When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble" (v. 12).

"Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life" (v. 13).

Step Two: Spiritual failure is fatal.

There is the way of wrong living (vv. 14-19). "Do not set foot on the path of the wicked" (v. 14).

"Avoid it!" (v. 15).

Step Three: Follow the path of right living.

"The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (v. 18).

"But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble" (v. 19).

III. The Father Emphasizes with His Sons a Life of Purity and Holiness (vv. 20-27)

"My son, pay attention . . . listen closely to my words (ears)" (v. 20).

Step One: Guard your heart: "Guard your heart" (v. 23).

Step Two: Guard your lips: "Put away perversity from your mouth" (v. 24).

Step Three: Guard your eyes: "Look straight ahead" (v. 25).

ILLUS. Linus had his security blanket in place and his thumb resting safely in his mouth, but he was troubled. Turning to Lucy, who was sitting next to him, he asked, "Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?"

Her response was typical: "I just think I have a knack for seeing other people's faults."

Exasperated, Linus threw his hands up and asked, "What about your own faults?"

Without hesitation, Lucy explained, "I have a knack for overlooking them."

Some people think it is their God-ordained responsibility to dish out criticism. They see it as their knack. Some even consider it their spiritual gift. But these people are often blind to their own weaknesses.

Step Four: Guard your feet: "Take only ways that are firm" (v. 26).

CONCLUSION:

"Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil" (v. 27).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song "Come and Praise the Lord Our King"

Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "Blessed Be the Name"

Hymn "Immortal, Invisible"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music "I Will Praise the Lord"

Message "A FATHER'S INSTRUCTIONS"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction "O Jesus, Do Not Let Us Go"

Creative Worship Ideas

Distribute Sermon Outline

Consider using handouts of your sermons each service. Your people will enjoy filling in the blanks!

Offertory Prayer

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. 3:8-9).

Benediction

"I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord" (Ps. 104:33-34).

BEYOND BELIEF



THE BREAKING OF BREAD

by Stan Toler

1 Corinthians 11
October 4, 1992

INTRO:

The ritual of Holy Communion is an indispensable act of love toward God. Every believer should participate often in this celebration. On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, we focus on the unity of the family of God.

Whenever Orthodox Jewish families gather around the table for the Passover meal, the youngest son always asks: "What means this feast? Why do we meet this night?" The father then tells the story of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt's bondage.

Perhaps, when we gather, one of our younger Christians should ask: "Why do we meet? Why do we celebrate with the bread and the fruit of the vine?"

The answer for the young Christian is threefold.

I. The Breaking of Bread Is Symbolic of Willingness to Obey Christ

A. *"I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you"* (1 Cor. 11:2).

B. *"And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me'"* (vv. 24-25).

1. By receiving the elements, we express our willingness to observe the ritual:

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). Do not let this be a burdensome duty.

2. Through our openness to the ritual, we express our faith in Christ.

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27).

Believers should always examine their attitudes and actions in this worship experience.

3. Any known sin should be confessed before accepting the elements.

ILLUS. Several years ago Ponder Gilliland shared this great thought with me. "Why not give everyone an opportunity to pray and confess Christ before distributing the elements?" As a result, many have been converted in Communion services under my ministry.

"For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (v. 29).

II. The Breaking of Bread Is Symbolic of Our Remembrance of His Shed Blood on the Cross of Calvary

"Do this in remembrance of me" (v. 24). This is more than a memorial of a historical event. It is a sacramental opportunity for "calling to mind" the Lord Jesus.

The exact word, "remembrance," only appears four times in the New Testament. Three of the four occasions refer to the Lord's Supper.

A. *In the breaking of the bread, the spirit is given over to worship:* "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

B. *In the breaking of bread, the soul is given over to remembrance:* "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24).

C. *In the breaking of bread, the body is given over to dedication:* "Eat this bread, and drink this cup" (v. 26, KJV).

III. The Breaking of Bread Is a Symbolic Act of Unity Within the Family of God

"You proclaim" (v. 26).

A. *We show our unity in Christ by our worship of Him:* "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17).

ILLUS. George Whitefield, the great British evangelist who lived over 200 years ago, exhibited great devotion to Christ. After preaching several times one day, he went to his room and prepared for bed. Then someone came and asked him to speak one more time because a crowd had gathered outside.

Although very tired, he picked up a candle and said he would preach until it burned out. An hour later the flame flickered and died, and Whitefield closed in prayer and went inside.

The next morning he was found on his knees beside his bed—the flame of his earthly existence had glimmered and died.

B. *We show our faith in Christ by our meeting at the table:* "You proclaim the Lord's death . . ." (11:26).

C. *We show our confidence in Christ by our hope that He is coming again!* ". . . until he comes" (v. 26).

CONCLUSION:

In Communion, we discover the element of true worship.

At the Jewish Passover feast, an empty chair is left at the head of the table. This chair is reserved for Elijah, forerunner of Messiah. During the meal, the oldest son is asked by his father to go and see if the expected guest is in view. Obviously, seeing nothing, the son returns, saying, "I see no sign of him." The father sends him back twice more, and still no sign! The father then admits that the day of Messiah has not come.

This is so unfortunate for them! However, our ritual is hopeful and exacting as we look to Christ's second advent! While the words of John 1:11 are true of the Jewish people, the words of John 1:12 ring out with new hope to every person who accepts Christ!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song "This Is the Day"

Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "Lead On, O King Eternal"

Hymn "Come, Thou Fount"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music "To God Be the Glory"

Message "THE BREAKING OF BREAD"

Communion Served

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction "Doxology"

Creative Worship Ideas

Communion Ideas

Ways to serve Communion:

1. Have the ushers stand at the front end of each aisle and let the people come forward to receive the elements and return to their places. After all have been served, partake together.
2. Have a come-and-go Sunday evening Communion service at the altar with the pastor and pastoral staff.

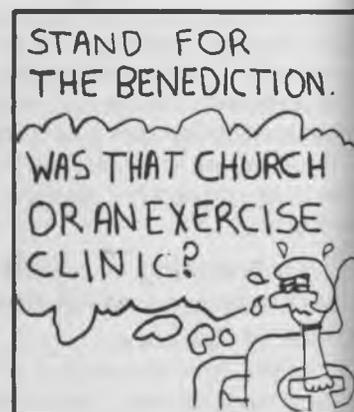
Offertory Scripture

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy" (Ps. 126:3).

