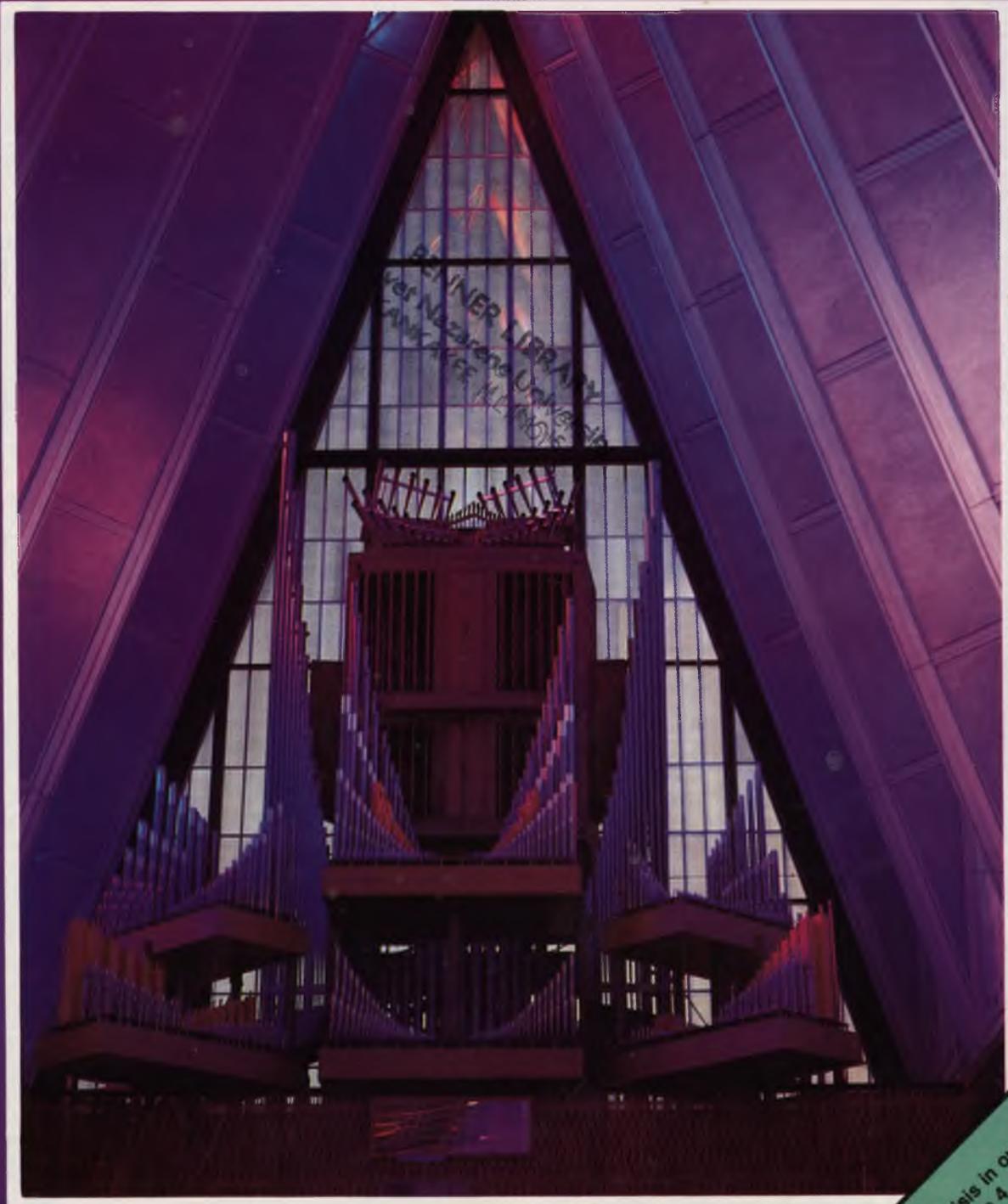


THE **IP** REACHER'S **IMC** MAGAZINE



WORSHIP

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SUITABLE FOR FRAMING

I will place no value on anything I possess save in relation to the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the kingdom of God it shall be given away or kept, only as the giving or the keeping of it shall promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and in eternity.

—David Livingstone

“PRECIOUS MOMENTS”

by Randal E. Denny

My earliest memories of worship bring up images of warmth and beauty. Nestled against my father, I watched the sunlight filtering through the amber-colored windows of the little Glassel Park Church in Los Angeles. I remember a sense of sacredness as Mother played the hymns and offertory and as Father held my little hand. From the beginning, worship evoked a strong emotion of security.

Later, growing up in Fresno, I remember vividly that worship was also a time of gathering together with the church family. With enthusiasm we sang and played instruments. We prayed together in earnest plea. Our good pastors opened our horizons on life and on the majesty of God. In worship, we felt a sense of belonging.

Karl Barth declared, “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that takes place in human life.” Indeed, times of worship have been precious moments—moments that bring life into fine focus.

Worship has a sense of expectancy. When Pastor Orville Jenkins walked onto the platform of our sanctuary, his face had a glow. We knew he had been with God—and anything could happen now. Someone defined worship: “The creation of an atmosphere in which a spiritual miracle can take place.” We need to come expecting God to do a great work in our lives.

Worship has a sense of aesthetics. Coming out of the humdrum and mundane routines of life, the beauty of worship demands that we give our highest and best. Since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the aesthetics of worship vary. As pastor of Los Angeles First Church, I remember that variety under one roof—the irrepressible joy of the Spanish-speaking congregation singing with delight to accompaniment of guitars, the dignity of the Korean choir singing with perfection the time-honored classical anthems, the Anglo congregation basking in the afterglow of the pipe organ playing gently with chimes “Just As I Am.” We need to come to worship more as poets than scientists. English poet William Blake and a London merchant watched the sun rise above the sea. The yellow disk splashed the scene with spectacular colors. The poet asked, “What do you see?”

The merchant responded, “Gold. The sun looks like a great gold piece. And what do you see?”

William Blake replied, “I see the glory of God, and I hear a multitude of the heavenly host crying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.’”

Worship has a sense of involvement. Worship definitely is not a “spectator sport.” Dr. P. Carnegie Simpson visited Oberammergau to see the famous Passion Play. The daughter of Burgomaster Lang, Anna, performed the part of Jesus’ mother. As a guest in the Lang home,

Dr. Simpson asked many questions of the world-renown drama. In a word of appreciation, he used the word *play* and immediately Anna exclaimed gently, “That is not a play, sir. It is an act of worship.” Each person must enter into worship.

Worship has a sense of intimacy. While a church service may contain elements that emphasize the community of believers, for me the special moment comes when I sense God’s nearness in my own spirit. He comes to touch me in quiet solitude of worship. Intimacy with God ushers me into “a place of quiet rest,” the hushed reverence of a cathedral that inspires me to look up, and the simple beauty of a flower garden glistening with the dew of God’s bright, new day that inspires me to look around. Dr. Albert Schweitzer said, “God has a place for every man; and every man has a place for God.”

Worship has a sense of inspiration. Inspiration is God’s gift to us—to take home with us, to equip us for the adventure of a new week, to pull back the curtains of doubt to let us see the horizons of God’s great grace. Pastor Charles Higgins sat at the keyboard and sang to the glory of God—and God used him as a resonating instrument of love to inspire in me great thoughts, new hope, and a strong desire to follow Jesus. Richard Clarke Cabot suggested, “Worship renews the spirit as sleep renews the body.” We need God’s inspiration. John Henry Jowett wrote, “Out of the church must go forth vigorous, healthy men and women who went in maimed and paralyzed. Broken things that no one could mend have been made whole again.”

* * *

This issue of *The Preacher’s Magazine* highlights a conference on worship held in Portland, Ore. The varied writers contributed to the workshop on worship. Their different perspectives and insights will encourage and instruct and inspire you in the priestly role as leader of worship. When it comes to worship, we have much to learn—but we are eager to learn.

Worship and Preaching Helps, begun by Dr. Wilbur Brannon, has been mailed to Nazarene pastors each quarter. These contributions enter *The Preacher’s Magazine* for a wider audience. The sermon outlines and worship suggestions were designed as aids for preparation and to stimulate your own ideas. Use whatever is helpful.

Free-lance sermon outlines will no longer be printed. However, written sermons are welcomed. Former editor, Dr. Wesley Tracy, informs me that “special day” sermons are usually in short supply—Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Worldwide Communion, Thanksgiving, etc.

Please send all submitted material to the following address: Randal E. Denny, Editor, *The Preacher’s Magazine*, 10814 E. Broadway, Spokane, WA 99206.

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THE PRESENT CRISIS IN OUR WORSHIP

by Dr. William M. Greathouse

I've been requested to address the subject of crisis in our worship. What I have to say reflects my personal viewpoint and bias and is designed simply to stimulate your thought and, I would hope, encourage you to reflect afresh upon your role as a worship leader, rather than to be understood as an *ex cathedra* pronouncement.

My credentials are 50 years of Nazarene ministry and, I would hope, an understanding of Christian worship. For my entire ministry, from my first home mission pastorate to the present hour, it has been my deep concern that Nazarenes learn better how to worship. I am persuaded that nothing we do as Christ's ministers is more important than our personal worship and our conduct of public worship, in which we have the high privilege of leading God's people into a living encounter with Him in His holiness and His grace.

My personal history will perhaps explain my acknowledged bias. I was born, baptized, and nourished in Methodism. My earliest memories are of kneeling with my parents to receive holy Communion and of singing with the congregation the great hymns of the church that celebrate His majesty, glory, and saving mercy. The worship of almighty God was a powerful molding influence upon my mind and heart long before I was aware of what was happening. For all this I praise God.

It was through the Church of the Nazarene, however, that I encountered Christ as my personal Savior, as a high school junior in a home mission tent campaign. Three years later, after my freshman year in Bethany Peniel College, I found my-

self the supply pastor of that struggling little flock in Jackson, Tenn., while I completed my final three years of undergraduate study at the Methodist college in that town. In chapel there, as at Vanderbilt Divinity School for five additional years (still as a Nazarene pastor), my understanding of worship and my appreciation for the church's hymnody was deepened.

At the same time I felt entirely comfortable in revival and camp meeting services where spiritual demonstration—weeping, shouting, and sometimes even sanctified dancing!—was the order of the day. Then, as now, I found a deep response to Dr. Bresee's call: "Oh, Nazarenes, keep the glory down"—along with an abhorrence of trumped-up emotionalism. With Dr. J. B. Chapman I say, "I was born in the fire, and I cannot settle for the smoke."

**Nothing we do is
more important than
our personal worship
and our conduct of
public worship.**

In my personal history both the liturgical and free church streams have flowed together, and to this day I can worship in a deep and meaningful way in either tradition. I yearn for only one thing: the manifest presence of God in the midst of His people, whether in the earthquake and fire or in the voice of gentle stillness.

True worship, I am convinced, is the vital spark of heavenly flame that inspires, refines, sustains, and builds up the life of the church. Worship is the highest act of which a creature of God is capable, for "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

For me, the most comprehensive and satisfying definition of worship is that of Archbishop William Temple who wrote:

Worship is the quickening of the conscience by the holiness of God; it is the nourishment of the mind by the truth of God; it is the purifying of our imagination by the beauty of God; it is the opening of the heart to the love of God; it is the surrender of the will to the purpose of God—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which human nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin.¹

Such worship can take place in either Canterbury Cathedral or the humblest chapel *if* the people of God there assembled have met to ascribe to Him "worth-ship"—to give Him who alone is worthy the value, the honor, the glory, the adoration that are His due as our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer—and to join intelligently and with feeling the angelic beings in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

It is against this background of conviction and understanding that I must attempt to assess the present crisis in our worship. My task is made extremely difficult, however,

not only by my own limited observation of what is actually going on throughout our movement in this matter of worship but also by the fact that I recognize there are many different models of worship style among us, even in the same city. We must allow for variations in forms and styles of worship, to recognize the widely differing cultural needs in any given community. However—and this is most important—there are certainly some norms by which to evaluate whether or not true worship is taking place where we are or under our ministry.

1. For a starter let me suggest that there seems to be in many

**“Keep the
glory down!”**

—Phineas Bresee

churches confusion as to what really constitutes worship. Many pastors apparently do not know how to plan a service of worship. They regularly ignore the elements that must go into true worship, which permits their services to fall into an informal formality that stifles the Holy Spirit. Of course, this is nothing new. More than 40 years ago General Superintendent Chapman complained that many of our services had more of the atmosphere of “an old-fashioned mountain corn husking” than of the worship of almighty God. He was struck by the fact that many pastors did not know the difference between hymns (which are addressed to God—or at least are God-centered in content) and gospel songs (which are subjective and experience-centered). The latter may be appropriate, he said, as the service moves into a more intimate and personal mood, but a service of worship should open—as does the Lord’s Prayer—with the acknowledgment and adoration of God, with hymns like “Come, Thou Almighty King” or “O for a Thousand Tongues,” music and words that enable the soul to rise into God’s presence. He was also bothered that the scripture reading was often limited to the quoting of the text for the sermon—a deplorable practice!—and that a special song was often inserted be-

fore the sermon, simply to have a special, when a hymn such as “Break Thou the Bread of Life” would be far more appropriate.

In many sections of the church this remains a problem. More times than I wish to admit, I have had to remind the minister of music or the pastor who was opening the morning worship in the district assembly that “Victory in Jesus” was not quite appropriate at that moment. Unless a service of true worship was planned, for the past two years I’ve had a standard suggestion that the morning assembly open with “Come, Thou fount of ev’ry blessing, / Tune my heart to sing Thy grace, / Streams of mercy, never ceasing, / Call for songs of loudest praise.” When the service of worship was to be deferred until the eleven o’clock hour I still insisted that the assembly open with a hymn like “I love Thy kingdom, Lord, / The house of Thine abode, / The Church our blest Redeemer bought / With His own precious Blood.”

Not many months ago I was in one of our larger churches in the Midwest, a truly great and influential church. I was disappointed and grieved in spirit not to be able to join in singing a single hymn of worship that morning. It was a gospel song service throughout. And although the people sang lustily, I sensed little of the “wonder, love, and praise” my heart yearned to experience. The entire service was experience-centered, and when I stood to preach I had to generate my own worship. My soul felt cheated that morning. The pastor and minister of music are spiritually minded and experienced men of God, but apparently neither has been taught the difference between “hymns, songs, and spiritual songs” or what constitutes an authentic service of worship. (Incidentally, I still see a valid distinction between the morning worship service and an evening gospel service where informality and songs of testimony *are* quite appropriate.)

I find myself in reluctant agreement with John R. Stott’s critique.

We evangelicals do not know much about worship. Evangelism is our specialty, not worship. We have little sense of the greatness of almighty God . . . Our worship

services are often ill-prepared, slovenly, mechanical, perfunctory, and dull . . . Much of public worship is ritual without reality, form without power, religion without God.²

Contrast this with Dr. Bresee’s description of morning worship in the old “Glory Barn” of Los Angeles First Church.

It was the fire within that gilded the boards with glory and made them shimmer and shine with the light of heaven. When the multitude has gathered, and there are hundreds of one mind and heart, and the Holy Ghost descends in His plentitude and power, that place is garnished with a beauty and glory in comparison with which all the adornings of Solomon’s Temple would be barrenness. Every board shines with the jeweled beauty of the New Jerusalem. What are carved marble and overlaying of gold and trimmings of silver; what are arches and turrets and spires, in comparison with the beauty of the Lord and the glory of the Divine Presence?

Ideal? Perhaps; but a worthy ideal for every pastor and congregation. Those who come into our services should be able to say, “This is indeed the house of God, the very gate of heaven.”

**“I was born in the
fire, and I cannot
settle for smoke!”**

—J. B. Chapman

2. A second critical area, as I see it, is the growing tendency to crowd out congregational singing with special music. If the church is not large enough to have a trained choir, they can at least assemble a gospel quartet—or a gospel combo!

This past October I had the high privilege of a 17-day preaching mission in Great Britain. What made the visit such a great spiritual benefit to me was the opportunity I enjoyed in each service—but one—of singing with the people of England, Scotland, and Ireland not only many of John and Charles Wesley’s hymns (sung to tunes I’d never heard but soon learned to love) but also those

**The chief end of man
is to glorify God and
enjoy Him forever.**

of other great hymnists like John Newton, Horatio Bonar, and Isaac Watts, men who knew how to describe in poetic language the soul's aspirations for and praise of our great Redeemer.

I said, in every service but one. I must be careful and considerate of what I say here because that particular Irish church was alive and growing. But since apparently it was the first time a general superintendent had visited them, they prepared almost an hour of special music—for the Lord I'm sure, but also for me and for the lord mayor of that city and his lady who would come that evening. The service opened with the heartfelt singing of Charles Wesley's "O for a Thousand Tongues"; but that was the end of the congregational singing that evening. For about an hour the youth choir, the ladies' ensemble, the men's choir, the combined choirs sang and sang and sang. When I was presented to preach it was already past nine o'clock, and I felt I was speaking into a spiritual vacuum. The sermon God had used in other services to expand my own soul and lift God's people, that night was a laborious struggle. What was wrong? An hour-long stream of "specials" had dissipated the spirit of worship. The lord mayor's wife commented to me kindly after the service, "I wish they had furnished us the words to their songs so I could have followed along." Her felt need, apparently, like mine, was to *participate* in the worship.

Robert E. Webber has rightly said, "Worship is a verb."³ It is not what the people passively listen to that constitutes worship, it is what they *do*. In overemphasizing special numbers to the neglect of congregational singing, we are robbing God's people of one of the best ways to involve them in worship—provided the hymns and songs are prayerfully chosen. I would add a second proviso—and provided the pastor *models* for his people the worship of God by his own spirit and participation.

3. Closely related to the growing practice of substituting special music for congregational singing is the drift toward religious entertainment in our services. This is not the place to go into all the reasons for such a drift. I will simply put it bluntly. This practice represents an invasion of the church by the spirit of this age. A narcissistic culture demands entertainment, and we can be religiously entertained and left untouched by the Spirit of Christ.

In another context Dean Inge once warned, "When the church marries the spirit of the age, she will be left a widow in the next generation."⁴ This is what has been referred to as the danger of "the secularization of our people's perceptions." And without the intention of unholy alliance the church is suddenly in a vulnerable position. I agree with James Spruce who writes,

The tension for the church is to remain a reliable witness by refusing to sacrifice its credibility to the god of worldly popularity . . . And it is within the sacred precincts of the church at worship that we are most severely tested.⁵

Spruce continues,

One of the obvious testing grounds is Christian music, where the blending of sacred and secular music is so subtly done that the difference between Christian praise and worldly entertainment is often confused if not indistinguishable. The response of the passive worshipper is often failure to distinguish between what is truly entertaining and what is truly God-honoring.⁶

This is not much an issue for people at a Saturday night "praise gathering" at a downtown concert hall. But what about Sunday morning when we gather in church to worship? Are we then, too, being entertained by the musicians or the preacher? Are we more impressed with the performer, showmanship, and decibels than we are with the

message and words? The current practice of applauding at least leaves the *impression* that the skill of a performer has drawn the response rather than the message of truth being conveyed. This is most disturbing to me when the singer has obviously been under the anointing of the Spirit and my soul, hushed in wonder and adoration, is assaulted by loud applause!

In this age of entertainment the focus is on the *medium* rather than the *message*. In our services the problem is that the soloist, the music, or the performer may become greater than the message they convey. If the people are only passive observers or spectators, their chances of confusing the medium with the message are very high.

Worship is not something done before or for the congregation, as if those leading the service are the actors and the congregation the audience. No, but as Søren Kierkegaard reminds us, in Christian worship the worship leaders are simply "prompters," for the true "actors" are the people of God gathered to ascribe worth, honor, and praise to almighty God. The "performance" is not by the leaders but by the congregation. George Frideric Handel's classic statement in 1741 after the premiere of his *Messiah* is still valid: "Sir, I should be sorry if I only entertained them. I had hoped it would make them better."

Being made better has little or nothing to do with whether or not we have a sense of fulfillment through being emotionally entertained, says Spruce.

But it has everything to do with a sense of fulfillment through servanthood. The sad consequence of passivity is the loss of servanthood for the fun of being a spectator. And in an age of Christian idols, fans find it easy to fol-

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**"Worship
is a verb."**

—Robert E.
Webber

The difference between Christian praise and worldly entertainment is often confused . . . This age of entertainment focuses on the medium rather than the message.