Benediction

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."' From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14-17).

JUSTIN TIME



A CALL FOR FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 5
October 11, 1992

INTRO:

Proverbs 5 deals with the theme of marriage. The writer deals with the subject of marriage in chapter 2 and again in chapters 6 and 7. The whole passage graphically contrasts a worldly marriage with a spiritual marriage.

I. God's Word Speaks Against Adultery (v. 15)

"Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well" (v. 15). These poetic words invite one to seek the enjoyment of married love as God intends it to be.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh'" (1 Cor. 6:15-16).

The Scriptures make it clear that a sexual relationship outside of marriage is wrong. It is condemned by God!

A. The Word of God speaks against sex outside the bonds of marriage: "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil" (v. 3).

The message of Proverbs 5 fits into our sex-crazed society. It is impossible to watch TV or read a newspaper without being made aware of the advertisements of sex. This passage points out the problem of sinful relationships in our society.

B. The Word of God warns of the temptations of sinful men and women: "but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not" (vv. 4-6).

"Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly" (vv. 20-23).

ILLUS. Viola Walden tells the story of a newly married couple riding a train on their honeymoon. A silver-haired man leaned across the aisle and asked, "Is there a third party going with you on your honeymoon?" The couple looked at him strangely; then he added, "When Sarah and I were married, we invited Jesus to our marriage. One of the first things we did in our new home was to kneel and ask Jesus to make our marriage a love triangle—Sarah, myself, and Jesus. And all three of us have been in love with each other for all 50 years of our married life."

C. The Word of God warns us about the pain of adultery: "Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn

aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man's house. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent" (vv. 7-11).

ILLUS. Moses provided a splendid example: "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Heb. 11:25).

D. The Word of God reminds us of our need for correction.

"You will say, 'How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly'" (vv. 12-14).

A sinful person will eventually look back and remember the pain of the past. God's Word will provide a painful correction.

II. The Word of God Endorses Faithfulness in Marriage

"Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well" (v. 15). We move from the warnings against adultery to the call of God to purity in marriage. The Hebrews writer states: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (13:4).

A pure marriage brings a threefold enjoyment.

A. A pure marriage relationship is satisfying (vv. 15, 18).

The terms "water" and "fountain" in these verses represent the wife. Understanding this is crucial to a happy relationship.

Solomon reminds us that nothing is more enjoyable than a faithful marriage relationship. It is like a fountain!

Paul and Peter both speak of the woman as someone to respect and love: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable" (1 Thess. 4:3-4).

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Pet. 3:7).

ILLUS. Perhaps the best compliment a husband ever gave his wife was given by Joseph Choate, onetime U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. When asked who he would like to be if he could come back to earth again after death, Choate replied without a moment's hesitation, "Mrs. Choate's second husband."

Such an expression of love would have to make a wife feel valued and secure. But the fact that Choate's reply was recorded for posterity points up a problem: we often forget those closest to us when it comes to things like compliments, courtesy, and good manners in general.

B. A pure marriage relationship permits great freedom (vv. 16-17).

"Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers" (vv. 16-17).

True love does not promote jealousy. It promotes freedom!

C. A pure marriage relationship brings unity to the home (vv. 18-19).

"May you ever be captivated by her love" (v. 19).

CONCLUSION:

The Scriptures challenge couples to make a total commitment for life! As marriage counselor H. Norman Wright says, "Marriage is the total commitment of the total person for the total life!"

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song

"Let God Be God"

Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn

"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"

Hymn

"Praise Him! Praise Him!"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus

"In the Presence of Jehovah"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music

"There Is a Fountain"

Message "A CALL FOR FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction

"Go in His Name"

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Focus on our sinfulness. Focus on God's forgiveness. Rejoice in victories won!

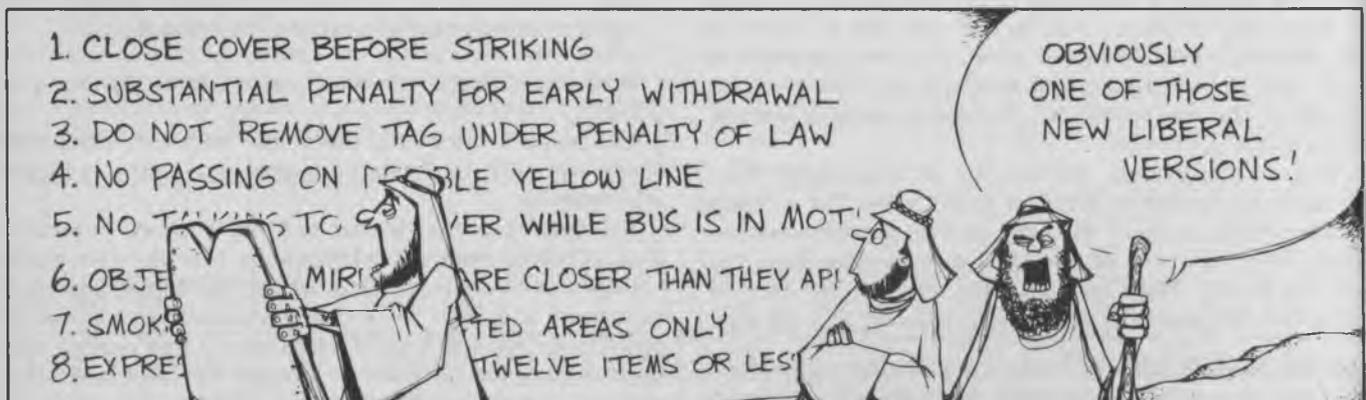
Offertory Thought

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col. 2:6-7).

Scriptural Benediction

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

BEYOND BELIEF



WHAT DOES GOD HATE?

by Stanley Toler

Proverbs 6
October 18, 1992

INTRO:

The first glimpse of Prov. 6:12-19 (KJV) makes one think that it is impossible for God to hate. But, as we study the Scriptures, we discover other passages that support the fact that God hates sin. He truly loves the sinner but hates sin!

I. Let Us Study Examples of What God Hates

A. *God is displeased when we place idols before Him.*

"That wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods you have not known)" (Deut. 13:13).

B. *God is unhappy with drunkenness.*

ILLUS. A man froze to death in Baltimore just before Christmas. What a terrible tragedy in a land of plenty!

TV people bemoaned the awful society that permitted such to happen. Warm houses were nearby, but no one took the poor man out of the cold. Where were the city, state, and federal governments? Why didn't the churches provide more shelters?

The man was drunk. No one blamed the liquor store. People had tried to help him, but the liquor people kept taking his money for drink. The beer companies spent millions on TV to push their beer upon him and others. TV advertised the wine, beer, and other alcohol as the ideal beverage for happy living. They said nothing about it causing such an unhappy dying. (*The Evangelical Methodist*, February 1990)

ILLUS. If four Boeing 747 airliners crashed today, killing a thousand people, and if four more crashed tomorrow killing another thousand, and if four more killed another thousand the next day, our country would be in an emotional uproar.

Aircraft would be grounded. Charges would fly; aircraft wouldn't.

Fortunately, that's not happening. But with too little notice, tobacco use kills more than 1,000 people—and alcohol use kills over 300 people—every day! (*Chattanooga News-Free Press* 3/25/90)

C. *God abhors the lack of respect in our society.*

"Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12).

D. *God hates a lying tongue* (v. 17).

ILLUS. D. L. Moody's first great evangelistic campaign in the British Isles was followed by more of the rumors and criticism that dogged him and Ira Sankey. Moody was scorched for his motives and even his English. Because the Moody-Sankey hymnbook was selling well in Britain and America, rumors arose that the two were growing rich off the royalties. In truth, every dollar was put back into the work. Neither man made one penny of

personal profit. Some even alleged that Moody was being backed by circus showman P. T. Barnum! No wonder Mr. Moody said, "A lie will get half round the world before the truth gets its boots on!"

E. *God hates the prideful eye:* "haughty eyes" (v. 17).

F. *God hates the senseless murders of our day!* (Deut. 5:17).

G. *God hates lying.*

"A false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers" (v. 19).

"A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever" (Prov. 21:28).

II. Let Us Focus on the Things That God Loves

With all the discussion about things that God hates, it is important to talk about His love for lost humanity. What does God love?

A. *God loves a heart that is open to His will:* "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

B. *God loves a liberal giver who has discovered the value of grace giving:* "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).

ILLUS. Charles R. Swindoll, in *Insight for Living Letter*, January 1991, made the following statement:

I have been thinking about why the Scriptures teach "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Why is it that giving is preferred to receiving? Here are a few reasons that have come to my mind.

—Giving encourages unselfishness within us.

—Giving brings others needed relief and encouragement.

—Giving forces us out of our own tight-radius world.

—Giving keeps us from becoming too attached to material things.

—Giving models the life Christ lived.

—Giving results in eternal rewards.

—Giving teaches us the value of servanthood.

—Giving makes us more cheerful, caring people.

—Giving prompts greater sensitivity toward others.

—Giving provides an example for others to follow.

No wonder the apostle Paul wrote that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7b).

C. *God loves a faithful and consistent witness.*

"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will re-

turn with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:5-6).

D. God loves every lost sinner in the world today.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

CONCLUSION:

God hates sin with a powerful anger, but let us be reminded that He loves the sinner.

Today's scriptures have reminded us of the things that we are to hate in verses 17-19. But, in order to fulfill the redemptive mission of Jesus, we are called upon to share His love and light with a lost world.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests
Song "How Great Thou Art"
Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"
Hymn "All That Thrills My Soul"
Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "Open Our Eyes"
Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings
Special Music "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
Message "WHAT DOES GOD HATE?"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction
Choral Benediction "Doxology"

Creative Worship Ideas

Offertory Scripture

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Tim. 6:6-7).

Benediction

"Rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:13-14).

BEYOND BELIEF



THE WISDOM OF FOLLOWING GOD

by Stan Toler

Prov. 7:1-5

October 25, 1992

INTRO:

Proverbs 7 reveals to us that the best of guidance is weak and insignificant unless the wisdom is completely applied to one's life-style. Chapter 7 calls us to obedience.

As the wise old teacher relates his story to his students, he repeats his message: "My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. . . . they will keep you from the adulteress" (vv. 1, 5).

In the opening verses of this chapter, the wisdom of following God spells out three very fundamental principles:

I. There Is a Call for Responsible Living

"My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you" (v. 1).

The word "command" in the Hebrew is "treasure," and it is a metaphor meaning "to lay up or hide."

A. God's Word highlights the need to obey Him.

The truth of God will perpetually affect our beliefs and our behavior. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11).

B. Obedience to God will result in His daily protection and guidance in our lives.

"Guard my teachings as the apple of your eye" (v. 2).

C. We must apply the Word of God in order to experience positive results.

"Bind them on your fingers" (v. 3).

We should memorize and understand the truth of God; but unless we apply it to our lives, we fail to become all that God wants

ILLUS. The devout Jew wore on his fingers and sometimes on his head a little leather box known as a phylactery containing parchments on which were written four texts (Exod. 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). This visible practical item reminded them that God's people had to apply His truth to the actions of life.

ILLUS. One evening an evangelist preached with great zeal on the text, "Thou shalt not steal." He impressed upon his listeners the necessity of absolute integrity in everything. The next morning he boarded a bus and gave the driver a dollar bill for his fare. Counting his change, he found that he had received an extra quarter. Without hesitation, he approached the driver and said, "You accidentally gave me too much change."

"It wasn't an accident," the driver replied. "I did it on purpose to see what you would do. Last night I was in your audience and wondered if you practiced what you preached. I made up my mind if you returned the quarter, I'd come and hear you tonight."

Paul, writing to the Colossians, says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (3:16).

II. There Is Great Joy in the Life of Holiness

"Keep my commands and you will live" (v. 2). The laws of God exist for our own blessing.

A. Seeking to be sanctified will result in wonderful joy.

Paul reminds us, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

B. A life of faithfulness to the will of God is critical to a life of joy.

Our obedience expresses our love for God and outwardly expresses our loyalty to God: "I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands" (Ps. 119:60).

ILLUS. A church member went to his pastor, Phillips Brooks, to tell him he was going to the Holy Land. He said that it was his intention to visit Mount Sinai. "In fact," the man told the minister, "I plan to climb to the top of that mountain and, when I get there, read aloud the Ten Commandments."

Thinking this would please Dr. Brooks, the church member was surprised to hear his pastor say, "You know, I can think of something even better than that."

The man responded, "You can, Pastor? And what might that be?"

Brooks replied rather bluntly, "Just this. Instead of traveling thousands of miles to read the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, why not stay right here at home and keep them?"

III. There Is the Promise of Joy When Wise Counsel Is Accepted (vv. 4-5)

These two verses suggest the potential of responsible living.