THE PASTOR'S WORSHIP DILEMMA:

Do I Entertain Spectators or Cultivate Participants?

by Bruce Petersen

Pastor, College Church of the Nazarene
Nampa, Idaho

What's a pastor to do? The fall Sunday School drive is on, and you are pitted against Pastor Joe Promo in the next town. At stake is a free trip for two to the Bahamas and a one-year exemption from all budget payments. Pastor Joe is canceling all morning worship services for six weeks in exchange for two-hour extravaganzas. Their church will enjoy such spiritual feasts as Binky the Christian clown; Wesson Smith, converted bank robber; a 125-piece Christian college marching band; the youth minister swallowing a record 29 goldfish; and for the finale, a born-again NBA star doing slam dunks into a makeshift basket on the platform.

Your leading board member comes to you with hands wringing, "Pastor, we have lost three families to the Church of the Open Mike because they have nationally known singing guests every other Sunday morning. When are we going to start having more fun? If you can't do the job, we'll find someone who can."

The pressures upon a pastor to abandon worship in favor of entertainment can be great. It may be an inner pressure to compete, to succeed with statistical growth, or to see successful promotion connected to self-esteem. Pressure can also come from parishioners who expect on Sunday morning what television gives them on Saturday night. The pastor keeps hearing the voice of Karl Malden in the commercial asking, "What will you do? What will you do?"

If worship really is important, then the pastor must assume responsibility for leading his church in worship.

As we examine the pastor's role in worship let us ask ourselves three questions.

1. Who are we trying to please in worship, anyway?

This question zeros in on the focus of worship. It is at this very basic place of beginning that many people in the pew are confused or misinformed.

Probably the paramount question in the mind of the person opening the bulletin before service is this: "What's in it for me?" The worship service is seen as a series of activities to be enjoyed or tolerated with the end result that one will feel more spiritual when it's over. If worship is nothing more than what we are experiencing, it will take something new and different, each week, to create the desired emotional responses. Thus the pastor is constantly facing the challenge of trying to top what was done last Sunday or what is currently being done at the church across town. If television creates couch potatoes and the spectator syndrome, then the church is also in danger of creating religious spectators or pew potatoes.

The word comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, which literally means to ascribe honor, dignity, or worth. "For the Hebrews, worship was a verb, something you did. The same idea is behind the New Testament Greek word for worship which means 'to serve.'"¹ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer define worship as, "... an active response to God whereby we declare his worth."²

The focus of worship is God, not

us. Søren Kierkegaard was on target when he compared worship to a drama with the congregation as performers, the pastor and other up-front participants as prompters, with God being the audience.

To answer our first question, in worship we are not trying to please ourselves, but God. The emphasis moves from passive observation to active participation by every worshiper present. The question everyone needs to ask after a worship service, according to Ben Patterson, is not "What did I get out of it?" but rather, "How did I do?"³

The task of the worship leader is to prompt the congregation to begin active worship to God. One of the great changes in worship brought about by the Protestant Reformation was the renewal of congregational participation. We lose our Protestant distinctive whenever we allow worshipers to become only observers. Our congregations desire more, and God deserves better.

2. Does worship need to be boring?

Whenever people choose to be entertained rather than worship, it indicates they either have never had a direct encounter with God, or if they have, they have no idea how it could be repeated. John Stott is convinced that the first fundamental principle of Christian worship is this: "We must know God before we can worship him."⁴

People who clamor for self-gratification in worship may be doing so out of a spiritual vacuum. Isaiah's encounter with God in the Temple in chapter 6 did not result in boredom.

He experienced conviction of his sinfulness in the awesome presence of the Divine. This experience with God changed his life forever. Worship was never the same again.

Worship involves my total personality. It causes my mind to actively comprehend God's communication through His Word. Therefore, preaching has a central place as God communicates to our intellect through words. Worship also involves the human spirit. Since God is a Spirit, we must worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Emotion plays a part in worship. God makes it possible for me to be in a personal relationship with divinity. Worship is the reaffirming and strengthening of my relationship with Him at an emotional level.

All of the significant events of life are acted out to give expression to the deep emotions connected with it. At birth we have a dedication ceremony. A wedding expresses the love and commitment of marriage. Baptism demonstrates outwardly the spiritual life within. Even the funeral aids us in the emotional separation from a loved one. Likewise worship is acted out drama that enables us to express to God our esteem and love. Robert E. Webber calls worship enactment. "In worship we retell and act out a story. The story has to do with what God has done for us and what our response is to His work."⁵

Most drama involves dialogue. In worship there should be interaction between God and the congregation. God speaks and the congregation responds. To create such a dialogue within the service takes careful planning and execution. The pastor or worship leader, like a playwright, should not risk the success of a drama on spontaneity. God, as the audience, is very aware of shoddy, careless work. He deserves nothing but our very best.

The pastor, as shepherd, has the responsibility of symbolically leading his flock to green pastures and still waters. A mother who is responsible for the nutrition of her six-year-old doesn't feed him cake and ice cream just because that's what he requests. She provides for him a balanced diet of meat, vegetables, fruits, and dairy products because she is concerned about growth and maturity. This doesn't mean the boy never gets cake. The wise mother prepares the meats and veggies so

that the boy will like what he needs and thus acquire a taste for what is best. Worship must be learned. It is an acquired skill. Usually the various facts of worship begin to take significance when people understand why we are doing them. The worship leader is responsible to choose the best methods for congregational expression and then train the worshipers to see their significance.

There is a delicate balance between form and freedom. Clumsy, wooden structures of ritual without meaning lead to boredom. Worship begins to truly take place when the individual worshiper directs his activity heavenward. This happens when the Holy Spirit inhabits the service and energizes the participants. In my own bulletin I mention at the bottom of the service order "Subject to change by the Holy Spirit." However, in the main I believe the Spirit can help us in the planning of the service on Tuesday as easily as He can adjust the order on Sunday. It is the Spirit's leading that keeps worship alive and vibrant.

The church is in danger of creating pew potatoes.

3. How can we bring life to worship?

Better worship begins with better planning. Unless you are an extremely creative person you will soon run out of ideas. Why not involve other staff members or, better yet, a creative team of lay members on a worship task force. Harry Causey suggests recruiting volunteers with genuine interest who want to be involved. They must first be taught to worship on a personal level before asking them to become planners.⁶ The purpose of participation is to get people out of the stands and on the playing field where the action is.

With planning comes a commitment to quality. David in 2 Sam. 24:24 refused to give a sacrifice to God that cost him nothing. God has the right to expect the very best from us. As pastor it means I must do quality preparation for the presentation of my sermon. If I am a musician, I must study the text of a song and present the music to the best of my ability. Quality even ex-

tends to the appearance of our sanctuary. How we dress ourselves, how we keep our place of worship, how we conduct ourselves, all speak of our attitude toward God.

Greater participation will aid worship. While it may be impossible for everyone to have a single role, lay involvement of any kind is symbolically representative of all worshipers. With planning we can use lay people in scripture reading, music, announcements, testimonies, prayers, and other responses. The Billy Graham Association discovered the direct link between the number of participants and the size of the crowd for a rally.

Better worship will come from better preaching. One of today's foremost authorities on preaching, James Cox, recently said, "There is no doubt that preaching has come into a new period of prominence. Part of this can be attributed to the more biblical character of much contemporary preaching. Preachers are more inclined to wrestle with the biblical text and do so with a thoroughness often lacking in the past."⁷ I sometimes hear people say, "We had a great service, there was no preaching." The early Reformers took the position that without preaching there is no worship. The Reformation restored the preaching of the Word to its proper place. We of the Wesleyan persuasion need a greater commitment to biblical preaching.

Music plays a vital role in good worship. More attention should be given to hymn selection. Objective hymns of worship to God should precede the more subjective gospel songs that speak of our experiences. The choir can be used to represent the congregation in responses that cannot be rehearsed beforehand by the congregation. The attitude and spirit of the choir can set the stage for the lifted expectations of worship among the listening participants. Music has the ability to express the emotions of the heart to God more effectively than words alone.

While there are many other things that contribute to meaningful worship, we must take care to evaluate all that we do in worship. Peter Toon proposes three tests to evaluate both public and private experiences with God:

1. Is the experience of God's
- Continued on page 29*

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

by Dennis J. Crocker

I. How can the essential role of music in worship best be defined?

Music can serve as an intensifier in worship. At its best, it can reinforce worship. At the opposite end of the continuum, it can detract and distract attention from God, the Focus of our worship, to ourselves.

As we are probably all aware, music tends to have a rather strong influence on our moods and emotions. It may be that we evaluate music more on the basis of how it makes us feel than by any other single factor. We may tend to determine a musical selection's merit or worth on the emotional response it elicits.

To carry this a step further, our response to music is based strongly on our past experience. To phrase it differently, our culture and society *have conditioned* us to respond in certain ways to a specific musical stimulus. I'm not talking about Pavlov's dogs, or that when we hear a particular harmonic progression we all salivate. An example of what I'm talking about can be seen in the hymn "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" (1), a stirring hymn, with music by F. J. Haydn and text by John Newton, the converted slave trader who also wrote "Amazing Grace." It speaks of the church and the fact that it is founded and sustained by God. But to some, particularly those from the European continent, this hymn may be offensive because of what they associate this music with. The music, originally from a string quartet, was used as the anthem of the Third Reich during World War II, "Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles," or "Germany, Germany over All." For those having experienced the Holocaust, negative feelings and emotions will inevitably be evoked. For those carrying this emotion, no words, scripture or otherwise, may be heard. We respond to music, in the church or outside of it, largely on the basis of what we associate it with.

This raises a further question—what is it that makes music sacred or secular? Apart from the text, the words

of a particular piece of music, what determines sanctity? Are certain melodies sacred and others profane? Are some harmonic progressions or rhythmic patterns sacred and others secular? To carry this even further, are some instruments inherently evil while others are not?

Initially, let me suggest that the intent of the composer, arranger, and performer has a bearing at this point. Certainly, if my desire and intent as a follower of Christ, who is also a musician, is to bring praise to God in all that I do, all the music I perform, then, is an offering of praise to God, even if the text is not specifically religious.

It is not always healthy to divide life, and music as well, into "sacred" and "secular" compartments.

However, if we believe that, as James writes, that every good and perfect gift comes from God (1:17) and that music is one of those "good

... and perfect" gifts, and that God really is Sovereign, then the idea that God can use and compel even pagan composers, arrangers, and/or performers to praise Him is not at all impossible nor unrealistic. Some of history's most inspiring music perhaps has been composed and performed by persons whose lives are anything but Christian.

By recognizing this fact, I am not suggesting that you go out and hire the most notable reprobate in your community and ask him to sing the solo just prior to your message this Sunday. Not at all; in fact, the life and testimony of the musician either enhances or detracts from worship. Actions do speak louder than words, or even high notes sung with full orchestral accompaniment! If my testimony is not consistent with my life—if the song I sing is not lived out—then I become "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

Yes, the intent of the arranger, composer, and performer influences whether we perceive a piece of music to be sacred or profane, but that influence is not all-pervasive.

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Music influences moods and emotions.

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BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WORSHIP

by Morris A. Weigelt

At one of those crucial moments in the pilgrimage called life, I had returned to the site of a devastation that had occurred 20 years earlier. The sanctuary was open and empty that Saturday morning.

I slowly made my way down the familiar aisle and sat for a few moments in one of the pews. Deep emotions were flowing. I recalled the high and holy moments of worship in that place. I remembered some of the deep moments of pain.

I walked up the center of that altar and knelt in prayer to ask for the healing I needed so desperately that morning. My sensitivity to the divine presence increased rapidly. The turning point of the journey was at hand.

Looking up through the tears of joy, my attention was drawn to the Bible propped open on the Communion table. These words were illumined for me by the Holy Spirit:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. . . . Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness: tremble before him, all the earth (*Ps. 96:1-3, 9*).¹

The momentous questions of the nature of worship grow out of both personal and corporate intersections with God. What does it mean to sing a new song? How does the earth sing? What is praise? Why does the Psalmist equate declaration of mighty deeds and glory with worship? How is worship different when the splendor of His holiness creates trembling? Especially when the whole earth trembles. How do worship and pain mix?

Later in the same psalm the sea joins the chorus, the fields are celebrating, and the trees are singing for joy. The splendor and glory and majesty of the Lord are celebrated by creation. Just what is the place of worship in the whole scheme of life?

The primacy of worship in the life of the church has often been noted in literature across the centuries. It has proven far more difficult to carry that primacy out in practice. In a recent article in *Christian Century*, R. A. Torrey is quoted, "The missing jewel of evangelicalism is worship."²

To return to the biblical foundations of worship will not only rejuvenate our perspective but also pro-

To open the heart to the love of God,

To devote the will to the purpose of God.³

John Burkhart has defined worship as "the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and promises to do."⁴ Such contemporary definitions invite us to move behind the concepts to the biblical foundations for understanding and theology.

Confrontation with the 96th psalm and the range of the definitions of worship calls for attention to the biblical terminology that describes worship. In the second section of this article the larger theological perspective for worship in the Bible will be examined.

1. Insights from Word Studies

One avenue of insight into the biblical foundations of worship is that of word studies. The habitual choice of words provides a clue to an understanding of the nature and content of worship in the mind of the writer and/or speaker.

In the Old Testament the single most important word is *shachah* (171 occurrences). The primary connotation of the word is to bend or bow down. Implicit in the physical action is humility and submission. More than half of the occurrences are translated into English by some form of the word *worship*. A fine example is Ps. 96:9, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness."

Shachah is also translated by words such as *stoop*, *do reverence*, *fall flat*, and even *crouch*. In bowing down to the king or one's superior there is the implicit understanding that this is God's servant, and there-

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"Sing to the Lord a new song."

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vide solid theological foundations on which to move from worship to living out of faith. To return to the biblical foundations of worship will also provide direction for structuring worship in appropriate and valuable patterns.

First, let's look at several definitions of worship. William Temple, in *The Hope of a New World*, defined worship as follows:

To worship is:

To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,

To feed the mind with the truth of God,

To purge the imagination by the beauty of God,

fore obeisance is appropriate. Bowing down to a false god or an idol is an affront to the Lord.

Daniel prefers the word *segad* (11 occurrences) to describe the bowing and scraping that are part of the royal trappings of the court settings. Worship in that setting is false because it is extended to the image of the king.

2 Kings prefers the word *abad* (5 occurrences). The primary connotation is one of service and labor in behalf of someone as an evidence of honor accorded.

From this overview, it is evident that *shachah* is the primary word for *worship* in Hebrew. Related words



“The missing jewel is worship.”

—R. A. Torrey



would include the whole range of language that speaks of sacrifice and offerings made to the Lord. Such offerings are evidence of obedience and submission to God.

In the Gospels, however, the word is used in relation to a divine object. In the Gospels the wise men bow to worship the Babe (Matt. 2:2, 11). In the temptation of Jesus the devil tries to usurp the worship owed to God alone. After the Resurrection the women “came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him” (28:9). In the Gospel of John, Jesus has a most interesting discussion over worship with the Samaritan woman.

In Acts 10:25 when Cornelius bows before Peter, Peter will not permit that kind of adoration to be given to him, “I am only a man myself” (v. 26). In Hebrews the word appears only in quotations from the Old Testament. Paul uses the word only once, in 1 Cor. 14:25, in a discussion of the function of tongues within the body of believers.

In Revelation *proskuneo* reappears with great frequency as the events of the end time are uncovered. Heinrich Greeven observes this surprising frequency of the word in the Gospels and in Revelation and then summarizes: “Proskynesis demands visible majesty

before which the worshiper bows. The Son of God was visible to all on earth (Gospels) and the exalted Lord will again be visible to His own when faith gives way to sight (Revelation).”⁵

The other major words relating to worship used in the New Testament relate to the concept of service and ministry. *Leitourgia* and its cognates occur 18 times. The absence of the official priestly ministry has certainly affected the usage of this word. The transliteration of this word provides our English word *liturgy*. In its original derivation it referred to the work of the people through which they discharged a duty owed to the society. In political terms it refers to specific social services provided for the state at one’s own expense. “According to Aristotle many democratic states fleece the wealthy by means of ‘liturgies.’”⁶

The word *liturgy* is often misinterpreted when the connotation of “the work of the people” is removed from the context of voluntary service, which is, in fact, a duty. That “duty” is both a personal obligation and a contribution to the body as a whole. The writer to the Hebrews implies this concept when he urges: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:24-25).

The writer of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* expressed it very clearly: “Now when thou teachest, command and warn the people to be constant in assembling in the Church, and not to withdraw themselves, but always to assemble, lest any man diminish the Church by not assembling, and cause the body of Christ to be short a member.”⁷

The concept of service to God⁸ is also found in the word family *latreuo*. It is used more than 90 times in the Septuagint. The Hebrew root is *’bd*, which connotes obedient service. When *’bd* is used in human relationships the Septuagint chose *douleuo* and when the service was directed to God the word *latreuo* was used. Most of the occurrences of *latreuo* are in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges. Deut.

10:12-13 captures the connotation well: “And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to *serve* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” (italics added). The noun form appears 9 times with similar connotations.

In the New Testament *latreuo* appears 26 times (21 verbs and 5 nouns). The influence of the Septuagint is visible, for all usages speak of service rendered to God. In verses such as Acts 7:7, 42; Heb. 8:5; 9:9; 10:2; and 13:10 the specific connotation is sacrificial ministry. In another group of verses (Matt. 4:10; Luke 2:37; Acts 26:7; Rev. 7:15; 22:3) the word is used in identifying acts of spiritual service that have inward and outward dimensions. In Rom. 12:1 Paul calls for a *loglike latreia* in the context of a personal living sacrifice with inner and outer dimensions—a *service* that is pleasing and acceptable to God.

The word family that clusters around *sebomai* combines elements of reverence and fear. Six times in Acts there are references to *sebomenoi* who go beyond honoring God to truly worship Him. With the prefix *eu-* the word designates persons whose devotion to God results in a quality of life—true godliness—godly actions.

Another major cluster of words in both the Old Testament and the New



“What does the Lord ask of you?”



Testament form about the general concept of sacrifice and sacrificial practice. Johannes Behm summarizes the Old Testament conception as follows:

The concept of sacrifice in the Old Testament is rooted in the reality of the covenant order . . . its characteristic distinctiveness . . . is due to the manner in which the God self-revealed in history has

ordered the relationship between Himself and the people . . . Sacrifice, whether it be the gift of man to God, the expression of spiritual fellowship between God and man, or a means of atonement, is always orientated to the presence of God in grace and judgment.⁹

The New Testament uses similar language to express the atoning work of Christ. Jesus himself uses covenantal language at the institution of the Eucharist. The New Testament understands that the death of Christ accomplished the purpose of the whole sacrificial pattern of the Old Testament. The finality of the sacrifice of Christ is most powerfully presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (10:11-13).

The sacrificial death of Christ has opened the curtain between God and man in the holy of holies. Access to the Father is available through Jesus, the High Priest. Worship takes on a whole new aspect because of the once-for-all sacrifice Christ made in the heavenly sanctuary.

An overview of the terminology just surveyed highlights ideas such as reverence toward, bowing down toward, sacrificing to God. The elements of fear, work, and service are also present. The biblical terminology for worship speaks of relationship and service and reverence.

2. The Biblical-Theological Perspective

A. Old Testament patterns:

The call to worship God in the beauty of holiness presented in the 96th psalm demands that we look at the biblical foundations from a more

synthetic and integrative point of view. Looking at individual words has exposed a good range of data. But specific data finds its greatest meaning when placed within the larger context. It is to that larger context that we now turn.

Jesus identified the central text of the Old Testament as: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, quoting Deut. 6:5). The love of neighbor was then identified as the second greatest commandment.

The elaborate instructions for the building of the house of worship, the utensils of worship, and the patterns

of worship form a large segment of the Pentateuch. The specific patterns for sacrifices provide directions for worship procedures.

Implicit in such a set of instructions is the understanding that God alone deserves worship, for He is the one who has intervened in history. The mighty acts of God in deliverance—visible especially in the creation, in the covenant, in the Exodus, and at Mount Sinai—call for a response. The opening commands of the Decalogue underline the exclusive nature of this worship and the prohibition of any images.