A. Christian friends often provide good guidance.

"Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'" (v. 4).

The role of the sister in the Hebrew family was that of an encourager. The word "sister" can also be translated as "bride." Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17a).

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

B. Look to Christian friends for lifelong relationships.

"Understanding" literally means "familiar friend."

CONCLUSION:

When encouragement and challenge join together in our lives, we have the impetus for keeping our lives from evil.

A study of the remainder of this chapter will provide the real picture of a world of sin, where holiness, happiness, and health are not attainable without the encouragement and challenge of the Word of God. The Psalmist knew this when he asked and answered his own question, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (119:9).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song "Now Let Us All Praise God and Sing"

Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "Heavenly Father, King Eternal"

Hymn "Day by Day"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "In His Presence"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music "Who Shall Ascend?"

Message "THE WISDOM OF FOLLOWING GOD"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction "The Power and the Glory"

Creative Worship Order

Offertory Prayer

"Serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:2, KJV).

Pastoral Prayer

Use the Lord's Prayer and use each line to build your pastoral prayer for the day.

Scriptural Benediction

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:5-6).

BLESSED BEYOND BELIEF

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 8
November 1, 1992

INTRO:

In the Bible the word "happy" or "blessed" appears hundreds of times in various forms. In the Beatitudes, our Lord emphasized His desire to bless His children.

Solomon introduces this thought in the closing verses of Proverbs 8. He also emphasized that life must be happy and blessed when we can identify wisdom with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul later declares: "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3).

Solomon gives us guidance to untold blessings from God. He reminds us that happiness and joy come from God in heaven.

I. We Must Never Underestimate the Importance of Listening to Instructions

We must learn our lessons well. Real-life blessings begin with listening!

Solomon reminds his sons of the importance of listening. Jesus speaks to this matter with His disciples: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).

James confirmed the sayings of Jesus: "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25).

II. We Must Never Permit Our Minds to Lose the Desire to Learn

"Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway" (v. 34).

Some scholars believe that the picture here shows an eager student waiting at the school doors for his teacher. Others visualize beggars seeking handouts from a rich man's home. Most believe that the imagery here speaks of a lover watching for his sweetheart. Similar language is used in Song of Sol. 5:2-8.

Our love for wisdom and knowledge must be intense. Someone has said that watching at the gate symbolizes the anticipation of Jesus in our day-to-day lives. If that is true, then waiting at His door symbolizes the intervention of Jesus in our lives each day. As we trust Jesus to be all we need every day, we develop the happy dependency of love.

III. We Must Never Minimize the Impact of Finding Jesus at Any Age

"For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord" (v. 35).

Helen Keller said, "Life is a daring adventure, or it is nothing!"

"I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me" (v. 17). In the original text, the thought expresses that those who look for Him "at the dawning" will find Him.

Knowing the favor of the Lord, you experience the blessings of heaven upon your daily life.

CONCLUSION:

God's blessings stretch beyond belief! In order to obtain such joy, one must dedicate everything to Jesus. "Blessed are those who keep my ways" (v. 32).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song

"This Is the Day"

Scripture

Ps. 96:1-2

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn

"Stand Up for Jesus"

Hymn

"My Jesus, I Love Thee"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus

"We Worship and Adore You"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Reception of New Members

Special Music

"Glory to His Majesty"

Message

"BLESSED BEYOND BELIEF"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction

"For Thine Is the Kingdom"

Creative Worship Ideas

Pastoral Prayer

Have everyone seated for the prayer time, and ask those who need special prayers of encouragement to stand. Then ask persons around them to surround them for a time of prayer.

Stewardship/Offertory

"May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us" (Ps. 67:5-6).

Reception of New Members

Ask those who are interested in joining the church to do so on this Sunday. Conduct four weeks of membership classes. Ask each new member to declare a ministry in the church according to his gifts.

All-Church Fellowship

Have a carry-in dinner and give your new members a chance to meet regular attenders.

WHAT CAN I DO TO STRENGTHEN MY FAMILY?

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 9

November 8, 1992

INTRO:

"Wisdom has built her house" (v. 1). "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. . . . But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:14-15). "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel" (Josh. 24:31).

We have been bombarded with articles on the family. Dozens of books have been written.

ILLUS. Mother Teresa was asked upon receiving her Nobel peace prize, "What can we do to promote world peace?"

Her answer: "Go home and love your family."

Since a home is built by wisdom, let me share six wise ways to build your home and strengthen your family.

I. Strong Families Are Committed to Building a Team Concept

Commitment begins before marriage. Marriage requires total commitment. Strong families work together!

II. Strong Families Value Quality Time Together

ILLUS. The amount of total contact parents have with their children has dropped 40 percent during the last quarter century. In 1965 the average parent had roughly 30 hours of contact with children each week. Today the average parent has only 17 hours of child contact per week (Dr. John Robinson, *Homemade*, February 1991).

Emphasize quality time, not quantity time.

ILLUS. Some 1,500 children were surveyed: "What do you think makes families happy?"

They answered: "Doing things together."

Bob Pierce said, "I built a great work but broke the hearts of my wife and children in the process."

III. Strong Families Give Each Other a Sense of Security

Showing appreciation to one another stimulates encouragement and provides for a secure environment.

ILLUS. I always ask young couples planning for marriage, "How did your family express love when you were growing up?" Couples always want to do better than their families did because everyone needs encouragement!

IV. Strong Families Have Established a Regular Time of Good Dialogue

V. Strong Families Deal with Their Problems Daily

ILLUS. Ten commandments for guiding your children.

1. Teach them, using God's Word (Deut. 6:4-9).
2. Tell them what's right and wrong (1 Kings 1:6).
3. See them as gifts from God (Ps. 127:3).
4. Guide them in godly ways (Prov. 22:6).
5. Discipline them (Prov. 29:17).
6. Love them unconditionally (Luke 15:11-32).
7. Do not provoke them to wrath (Eph. 6:4).
8. Earn their respect by example (1 Tim. 3:4).
9. Provide for their physical needs (1 Tim. 5:8).
10. Pass your faith along to them (2 Tim. 1:5).

VI. Strong Families Have Discovered a Spiritual Depth in Christ

ILLUS. A recent study revealed that if a mother and father attend church regularly, 72 percent of their children will do so when they grow up.

CONCLUSION:

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. . . . But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:14-15).

The key to a strong family centers on this principle: Commit yourself to a spiritual life in Christ!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song

"Blessed Be the Name"

Scripture

2 Cor. 4:6-7

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn

"Let All the People Praise Thee"

Hymn

"Fairest Lord Jesus"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus

"Worthy Is the Lamb"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music

"Grace Greater than Our Sin"

Message

"WHAT CAN I DO TO

STRENGTHEN MY FAMILY?"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction

"Go in His Name"

Creative Worship Ideas

Prayer for the Sick

Have an anointing service for those who need healing. Consider designating an area of altar space to prayers for the sick each Sunday thereafter.

Benediction

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

A LIFE OF REAL EFFORT

by Stan Toler

Proverbs 10
November 15, 1992

INTRO:

One of the words used in Scripture to describe the "outworking" of salvation is the term "diligence," found five times in various forms throughout Proverbs. In each case it means the sharp-pointed and determined activity of a truly dedicated person and calls for hard work or effort.

I. A Life of Real Effort Calls for Dedicated Servanthood

"Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth" (v. 4).

By contrast, Solomon teaches us that hard work clearly pays off.

A. God is unhappy with laziness (v. 4).
(Have the people read in unison Matt. 25:24-30.)

B. God is faithful to reward hard work.
"Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor" (Prov. 12:24).
(Read 1 Tim. 3:1-13.)

Jesus challenged His disciples: "Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9:23).

II. A Life of Real Effort Will Result in Total Victory

"The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions" (Prov. 12:27).

A. We will be victorious when we work hard in Kingdom building.

ILLUS. A vital part of worship is giving. We are to respond to the needs of the church and God's people in a loving, sacrificial manner. Leslie B. Flynn illustrated this kind of personal giving in his book *Worship*. He wrote:

A man was packing a shipment of food contributed by a school for the poor people of Appalachia. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meats. Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the pupils had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of the paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "Christy—Room 104." She had given up her lunch for some hungry person.

B. We will be victorious daily because of the work of Jesus on the Cross.

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17).

III. A Life of Real Effort Is Rewarded with Peace and Satisfaction

"The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied" (Prov. 13:4).

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

When a person applies the principles of hard work in every aspect of life, there will be fullness and enjoyment: "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" (Isa. 58:11).

We might call this quality Christianity!

IV. A Life of Real Effort Is Buoyed by Confident Planning

"The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty" (Prov. 21:5).

The "thoughts" (KJV) or the "plans" (NIV) in the original would be translated "purpose." "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance" (Prov. 20:18).

The diligent person weighs all the issues and makes good decisions.

A. Good planning brings about real celebration.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

B. Good planning spiritually provides for a reward after this life is over.

ILLUS. At one time Frederick the Great held a banquet at which Voltaire, the French philosopher and skeptic, was present. When dinner was served, the noted unbeliever began to ridicule the Christians who were there. Finally he said, "Why, I would sell my seat in heaven for a Prussian dollar!"

There was a pause. Then one of the guests quietly rose from his chair and said, "Sir, you are in Prussia, where we have a law that requires that one who wishes to sell anything must first prove ownership. Are you prepared to establish the fact that you have a seat in heaven?" Surprised and embarrassed, Voltaire, the normally quick-witted scoffer, had nothing more to say for the rest of the evening.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

CONCLUSION:

God promises the hardworking believer blessings beyond belief!

ILLUS. A pastor had just received the news that he had a terminal illness. The next Sunday he said to his congregation, "I walked the five miles from the doctor's office to my home. I looked toward that majestic mountain that I love. I looked at the river in which I rejoice. I looked at the stately trees that are always God's own poetry to my soul. Then in the evening I looked up into the great sky where God was lighting His lamps, and I said, 'I may not see you many more times, but mountain, I will be alive when you are gone. And river, I will be alive when you cease running toward the sea. And stars, I will be alive when you have fallen from your sockets in the great pulling down of the universe.'"

A wonderful hope lies beyond the grave for all who are trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior. Death is not the end. Innumerable, indescribable, eternal glories await the child of God.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests

Song

"Sing for Joy"

Prayer of Invocation

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn

"Come, We That Love the Lord"

Hymn

"Moment by Moment"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus

"In His Presence"

Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings

Special Music

"'Tis So Sweet"

Message

"A LIFE OF REAL EFFORT"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction

Choral Benediction

"Jesus, Do Not Let Us Go"

Creative Worship Ideas

Invocation

"O God, we have come to sing Your praises. We love You because You first loved us. Speak to our hearts through this worship experience. We worship You in spirit and in truth."

Offertory Thought

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

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).

Inside- Out Psalm 23

by Russell W. Hamilton

Fresno, Calif.

Editor's note: Pastor Hamilton shared these interpretive words at a funeral of a faithful Christian.

The Lord is!

My Shepherd; I have no needs now.

We lie in the green pastures
beside the quiet waters.

I am completely restored!

I have come through the righteous way
by His name.

Death is only a shadow, and I fear no evil;
for the Lord is beside me,
and the comfort of heaven is mine.

He has set the table for me!

And has anointed me
with His special perfume.

My joy is inexpressibly overflowing.

Goodness and love completely surround me,
for I am at home—in the house of the Lord.

Forever!

THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

by Stan Toler

Numbers 11
November 22, 1992

INTRO:

Many years ago I heard Norman Vincent Peale coin the phrase "The attitude of gratitude." As we study the children of Israel, we will learn many lessons about the attitude of ingratitude versus the attitude of gratitude.

The children of Israel experienced God's provisions daily. God gave them manna, light, shelter, and godly leaders. The children of Israel had everything they needed to fulfill God's plan. But—

I. The Children of Israel Possessed an Attitude of Ingratitude (vv. 1-3)

The children of Israel had just finished the Mount Sinai experience. Mount Sinai represents the presence of God and the holiness of God. Three days after they had seen the glory of God, they started to complain.

A. We make four observations about their attitude:

1. The children of Israel possessed an attitude that was unaffected by God's discipline (vv. 3, 34).
2. The children of Israel possessed an attitude that was unappreciative of God's blessings.
3. The children of Israel soon forgot yesterday's pain.
4. The children of Israel were insensitive to God's guidance.

B. Let us assume several reasons why the attitude of ingratitude is wrong:

1. The attitude of ingratitude will spread to others quickly. "The Israelites started wailing" (v. 4).

ILLUS. Someone questioned Zig Ziglar: "We read and hear a great deal about the coming 'recession.' What is your opinion of that possibility?"