The priest played an important role in dramatizing worship and leading persons into the presence of God. The great feasts of the liturgical year—especially Passover, Pentecost, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles—provided rich symbolism and meaningful worship.

The practices and teaching and symbolism of the Tabernacle and the Temple were picked up and transmitted through the worship procedures of the synagogue. The role of Scripture was powerfully present throughout the pattern.

The broader perspective in liturgy and worship in the Old Testament is

provided by the Psalms. Specific examples of Israel's response to God enable us to see worship in operation.

Walter Brueggemann has recently stimulated understanding of the meaning of worship in *Israel's Praise*.¹⁰ Working from the insights of form criticism and the seminal work of Sigmund Mowinckel, Brueggemann writes:

I wish . . . to suggest that the praise of Israel—or more broadly, the human vocation of praise—is to maintain and transform the world, obtain a blessing that would not be obtained, maintained, or transformed, except through this routinized and most serious activity authorized by God and enacted by human agents . . . Praise is not a response to a world already fixed and settled, but it is a responsive and obedient participation in a world yet to be decreed and in process of being decreed through this liturgical act.¹¹

It is Brueggemann's contention that the worship of God by Israel is not mere submission. Israel is, in fact, involved in "world-making" as she worships. In spite of the economic and political despair that external circumstances often dictated, Israel expressed its faith in God to make a difference. "The pivotal point in Israel's liturgic life is the continued reassertion of the astonishing claim that the gods are defeated, Yahweh rules, and therefore the world can act out its true character as God's creation."¹²

This is not indulging in fantasy but is an expression of faith in the God who intervenes and reverses and changes. The God who brought the nation out of bond-

age is capable of a new exodus that will forever change the fortunes of those who serve and worship Him.

Such liturgical worship is revolutionary at the deepest level, whether it occurs in secret when slaves are whispering to each other or when rulers are dedicating themselves to God's leadership or when a lonely penitent shouts his lament into the face of the wind.

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**God alone
 deserves worship.**
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— ◆ —
**Old claims are made
 present realities.**
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There is both a historical memory involved in such worship and a fresh anticipation of the activity of a radical God. It is imaginative and interpretive and hopeful in the most radical sense.

The liturgic message is rooted in a memory, but is the fresh announcement itself which causes kings to celebrate, peasants to dance, governments to tremble, troops to be given R&R. The liturgic act is the moment of announcement in which old claims are made present realities, in which victories won in other places are made available as victories in this place now. Through such speech the world is changed.¹³

Through exegesis of a variety of the psalms, Brueggemann demonstrates the power of his thesis. He also notes the opposite practice in Israel's worship. When the royal power gained control of the liturgical process, praise and worship were emptied of their power of world-creating. Several shifts in emphasis are presented: a shift from concrete memory and experience to a call for praise without presenting the reasons for that praise; a shift from specificity to generalization; and a shift from the motif of liberation to a motif of creation.¹⁴

These liturgical adjustments emptied the worship of its formative and revolutionary power. "The kings of Jerusalem and their established urbane constituency with their tendentious ideology likely preferred to keep the treasured words as useful appeals to the support of the tradition, but emptied of their rawness, embarrassment, and revolutionary potential."¹⁵ "The outcome is a despairing, administered, contained people who mouth praise to a god who can do nothing, who live in a system which cannot be changed, and who grow more brutal where the memories of transformation fade."¹⁶

When God is domesticated and the memory of His saving deeds is obliterated, hope is destroyed and liturgy becomes perfunctory. Brueggemann exegetes some materials from the prophets to illustrate the way in which a fatigued and enervated Israel no longer has a passion for world-making. Brueggemann un-

derstands pain as the matrix out of which praise that is world-creating comes.

The biblical community knows the pain cannot be handled alone. In isolation, the power of pain grows more ominous and more hurtful. The pain must be handled in community, even if a community of only a few who will attend. It knows that finally pain must be submitted to the power of the holy God.¹⁷

Bringing the current pain into the context of the intervening God revolutionizes the setting and the re-

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Pain is the matrix of praise.

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sponse of the worshipers. "The praise has power to transform the pain. But conversely the present pain also keeps the act of praise honest."¹⁸

"Thus the doxology of faithful Israel is rooted in pain and astonished in liberation."¹⁹ Worship in the context of personal and collective pain within an understanding of the revolutionary work of God brings hope and perspective and direction. Worship is, indeed, a revolutionary and subversive activity from this point of view.

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In the New Testament praise and celebration were the order of the day.

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But what happens when we move from the world of the Old Testament to the world of the New Testament? How is worship affected by the gospel? What integrative viewpoint now controls understanding? What does it mean to sing a new song and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness from a post-Resurrection perspective? That is the perspective to which we turn in this concluding section of the article.

B. New Testament patterns:
Researchers into the perspective

and patterns of worship in the New Testament are agreed that there was no major disruption in direction. There was a merging of the Temple worship, the synagogue worship, and the distinctives of the early Christians.

The distinctive center of New Testament patterns is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews summarizes this distinctive as follows:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. . . . since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (10:12-14, 19-22).

Worship has now become a celebration of the completed work of Christ for us. The trembling fear breaks into confidence to come before the throne of God.

Jesus himself had predicted to the Samaritan woman that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). As He prayed that great priestly prayer in Gethsemane He asked, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (17:24).

On the night before His crucifixion He celebrated the Passover with His disciples and invited them to participate "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The first day of the week was forever turned into a worship celebration by the Resurrection. It became known as "The Lord's Day." Love feasts and the Lord's Supper became the "basis and goal of every gathering."²⁰

The Book of Acts introduces us to the worshipping community of the Early Church. The Day of Pentecost

is characterized by the preaching of Simon Peter and the coming of the Holy Spirit. There are references to teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers (Acts 2:42).

From the range of doxologies preserved in the New Testament it is apparent that praise and celebration were the order of the day. The most detailed guidance for worship procedure comes from Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (v. 26). Orderliness was the method of moving toward the edification of the body—a body in which every member was important.

In Eph. 5:18b-20 another clue to the nature of Early Church worship patterns is found: "Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

One of the great treatises on worship is the Epistle to the Hebrews. After recounting the finality and superiority of the sacrifice of Christ, the author turns in the final chapters to the way in which this new life in Christ is to be lived out. He does not gloss over the pain and the struggle or the discipline necessary to follow the promise to the end. The unshakable Kingdom and the unchangeable Christ call for total devotion. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Heb. 12:28-29).

The New Testament closes with numerous descriptions of worship in the Book of Revelation. The celebration of worship in heaven reflects the great victory of the Lamb on the earth. The Lamb is worthy to open the seals of the scroll, "because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our

God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

Worship scenes continue throughout the letter. Who can forget the triumphant note when the seventh trumpet sounded: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15).

In the midst of excruciating pain as the crescendo of evil reaches its climax, notes of worship and praise continue. In chapter 19 the great "Hallelujah Chorus" begins in celebration of the final victory of the Lamb. Revelation closes with the promise of the victorious Lord Jesus to come again. The great Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be the worship experience of worship experiences.

The victory the church announces in worship is no mere whistling in the dark. The subtlety and sordidness of sin is recognized, but the work of God in Christ has brought victory over sin. In the midst of the pain and the loss and the tragedy there is a world-making announcement.

We are here at the irreducible heart of evangelical faith. We do not know how the newness happens. There is something inscrutable and hidden about the ways in which God transforms. God's people are not able to give explanations. But they are capable of testimony about the possibility of new life . . . The trouble is real, it is specific, it hurts. And it has been overcome!²¹

It is at this point that worship becomes a proclamation and a mission. Such good news cannot be hoarded and restricted. It must be proclaimed and celebrated for all to hear. It is here that the worshipping congregation hears the words of its Lord, "As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

3. Summary

The call to "sing a new song" and "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" is a powerful summons to hope in the midst of life's crushing experiences. It is a call to turn to the God who acts in the midst of the sin and despair of life. It is a call to celebrate the victory that is en route. It is

a call to open oneself to the invasion of God through the death of Christ. It is a call to anticipate the final celebration when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

It is a call to live in community and serve the upbuilding of the community. It is a call to proclamation of the good news "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19).

It is a call to praise of the highest order. Brueggemann concludes his discussion of the worship in the Psalms with these words:

Such praise is indeed our duty and our delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community, indeed of all creation . . . Praise articulates and embodies our capacity to yield, submit, and abandon ourselves in trust and gratitude to the One whose we are . . . We have a resilient hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth to the one from whom it has been granted.²²

"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. . . . Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth" (Ps. 96:1, 9). 

NOTES

1. All biblical quotations are from the NIV.
2. R. A. Torrey quoted by Daniel J. Lehman, "Evan-gelizing the Evangelicals," *Christian Century*, Vol. 105, No. 30 (October 19, 1988), 917.
3. William Temple, *The Hope of a New World* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 30.
4. John E. Burkhardt, *Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 17.
5. Heinrich Greeven, "Proskuneo," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans), 6:765.
6. H. Strathmann, "Leiturgee, leiturgia," *Theological Dictionary*, 4:225.
7. Quoted in Burkhardt, *Worship*, 43.
8. In German the words *Volkswerk*, *Volksdienst*, and *Gottdienst* all combine the concept of obedient service owed with the one to whom that obedience is owed—whether society or God.
9. Johannes Behm, "Thuo, thusia, thusiasterion," *Theological Dictionary*, 3:183.
10. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
11. *Ibid.*, 11.
12. *Ibid.*, 38.
13. *Ibid.*, 36.
14. *Ibid.*, 103.
15. *Ibid.*, 104.
16. *Ibid.*, 120.
17. *Ibid.*, 136.
18. *Ibid.*, 139.
19. *Ibid.*, 153.
20. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1953), 29 f.
21. Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 145.
22. *Ibid.*, 160.

“We cannot live without worship.”

Creating a Context for Public Worship

by Edwin E. Crawford, Jr.

After concluding an address to a regional meeting of a government agency, I was confronted by a lady who was obviously concerned. “You are a teacher at Northwest Nazarene College,” she began. “I need to talk with you for a moment.” With irritation, I slowed my steps toward the exit. Fortunately, it only took a few sentences for her to relate her frustration. She and her husband were active members of a Church of the Nazarene in another state. They liked the people and the pastor. They enjoyed the activities. But they had expressed to each other a growing sense of uneasiness. On the way home from a recent service, the husband put his finger on the problem when he sadly mumbled, “How long has it been since we have really had worship in our services?” She then said to me, “What can we do? We cannot live without worship.” I said some kind words and provided some hollow assurances and lunged through the door. As I pulled onto the main street out of Boise, the impact of the conversation sent my mind staggering for balance. Has this couple struck the “glass jaw” of our ministerial effort? What others may not be able to articulate, what pastors themselves try subconsciously to cover up, what threatens to negate all of the good that the church can do is a growing uncertainty and frustration about worship. **WHAT CAN WE DO? WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT WORSHIP.**

The purpose of this discussion is to consider the means that can be employed intentionally and rever-

ently to assure that a context is provided in which people will find the opportunity for worship. Here we are not looking specifically for biblical or theological foundation, nor are we trying to put together a specific order of service. Rather, we are going to consider what constitutes the essential components of worship and ways to plan for these essentials to be present in any particular

TV ministries and revivals are not models for worship.

service. It is important to remember that worship is what the minister helps the people do, not a performance they come to watch. This should make clear that television ministries, revival meetings, etc., are not models for worship. This also indicates that choirs, special music, and other singular efforts must not be treated as performances but as aids that enhance the worship context.

From the perspective of the worshiper, there seem to be four things that are essentially happening in a worship experience. These are: (1) An encounter with the Holy; (2) an understanding of the Word; (3) an affirmation of identity; (4) an assurance of capability. Under each of these essentials, I have listed areas of discussion with a short paragraph

that is intended to prompt thought and interaction.

I. An Encounter with the Holy

There is a tendency for evangelical services to have the feeling of a gathering. The focus tends to be on the discrete segments of the program, on the performers, on each other. We sing together, listen to prayers and scripture readings, shake hands, listen to a sermon, judge ourselves (or someone else), and go home feeling a little better or a little worse. Whatever good or bad might be produced by such an experience, this is not worship. Worship is always and necessarily an encounter with God (Exodus 3; Isaiah 6; 1 Pet. 1:13—2:10).

A. The Need for an Aesthetic Experience

Reason and sense experience both fall short of bringing us into the presence of the Eternal. One alternative is to concede and settle for performance and social contact. Another is to act as though we are able to reason or feel God. Perhaps the correct direction would be to realize that humans are capable of aesthetic awareness. Much of this has been buried under rationalism and technology, but it is still there and can bring the human soul into the presence of that which is not earth-bound.

B. The Content of Aesthetic Experience

In the case of both reason and sensation, each has its own content, so it is that the aesthetic experience has content. Reason and sensation are put to use here, but there is need

for something more. Words like *form, drama, symbol, and metaphor* make one aware that something is going on that is not limited by what we see or what we reason. These things become the environment in which the temporal and the eternal can meet.

C. The Purpose of Aesthetic Experience

The performance of an aesthetic object (music, art, poetry, theater, architecture, etc.) is done to communicate some specific emotion or emotions. Information is only important as it contributes to that commu-

Worship is an encounter with God.

nication. Technique is important only as it facilitates that communication. Sense data is only important as the medium through which the communication takes place. The value of the aesthetic experience is determined by the quality of the emotions that are communicated: personal gratification is qualitatively inferior to compassion for one who is suffering.

II. An Understanding of the Word

There is the need not only for an aesthetic experience in worship but also for cognitive content. Human understanding reaches for some objective stuff upon which to base principles and to make decisions. Within the Christian community, Jesus of Nazareth is claimed to be the Word of God that has become flesh. It is believed that He is the full and final expression of God to humanity. This provides the beginning point for Christian understanding.

A. The Word

The Christian world in general and Protestants in particular hold great reverence for the Bible. The central pulpit in most evangelical chapels is the symbol of the centrality of the Scriptures. But we must be careful to understand that the reason for the significance of the Bible is not intrinsic to the Bible itself but is imputed to it because it is the source of our encounter with Jesus. Not only the Gospels but also the rest of

the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible contribute to the quality of that encounter. Therefore, the exposition that is done from the pulpit is not finally a representation of what the Bible says. The final purpose is the exposition of the Word that has come from God to bring light into the world.

B. The Sermon

The sermon is to be a significant part of worship because it provides for the cognitive content. But, in worship, not just any sort of address will do. The presentation of some sort of interesting account or humorous story will obviously not do. But there are other sorts of talks that seem to be questionable: Bible studies that provide only for a literary or historical understanding, exhortation that primarily aims at setting behavioral expectations, a group of stories that provide the content rather than function as illustration. If our analysis above is to be instructive, then the only thing that will qualify as a proper sermon for a worship service is one that is ultimately and primarily an exposition of the Word, that is Jesus, the Word from God.

C. The Expectation

There are those who see the sermon as the central activity of the worship service. This is easy to deny, but practice seems to argue for the former. It seems correct to say that the sermon is an essential part of Christian worship when it is an exposition of the Word. The sermon, then, must be seen as part of the whole but with a unique function. That function may be indicated with these sorts of phrases: celebration of the Christ event, the grace of God, reconciliation, assurance, relationship in Him. More specifically, the purpose of the sermon is to search for, discover, display, and apply those principles that are demonstrated through the grace of God that is in the Christ event, the exemplary life that Jesus lived, the teachings He gave, the sacrifice He made, and the eternal strength His resurrection provides.

III. An Affirmation of Identity

The confession that we pray as a part of our encounter with God is not focused on sinful thoughts and actions, nor on the acceptance of our own fallibility and limitation. Certainly these are a part of the confes-

sion, but the essential claim of confession is that the worshiper is fundamentally a child of God. Without this, the confession is meaningless. With it, we have identity.

A. Identity Is Life Determining

One of the most significant factors when confronting alternatives is an awareness of who one is. Without sounding too simplistic, it seems that this is much more determining than training and fear of punishment. Because of who we think we are, some options are not live options simply because we do not see ourselves doing that sort of thing. On the other hand, some options are sought because we see ourselves in that sort of activity. The larger questions about direction and purpose are settled by identity.

B. Identity and the Grace of God

It seems that identity is not so much a matter of objective measure as a matter of subjective conviction. That conviction is the product of relationships: it is through others that we see ourselves. The good news that Jesus brought to this earth is that God has accepted us as we are, and we are His children. Children in terms of identity, not in terms of dependency. We are heirs along with Christ. His grace has freely provided that relationship, and by faith we live out that identity.

C. Identity and the Church

Relationship with God is seldom pictured as isolation from people. It

The central pulpit symbolizes the centrality of Scripture.

seems that a clear understanding of Old and New Testaments indicates necessary participation in community. A part of the celebration of the sacrament is the reality of community. But this community is not just a matter of enjoyable company. The community senses itself as individuals come into the presence of the Father. The community expresses itself as individuals find fulfillment as a part of the whole. It is the entire church that is the Body of Christ.

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FRANCIS ASBURY'S CONTRIBUTION TO OUR WAY OF WORSHIP

by Don Irwin

The Wesleyan movement began in England with John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century. It continued beyond Wesley's death into the next century and beyond. As it spread to Europe and America, new voices were added to proclaim the Wesleyan message.

John Wesley claimed the world was his parish. However, there is no evidence that he had even been thinking of America as a possible mission field. It was not until he learned that Methodist classes had been formed by English Methodists settled here that he made an appeal for volunteer preachers to come. This appeal brought an immediate response, and Wesley sent eight missionaries to America. Their ministry was cut short, however, by the beginning of the American war for independence. All but one returned to England. This was Francis Asbury.

The impact of Asbury's 45 years in America has not been fully recognized in either secular or church history, and especially in our holiness tradition. When Asbury died on Sunday, March 31, 1816, "He was by now the best-known man in the United States."¹

George G. Small concluded his biography of Asbury with these words, "With the death of Asbury passed away the man who had exerted a mightier influence over America than any other who had ever lived in it. His place in the history of American civilization has not been accorded."²

The number of Methodists in America could be counted by the hundreds when Asbury arrived in 1771, and there were 8 missionary preachers. Forty-four years later, however, in 1815, the year before he died, there were more than 700 circuit-riding preachers, more than 2,000 local pastors, and Asbury gloried in a membership of ". . . two hundred and twelve thousand, with possibly not one, but three million of souls congregated in the year. Formerly, our people covered only three or five hundred miles but now scattered over one thousand or fifteen hundred miles in width, three thousand in length."³

After the death of Wesley in 1791, the American movement continued to flourish in a manner that sur-

passed in numbers and in national influence the mother movement in England. In America it spread like a prairie fire from the East to the West and from the South to the North. In touching the very grass roots of society, it changed the moral and spiritual climate of this young nation and helped bring about great social reform. This movement planted the seeds of Wesleyan doctrine in a Calvinistic theological church world that produced the great American holiness movement.

In this holiness movement the Church of the Nazarene has its roots. The progression from Wesley in England to the Church of the Nazarene is well documented by Dr. Thomas A. Langford in his excellent book *Practical Divinity, Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*.⁴

The objective of this article is to highlight the contribution that Francis Asbury made in adapting the Wesleyan message to the needs and culture of America from 1771 to 1816.

If we could go back 200 years to the frontier life in America, we would find very little to appreciate. Ninety-two percent of the people lived in the sparsely settled rural areas linked together by dirt roads that were nearly impassable for half the year. It would be difficult to adjust to the primitive way of life—the inconvenience, the food, housing, clothing, sanitation, personal hygiene, and the constant threat of danger. However, we probably would enjoy the fellowship found in the Methodist society meeting. In spite of the crudely built, drafty building with its backless benches, our hearts would be warmed by the singing of familiar hymns by Charles Wesley, by extemporaneous, fervent praying, and by evangelistic, biblical preaching. A comparison of our church services and those of that day would reveal some differences—not in doctrine, but in methods, forms, and practices. Likewise, there were already differences between the English Methodist practices and those in America.

When an institution is transplanted, it often develops in a different manner. This happened as the Wesleyan message took roots and grew in America under the leadership of Asbury.