He answered:

Over the years, the media has accurately predicted 28 of the last two recessions. There is always a recession going on in somebody's life. Fortunately, there also is a boom-time going on in the lives of other people. Over the years, I've noticed that even when times have never been so good, some people manage to foul up their own financial situation in a colossal way. I've also noticed that regardless of how bad times are, there are many people who manage to do extremely well financially. To emphasize this point further, my friend Calvin Hunt, an outstanding insurance sales executive, lived in Victoria, Tex., in 1982, during a "recession." Calvin explained that during recessions the insurance business declines approximately 10% but approximately 50% of the people in the business either quit or quit trying. Calvin figured that with 90% as much business and only 50% as much real competition, he should be able to double his business. That's exactly what happened.¹

2. The attitude of ingratitude has a poor memory. "Fish we ate in Egypt at no cost" (v. 5).

3. The attitude of ingratitude cannot be content with the present: "But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (v. 6).

4. The attitude of ingratitude has its roots in "meism" (vv. 16-23).

5. The attitude of ingratitude makes God angry: "But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food" (vv. 33-34).

II. The Children of God Should Possess an Attitude of Gratitude

A. "The attitude of gratitude" is a great phrase and very usable at this Thanksgiving season.

"It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High" (Ps. 92:1).

"Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:14).

B. Three things cause ingratitude:

1. We fail to see our potential in Christ and see only our problems.
2. We fail to give our life to God. We only give Him our broken dreams.
3. We fail to see a new excitement in life with Christ, living in a dark prison.

CONCLUSION:

Paul wrote from prison to Christians at Philippi: "I . . . do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (1:18, KJV). As we study his message to the Philippians, it is clear that he only refers to his "bonds" 4 times, then to his joy and gladness 16 times, and 2 times to thanksgiving and praise. How's that for the attitude of gratitude?

ILLUS. The Therapy of Thanksgiving

Willie wrote over 500 letters of thanksgiving. One letter came back from an 80-year-old schoolteacher. "Dear Willie, When I think back over my years of teaching, you are the only one who has ever written me to say thanks for my contribution as a teacher. You have made me so happy! I've read your letter through my tears. I have your letter by my bedside, and I will read it every night till the day I die!"

Willie was healed through the attitude of gratitude and through the therapy of thanksgiving.

The true measure of your gratitude is in your attitude!

1. *Top Performance* 4, No. 6 (November—December 1990): 4.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome and Greeting of Guests
Hymn "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"
Scripture Ps. 147:12-15

WORSHIP IN SONG

Hymn "We Gather Together"
Hymn "Now Thank We All Our God"

Special Music

PRAYER TIME

Prayer Chorus "We Come, Lord, We Come"
Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

Tithes and Offerings
Special Music "Lord, We Come"
Message "THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

Prayer of Benediction
Choral Benediction "Doxology"

Creative Worship Ideas

Congregational Assignment for Thanksgiving

At the end of your message, ask each person to write one letter of thanksgiving in order to develop the "attitude of gratitude."

Benediction

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

FALLOWFIELD

BASERBALL FAN IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE



A Farewell Message

by Everett Atkinson

Editorial Note:

Though we no longer publish free-lance sermon outlines, this farewell message came from a pastor who had served for 26½ years. His pastor's heart shows in outline. He died in 1949 at the age of 53.

Acts 20:17-32 (KJV)

- I. I have declared the whole counsel of God.
 - A. I have never concealed truths you needed to hear.
 - B. I have stood for right, disregarding all hazards.
 - C. I have given my best, leaving pure from your blood (v. 26).
- II. I leave you a final warning.
 - A. Do not follow the trends of times or get overly accustomed to material things.
 - B. Do not get like people who see no harm in anything.
 - C. Do not lose your vision.
 - D. Do not be satisfied with no souls, no burden, or no shouts of victory!
- III. I commend you to God.
 - A. I resign and entrust you to another pastor.
 - B. I recommend you as worthy of another pastor's confidence.
 - C. The heartache of our separation should be absorbed in winning souls.
- IV. We have the promise of triumph.
 - A. Put your faith in God, not in man.
 - B. Let God build you up, giving growth and strength.
 - C. God has promised an eternal inheritance among the sanctified.
 - D. There is coming a time when there will be no parting.

CONCLUSION: It is God's will that we shall remain friends, but not your pastor. Stay with your church and new pastor. God will continue to bless you. Great things are ahead for you.

Farewell,
Pastor Everett Atkinson

OUR WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

by Stan Toler

Isa. 9:6

November 29, 1992

INTRO:

On this first Sunday of Advent, my message is based on Isa. 9:6.

Names are meaningful in the Bible. God named the first man Adam, because he was made from the dust of the ground. "Adam" means "ground" or "earth." God changed Abram to Abraham, which means "father of many nations." When Abraham and Sarah at old age were informed that they were going to have a son, the child was named Isaac, which means "laughter"—because they thought it was funny!

The names of Christ in the Bible are descriptive in nature. "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus is the Greek word form of the Hebrew name Joshua. Both mean "the Lord is salvation."

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied of His coming. Isaiah called Jesus "Wonderful Counselor." The term "wonderful" is a very powerful thought. When I think of a counselor, I think of someone who gives advice or guidance. Many seek counsel in today's world. Thank God for counselors! Let us focus today on our Wonderful Counselor.

I. Let Us Study the Character of Our Wonderful Counselor

"Wonderful" means "separate, unique, distinguished, different."

A. Jesus was wonderful because of His powerful knowledge: "I am . . . the truth" (John 14:6).

B. Jesus was wonderful because He was willing to give up the riches of heaven to become poor: "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom" (Col. 2:3).

II. Let Us Study the Faithfulness of Christ, Our Wonderful Counselor

The only person who can deal with our basic needs and restore order and wonder to our lives is Jesus Christ because His name is Wonderful.

A. The Wonderful Counselor calls people wherever they are.

ILLUS. British statesman and financier Cecil Rhodes, whose fortune was used to endow the world-famous Rhodes scholarships, was a stickler for correct dress—but apparently not at the expense of someone else's feelings. A young man invited to dine with Rhodes arrived by train and had to go directly to Rhodes's home in his travel-stained clothes. Once there, he was appalled to find the other guests already assembled, wearing full evening dress. After what seemed a long time, Rhodes appeared in a shabby old blue suit. Later, the young man learned that his host had been dressed in evening clothes but put on the old suit when he heard of his young guest's dilemma.