Francis Asbury was born the son of Joseph and Elizabeth Asbury in Staffordshire, England, on either the 20th or the 21st day of August 1745. He had a sister who died in infancy, causing his mother to turn to a religious life.

Asbury learned to read at the age of 6. However, because of the severe beatings administered by a schoolmaster, he dropped out of school when he was 12 and never returned. At 14 he was brought under conviction through the prayers and conversation of a visitor in his home.

When he inquired about the people called Methodists, his mother arranged for him to attend his first Methodist meeting.

I soon found that this was not the [state] church—but it was better. The people were so devout—men and women kneeling down, saying, “Amen.” The preacher had no prayer book and yet he prayed wonderfully! The man took his text, and you had no sermon book. Thought I, “This is wonderful indeed! It certainly is a strange way, but the best way.” On a certain time we were praying in my father’s barn, I believed the Lord had pardoned my sins and justified my soul.⁵

Asbury started to preach while pursuing his trade as a clerk, at about 17 years of age. At 20 he entered the full-time ministry. He never mentions that he met Wesley, but there is little doubt that he accompanied Wesley on the points of his circuit. At least Wesley knew of Asbury’s ability as a preacher and leader.

Wesley issued a challenge in August 1771 at a conference in Bristol, England, for missionary preachers to go to America. Asbury had a strong impression that he should go and left Bristol immediately to share his plans with his parents. He set sail for America September 4, 1771, from a port near Bristol.

On September 12, while at sea, he wrote in his *Journal*,

I will set down a few things that lie on my mind. Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No; I am going to live for God and to bring others so to do. In America there has been a work of God; some moving first among the Friends, but in time it declined; likewise by the Presbyterians, but among them it declined. The people God owns in England are the Methodists. The doctrines they preach,

“The doctrines and the discipline—the purest of any people now in the world.”

—Asbury

and the discipline they enforce, are, I believe, the purest of any people now in the world. The Lord has greatly blessed these doctrines and this discipline in the three kingdoms; they must be pleasing to him. If God does not acknowledge me in America I will soon return to England. I know my views are upright now; may they never be otherwise.

In these statements we have the secret of Asbury’s success in America. This was his plan and program for the 45 years he lived in America. He lived for God—his deepest and greatest desire was to be holy. He endeavored to bring others so to do.

From 1771, when the 26-year-old Francis Asbury first set foot on American soil, he saw himself called to be a man of destiny . . . and, indeed, that destiny was far greater than he ever imagined. The American Methodist church became his wife, children, and home, for whom he sacrificially gave his full measure of devotion.

Others had preceded Asbury and found a cordial welcome here. Joseph Pilmoor, one of the first missionaries to reach America, wrote to Wesley 10 days after landing, “I have preached several times and the people flock to hear in multitudes.”⁶ From the beginning, the work of God proceeded to grow by leaps and bounds. Asbury preached in Philadelphia the very night he arrived in America. He, too, was impressed by the warm welcome he received. He was not impressed, however, with the lack of discipline among Methodists at either Philadelphia or New York.

Asbury was first assigned to Wesley Chapel in New York but was unhappy about having two Methodist preachers living and preaching in the same city at the same time. Consequently, he set up preaching points out of the city and spent more time riding in the country “to show them the way.”⁷ As a result of Asbury’s concern, new circuits were established in rural areas.

One year after his arrival, Asbury received a letter from John Wesley naming him Wesley’s assistant for America. Straightway, the young leader arranged a circuit of 200 miles, with 24 appointments, which were covered by him every three weeks. As he moved from point to point, he heard statements such as that expression by Thomas Jefferson, “The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.”⁸ However, he gave little attention to the American revolt in his *Journal*. In fact, he looked upon the war as an interruption of his evangelistic efforts in America. So, as the revolution progressed, and all of Wesley’s missionaries were called home, Asbury responded, “I can by no means agree to leave such a field for gathering souls for Christ, as we have in America.”⁹

To remain here during the revolution created problems for Asbury. Many patriots denounced all Methodist preachers as British agents, although there was no proof to establish such a contention. Consequently, for two years Asbury was confined in the home of Judge Thomas White in Delaware. This was a profitable time, for he filled his days with hours and hours of study and devotion. Never before had he found the time to study and read like this. In addition to all the great classics, he read Wesley. He especially read Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament*. He saturated his mind with the Scriptures, over and over again. He read the Bible in English, German, and Greek. He scheduled hour upon hour of prayer.

By the spring of 1780, he was a recognized citizen of Delaware, issued a passport, and able again to ride the circuits and preach. In spite of the war and his confinement, new circuits had been established, and the membership in every area was increasing steadily by the thousands.

“The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.”

—Thomas Jefferson

The departure of the other English missionaries in the midst of the war was a blessing in disguise for Asbury. There was no one else now available to lead the Methodist people and, by remaining when the other missionaries left, he had proven to be one of them. The American Methodists were prepared to accept his guidance and, indeed, sought it eagerly. In fact, just as George Washington emerged from a host of patriots to become the leader of our country, so did Francis Asbury emerge to become the natural leader in establishing in 1784 the Methodist Episcopal church in America.

Joseph Pilmoor had previously informed the American societies that "the Methodist society was never designed to make a separation from the Church of England or to be looked upon as a church."¹⁰ However, the general fascination, following the Declaration of Independence, was with things independent and American, rather than things formerly connected with England. By 1777 it seemed inevitable that the American Methodists would separate from the Church of England. The New World would no longer be amenable to the ordered ways of the established Church of England.

Peace with England was ratified by Congress in January 1784—eight years after the spilling of blood at Lexington. By this time, the number of Methodist preachers and laymen numbered 13,740. This is triple the number they had at the beginning of the war, but there was still not one ordained elder among the 82 preachers. In order to follow the John Wesley pattern, members of the Methodist societies were to receive the sacraments at an Anglican church. However, since there were no Anglican churches, most Methodists were denied the benefit of the Lord's Supper and baptism.

Asbury had not been able, in 25 years, to serve the sacraments of the Lord's Supper to a single member of his growing movement. Since neither he nor any of his circuit-

Unable in 25 years to serve the sacraments.

riding preachers and local pastors were ordained, there was no one with authority to administer such. This caused tension and threatened to split the societies. The people were asking that the sacraments be served, and some of the leading preachers were determined to accommodate them. Asbury's leadership was severely tested during this revolt, but he personally persuaded conference after conference to postpone separation and the granting of authority to administer the sacraments.

Francis Asbury had the pragmatic philosophy that whatever didn't work might be changed or discarded. He was always true to Wesley's theology and deeply loyal to the man whom he admired and respected above every other—however, to him, admiration and respect did not always mean agreement, any more than copying implied slavish devotion.

Perhaps no one understood the American situation better than John Wesley. He was convinced, through the numerous letters from Asbury and personal contact

with his men returning from America, that he must provide a means to serve the sacraments. Unless he did, he knew these Americans would find a way, as indeed a few from the South had already done. So in 1780, John Wesley, a faithful, loyal Anglican churchman, requested Bishop Robert Lowth of London, who had jurisdiction over the American Anglican churches, to ordain a Methodist minister for America. The bishop refused on the grounds that there was not an American Methodist preacher qualified to be ordained by the Anglican church.

Wesley believed that he had sufficient cause and authority to ordain men himself. He shared his plan with his associate, Dr. Thomas Coke, a priest in the Anglican church. Coke agreed with his plan and was ordained a superintendent. Wesley had used the ceremony for the consecration of a bishop found in the English *Common Book of Prayer*, substituting the word *superintendent* for *bishop*. However, both Coke and Asbury retained the title of bishop, as printed in the ceremony.

Wesley's representatives arrived in America in November of 1784 with documents that would sever the American Methodists from all English ties and make them an entity unto themselves. Wesley wrote, "As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scripture and the primitive church."¹¹ However, being appointed superintendent was not enough for Asbury. He understood the newly gained privilege that Americans enjoyed in a democracy and insisted on calling a conference to allow the preachers to vote on him.

This hastily called conference, known as the Christmas Eve Conference of 1784, in Baltimore, voted into existence the Methodist Episcopal Church of North America. Of the 80 or more preachers, nearly 60 were present and unanimously elected Asbury as superintendent. For the next 30 years he remained the architect and leader of this growing church.

When Bishop Coke returned to England five months later, he was criticized because, "It is evident that he went further in the way of separation from the Church of England than Wesley had intended . . . Asbury undoubtedly exercised a determining influence in the modification of Wesley's plan, Coke giving way to the stronger personality."¹²

The Christmas Conference was not just another conference. It was the pivotal point in the entire Wesleyan movement. It marked the end of an era and the beginning of something new. It marked the end of John Wesley's dream of using Methodist societies to bring spiritual renewal to the state Church of England. In *Wesley's Works*, he reveals his attitude regarding other movements that had been organized, determining that they scarcely did any good, except to their own little body.

Wesley never understood the hyper-democratic drive.

They aroused prejudice against themselves, and they totally cut off the hope of a general national reformation.¹³

John Wesley believed the Church of England was the Church with its roots going back to the apostles. *The Common Book of Prayer* was a vital part of his personal and ministerial life. Even in the very informal field services, he read the prescribed prayers from it. He also held the high view of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper. At least once a week he received Communion at the state Church of England, and he wanted all Methodists to do the same. He considered the Church of England "the best constituted National Church in the world."¹⁴

Wesley's view of the Church also included the Methodist societies and field preaching. He saw no conflict between the formal worship services held by the state Church of England and the free, informal, evangelistic meetings held by the Methodists. It was all one church. Wesley was a wholehearted, devoted Anglican and a wholehearted, devoted adherent of the free church—all at the same time. The one type of worship provided balance for the other.

Asbury held the same view when he arrived in America. However, things were different in America, where only Maryland and Virginia followed England in establishing a state church. Asbury surrendered much of his Anglican ritual and formality to accommodate the frontier culture of the Americans, where their church tradition was not strong.

Among the documents signed and sent by John Wesley to the American Methodists was *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, a

liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England, which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's Day in all congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays and praying extempore on all the other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper on every Lord's Day.¹⁵

He felt that the American Methodists needed a balance in their worship services, and this document would assist them in achieving that balance. It contained responsive readings of scripture and prayers, prayers for

Whatever didn't work might be changed or discarded.

special days of the Christian calendar, morning and evening prayers, a ritual for the Lord's Supper, and Wesley's abridgement of the 39 Articles of Faith. He reduced the number to 24, carefully screening to exclude Romanism, high church ritualism, and Calvinism. The Christmas Conference members added the 25th, recognizing the authority of the president and the Congress of the United States.

The American church loved and appreciated John Wesley. He was the father and founder of their church. However, the time had now come for them to find their own identity and do things as they felt they should. The *Sunday Service* was used but not uniformly.

Jesse Lee wrote, "At this time the prayer book, as revised by Mr. Wesley, was introduced among us; and in the large towns, and in some country places, our preachers read prayers on the Lord's day . . . But some of the preachers, who had been long accustomed to pray extempore, were unwilling to adopt this new plan, being satisfied that they could pray better and with more devotion while their eyes were shut than they could with them open. After a few years the prayer book was laid aside, and has never been used since in public worship." . . . The superintendents and some of the elders introduced the custom of wearing gowns and bands, but were opposed by many of the preachers, as well as private members, who looked upon it as needless and superfluous. Having made a stand against it, after a few years it was given up, and has never been introduced among us since.¹⁶

Wesley's plan for the worship service with the sacraments served every Lord's Day was not followed. There were too few ordained elders to serve the sacraments even once a quarter, so in many places it was observed only once or twice a year. Selected elders

Too few elders to serve sacraments once a quarter.

visited the local churches to provide the sacraments, and Asbury developed the idea of making these elders into presiding elders with additional administrative duties. He divided the whole of Methodism into districts and assigned a presiding elder to each district. These presiding elders were later called district superintendents. The presiding elder was the bishop's man on every district.

The circuit-riding preachers and the local preachers were amenable to the presiding leader, who was in close contact with the local churches and was charged with the appointment of preachers for all preaching points. The presiding elder was amenable to the conference, and Asbury presided over each conference annually. Thus, Asbury was in close contact with the grass roots of Methodism. He succeeded in preserving the national unity of the American Wesleyan movement. He personally provided leadership and motivation that brought stability and continuity to the church.

"For some reason, Wesley never quite understood the system. Perhaps this was because he never understood the hyper-democratic drive and pushes of the American frontier."¹⁷

When Asbury came traveling on a local circuit, he knew where to find the heart and center of his church—it was the local class meeting. This was one of a number of ideas that worked so well in England for Wesley and worked in America as well. All professing Christians belonged to a class, and all those seeking sanctification belonged to a class. Larger congregations could have a number of classes, but always there was at least one class and a leader. The leader was the best man available within their own group. He could be a preacher or a layman. He received no pay. Others could assist him in preaching, singing, and praying, but he was responsible for scheduling and conducting local services each

The heart of his church—the local class meeting.

“Among the pioneers, Asbury stood first and chief.”

—Thomas Ware

week. In the class meeting, only believing members could attend. Every member was to give a personal testimony, relating the victories he had over evil and temptations, as well as relating the opportunities of doing good. He then was to report on his attention to the natural means of grace; that is, Bible study, prayer, church attendance, and receiving the Lord's Supper, if offered. The leader and the class were always seeking new professions of faith, eager to add them to the class. Offerings and collections were taken through the class, and assignments were made for visiting the sick and training the children.

Lay preachers were recognized as called of God for a particular purpose. Before the Christmas Conference, all preachers were laymen, and they served societies rather than churches. They were not scholars but witnesses—good witnesses—who knew their sins were forgiven by grace through faith, regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They were men who once were blind but now could see and knew it was Jesus who had given them their sight. As they prayed, studied the Bible, and preached, they grew into effective preachers.

For Asbury, the fields were ripe for harvest, and the harvest could not wait for college-trained ministers. H. K. Carroll asks and answers a good question, “What would have been the condition of American Christianity, if . . . Francis Asbury . . . had insisted on college men only for the ministry? It is not necessary to search for an answer. The Baptists would have gained twice as fast and the Methodists would have been select, but few in number.”¹⁸

When John Wesley died in 1791, he left no successor for his work. The English Methodists were guided and governed by the conference, but the conference was divided concerning the direction it should go. In 1795 Thomas Coke tried to bring British Methodism in line with the American church. But this time the focus had moved across the Atlantic to Asbury and the expanding Methodist Episcopal Church of North America.

The emphasis of this growing movement changed little by little and year by year, until the Word preached and heard became the chief means of grace. Revivalism was to be the mission of the American Methodist church, and this emphasis would continue throughout the life and ministry of Asbury and beyond for at least six decades of the 19th century.

Thomas Ware wrote his impressions of Asbury,

Among the pioneers, Asbury—by common consent—stood first and chief. There was something in his person, his eye, his mien, and the music of his voice which interested all who saw and heard him. He possessed much natural wit and was capable of the severest satire; but grace and good sense so far predominated that he never descended to anything beneath the dignity of a gentleman and a Christian minister. In prayer he excelled. He prayed the best and the most of any man I knew. Although a strong preacher, and sometimes impressively eloquent, his prayers

nearly always made his sermons a disappointment to strangers.¹⁹

This description helps us understand why Asbury was the elected leader of Methodism for his lifetime.

Robert Tuttle states,

Asbury was an exceptional evangelist. Not that he was always successful—he was not. Nearly half the time he reports his response was dull. Yet preaching the gospel was his life's blood. He arose to preach in the morning (frequently at 5:00) and preached again before going to bed at night. Having no predetermined corpus of sermons, he preached to a particular need and rarely less than an hour.²⁰

Asbury also preached at scheduled places during the day. In fact, it was said that he preached whenever his horse stopped.

At the turn of the century, revival was almost universal in America. Asbury was refreshed by the reports of revival outbursts in many places. They were producing multiplied hundreds of converts in meetings held in chapels, private homes, and in many unlikely places. It may be that Asbury's happiest hours were those spent in revival efforts. Neither he nor any of his preachers was afraid of emotion or the intensity of the revival. Instead he sensed that God could use emotion to bring conviction to the sinner and the joy of victory to the believer. His aim was to spread revival in every manner possible and to keep up with the expanding frontier.

Just as Wesley was introduced to field preaching, Francis Asbury was introduced to the camp meeting. There is a difference of opinion as to when and where the first one occurred. Bishop Warren A. Chandler stated, “Camp meetings began in Logan County, Kentucky, in July, 1780. A Rev. Barton W. Stone carried the news of wonderful experiences back to Cane Ridge (Bourbon County, Kentucky), where in August 1801, the great camp meeting was held.”²¹

Peter Cartwright, a young traveling associate of Asbury's, recorded in his autobiography that this Cane Ridge meeting was protracted for weeks. It was supposed that there were at times 12,000 to 25,000 people in attendance. It was not unusual for one, two, three—even seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from different stands erected for that purpose. He believed that there had never been a greater revival than this since the Day of Pentecost.

The first recorded visit of Asbury to a camp meeting was in October 1800, when he and Bishop McKendree preached at the Presbyterian Drake's Creek meeting in Tennessee. Asbury entered the following description in his *Journal* on October 21, 1800,

Yesterday, and especially during the night, were witnessed scenes of deepest interest. In the intervals between preaching the people refreshed themselves and horses and returned to the ground. The stand was in the open air, embosomed in a wood of lofty

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**Preaching was
his life's blood
. . . he preached
whenever his
horse stopped.**

**Heaven smiled—
mercy flowed.**

BETWEEN TWO THEOLOGIES: *Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*

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The influence of Puritanism upon the life and thought of John Wesley in the 18th century has not gone unnoticed by recent scholars (Robert Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*). Indeed, that influence touched nearly every area of Wesley's life, ministry, and thought. Wesley's personal life was nurtured in discipline through his parents who were both Puritan Dissenters before they joined the Anglican church. Particularly Wesley accepted Puritan thought, which he brought to the service of his own understanding of Christian faith, however, modified by Arminian principles and his own evangelical experience. More to the point, covenant theology with its own emphasis upon salvation and the Church had a great deal of bearing upon Wesley, the early Methodists, and later holiness churches (cf. Donald D. Wood, "Puritan Influences on Wesley's Covenant Theology," *Preacher's Magazine*, SON '88).

However, the latter 19th century witnessed the introduction of another form of theology, which was to have a more far-reaching influence than conservative Methodism and the holiness churches could foresee. Along with revivalism and the Fundamentalist/Modernism struggle came dispensational theology imported from England with emphasis upon the second coming of Christ, last things, and a renewal of the life of the church. The origin of dispensational thought developed

from John Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren with roots in Calvinism. But the thrust of this movement came from C. I. Scofield, popular for the study Bible that carried his name. Like Wesley in the 18th century, who modified Puritan covenant theology to give meaning to his message, the conservative Methodists (cf. W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*) and early holiness churches of the 19th century recast the motifs of redemptive history and last things to serve their message of holiness and revival.

Numerous believers in Wesleyan-oriented churches of more recent times find themselves between these two theologies with certain contradictions that each poses for the other. A number of churches that once had a strong statement in dispensational beliefs have softened, if

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"Dispensation" and "covenant" are biblical terms and the property of the entire church.

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not almost removed, their beliefs in order to accommodate an early Wesleyan stance. Many of the Wesleyan persuasion, including this writer, reared on the same views have made the pilgrimage to what they believe is a more comfortable stand in covenant theology. The reverse may be true of still others in

Wesleyan ranks. Very often, many of a Wesleyan persuasion will hold to covenant theology regarding salvation, but to dispensationalism in respect to last things with an uneasiness that the two cannot be harmonized. This article is not a polemic of one view, although the author's stance is evidenced at certain points. The article is an attempt to compare these two systems of thought at critical areas for the reader to evaluate.

It is important to remember that "dispensation" and "covenant" are biblical terms and the property of the entire church. Neither term is the exclusive possession of a particular theology or group. When either "dispensation" or "covenant" is so defined that it becomes the organizing principle around which all other points of theology orbit, then a specialized theology is developed in order to give meaning to the Scriptures, the Church, and God's method of salvation with the human race. Thus, dispensational theology is a system that attempts to give understanding to biblical history through the dispensations, while covenant theology places its emphasis upon various covenants. Dispensationalists would not agree to the same covenants as covenant theologians; nor would covenant theologians agree with the partitioning of the exact dispensations as do dispensationalists. Each works with his own methodology.

Dispensational theology looks on

Seven dispensations according to sabbatical law.

the world with the history of mankind as a household over which God is administering His purpose and will. The administering of God's will is in various periods called "dispensations." The human race is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of God's will and eventually judged for failure. There are seven specific dispensations according to the sabbatical law; the millennial kingdom is God's rest for His elect. These "dispensations" are generally named:

1. Innocence—Gen. 1:28—3:24
2. Conscience—Gen. 4:1—8:14
3. Human Government—Gen. 8:15—11:32
4. Promise—Gen. 12:1—18:27
5. Law—Exod. 19:1—Acts 1:26
6. Grace—Acts 2:1—Rev. 19:21
7. Kingdom—Rev. 21:1-6

Dispensationalists generally believe the earthly kingdom was promised to Israel through Abraham and his heirs. When Israel rejected Christ, their King, the Kingdom was suspended until the time of the second advent. Consequently, prophecy is important to dispensational thinking. Furthermore, the philosophy of history for dispensationalists is linear, that is, each dispensation is distinct and completed in linear time.

Covenant theology works from a different premise. It centers on one overall major covenant known as the covenant of grace. According to this view God entered into a covenant of works with Adam, who failed in obedience. God then entered into a covenant of grace with His Son. This covenant superceded all other covenants since it was God's intention that any real relationship with God depended upon faith in God's benevolence (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*). Therefore, a covenant of grace runs progressively from Adam through Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets, though they are types and shadows of the final covenant of grace. The covenants in the Scriptures are means by which God is working out His covenant of grace. These covenants are:

1. Covenant of Works—Genesis 1—2
2. Adamic Covenant—Genesis 3

3. Noahic Covenant—Gen. 6:17—9:17
4. Abrahamic Covenant—Gen. 12:12—35:12
5. Mosaic Covenant—Exodus 19—24
6. Davidic Covenant—2 Sam. 7:1-16; 1 Chron. 17:3-15
7. The New Covenant—Jer. 31:31-34; Hebrews 8—10

Unlike dispensationalists who believe each dispensation is complete and distinct in history, covenant theologians believe that each covenant builds upon the preceding one. The period of one covenant does not come to an end in order to move to the next covenant and includes aspects of the previous ones until all culminate in the new covenant. The covenants unfold much like the unfolding of the petal of a rose. While dispensationalists' primary interest is prophecy, covenant thinkers' concern is salvation.

This brief history and description given above is the groundwork for the following comparison of the two systems of thought that intersect at several points but with differing views.

I. GOD'S PEOPLE—Dispensationalism postulates that God has two peoples—Israel, the Old Testament people of God (the earthly seed of Abraham), and the Church of God (the heavenly, spiritual seed of Abraham)—with a polarity between the two. The two do not coincide, equal, or overlap in a way in which one is included in the other. Covenant theology, on the other hand, believes that God has only one people, the Church, with two manifestations of it, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament. What God has been doing since the fall of man concerns the calling out of a people to be His own. Consequently, the saints of God of the Old and New Testament periods compose the one Body of Christ.

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE—Dispensationalism maintains

that since God has two peoples, Israel and the Church, He also has two plans—a separate plan for each of these two distinct peoples. For Israel, God has promised the earthly kingdom that is yet to come, since Israel rejected the King and the Kingdom in Christ's first coming, whereas, the Church occupies a mere parenthetical time span until God's purpose returns to Israel. God's program is to call out a heavenly people for himself from the New Testament age. To the contrary, covenant theology observes that since God has one people, the Church, He, therefore, only has one purpose in all the ages. Since the fall of man, God has been calling into one body, His people, the Church from the Old and New Testaments.

III. GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION—Dispensational thinkers have been divided on this point, particularly regarding Israel. Older dispensationalists believed that God had one plan of salvation for Israel, while another for the Church. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer makes the following statement:

In this age, God is dealing with men on the ground of His grace as it is in Christ. His dealings with men in the coming age are based on a very different relationship. At that time, the King will rule with a rod of iron. *There is no word of the cross or of grace in the kingdom teachings [italics mine] (Systematic Theology, 4:219).*

Modern dispensationalists would insist, however, that God has only one plan of salvation which is by faith, yet meaning that salvation by faith is in God, without any content of Christ (C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 122-24). This lack of "any content of Christ" for a period after the New Testament makes "the death of Christ of no effect" according to covenant theologians. It is their belief that God has had one plan of salvation for His one people since the fall of Adam. That plan of salvation is of grace in which each covenant is an outworking of that plan. The content of faith in both testaments has been Jesus Christ, although the New Testament period

Covenant theology centers on one major covenant of grace.

has a deep concept and understanding of the content of faith concerning Jesus Christ.

A number of New Testament passages bear upon the fact that the Old Testament does have in its content the revelation of Christ, and therefore faith in Christ as the content of faith was possible. John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." 5:46, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me." 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." These

passages are strong persuasive arguments for the covenant theologian to believe that the faith of the saints in the Old Testament was in Christ; therefore, only one plan of salvation is offered for all people.

IV. PLACE OF ETERNAL DESTINY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE—Dispensationalists again have not been in full agreement to this tenet. Some would hold that Israel will reign on the earth during the Kingdom Age while the Church rules in heaven with Christ. Still other dispensationalists would hold that the heavenly age will be an extension of the millennium and therefore, the distinctions between Israel and the Church will continue eternally. Covenant theologians believe that since God has only one plan for His people, they will spend eternity as one people in Christ in God's presence.

V. THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH—Dispensationalism maintains the Church's birth began on the Day of Pentecost. The Church had no beginning prior to the New Testament, it was "a mystery hid in ages past" (see Col. 1:25-26). The Body of Christ is strictly New Testament, and those saints found in the Old Testament make up Israel and therefore are not part of the Body of Christ. Covenant theology, on the other hand, is persuaded that the Church existed prior to the New Testament period, including all the saints of the

Old Testament. What took place on the Day of Pentecost was not its creation, but the empowerment of the New Testament manifestation of the people of God, the Church.

VI. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING—Dispensational thinkers believe that the purpose of Christ's first coming was to establish an earthly kingdom, promised to Israel in fulfillment of the Old Testament. Jesus came preaching and proclaiming the "kingdom of heaven," which the Jews believed as an earthly kingdom. If the Jews had accepted Jesus' offer of that kingdom, it would have been fully established

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God calls out a heavenly people for himself.

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at that time. Covenant theologians hold that the purpose of Christ's first coming was to establish a new Israel, the Church. This was a continuation of God's purpose with a definite historical revelation as the Church was now related to God in a new and better covenant. The Kingdom that Christ offered was not an earthly kingdom but was the authority of the King over the life of the one who would accept Him. Thus, the Kingdom that Christ offered was a present, spiritual, invisible kingdom rather than an earthly and visible one.

VII. THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE KINGDOM—Dispensationalism maintains that the Kingdom, which was offered by Christ but rejected by the Jews, has been postponed until the millennium. That is to say, when Israel rejected the promised Kingdom, God placed the Kingdom on hold; He suspended His first promise, while at the same time He unfolded plan 2

(the Church). The Church is therefore a parenthesis, an interim time gap, until God can move back to plan 1, the Kingdom promised to Israel. But before plan 1 can be initiated in its final movement, plan 2 must be brought to a close through the rapture of the Church from the earth. According to differing writers of dispensationalism, the Rapture

may take place before, midway, or at the end of the Great Tribulation. This rapture even with the tribulation event sets in motion plan 1 to fulfill the Abrahamic, Palestinian, and the Davidic covenants with Israel. Unlike dispensationalism, covenant theology has no concept of a postponed kingdom since it does not believe that Jesus offered an earthly, visible, and literal kingdom to Israel. For the representatives of this system of thought the Old Testament was written with a future tense—"in that day," "in those days"—while the New Testament was written in a present tense—"the kingdom of God is come upon you," "is already in your midst."

VIII. THE CHURCH AS THE WORK OF GOD—Dispensationalism considers the Church as the secondary work of God. Hypothetically, if there had been no rejection of the Kingdom by Israel, there would have been no Church. Covenant theology asserts that the calling out of an elect people, that is, the formation of the Church, has always been God's primary work. Therefore the Church is seen as going through the tribulation period. If the Church is viewed as the end of God's redemptive plan with the consummation ending in severe trial, then it is the Church that is God's agent as witness to the world and even to Israel. Those saved during the Tribulation would then be added to the Church as part of the Body of Christ.

IX. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT—Dispensational thinkers are divided over the fulfillment of the passage in Jer. 31:31 ff. concerning the new covenant. John Darby held that the new covenant in Scripture was made with Israel and Judah rather

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Only one plan of salvation is offered for all people.

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than with the Church. Fulfillment, therefore, would be in the future, in the "latter times." The reference to the new covenant in the New Testament has no reference to the church. C. I. Scofield held to one new covenant with a double meaning or application: one to the Church now and one to Israel in the future. More recent thinkers, such as L. S.

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**God's people will
spend eternity as one
people in Christ.**

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Chafer and John Walvoord, believe there are in fact two new covenants, one with Israel and one with the Church. Thus, the references must be interpreted properly for each group. Covenant theology regards the promises of the new covenant given in Jer. 31:31 ff. to be fulfilled in the New Testament.

X. PROPHECY AND/OR SALVATION SCRIPTURES—Dispensationalism views the greater bulk of Old and New Testament narratives as futuristic prophecy that would be fulfilled at a later time when God administers judgment upon Christ-rejecting Israel and a God-rejecting Gentile world. This would be the time of the rapture of the Church and the beginning of God fulfilling His promises of the earthly kingdom to Israel. Covenant theology insists that the bulk of the Scriptures is really soteriology (salvation), rather than eschatology (last things), and has much more to do with the present. Much of the Old Testament has been fulfilled: the promised land given to Israel (Josh. 11:23; 21:41 ff.; Neh. 9:21-25); Israel delivered from captivity (Ezra 1:1-5; Jer. 29:10-14); Israel rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14-15). These promises were made and fulfilled in a literal way and thereby do not need fulfilling a second time. New Testament passages, which were often interpreted futuristically, should be interpreted in the present tense, according to covenant thinkers. This should include passages such as Matthew 13 and 24, Romans 9—11, Hebrews 8, as well as much of Revelation.

XI. PROPHETIC SYSTEMS—Dispensationalism has always gone hand in hand with premillennialism. It would be a truism to say that all dispensationalists are premillennialists, but not all premillennialists are dispensationalists. The system logically develops in that format. Covenant theology has tended to be amillennial by its very nature in that it

interprets the Kingdom as spiritual and present in the world. However, it is not correct to say that all covenant theologians are amillennialists. Some are indeed premillennial in nature. This latter group would hold that the present Kingdom is invisible and spiritual in nature, but that a future earthly kingdom is also promised, but without a return to the Old Testament trappings the dispensational premillennialist would envision. They would see God dealing again with Israel, but not outside of the Church.

XII. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST—Dispensationalism views the second coming of Christ fulfilling a number of purposes. It consists of His coming for a heavenly people—the Church, His coming in great power to judge the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and His coming to set up His earthly kingdom. Covenant theology views the second coming of Christ in the culmination of God's one total plan—the calling to himself a people on the basis of His everlasting covenant of grace. Accord-

ingly, some believe there will be an earthly millennium while others believe that Christ's coming will immediately lead to the final judgment (Richard P. Belcher, *Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*).

Nearly all evangelical groups have struggled over these matters. Yet the influences of both dispensationalism and covenant theology continue to operate, sometimes conflicting in the life of the church. If Donald Wood is correct that "covenant theology appears to be a significant concept in attempting to harmonize Reformed and Wesleyan theology as a whole" ("Puritan Influences on Wesley's Covenant Theology," 38) with tension between predestination and universality of prevenient grace, then our ministers and churches will also need to find a further means of harmony in the tension between dispensationalism and covenant theology. Certainly a love for God, His Word, and His people are of primary worth with all other concerns viewed in their proper perspective. 

Context for Worship Continued from page 18

IV. An Assurance of Capability

A significant part of being a Christian is the sense of mission. We have been called to participate in the reconciliation of the world to God. The redemptive work that was begun in Christ is the continuing work of the church. Each time a believer leaves worship he is beginning another segment of that reconciliation.

A. Challenged by a Significant Task

The task that the worshipers confront when leaving worship is not the eternal task of reconciling the world but the task of living in their world in a redemptive fashion. It is important that each sees his opportunities as important within the eternal scope. The tasks will usually be usual. Some things are not of eternal consequence. In all of it there can be the identification of some attitudes and behaviors that are significant.

B. Assured That Effort Matters

The church is filled with frustrated people. They were challenged to some task and they either failed or discovered that what they did made

no difference. A few more such attempts and failures and the trying stops. At some point there must be the satisfaction of having done something that matters.

C. Strengthened by Self-confidence

There are times when it is good to be reminded that we are relatively unimportant in the larger picture and that we have sinned and are unworthy persons. But it is not true that we are worthless, stupid, and ineffective. God's ultimate act is toward us because we are worth it. God created us with the ability to reason and decide. And the grace of God has renewed our minds so that we can know the will of God.

D. Empowered by the Spirit of God

We do not enter the world alone. There is One who stands beside us with power. That does not mean that some sort of magic is going to make everything turn out just the way I had hoped. But it does mean that the One who has called us to the task has promised to respond to our weakness with His strength. 

Preaching the Gospel Today

by Donald E. Demaray

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Preaching is an exciting business today. One important reason? The expectations of our listeners.

I. TODAY'S WORLD WANTS BIBLE PREACHERS.

The current mood dictates biblical preaching. It is more fun to preach now than it used to be because people bring their Bibles to church, follow along as the lesson is read, and often take notes as the minister preaches. Listeners seek biblically oriented truth; in fact, they seek it urgently. But there is a hazard. David Seamands, pastor of the Wilmore United Methodist Church, serving many students and faculty from Asbury College and Seminary, says he fears he will be at once biblical and dull. How do we avoid the dullness characteristic of so many Bible preachers?

(1) Creativity is one answer. If the preacher does his own work and refuses to imitate another, he is very apt to be interesting. Maturity has the ability to see greatness in another without copying him. A genuine, individual, hard-earned, creative product fascinates the human mind. (2) Contemporary language aids listening. Antiquated terms, however grand in historical color, do not get through to modern man. The preacher must use up-to-date expression—like the six o'clock newscaster. (3) Relevancy is a third way to be biblical and bright. Dealing with questions no longer asked bores and wastes time.

Churchgoers will listen with heartfelt appreciation to the minister who preaches God's Word with freshness.

II. TODAY'S WORLD WANTS AUTHORITATIVE PREACHING.

We are made for authority . . . especially when it comes to something as important as religion. People demand a sure word.

Always when the term *Abba* appears in the New Testament, *Father* comes with it. The two words indicate the two sides of communication. *Abba* is Aramaic for Daddy; it connotes the warm, sympathetic, tender side of God. *Father* indicates firmness, authority. In "Abba, Father" we have the velvet and steel of every whole person, and of God himself. While it is impossible to communicate as hard-nosed authoritarians, we can, nonetheless, communicate winsomely, with kindness and understanding.

Preach with authority from God's Word, in tone and manner, and people will respect exposure to the truth and find security in it.

III. TODAY'S WORLD WANTS ILLUSTRATIVE PREACHING.

Always the kerygma is couched in story form in the New Testament. Jesus never spoke without a parable. The genius of the story or picture in preaching

is that it has power to get at people's problems, to identify with them exactly where they live.

Long, abstract passages in sermons turn people off. On the other hand, parishioners do not come to church for entertainment; they come for a definite word about how to make it through another week in a very sinful and difficult world. W. E. Sangster, criticized for using too many illustrations, replied that he knew his "fault" but that he also knew what communicated. Spurgeon, perhaps the greatest preacher since St. Paul, used many illustrations and used them well. A sizable chunk of both Spurgeon's and Sangster's power in the pulpit was the employment of pictures—pictures that touched people precisely where they lived.

IV. TODAY'S WORLD WANTS HONEST PREACHING.

One of the happy marks of our age is the return of the pulpit to a position of respect. It still has a ways to go, but clearly it's getting there.

Why the return? Because preachers are developing a conscience for accuracy and integrity. The old style preaching that exploited people's ignorance by fabrication and exaggeration is almost gone. Yes, you can still hear the remnants of that older preaching on radio and in some pulpits, but today's seminary graduate comes close to the kind of scientific honesty that characterizes the laboratory.

What are the marks of honest preaching? (1) Work. The honest preacher will do his own work, not depend on others' sermons, exegesis, and creative ideas. He will expose himself to a text passage inductively, let it speak to him by the power of the Spirit, and then share what he has received. (2) Personal growth. No two sermons should reflect the same level of maturity. The conscientious preacher reads, thinks, wrestles, listens. He grows. And people can sense that growth. (3) Advance as a communicator. He learns from TV, radio, newspaper and magazine journalism. He reads after the best writers of books and listens to the finest public speakers. He turns over in his mind the problems of communication and develops new ways of getting the gospel through to his people with crystal clarity. (4) Spiritual alertness. People detect at once the sensitivity of their minister. He comes to the pulpit from his knees, and people know it; he concludes his sermon with prayer, the most natural extension of true preaching, which is truly worship. He reads and studies the spiritual giants. In a word, he so equips himself that he can and does lead his people into the presence of Almighty God. 🏹

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The Present Crisis in Our Worship

Continued from page 6

low the stars. When our favorites are performing either on television or at an all-night sing or are moving from church to church, who has time for servanthood? Who has time to visit the nursing home? Who provides a meal for the poor?⁷

This is not to criticize Christian artists who sing or preach for us. They, too, have a duty to fulfill before God. They have the responsibility and privilege of helping *us* praise God good. But let us place the Christian response to human need where it really belongs. Spruce concludes: "On the shoulders of the people who come to enjoy good feelings or their old-time religion but are rarely, if ever, moved to faithful servanthood."

Theologically this means that religious entertainment, in harmony with the spirit of this age, tends to reinforce the egocentricity of our fallen humanity. Whereas, true worship, as William Temple believes, in moving us to the surrender of our wills to the purpose of God "in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which human nature is capable," provides "the remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin." To me this is the heart of the present crisis in our worship.

Underlying this crisis is a cultural shift in the way people think and feel. Robert E. Webber has put it well.

There was a time when the idea of mystery was more a part of our thinking than now. God was in His heavens—high, holy, and lifted up. In worship there was a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of the One who was wholly Other. But now we have . . . so reduced [God] to clichés and formulas that the mystery has disappeared. Our approach to God is intellectual and scientific in one extreme and excessively "buddy-buddy" on the other; both are sorely lacking in imagination.⁸

We holiness evangelicals have not escaped this secularization of life and the influence of our narcissistic culture. We rejoice in our "Body Life," as we should, but our worship tends in some churches to be too

much a reflection of *our* experiences in Christ. Great hymns like "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" lost the depth of their meaning in man-centered worship; *then* our services tend to become exercises in showmanship and decibels. The celebration of our oneness in Christ is precious, but it must not be divorced from the sense of God's sublime glory and matchless grace, which move true worshipers to be "lost in wonder, love and praise."

Despite the scientific, secularized, man-centered thinking of this present age, God is still God. He remains indeed "the high and holy One who inhabits eternity." He has *not* abdicated His throne, and He *is* worthy of our praise as our Creator and our Redeemer in Christ. Since this is true, we must find ways to instill a sense of awe within the worshipers. We must help them understand why they are in church on Sunday and what it means to bow down before the infinite God in that mixture of awe, wonder, and joy that we call "worship!"

As Christ's ministers we must "take time to be holy" by living in the Word and sustaining a deep, personal relationship with God in Christ. From that should flow a spirit of awe, praise, and adoration that will communicate itself to the worshipers who gather in our churches on the Lord's Day. "We must commit ourselves to the biblical view of knowing that God deserves so much more than He is getting from us," Spruce reminds us. "Of course, in our frailty we will never give God all the glory He deserves, but we can give Him our best! And our best means that God paid a great price for *us* to be able to sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain' (Rev. 5:12)."⁹

NOTES

1. James R. Spruce, *Come, Let Us Worship* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1986), 9.
2. *Ibid.*, 10.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 52.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 54.
8. Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
9. Spruce, *Come, Let Us Worship*, 74-75.