B. The Wonderful Counselor loves people, whoever they are.

C. The Wonderful Counselor saves people, whatever they are.

ILLUS. Steve Estes reported a remarkable example of turning hatred into love in the *Wycliffe Bible Translator*. In January 1981, Colombian rebels kidnapped Chet Bitterman, shot him, and left his body in a hijacked bus. Imagine how his parents and loved ones must have felt at the senseless death of this young man!

But in April 1982, as a demonstration of international goodwill, the churches and civic groups of Bitterman's native area, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, gave an ambulance to the State of Meta in Colombia, where the young linguist was killed.

Bitterman's parents traveled to Colombia for the presentation of the ambulance. At the ceremony his mother explained, "We are able to do this because God has taken the hatred from our hearts."

"Then Peter began to speak: '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' (Acts 10:34-35).

Isa. 9:6 points out the magnetism of Jesus Christ.

Why did Isaiah call Him Wonderful? He is wonderful in His person. He was wonderful in the life He lived on earth. He was wonderful in His death on the Cross. He was wonderful in His resurrection.

III. Let Us Be Reminded That the Wonderful Counselor Is Our Comforter

A. Jesus comforts us when no one else has the answers.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault" (James 1:5). The fact that Isaiah called Jesus "Wonderful Counselor" indicates that God has a definite plan for our lives. We must seek His guidance if we are to experience His grace and glory. Jesus is a qualified counselor.

ILLUS. A church was in need of a pastor. A candidate came who preached on hell. The next Sunday another candidate came whose sermon was also on hell, and his fundamental teaching was the same as that of the first one. When the members of the church were called upon to vote, they voted for the second candidate. When they were asked why, the answer was, "The first one spoke as if he were glad that people were going to hell, while the second one seemed sorry for it."

B. Jesus comforts us when we are in pain.

"You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory" (Ps. 73:24).

C. Jesus comforts us when we have experienced loss by death, separation, or divorce.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

D. Jesus comforts us when we are undeserving.

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because [Jesus] himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:17-18).

CONCLUSION:

As our Wonderful Counselor:

- Jesus always gives us the truth with compassion.
- Jesus always provides the strength we need.
- Jesus will always have patience with us.
- Jesus knows our hearts and needs. He comes through right on time.

"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2).

ILLUS. After renowned missionary Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) had spoken in a chapel in southern China, a man asked to talk to him. He said, "I have heard you speak three times. You always have the same theme. You always speak of Jesus Christ. Why?"

The missionary replied, "Sir, before answering your question, let me ask, What did you have for dinner today?"

"Rice," replied the man.

"What did you have yesterday?"

"The same thing."

"And what do you expect to eat tomorrow?"

"Rice, of course. It gives me strength. I could not do without it. Sir, it is . . ." The man hesitated as if looking for a strong word. Then he added, "Sir, it is my very life!"

Missionary Goforth responded quickly, "What you have said of rice, Jesus is to our soul! He is the 'rice' or 'bread of life.'"

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

CALL TO WORSHIP

- Welcome and Greeting of Guests
- Song "Hear the Joyful Call"
- Prayer of Invocation
- Hymn "Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
- Advent Liturgy

WORSHIP IN SONG

- Hymn "As with Gladness Men of Old"
- Special Music

PRAYER TIME

- Prayer Chorus "We Worship and Adore You"
- Pastoral Prayer

SPIRIT OF WORSHIP CONTINUES

- Tithes and Offerings
- Special Music "The Call of Christmas"
- Message "OUR WONDERFUL COUNSELOR"

SERVICE CONCLUDES

- Prayer of Benediction
- Choral Benediction "For Thine Is the Kingdom"

Creative Worship Ideas

Advent Ideas

1. Use your children and teens to light the candles during the season.
2. Consider a "Hanging of the Green" service for tonight.
3. Ask members of your congregation to write an Advent devotion for each day of the season through Christmas. Put it in a looseleaf or book form.
4. Schedule a candlelight service with an informal look. Sing carols. Keep this service brief—approximately 45 minutes.

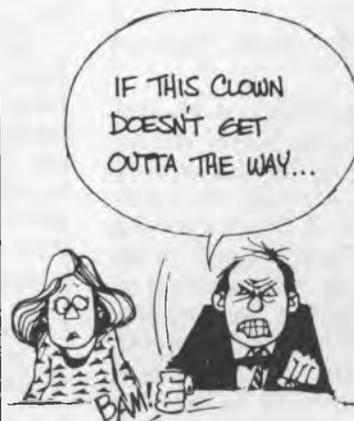
Offertory Sentence

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Benediction

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

BEYOND BELIEF



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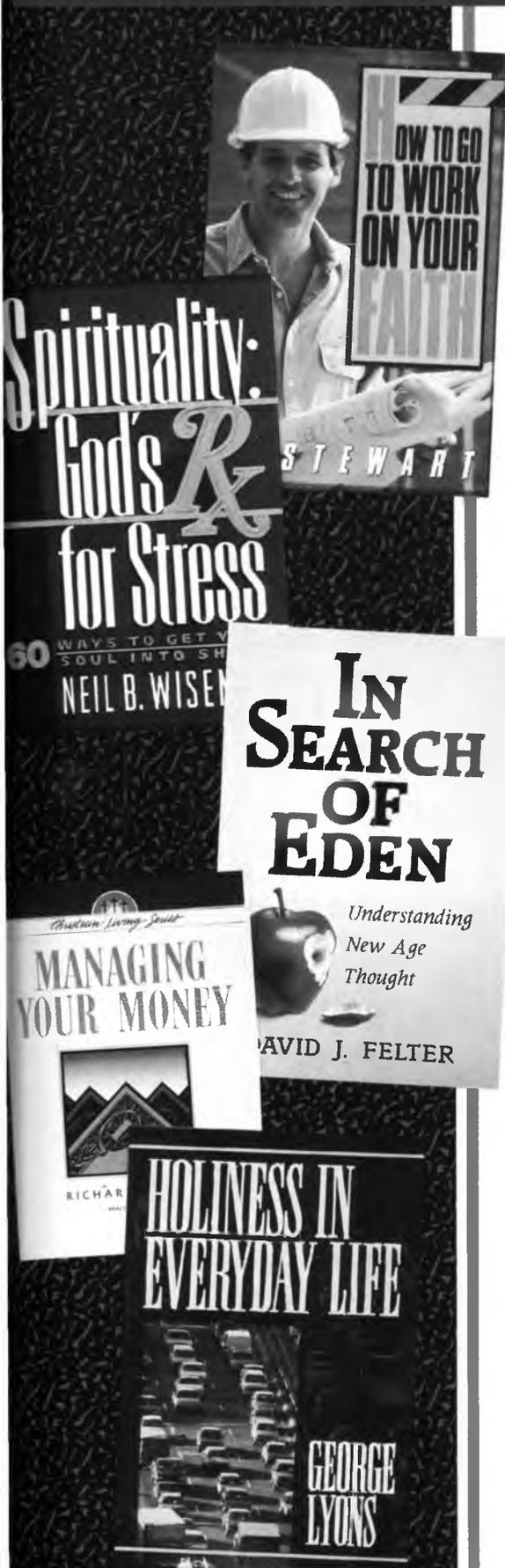
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MUSICCREATIONS