Spectators or Participants?

Continued from page 8

nearness (or power, or love) true to His Word?

2. Is the experience of God such as to foster the oneness of the Church of Christ, or such as to damage it?

3. Does the experience of God lead to an ethical strengthening, or does it promote holiness?⁸

Worship must be seen in the larger scope of the life of the Church. Perhaps it could be best seen in the following chart of church life:

Function	worship fellowship evangelism
Direction	upreach inreach outreach
Focus	God ourselves others
Purpose	exalt God edify believers evangelize the lost
Practice	love God love one another love the world

Pressure comes from parishioners expecting on Sunday morning what TV gives on Saturday night.

A church overemphasizing any one aspect to the neglect of the others becomes unbalanced. A church should reflect balance for all three functions in programming and even through the church budget. Too often, we have given worship the short change figuratively and literally. 📖

NOTES

1. Ben Patterson, "Worship as Performance," *Leadership* (Summer 1981), 49.
2. Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror, *Worship, Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1982), 16.
3. Patterson, "Performance," 52.
4. John Stott, *Christ, the Controversialist* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 162.
5. Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 97.
6. C. Harry Causey, *Open the Doors . . .* (Rockville, Md.: Music Revelation, 1985), 7 Elmwood Ct., Rockville, MD 20850. The author speaks from years of experience as minister of music and worship leader at College Hill Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. This is an excellent book on creativity in worship.
7. James W. Cox, interview by R. Albert Mohler, *Preaching* (Jan.-Feb. 1989), 3.
8. Peter Toon, *Knowing God Through the Liturgy*, quoted by Allen and Borror, 102-103.

Comforting the Mourning

“Everything is going to be all right” means nothing when you suffer the loss of a loved one.

Suzette Pruitt

“It’s God’s will.”

“Everything’s going to be all right.”

“You’ll see this as a blessing in the long run.”

Consolation given to the grief-stricken is often inappropriate, irritating, or downright cruel. Christians, desirous of bringing God’s peace, love, and order into unhappy situations, are sometimes the worst offenders. In their attempt to make sense out of tragedy, they may attribute deaths, divorces, estrangement, and handicaps to God.

When we counsel the grief-stricken, we should avoid platitudes that are as unscriptural as they are ineffectual. Avoid trying to answer the question “Why?” Bad things simply do happen to good people—including Christians.

The Bible does not teach that God will deliver us from all sorrow and trouble. It does promise, however, that God will be with us in our sorrows and troubles. He will deliver us before we are overcome by them.

When I was going through what seemed to be an unbearable grief, I learned the power of God’s presence through His Word and through sincere Christian compassion.

Unfortunately, I was also subject to overly optimistic bromides, Bible quotes that didn’t fit the situation, and admonitions that I “should have a better attitude.”

I never questioned that the Lord was with me, but I had to accept that on faith rather than on feelings. There are those who have supernatural experiences of God’s presence in their trials—but that was not my experience.

I knew His presence in less dra-

matic ways—the appearance of a friend at the door when I needed to talk, a passage in the Bible that touched my heart in a personal way, a recognition long after the fact that because this adversity happened, I was better equipped to minister to others in similar struggles.

At the outset of this trial I was immobilized. I was too much in shock to share my grief publicly, but I needed to share it with an understanding friend who would keep it in a Christian perspective. I called my prayer partner and received the counseling I craved. What did my prayer partner do?

First, she cried with me. Grief counseling generally begins by sharing the other’s sorrow. This may be an embrace or through other gestures of heartfelt sympathy or by simply saying, “I’m so sorry.”

Rom. 12:15 advises us to “mourn with those who mourn” (NIV). So rather than expressing belief that “things will work out” (they may not) or that good will come of it, the best thing for someone counseling the grieving to do is to recognize the person’s pain and share it.

Second, she listened to me. Listening is a communication skill, one that is perfected in few people. Too many of us only appear to be listening while we are preparing our responses.

◇ ————— ◇

The Lord was with me—I accepted that by faith, not by feelings.

◇ ————— ◇

We come up with a good idea and attempt to “straighten him out” with our analysis of the situation and what we think should be done to correct it. The listening may have finished long before the speaker finishes his sentence.

Listening involves hearing what the person is saying by observing the body language, the pauses, and the facial expressions and getting clues to what the person is feeling as well.

Listening is best when the listener keeps his mouth shut, except to ask further questions for elaboration.

Contemporary classes in communication (for parent-child, husband-wife, teacher-student) suggest “reflective listening”; that is, repeating back to the person what you think he is saying or feeling. This becomes a springboard for deeper communication and clarifies the issue for speaker and listener.

Third, and most important, my prayer partner prayed for and with me. A Christian’s first response to any crisis should be prayer.

You can always pray *for* someone in your personal, private prayer time or with your church or prayer group. But there are times when the situation calls for praying *with* that person. We can pray together on the telephone.

Holding hands in prayer or touching the person gently on the shoulder while praying is especially helpful because it gives a tangible transmission of the intercessory nature of the prayer.

Significantly, my friend’s prayer was more general than specific. She was specific only in the issues

where she could pray with confidence, such as for my peace, for Jesus' presence in the situation, and for the others involved. She left the door open for the Lord to accomplish His will in His own way and in His own timing.

Fourth, she restricted her comments to the current situation. She didn't speak about a future date when things could be "better."

When a person is grieving, he can't handle future possibilities, whether they are happy resolutions or grim consequences. He can deal only with what is happening that day—not with what might happen the following week.

The Twelve-step (Alcoholics Anonymous) program slogan, "One day at a time," is the best guideline for daily life. Jesus agrees, for He tells us in Matthew 6:34: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (NIV).

Fifth, as the days went on, my friend kept in touch. When we couldn't meet in person, she called me on the phone to see how I was doing. By this concentrated attention, she proved that she was sharing the burden with me.

Because she knew me well, as only someone who prays with you regularly can, she was perceptive to my changes in mood. When she noticed a change for the better, she commented on that without making a judgment. In other words, she didn't pounce on me in a "Well, that's better!" way.

When she noticed my move from despair into bitterness, she commented on that in a nonjudgmental way, suggesting that I was progressing through the natural stages of grief (anger generally follows shock).

At times, her mood even seemed to coincide with mine as she took on some of my anger and indignation (though in a more subdued fashion). This happens with the burden-bearer and can be helpful in opening up the communication.

Sympathy and empathy from others allows mourners to open up and share their feelings—the bad and the good. Judgment and criticism only cut off communication.

◇ ————— ◇
She didn't speak of a future when things would be "better."
◇ ————— ◇

Sixth, she waited until I was ready before she gave advice. Only after I had worked through the initial excruciating pain was I willing to listen to anyone's opinions.

Even then, she was careful to let me come up with answers, analyses, or conclusions, rather than supplying them herself in a "let me tell you how to handle this" vein.

My first reactions were somewhat irrational and harsh, but she did not jump in with "You don't mean that!" Rather, she nodded sympathetically and said, "I understand how you must feel."

I was free to express my human reactions without being judged. I could then progress to stating my anxiety over the basic issues— anxiety over how I was going to manage in the new situation I was in, disappointment in God for not protecting me when I thought He should have, fear that I would never be able to love, trust, hope, or be vulnerable again.

She showed me that God was with me in my trials and that He would ultimately protect and deliver me (the Psalms were especially meaningful on this point). She reinforced this by reminding me of other times in my life when the Lord had led me through what seemed like insurmountable ordeals.

We adopted 2 Cor. 4:8-9 as our most applicable scripture: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (NIV).

Notice that this does not deny the fact of sorrows and tribulations happening to the believer, an important point in dealing with the grieving. It does suggest, though, that the Lord will not let us be overcome.

When I would feel I had had enough and protest that I didn't believe a particular Scripture verse or advice applied, my prayer partner would step back and not push it. As she allowed me to find my own way with the accompaniment of her and

the Lord, I began to climb out of my deep pit and get back on track again.

I'm not saying that my prayer partner's counseling was perfect. There were times when she grew impatient and tried to suggest actions that were not appropriate. Other times her sympathy was so strong that she allowed me to rant and rave more than was healthy for me.

Nevertheless, because the majority of her interaction with me was so helpful, it outweighed any minor mistakes she may have made.

Because I learned firsthand that a sensitive approach in grief counseling is more helpful than quick-fix advice, I believe that I am now better able to follow the commission in Isa. 61:1-3:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and to provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor (NIV).

I, like my friend, will be called upon to express sympathy at a time of loss, concern for someone's illness, or reaction to someone's change of life-style. The good news is that I share this commission with Jesus. I do not do it alone.

I know by experience that I can best minister to the grieving by sympathizing with them, listening to them, praying with them, restricting my comments to the situation at hand, keeping in touch, and advising only when they are ready to receive advice.

Until the time comes when the Lord will "wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4, NIV) there will be "time for tears," but when we have the love and support of our Lord and good Christian friends, we will find that "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:5, NIV). 🙏

The Place and Purpose of Announcements

Kenneth Vogt

Announcements have been analyzed, criticized, and shifted from one place in the worship service to another. Attempts have been made to leave them out entirely. Always they seem somehow to creep back. The reason for that is clear. Announcements, properly understood, are a part of the fabric that assists the worshipers to be participating members of the family of God.

Webster says, "to announce" is "to publish the intelligence of . . . to proclaim formally, publicly, and efficiently." *Announce* is chiefly used in the anticipating sense. We announce an event that is about to occur and in which many people are, or could be, interested.

Right at this point, church leaders often encounter difficulty. Some who are present are not expected to be personally involved in every given event. However, if the announcement is given as though everyone is supposed to be involved, when in fact not everyone is, then resistance or lack of attention sets in. Announcements properly understood and given are a part of the fabric that makes an entire congregation one, not necessarily in activities but in spirit.

I attended a service in Park Street Church in Boston, where Dr. Harold Ockengay was pastor. It was a beautiful, rather formal service. The ministers who were participating wore robes on the platform. Pastor Ockengay had different ministers lead in different parts of the service. Suddenly, to our surprise, he was on his feet, announcing with fervor and enthusiasm the upcoming Sunday School picnic to be held on the following Saturday. Obviously, everyone there was not destined to go to that picnic. Yet that announcement was so given as to make that worshiping congregation one in spirit with this particular event. That announcement served more than one purpose. It did inform, invite, and encourage

participation. But more than that, it created a sense of unity and togetherness for the entire family of God. Although we did not go to the Sunday School picnic, that announcement left a warm glow in our hearts for that church.

It might help us to understand the meaning of announcements when we consider some antonyms such as: *bury, conceal, hide, keep back, hush, suppress, and withhold*. Not to announce almost implies secrecy.

The privilege of making announcements has been often and terribly abused. Sometimes they are too long. Sometimes they are preached. Sometimes they are poorly prepared. Sometimes they are relegated to statements in the bulletin. That should be sufficient for some events taking place in the church, but there are other events that need the force and unity of a statement from the pulpit, either by the pastor or a lay leader. When these are properly prepared, not only will they inform people and encourage participation, but the whole church will be proud that they are a part of an active, going movement to promote special events for special people.

To leave announcements out is virtually impossible, and to attempt to do so often leaves a congregation groping for something not said. Announcements are often the glue that molds a diversified people into a participating and united people. An increasingly common practice is to make announcements in the form of a greeting, before the worship starts, or as the point of beginning for a worship service. Perhaps this is better than to "break into the middle" of the worship service. Announcements are necessary, but they need not be bad. They can become a joyous moment to tie a worshiping congregation together. 

Pontius' Puddle



Eliminating the Unsuccessful Preacher*

by Roy Smee

I am reminded of the farmer who had a mangy dog. The disease was spreading. Other animals on the farm were subject to it. The mangy dog must be eliminated! There were three ways by which this could be done. He could cure the mange, kill the dog, or let the disease take its course and in the end nature would eliminate the dog.

There are three ways to eliminate the unsuccessful preacher. Eliminate the cause of his failure, ecclesiastically kill him, or let circumstances take their course and thus eliminate him.

First, if possible I feel that we should "cure the mange." I believe that the successful district superintendent should discover the causes of failure. We are responsible in a great degree for the success of our preachers. Many

**If possible,
"cure the
mange."**

of our men will appreciate constructive counsel. I know that there is danger here. The mangy dog might bite. The unsuccessful preacher might retaliate. Sometimes it may take strong medicine to cure the mange, which is also true concerning the preacher. If the farmer values his dog sufficiently to cure the animal at the risk of being bitten, surely we should be willing to risk something in order to help one of our brethren who is failing because of some shortcoming of which he may be completely unaware.

For instance, one of my pastors, who is very excellent in the matter of visitation, sympathetic contact, and personal piety, together with being a splendid singer, was about to be voted out of his church. I discovered the condition in time to counsel with some of the members of the church. I found that this good man was rather slow of speech and unfor-

tunately followed a pastor whose one strong point was his ability to preach. My man felt that he must do his best to preach big sermons. The sad thing about it was that his sermons were big in point of duration only. The result was that the people were bored almost beyond their ability to endure. They could stand it no longer, so they determined to have a change.

What was I to do? Could I stand by and let this man who had been there only a year come up for reelection and be voted out and thus be injured beyond recovery? I felt that if ever I was my brother's keeper, I was in regard to this man. I determined to have a frank talk with him. I knew that I had to use all the tact possible and asked God for divine wisdom in making my approach. I told him the exact condition as I had found it and assured him that I was his friend and desired above everything else to help him. My advice to him briefly was thus: Do not preach over 20 minutes. Be sure to have something to say and when you have said it, stop. Write your sermons out. If necessary, take your manuscript to the pulpit and read it. You had better read a good sermon than to extemporize and say nothing. I further advised him that if he would write his sermons and read them several times before his wife or before a large mirror before going into the pulpit, he would have more fluency and ease in expression when he stood before his congregation.

He thanked me very much for this advice and seemed to appreciate it. The direct result to him was a unanimous vote for his reelection. That church today is one of the bright

spots on my district. I believe that I saved this man for the ministry, saved his family from embarrassment, and saved the church from division.

Another way we can help the unsuccessful preacher to succeed is to so thoroughly know our men and be so well acquainted with our churches that we can place round men in round holes and square men in square holes. There are distinct types of congregations as well as distinct types of men. It seems to me that our one big job in the superintendency is to secure pastors who fit. If our pastors succeed, our district will succeed. The most satisfactory way to eliminate the unsuccessful preacher is to help him to succeed by eliminating those faults that make him unsuccessful.

There are times, however, when all that we can do will not save a preacher from failure. Either he cannot or will not make the necessary adjustments in order to succeed. I believe that in these cases it is necessary to eliminate the preacher by frankly refusing to recommend him. This may cost us some votes at the next district assembly and in extreme cases may cause us to suffer defeat. I feel, however, that this need not be the case if we exercise proper diplomacy in our procedure.

It may be properly said here that our strength as superintendents depends not upon the power delegated to us through legislation but more especially upon our ability to gain and hold the confidence of our pastors. To this end we must ever be known as the pastor's friend. Only in the rarest cases is it wise to take

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**You had better read a good sermon
than extemporize and say nothing.**

Church Growth

BREAKING THE FIFTIES BARRIER

by Robert Hudson

Mission Director/District Superintendent
El Salvador, Central America

About half of holiness churches have less than 50 members.

Many holiness churches have passed the 500-member mark in the last few years. Others have reached a thousand. Some even expect to reach 2,000 within a few years. Praise the Lord!

Other churches whose pastors and people seem to work just as hard seem to have stalled at a

lesser number. For years, they have been at their present level—no more, no less.

An even more devastating fact is that about half the total number of holiness churches have less than 50 members. Most of them had better days somewhere in their history, but the fruit withered on the vine. They probably would like to have a better evangelistic outreach, but for some reason their church is a barren island, offering little to the starving souls around it.

One pastor of a 25-year-old church received three negative votes. That was enough to vote him out even though the other three voting were for him.

Another church situated in a heavily populated area of a large city closed its doors permanently. In its 15 years the church had not received enough members to fill the front two pews on one side.

It is too bad that every pastor cannot spend a couple of years as a superintendent, an evangelist, or a missionary on deputation. Observing the churches that stall as well as those that advance brings back my college and seminary pastoral administration classes. Experience bears out some of the principles advocated there.

Growth will not crawl ahead of the pastor's administrative abilities. Yes, something like a good revival or a Sunday School contest might swell the statistics now and then, but without proper administration the tendency is likened to a harvest after a rainless season.

Neither will growth exceed the administration of the Sunday morning program. A rapidly scribbled sermon nearly identical to each of the last 500 will probably be "performed" before a congregation that has been nearly identical the last 500 Sunday mornings.

Growth also responds to the administration of the church music program. The church whose congregational hymns include only 10 percent of those in the hymnal will likely have a growth rate of 0 percent. Special music that includes only 10 songs, sung by only two or three overused singers, will also lend itself to a zero growth rate.

The church plant as it compares to the homes of the church members also affects church growth. Selfish members who care more about their personal houses

than the church facilities will not produce a loving, growing church.

Church growth is also influenced by the generosity of the local church in supporting general and district projects. A few flamboyant men can produce independent superchurches, but there are only a dozen or so such men in North America. The rest of us will have a greater ministry by joining a worldwide church. I'm not sure I can think of a single holiness church that ignores district and general activities (whether it be reading books or budgets) that is growing consistently.

Growth will not go ahead of administrative preparations for the Sunday evening service. One church was promised a quarter section of land if they would average 100 or more on Sunday evening for a year. Working for a big piece of dirt seemed more exciting than working for streets of gold. They earned the farm, but thereafter the attendance soon fell to 50 again. The church could still have 100 each Sunday evening with the proper promotion and administration.

One pastor in his annual report to the district assembly announced that his congregation had stopped having Sunday evening services during the year, but they were going to start again whether the people liked it or not. He kept his promise, but the people didn't like it and few attended. The idea of Sunday evening services was not the debated point. It was the pastor's failure to prepare an exciting service that was spiritually uplifting.

Growth will not surpass the visitation program. Twenty calls a week total a few more than 80 a month, or about 1,000 a year. That should be a minimum for a pastor of a church with less than 50 members.

These visits should be analyzed. One pastor makes 125 calls a month, but his Sunday School averages about 10. Another pastor makes 60 calls a month and enjoys a 25 percent annual growth. In the case of the first pastor, either his calls raise no interest in spiritual things or perhaps his services are poorly administered and one visit to the church ends all interest.

The church will not grow beyond the pastor's administration in revival planning and follow-up. One pastor informed me he was having a revival: "Praise the Lord! When?"

Church growth does not exceed a pastor's administration.

"Next week."

"Great! Who is the evangelist?"

"Well, we are thinking about that now. Could you come and preach?"

Even if the evangelist is invited years in advance, the pastor interested in leading people to Jesus will do far more to involve his people than to announce the revival from the pulpit.

Church growth will be affected by the pastor's administration of his time. I often hear four words from pastors of stagnant churches—"I don't have time."

Pastors of growing churches show up when a workday is called to clean and paint a building for a new mission. Growthless pastors do not have the time. The growth pastors are generally more faithful at district board and committee meetings.

Excitement of the new and the different stimulates church growth. That does not mean the flamboyant and dangerous. Growthless churches generally have dull and tedious announcements of the same services, done the same way.

Something new, different, or out of the ordinary will

continually be in the planning of the growing church, with creative, innovative announcements.

A church's growth depends upon the pastor's involvement with his people. The church whose entire program (morning worship, youth work, missionary society, Sunday School, etc.) involves only the leadership of the pastor and two or three others probably will not pass 50.

Church growth will also stay within the limits of the record and file system of the church. The church that keeps records and constantly compares them with statistics a month ago and a year ago will probably find that the most recent statistics are the most outstanding. Otherwise, no one will know or care what is happening to the soul-saving mission of the church.

One district sent pastors to two distinct but similar communities to begin new churches. The following year, the reports of the two men were similar. Both baby churches grew to 40. However, from there on the reports moved apart. One stalled at 40 and that number persevered year after year. The other shows an increase every year. The difference is in the administrative abilities of the two pastors. 

Eliminating the Unsuccessful Preacher

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sides with a congregation against the pastor. Even though I may be sure that a pastor is opposed to me as superintendent, I do not feel that this is sufficient cause for me to seek his removal. It is a larger thing for me to get along with him and thus win him rather than to have a fuss and drive him from my field. When we have gained the confidence of our men we can safely counsel with them concerning whatever changes may seem to be the best for the work.

We should remember, too, that to merely transfer an unsuccessful man from one district to another does not eliminate him. I think a little old-fashioned honesty might be more ruggedly practiced when it comes to recommending our unsuccessful preachers.

Too many times our recommendations are so written that there is more between the lines against the man than what the lines themselves express in his favor. This might seem all right if all are properly versed in reading this code. This

practice among us is doubtless prompted as a means of self-protection. We fail to give a fair recommendation because we fear our communication will not be held in strictest confidence. Brethren, let us be fair with one another.

There are extreme cases where all we can do to eliminate the unsuccessful preacher is simply to let matters take their course and his own failures will close every door against him. Churches want pastors who succeed. Of course we will be blamed for not finding him a place. But we really have nothing to fear because every right-thinking man will know the fact of his failure. Of course if he has become an elder and lives in California, we will always have him with us to keep us humble by criticizing us and finding fault in general.

In conclusion, I might suggest that the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," could well be applied in this matter. I feel that we should be more strict in our requirements for ordination. Not necessarily in our educational re-

quirements but in those other matters that make for success. One may be ever so well versed when it comes to theory, and be very spiritual indeed, and yet not have the adaptability to successfully apply his theories. Does he know how to lead his people into the deeper things of the Spirit? Can he exercise leadership? Can he get along with people? Does he have a teachable disposition? Does he know how to practice loyalty to leadership? Does he have a sympathetic attitude and a spirit of sacrifice? We should discover these qualities of character more accurately in the future before ordaining men into this most sacred order of the ministry.

Doubtless our schools and colleges could help with more extensive courses in practice, and by generating a feeling among our prospective preachers that graduation merely prepares them for the apprenticeship of the ministry, and that their advancement will depend upon their efficiency in carrying forward the work of God. 

*From the March 1935 edition of the *Preacher's Magazine*.

MY LAST SERVICE

by Albert Lown

Evangelist, Keighley, England

Normally, and mercifully, it is not ours to know that we are meeting a loved church and giving a final address to that congregation. "God kindly veils our eyes" so that "we may live for today, nor anxious be." But if I knew that a particular meeting would be a last fellowship and ministry—as Paul and the leading laymen of the church at Ephesus knew—would it follow the pattern of the apostle's final testimony and exhortation to his sorrowing friends? There was a mutual awareness in the moving farewell on the shore at Miletus, recorded in Acts 20, "they should see his face no more" (v. 38). Convinced of this, the father of a city church born of 12 charter members and baptized in revival poured out his soul in encouragement and warning.

It could transform relationships, life, and service if we registered the possibility—though not a morbid one—that the tear-baptized conviction of Paul and the church board of Ephesus First Church could be true in ministry: "This may be my last service, therefore concern and burden must be fully and faithfully expressed."

LOOKING BACK

Gratitude for all that God's grace had permitted him to accomplish in Ephesus was blended with the heartbreak of parting. Paul recalled his first entry into the city, to find 12 sincere men, candidates and claimants for the sanctifying baptism of the Spirit. The "night and day" ministries that followed: Three years of preaching, visiting "house to house," prayer and personal counseling, pursued side by side with the task of supporting himself and his fellow workers with "these [calloused, tentmaking] hands." If any pastor

could submit to the scrutiny of God and man, it was Paul. "I take you to record this day," he witnessed, "that I am pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). The motive of life was sacrifice, its motto service, and its mission souls. He had exemplified his Lord's unrecorded beatitude, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," although at times he needed to be on the receiving end and was grateful, especially to the Philippians, when this was experienced. But like Jesus, "he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give himself . . ." knowing,

*And when I am dying,
how glad I shall be
That the lamp of my life
was burned out for Thee.*

LOOKING FORWARD

There are "faces in the gallery of every heart," and for the weeping

**"Faces in the gallery
of every heart."**

laymen one face had a special place: that of their spiritual father, shepherd, counselor, and friend. In the hour of parting, the realization of all they owed Paul flooded their hearts. They would miss him, but the altars of memory's gratitude were already being erected. In that last meeting they were aware of a debt that will be uppermost in life's review when we too "come to the last mile of the way"—how much we owe to key people in life and ministry. "My fa-

ther, my father," cried Elisha in fuller tribute as Elijah was taken from him and needy Israel. And sometimes tribute may be blended with regret that we did not endeavor in life and presence to pay that debt more thoughtfully and tangibly in word, token, and deed.

Those who would miss him were in the forefront of Paul's concern for the coming days; above any concern for his own persecution. God had done so much in that cosmopolitan city, the devil would surely attempt a comeback. "After my departing," he warned, "shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). Internally, "of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (v. 30). Seducing doctrines and self-appointed carnal leaders would imperil "the church of God, which he [Jesus] hath purchased with his own blood." "Take heed therefore," Paul pleaded, "unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church . . ." (v. 28). "Watch and remember" (v. 31), he urged, seeking to reproduce in the lay leadership the selfless spirit and total devotion of his own ministry; knowing a Spirit-filled, doctrinally pure, and sacrificially united church board would ensure the survival and progress of the church.

LOOKING UPWARD

His last will and testament of warning and encouragement embraced all a mature pastor could give and do to safeguard the church he would see no more. In faith and prayer he committed them to God, "and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give

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Personal Growth

PARING DOWN

by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Walpole, Mass.

Several years ago my family decided to gear toward a more simple life-style. We had been under the crush of hurried, complicated family schedules and concluded that such was working against our spiritual growth.

Purposefully we set in motion the following:

(1) Cut credit cards down to one, and that only for emergency use. We had been used to flinging those cards around too freely, to our detriment. Having only one on hand for rare use would discipline us within realistic boundaries of financial fact.

(2) Marked on the family calendar are home activities along with the outside obligations. Before we had penciled in only those meetings at the school, commitments at the church, and organizational duties that called us away from the house for too many hours.

But now we wrote into our calendar evenings together at a neighborhood restaurant, that morning set aside for just my wife and me to have breakfast, and that Sunday afternoon with one another at the park. The family gatherings were put on the same par as the out-of-the-home pullings.

(3) Pared down outside infringements on our time. Instead of living as we had been doing for years—running here and there, separating ourselves from one another sometimes for weeks on end—we covenanted to pull in the strings of family life so as to get to know one another on deeper levels.

In order to see this a reality, all of us had to learn to say *no* to many invitations. In doing so, we learned that none of us is indispensable and that many committees can actually survive without us.

(4) Turned off the television. Instead of hearing that box chattering on for hours, we turned the knob to the left and found quiet. At first, it was a bit awkward; but it did not take too long to come to value the new dimension of silence.

The two little children have their few hours to watch programs directed to their interests, even then with careful monitoring from parents as to content. And the rest of us who are older have discovered books we had not read, games we had not played, conversation we had not had time for, and relaxing moments doing nothing particularly productive that we simply had not permitted before.

(5) Took car rides more frequently. Even with gas prices as they are, we allow in the budget gas money for family excursions. This may mean doing without some-

thing else, but we are willing to live with this priority.

In New England there are so many things to see: Plymouth, Cape Cod, Gloucester, the Freedom Trail in Boston, and Sturbridge Village—not to mention the winding backroads, tucked-in fields and streams, old barns, water wheels, and pastures.

And car rides naturally invite picnics. We now have the details down to a science with each person having his errands to run—quick as a flash—in readying for a meal out-of-doors. It doesn't always take all that much; sometimes a few sandwiches and beverage will do.

(6) Slowed down our movements. For years I have scaled staircases a couple of steps at a time. Now I tell my feet to take *one* step at a time; no need to set the wood ablaze.

The same with driving the car. Instead of rationalizing why I could get by with going over the speed limit, I now content myself with keeping within the law. (Not bad for a preacher.)

(7) Concentrated on the simpler things of life: walking through the snow with the family, going out for a "night on the town" by purchasing an ice cream cone apiece, crayoning a picture with my four-year-old, writing a home-made poem on the back of a napkin at the coffee shop, discovering a new field of horses, and meandering for an evening through one of the "junk shops" at the other end of the village.

(8) Gave God a chance to freshen up our days. Before, we worked on remote control most of the time. We had learned the doctrines and the orthodox phrases; they were given forth with sincerity but more times than not from empty wells.

Now God has become more real, more personal. He has had an opportunity to be more creative in our walk with Him.

As we look about us at other Christians, we realize they too hunger for that fresh approach to God; however, they are caught up in the same rat race we had been pressed into. Most of the time they do not realize why they are exhausted in service for the Lord.

Thanks be to Him, He has opened up the simple life for our family. In it we have come to experience that rejuvenation so rarely found in this speed-crazed world.

Other than my experience of personal redemption through Jesus, I must confess that this experience of the simple life has been the most exhilarating discovery I have ever come upon.



IS CHAPLAINCY YOUR CALLING?

by Chaplain David Grosse
Chief, USAF Chaplain Resource Board
Maxwell AFB, Ala.

Most of us have heard the story of the chaplain who returned home, filled with enthusiasm for his new vocation. He was greeted by a pastor who asked, "John, why did you leave the ministry?" Unfortunately, that experience has been repeated often.

Make no mistake: Chaplaincy is first and foremost a calling. All of the elements present in any other religious vocation—the push from behind, the pull from before, the prodding within—all must surely be present in the call to chaplaincy.

For one thing, the work of chaplaincy is highly specialized. It is specialized because the setting and skills one needs and uses to carry out this ministry are more narrowly focused than those of the civilian clergy. For example, the military chaplain's "parish" is youthful, with an average age of 26. It is predominantly single and male. It is highly mobile; there is a near 100% turnover of the military congregation every three years! It is broadly ecumenical and interfaith, 77 different religious denominations represented in the military chaplaincy. Chaplain pastoral care requires competency in crisis intervention, and it is largely carried out among the spiritually indifferent and undernourished. Finally, the 70:30 ratio of administrative to pastoral care duties reported by civilian pastors is approximately reversed for chaplains. Pastoral care (visitation, counseling, etc.) can occupy up to three-quarters or more of a chaplain's duty week. Clearly, the chaplaincy is no place for the person committed only to status quo, traditional forms of parish ministry.

Moreover, since the context of chaplaincy ministry is unique, the

pull of the chaplaincy vocation takes on exceptional importance. In addition to a keen sense of spiritual calling, one can get a sense of the rightness of this vocation by addressing several crucial questions. What is it that draws you to chaplaincy? What sense of need fastens itself on you? Does your perception of the world in which your ministry would occur square with reality? Can you see yourself in that setting?

This matter of context is of importance for yet another reason. Many an unfortunate and misguided career decision has been made by the well-intentioned but uninformed, simply through failure to secure sufficient available information about the setting in which that ministry will take place. In the case of the military chaplaincy, such information is vitally important, because the conditions within which one ministers are so critical to the minister's success. It is a world characterized by ministry in the presence of loneliness, confusion, and impermanence. Often you may feel yourself to be among the walking wounded—a wounded healer, to use Henri Nouwen's phrase, offering comfort, counsel, and care out of your own deep sense of need for the same things.

The military is, of course, a world of regimen and uniformity, where group needs transcend individual needs. For Air Force chaplains, this may mean:

- a seven-story elevator ride deep into the hole of a missile silo, where men keep lonely vigil over a nuclear-tipped missile
- a ski-equipped plane to a remote arctic ice pack, bringing mail, supplies, and the chaplain, expected to conduct a religious

service in a makeshift setting, provide friendly banter, and offer serious prayers and counsel

- visits with security, maintenance, and emergency personnel, at all hours of the day and night, frequently to isolated and lonely outposts
- offering prayers for the safety of crews preparing for predawn launches, sometimes on life-threatening missions
- counseling spouses in anxious vigil, worry, and fear for loved ones who serve in remote locations, perhaps on freedom's frontier
- daily hospital rounds to the victims of mass casualties, offering consolation, hope, and above all, the tender solicitude of the Heavenly Father
- assisting in the delivery of a death notice and then providing often demanding pastoral and personal support until family members have readjusted to life without a parent or spouse

This and much more is the "context" and content of ministry for military chaplains. Yes, there are the more familiar forms of parish life ministry: worship services, Sunday Schools, fellowship, group Bible studies—those ministries more recognizably "routine." Even reports, forms, bulletins, and all the other administrative baggage that goes with life and work in any institutional setting are part of the life and work of the chaplain.

There is, on the other hand, the excitement and the reward of living and working in faraway places. Above all, there are unlimited opportunities for ministry in the presence of great spiritual need. The inner val-

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MAKING FRIENDS IN YOUR OWN CHURCH

by Lauri S. Herr

Burnsville, N.C.

"This is just a friendly warning," the note said. "Beware of playing favorites in church."

This "friendly warning," written by a blue-haired lady to her pastor's wife, echoes the advice ministers and their spouses often receive. Sometimes they even give it themselves. One veteran clergy wife, for example, once cautioned a young woman upon her engagement to a seminary student. "Let me tell you about being a minister's wife," she said with a congratulatory hug. "If you do make a friend in your church, never let the other members know it. I have friends with whom I do things during the week, but at church I hardly speak to them. Otherwise, people think you're partial."

People will think you're partial.

Such a fear of appearing partial is just one of the obstacles that spouses of ministers, and wives in particular, face when it comes to making friends in their own churches. Some of these obstacles are caused by the nearsightedness of church members. Others the pastor's wife herself may unknowingly create. By becoming more aware of these obstacles, however, the pastor's wife can more successfully overcome them.

While we all crave close friendships, there are several reasons that a minister's wife especially needs them. Frequent moves are not only hard on the fine china but also can damage a fragile self-esteem. Her husband's odd work hours often keep him away from home. Usually she is the only one who ever hears her husband fume after a frustrating board meeting. She is also an easy target for criticism on everything from how she dresses to how her children behave.

Added to all this is the constant underlying pressure to please. One parishioner, for instance, once informed her new pastor's wife that she always judged a pastor by his wife's performance!

For a minister's wife, all of these factors combine to create a very real need for emotional support beyond that which her husband and family can give. Even a strong relationship with God cannot replace the need for a hug or human conversation.

A strong relationship with God cannot replace the need for a hug.

It would seem that one of the most logical places to find such a friend would be in one's own church. Yet of the eight women I interviewed whose husbands are ministers,¹ most found their church friendships superficial. Only two felt satisfied with the friendships they'd formed, and for one this was a happy change. "For the first time in our ministry," she said, "we are in a place in which we have real friends—not just church relations."

The way that many church members perceive their pastor and his family poses part of the problem. Because ministers move frequently, some parishioners tend to view them as temporary members of their community.

They may even express this in not-so-subtle ways. During my husband's internship, for example, we learned that none of the past several associate pastors of the church we were serving stayed more than a year or two. Within six months of our arrival, people began asking when we planned to move. While this may have been only polite interest, we couldn't help wondering if maybe they were a little too eager to help us pack!

Nevertheless, it's important to realize that some church members are deeply hurt when it comes time to say good-bye to clergy families they've grown close to. Rather than risk being hurt again, they hesitate to make another emotional investment in a pastor and his wife. As one member explained: "It's always easier for the ones who move than for those who stay behind."

The false distinctions some members make between clergy and laity raise another serious obstacle to close friendships. One pastor's wife of 15 years remarked that ministers and their families are "not thought of as part of the real world." Parishioners don't necessarily consider a pastor's wife as better than others (although

some people mistakenly believe that as well); rather, they may view her as "out of it" and basically not much fun. Unable to see beyond their picture of "Mrs. Pastor" (a term many church members think is cute but in reality

Parishioners view ministers as temporary members.

"People assume all we do is pray and hum hymns."

strips a woman of her individuality), they fail to get to know a complete person who has the same ambitions, faults, quirks, and spiritual struggles as the rest of the world. As one pastor's wife put it: "It's hard to get close to someone who assumes that all we do at our house is pray and hum hymns."

Some laity have preconceived ideas not only of what their pastor's wife should be like but also of how *she* expects *them* to be. "In general, people are wary of being too open or honest with their pastor's family," one clergy wife said. Because the pastor—and somehow his wife—represents so much more to them than what they actually are, these members resist exposing too much of their true selves, preferring instead to keep the relationship on safe, superficial levels.

In her book *Who Is the Minister's Wife?* Charlotte Ross points out that some people may even treat the pastor's wife as a personified conscience. She quotes one woman who experienced this type of rejection: "People, I think, shy away from me if, for example, they've missed church. It's not much fun to be a walking judgment on others."²

Such distinctions blur the focus of God's ministry. They distract both clergy and laity from the true church Leader, the only One who can judge hearts. And they keep us from being genuine with one another.

It's easy to blame church members for their apparent lack of understanding, yet we must also recognize the obstacles to friendship the pastor's wife herself often sets up.

Frequent good-byes, for example, can harden clergy as well as laity. Without realizing it, a pastor's wife may succumb to the thinking of the woman who told her daughter not to love her dog too much because it would only die someday and make her sad. By steeling herself against loss, the pastor's wife can miss out on a great deal of love.

As mentioned earlier, the fear of showing partiality may also inhibit a pastor's wife's friendships. To an extent this concern may be valid. But it can also be overestimated. Surprisingly, not everyone is dying to be the pastor's wife's best friend. Ruth Senter, author of *So You're the Pastor's Wife*, tells in her book how she had a hard time grasping this:

There is a myth about the pastor's wife that contributed to my lonely times during the first years of marriage . . . Somewhere I got the picture that the church was full of people who were just waiting for the chance to be friends with the pastor's wife. In order to be fair to everyone and not have anyone get jealous over the fact that she was not my friend too, I would have to be friends to everyone. That kind of thinking did a lot for my ego.³

Ego-boosting as it may be, the concept is, as Senter says, a myth. She goes on to point out that while she would never want to close herself off to others by maintaining exclusive friendships, she believes that "it is pos-

sible to have close friendships without having cliques."⁴

Occasionally a pastor's wife will run into someone who accuses her of "playing favorites." While she must be sensitive to the opinions of others, she cannot let them control her personal relationships. Rather than hiding such friendships when in public, she can decide on ways to handle the criticism with tact and kindness. Doing so will enable her to be truer to her church members, her closest friends, and herself.

Sometimes meeting the problem head on may uncover the fact that her personal friendships are not the real issue at all. For example, when the pastor's wife who received the note mentioned at the beginning of this article confronted its writer, she learned that the woman had been deeply hurt by a former pastor who had shown blatant favoritism in his church management. But was she jealous of this pastor's wife's close friends? "Oh, my dear, no!" the older woman said. "I didn't mean you shouldn't have friends! You go right ahead and make all the friends you can!" Both women left with a deeper appreciation for the other.

But the greatest obstacle to friendship that a pastor's wife faces may be the fear of confiding in a church mem-

"I came across as highly self-sufficient."

ber. The women I interviewed shared these complaints: "Hard to know whom to trust with certain information"; "Not really able to let your hair down"; "Difficult to share personal concerns unless they're fairly general." When asked whom, other than their husbands, they usually confided in, only one of these women specifically mentioned a good friend in her church (and one woman responded with an emphatic "I don't").

Naturally the fear that last night's argument with her pastor-husband might become a tasty after-dinner treat for some members at the next potluck is legitimate. But assuming that everyone in her church likes to gossip may keep a pastor's wife from enjoying some truly trustworthy friendships. Just as others trust her to keep confidences, she must show enough faith in others to trust them with hers. As one pastor's wife said: "Once you've found a friend you can totally trust, you have something very special and worth keeping." Unless she risks trusting a few souls, a pastor's wife will never know that kind of friendship within her church.

What can pastors' wives do to overcome these obstacles? The women I interviewed suggested everything from the familiar "Be yourself" to "Get out of the ministry!" Fundamentally, however, a pastor's wife must make sure she opens herself to new friendships.

This means being patient. The women interviewed said it took them anywhere from three months to a full year to feel at ease in a new church. During these transition periods they often relied heavily on friends from former districts.

It also means being willing to take the initiative in making friends rather than waiting for the dinner invitations to come rolling in. "If you're patient, the Lord will usually send you some friends," said one minister's wife. "But

Frequent good-byes can harden the hearts.

be careful to be looking for them. They may not be the persons you're expecting to find."