JOY, the Gift of God

One of Christian music's most admired arrangers, **Don Wyrzten**, presents his first choral publication for Lillenas. Conceived with flexible performance in mind, *JOY, the Gift of God* exudes warmth and familiarity, yet is fresh and current. The story of Christmas is shared through six musical suites (Festival of Joy, Rejoicing in the Promise, Rejoicing in His Nativity, Rejoicing in His Glory, Rejoicing in His Majesty, and Christmas Rhapsody).

Book	PAMC-77	\$5.25
Cassette	PATA-9141C	\$9.98
CD	PADC-9141	\$12.98
Choral Preview Pack (limit 1 per church)	PAL-9141C	\$5.00
Accompaniment Cassette	PAMU-9141C	\$60.00
Accompaniment CD	PAMU-9141T	\$60.00
Rehearsal Tapes*	PAMU-9141R	\$45.00
Service Folders	PAMC-77SF	100/\$6.00
Orchestration	PAOR-9141	\$112.00

The Glory of the Lord

The volunteer choir, regardless of its size or musical ability, will sound like a "Festival" chorus when they present *The Glory of the Lord* this Christmas. **Tom Fette** has provided easy voicing and smooth, singable vocal lines for SAB choir, with optional children's choir. Simple but effective Scripture narrations may be used for continuity, with ample opportunity for drama or pageantry. Useful both as a complete work in itself or as a source of material for the entire Advent season.

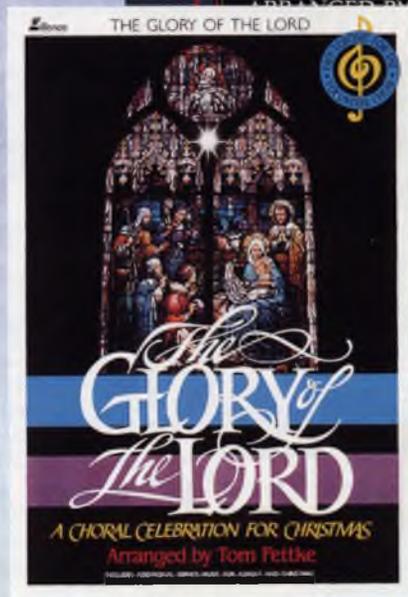
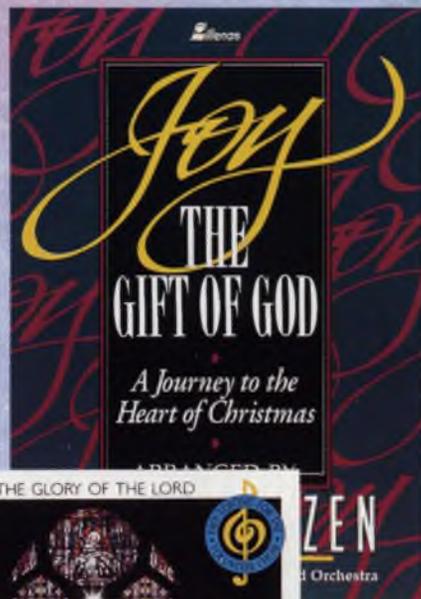
Book	PAMC-79	\$5.25
Cassette	PATA-9143C	\$9.98
Choral Preview Pack (limit 1 per church)	PAL-9143C	\$5.00
Accompaniment Cassette	PAMU-9143C	\$60.00
Accompaniment CD	PAMU-9143T	\$60.00
Rehearsal Tapes	PAMU-9143R	\$45.00
Service Folders	PAMC-79SF	100/\$6.00
Orchestration	PAOR-9143	price not set

Ladies' Christmas

Never before have ladies' vocal groups had such a wide assortment of Christmas music available in one source.

Tom Fette has compiled a master list of traditional carols, classics, and contemporary Christmas songs for groups with anywhere from 3 to 300 voices. Within the collection is a suggested minimusical perfect for Advent services, Christmas banquets, or other similar occasions.

Book	PAMC-76	\$5.25
Cassette	PATA-9140C	\$9.98
Accompaniment Cassette	PAMU-9140C	\$60.00
Accompaniment CD	PAMU-9140T	\$60.00
Choral Preview Pack (limit 1 per church)	PAL-9140C	\$5.00



Twinkle and the All-Star Angel Band

Children of all ages will enjoy this "play within a play" about angels. The older kids form the Angel Choir while the younger angels, dressed as stars, tell the story their own special way. "Twinkle," the "star" of the angelic production, learns a lesson that God can use her just as she is. As in other children's works from **Linda Rebeck** and **David and Bonnie Huntsinger**, this Christmas musical features singable songs, tasteful comedic situations, and delightful characters.

Singer's Activity Book	PAMC-78	\$3.50
Director Edition Book	PAMC-78A	\$9.95
Cassette	PATA-9142C	\$9.98
Choral Preview Pack (limit 1 per church)	PAL-9142C	\$5.00
Accompaniment Cassette (side 1: stereo trax; side 2: split-channel trax)	PAMU-9142C	\$60.00
Accompaniment CD (split-channel)	PAMU-9142T	\$60.00
Service Folders	PAMC-78SF	100/\$6.00



Order from Your Publisher

FOR CHOIR DIRECTORS! Free Christmas Previews 1992 Cassette (PATA-570C), containing excerpts from all four new Christmas choral works.

*1 cassette per voice part, in a vinyl binder. Cassettes may be duplicated for a minimal fee.