Most important, being open to new friendships means acknowledging your need of them. Ross points out in her book that "the admission of such needs by clergy wives and the abandonment of a phony posture of self-sufficiency will lead to a greater maturity."⁵

One young pastor's wife hadn't even realized how she had assumed this falsely superior attitude. "I was shocked when a friend told me that I came across as highly self-sufficient in our church. Unintentionally I had been putting others off, keeping them at a safe arm's length even when I was feeling my loneliest. "Ironically," she smiled, "it took a good friend to help me see this."

Another woman said that she didn't realize the potential for friendship in her church until it was time to leave. "When my husband and I decided to take a call to another part of the country, we explained to our members that it was because we needed to be closer to family. Later one woman who had always been very kind to us met me with an indignant look on her face and said, 'But we're family too!'

"I realized she was right. There were some wonderful,

funny, interesting people in that church. But I'd been so busy feeling sorry for myself that I'd failed to notice many of the times they'd reached out to me."

Acknowledging her needs for friendship and doing what she can to overcome the obstacles that may exist in her church will help a pastor's wife feel more a part of her church family. It will better enable her to break through some of the phony facades that both clergy and laity sometimes hide behind. And hopefully, it will help find some irreplaceable friends.

This article first appeared in the March 1989 issue of *Ministry*.

NOTES

1. These women ranged in age from 27 to 40 and had spent anywhere from 1½ to 17 years with their husbands in the ministry. One woman's husband had left the pastoral ministry and had gone into another related career. While these interviews in no way pretend to be an exhaustive study, they do reflect some common feelings of pastors' wives in different situations.
2. Quoted in Charlotte Ross, *Who Is the Minister's Wife? A Search for Personal Fulfillment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 67.
3. Ruth Senter, *So You're the Pastor's Wife* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 87-88.
4. *Ibid.*, 88.
5. Ross, *Who Is the Minister's Wife?* 53.

☞ "We're family too!" ☞

Is Chaplaincy Your Calling?

Continued from page 38

idation of God's call, then, comes in those joyful, blessed moments when God's love and healing reaches the truly needy, the ready, and the responsive, in deep life-changing ways.

The context of chaplaincy vocation is as varied as it is vital. The virtues of flexibility, emotional maturity, teamwork, dedication, spiritual stability, and vision are to be highly prized. While the chaplain's assignment often takes him far from family, friends, church, and neighborhood, he is never far from God or from the influence of the prayers of those who care back home.

Still interested? Call your chaplaincy endorser for more information on the varieties of military and institutional chaplaincies opening to those who are prepared to answer "yes" to the call of God into chaplaincy.

My Last Service

Continued from page 36

you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). As always, "the whole counsel of God" and the whole of God's grace blended in prayer and preaching.

Commending them to God's grace, Paul reaffirmed his own consecration. Though aware that bonds of afflictions awaited him and in some way Jerusalem was linked with the finishing of his course and ministry, nothing would deter him, for he had already died to everything but the approval of Jesus. The path was veiled, but that same grace would be sufficient for life's closing service and sacrifice.

The words of Paul's final parting prayer are not recorded; but "he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they wept sore" (Acts 20:36-37a), embraced him as if love could not bear to let him go, and accompanied him to the ship for a last glimpse of the minister they would see no more.

If my heart knew this was my final message, God grant my conscience would be pure; my living and labor, preaching and teaching a record I could urge others to emulate, and my last words love's prayer for those I hold in my heart.

THE ASTONISHING CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

by C. S. Cowles

John 1:14, 18

GOD HAD A PROBLEM!

We are not accustomed to thinking about God having problems. But He did. How could He establish a meaningful relationship with man? If we can imagine the difficulty we would face in finding a way to fellowship with an ant, then we can begin to appreciate the problem God must have had in scaling himself down to the dimensions of a fallen human being. The first problem God faced was a . . .

I. COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEM

How could God communicate to man who He really is, and what are His gracious intentions for the human race?

Since the Fall, man's spiritual eyes have been so darkened that whenever he tried to look upon the face of God all he could see was a fearsome, dark, grotesque image. We see that in the idols men have fashioned of wood and stone. Carved upon them are portraits, hideous and repulsive, halloween masks, filling pagan worshipers with foreboding and fear.

In the light of our distorted perceptions, how could God break through our darkened understanding and reveal His gracious and loving character? If He came on too strong, we would be destroyed by the blazing glory of His power. On the other hand, if He came among us too subtly, then it is possible that we might not recognize the day of His visitation.

So, how could God come among

us without overpowering and thus destroying our free will? I had the same kind of problem while backpacking with my boys in the California High Sierras. We stopped by a mountain lake for a midmorning trail snack. Inadvertently I spilled some trail mix on the ground. Soon a couple of chipmunks appeared and began to dart in snatching up the peanuts and granola. I tried to be friends with them. But every time I moved close they darted away. When I backed off, they ventured out again. No matter how sweetly I talked or how gently I approached, they misunderstood my intentions and fled in fear from my presence.

How could God break through?

I asked myself: How could I communicate to those chipmunks that I wished them no harm but only desired to enter into a personal relationship with them? As I reflected on it, I came to the conclusion that **the only way I could ever really communicate with a chipmunk was to become one.** And that is exactly what God did!

John puts it this way, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No man has seen God at any time;

the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him [communicated Him]" (John 1:14, 18, NASB). The apostle Paul adds, "He [Jesus] is the *image* of the invisible God . . . For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 1:15; 2:9, NASB).

A little girl stopped in the middle of her bedtime prayers and said to her mother, "Mommy, it's so hard to pray to a God I cannot see. I sure do wish God had skin on His face."

The **miracle of Christmas** is that, at a point of time in human history, God did put skin on His face. And it was the face of Jesus! And it was not the grotesque visage of pagan gods but a face "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

How did God solve the communications problem? *By incarnation:* by stepping into the stream of human history, by putting on flesh of our flesh, skin of our skin, and bone of our bones in Jesus of Nazareth.

God, however, faced a second and even greater challenge, and that was the . . .

II. CREDIBILITY PROBLEM

How could God become flesh and dwell among us in such a way that we would recognize who He was and take Him seriously as the Son of God—and not some wild-eyed visionary or crazy psychotic?

One afternoon while vacationing in Yosemite National Park, Dean, my oldest son, came into camp and told me that he had just been talking to Jesus. At first I thought he meant he had been having his devotions. But no, he claimed to have been talking

to Jesus in the flesh, over on the other side of the Merced River.

He went on to describe this unusual encounter with a strangely dressed young hippie who claimed he was Jesus Christ. He had a full untrimmed beard and long matted hair. He was dressed in a robe, had a staff in his hand, and sandals on his feet. And he was preaching to a small group of children and teens that he was Jesus Christ. Oh yes, he was also smoking a marijuana cigarette!

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, reports numerous self-proclaimed messiahs who appeared in Judea prior to the time of Christ. Some of them gained large follow-

"I wish God had skin!"

ings. And yet they all came to nothing. So why should anyone take seriously this carpenter's son of uncertain birth from the obscure village of Nazareth? How did God set out to solve the credibility problem?

First, God had to create a sense of expectancy for the coming of His Son into the world. And that is because people only recognize what they are looking for.

In his massive history of science, *The Pentagon of Power*, Lewis Mumford reproduces a picture showing a screw propeller for a ship or a turbine. Its concave blades are symmetrically formed. I was surprised when I read the caption, which indicated that it was not a propeller at all but a carving discovered by archaeologists in Peru dating from the ninth century before Christ! It had been crafted to decorate some ancient Peruvian king's mace as a symbol of political authority. It never occurred to Peruvians, or anybody else for nearly 2,000 years, that it could function to propel ships through the water. (Lewis Mumford,

The Pentagon of Power: The Myth of the Machine [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970], 2:370, Illus. No. 17.)

If Jesus was to be believed and accepted as God's Son, it was necessary that a mood of expectancy be created so that someone would be looking for Him and recognize Him for who He was. Toward this end God carefully prepared a called out and chosen people, Israel, among whom He raised up generations of prophets. They would paint a portrait of a Messiah who would be recognized as such by people like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, and aged Simon and Anna in the Temple. Establishing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies became critical in the life of the Early Church as they sought to convince Jews that Jesus was indeed the Christ of God, the One who was to come. Matthew either quotes or alludes to the Old Testament no fewer than 113 times in order to establish the credibility of Jesus as the One anticipated in the "law and prophets."

Second, if Jesus was to be credible as God's Son, He would have to be known and trusted.

People instinctively distrust strangers but tend to trust those whom they have known a long time. So it was necessary for Jesus to establish deep roots in one locale, Nazareth, where people would get to know Him and develop confidence in Him. Several of Jesus' disciples may have known Him because they had previously been disciples of John the Baptist, who was Jesus' cousin. It is entirely possible that all of Jesus' disciples knew Him well before He ever called them to follow Him. Consequently there was a long history of relationships in which Jesus' fundamental credibility had been established, preparing the way for calling them into a special relationship with himself.

Third, God established Jesus as His Son by accenting His uniqueness.

If Jesus were ever to be credible

as God's Son, it was vital that He be something more than an itinerant teacher. Consequently, from His birth onward, God surrounded Jesus with a multiplicity of supernatural signs that said, in effect, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased, listen to Him." There are no fewer than 13 supernatural occurrences preceding, accompanying, and following His birth.

Throughout His public ministry Jesus was enveloped with an aura of supernatural power. The Gospels report 35 "mighty works" in detail, besides giving summary statements indicating that Jesus touched thousands of lives with His miracles. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, confessed, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him" (John 3:2, NASB).

The supreme and final vindication of Jesus' deity is His mighty resurrection from the dead. Paul writes, "[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4, NASB).

There was, however, yet another problem confronting God. And it was a . . .

III. RELATIONAL PROBLEM

It was one thing for God to become flesh. It was quite another

The supreme vindication of Jesus—His mighty resurrection.

thing for people to feel comfortable with divinity dwelling among them. Most of us would find it difficult to feel at ease if the president of the United States were our dinner guest. How much more difficult would it be for us—weak and fallible as we are—to feel comfortable in the presence of the sinless Son of God, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

So, how did God bridge the awesome social gap between God and man?

First, God allowed His Son to enter the world as a tiny, fragile, and very vulnerable baby. Why? So that no one would feel intimidated in His presence.

Second, Jesus was born, not of royalty, but of a peasant mother and a craftsman father so that all of the common people who work and live simple lives could feel an identity with Him.

Third, Jesus was not born the son of a prophet or of a priest. He was never a member of the religious establishment of His time lest some would feel awkward in the presence of a religious professional.

Fourth—and admittedly a delicate matter—Jesus was born with the shadow of illegitimacy over His head. While we accept Matthew's and Luke's witness that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, that was not a miracle likely to be believed by the gossips of Nazareth. Even as an adult, Jesus' enemies slurred Him by saying, "We were not born of fornication" (John 8:41, NASB), implying that Jesus was. Why was Jesus, the sinless Son of God, born under such questionable circumstances? So that the millions of illegitimate children born every year could feel that He identifies with them and understands their pain.

Several years ago I shared this aspect of Jesus' birth in a Christmas message. Later I learned that the adopted son of a medical doctor, who had been having a difficult time dealing with the circumstances of his birth, told his father after the service, "It's all right now. Jesus understands what I have been going through, because He must have felt the same things I feel."

Fifth, Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant. He assumed the lowliest of social roles so that the humblest and most disadvantaged would not feel awkward and ill at ease in His presence.

Sixth, Jesus did not speak the

language of philosophers and intellectuals. Neither did He speak classical Hebrew, which, in His day, had become the language of the scribes and religious professionals. Nor, on the other hand, did He speak in unintelligible tongues as experienced by some in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 14). Rather, He spoke in

How did He bridge the gap between God and man?

Aramaic, the language of the common people in Palestine. Further, Mark tells us that Jesus did not speak to the people without using parables. Jesus was ingenious in creating vivid word pictures so that even the simplest among His listeners could understand the Word of God and enter into the joys of His kingdom. Not surprisingly, the Gospels tell us that the common people heard Jesus gladly.

Seventh, Jesus knew suffering, abuse, rejection: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). He was misunderstood, mocked, and mobbed. He was poor, homeless, and owned no property apart from a seamless peasant's cloak. He was arrested, falsely accused, convicted, and condemned in a travesty of justice. He died a hor-

Why take seriously this carpenter's son?

rible death, executed as a common criminal so that every social outcast, every human reject, every loser—even felons like the two thieves on the cross, could find a point of identity in Him.

We can now begin to understand

the lofty sweep and yet profound depth of Paul's words when he wrote, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9, NASB).

What lengths God went to in order to reveal Jesus among us! What a tremendously complex, intricate, delicate, and yet powerful **Christmas miracle** it was that constituted the *Incarnation*. I want to lift my voice and sing with Charles Wesley,

*He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.*

*'Tis mercy all, immense and free!
For, O my God, it found out me!*

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.*

Thine eyes diffused a quickening ray.

I woke; the dungeon flamed with light.

My chains fell off; my heart was free.

I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

*Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die
for me?*





WORSHIP

& PREACHING

HELPS

December 1989

prepared by Randal E. Denny

INTRODUCTION

In this month's worship services, a feature called "Words of Praise" appears nearly every Sunday. Many years ago I began arranging for a planned, prepared, effective, three-minute, up-to-date testimony from a person in our congregation. This has been a wonderful addition to our worship services. The effect is to let "the Word become flesh" in people's everyday lives. Persons who probably would never stand and voluntarily testify in the prayer meeting tradition, amaze me with their insights and the freshness of their walks with Jesus, and give inspirational feedback on things in the church's family life that have had positive results. Try it. Handpick the first few to get it started on a level above the customary off-the-cuff sharing. You'll be glad you did!

In developing a style of sermon preparation, we are all different. To enable you to follow my path, five steps seem logical to me for developing a given major point in a sermon. Since I favor expository preaching, I find the big ideas and principles of a biblical event or paragraph, in contrast to verse-by-verse exposition. Once the broad strokes are discovered and the outline has opened, I treat each major point in the following way:

First, Statement: The basic point, such as "God is love."

Second, Clarification: What do you mean, "God is love"?

Third, Explanation: The development of the passage, tracing the theological concept or doctrine, the word studies and insights that are the meat and the substance of the sermon. "How do you know God is love?"

Fourth, Illustration: The picture window of truth: How can I see or feel the fact that "God is love"? Be sure to poke holes in the darkness with illustrations and let the light shine through. It is an art that Jesus mastered—and the people heard Him gladly.

Fifth, Application: Answer the brutal question, "God is love. So what?" Without application, you only have an essay or lecture. Preaching applies the proclamation of God's truth to life. Don't preach without it!

Walk with me through the most humbling privilege of preaching the good news of our God who came to us in human form. How can you top such a high calling?

Let the Word of God speak to your parish through your sanctified personality.

—Randal E. Denny .

“LOOKING UNTO JESUS”

1 Pet. 1:10-12

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 3, 1989

INTRO:

Living behind China's "bamboo curtain," Dr. Timothy Yeh, a Chinese Nazarene physician, was questioned about how Chinese Christians could endure hardships put on them. He said, "I thought *all* Christians endured. Wonderful things happen when all you see is Jesus!"

Seeing another coming persecution, Peter's letter urged his Christian readers to look to Jesus. Peter's first letter was sent to encourage Christians to face oncoming trouble. With Jesus, they could have courage to remain true. Peter assured them that present sufferings would someday give way to future glory. God would keep them for salvation's final completion through faith in Jesus.

ILLUS. A minister told of a good man, "But I heard a farmer say he was a miserable plowman because, while he was driving the plow, he continually looked back to see if he was on the right course as he plowed and to see if he had made a straight furrow. Consequently, it was always crooked. There is only one way to drive a plow—to look steadily before you. Do not look at your attainments but to the Lord, walking in His smile."

In all of life, look to Jesus (vv. 10-12).

I. Prophets of old pointed to Jesus

The word *prophet* comes from the root *phe*, which means "to say or proclaim." The prefix *pro* is added, which means "before or in advance." A prophet speaks in advance the word and will of God. Peter says their message centered around "the grace that was to come to you" (v. 10, NIV)—the "unto you grace"—Jesus! This important passage tells us two things about the prophets.

A. The prophets worked under inspiration: "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing" (v. 11, NIV). The prophets did not come up with ideas of their own. The Spirit of the Lord inspired them. He goaded and guided their message: "the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing"—"kept on pointing out" the twofold theme, "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."

God often chose to reveal truths in Scripture that were beyond the comprehension of the writers. Though they didn't fully understand, they wrote as the Holy Spirit directed them.

B. The prophets worked with anticipation: "the prophets . . . searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (vv. 10-11, NIV).

The prophets spoke of things better than they had known or experienced.

The prophets pointed to Jesus with eager anticipation, wanting to understand better what they had written about Him. Peter's verbs "searched intently" and "searched with great care" graphically depict miners digging down, breaking the soil, chipping away through rock, and coming at last to the rich ore of precious metals. Being inspired does not preclude but stimulates hard work. The myth of neglecting study and

simply opening your mouth to let the Holy Spirit fill it is a terrible joke. Inspiration is the product of the searching mind of man and the revealing Spirit of God.

The prophets dug down to find out, "What does it say?" They concluded, "Some One is coming!"

II. Preachers of Peter's day pointed to Jesus

Speaking of the prophets, Peter said, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (v. 12, NIV). Preachers proclaimed the message of Good News—the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Good News is Jesus.

A. Preachers in the Early Church spoke with authority as witnesses. Theirs was no hearsay message. They had seen and heard and felt the mighty movings of God through Christ. They could say without a doubt, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory" (John 1:14, NIV).

B. Preachers in the Early Church spoke about fulfillment of Scriptures. Having witnessed Jesus and the mighty acts of God, the preachers began digging up truths out of the Scriptures and found them all pointing to Jesus.

The prophets dug down to find out, "What does it say?" They concluded, "Some One is coming!"

The preachers dug up to find out, "What does it mean?" They concluded, "Some One is come!"

III. Angels of heaven point to Jesus

Peter adds, "Even angels long to look into these things" (v. 12, NIV). What prophets wrote about and preachers spoke about, the angels long to catch a glimpse of. There's no room for triviality in preaching. Angels don't know everything but are eager to learn.

Peter's word "to look into" is descriptive, meaning "to stoop down to take a peek." The angels stoop down to peek in on the delight of our salvation in Christ Jesus. They stoop down to see what the prophets wrote and the preachers spoke!

A. Angels look for revelation. The more they see God at work, the more they admire and praise Him. They watch for additional facets of revelation of God's goodness and grace.

B. Angels look toward glorification. They know Jesus is coming again in glory. There's a great day coming. The next great event in God's plan is Jesus' return in glory.

The prophets dug down to find out, "What does it say?" They concluded, "Some One is coming!"

The preachers dug up to find out, "What does it mean?" They concluded, "Some One has come!"

The angels stoop down to find out, "How can these things be?" They conclude, "Some One is coming *again!*"

IV. Believers of today point to Jesus

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what has been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40). They lived in an era of

prediction; we live in an era of fulfillment. Fulfillment perfects prediction. How can we use it?

A. Believers study the Bible for an interpretation of Jesus. The same Holy Spirit guides us in understanding Jesus as the interpreter of God's Word. Jesus is the Word that translates the language of heaven into terms we can understand.

ILLUS. Christianity is Jesus. God didn't drop a scroll of the-ology from heaven. He came himself. Finishing the course on the New Testament, a Greek professor told his class: "You have studied Christ himself, the whole Christ, all of Christ. When you study the Bible, you are studying the Lord himself. For all we know of the Lord is encompassed in these sacred pages." Believers study to understand Jesus.

B. Believers yield themselves for an application of Jesus. As the believer trusts Jesus as Savior and Lord, out of these facts emerge comprehension and application of ethics, of doctrine, of duty, and of how we live. We must allow Jesus to apply himself in our motives and values.

C. Believers extend an invitation for Jesus. Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life" (John 10:10, NIV). We invite you to Jesus.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. . . . How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Heb. 1:1-2; 2:3, NIV).

ILLUS. A missionary sat on the patio watching a black ant crawl up a table leg until it reached some spilled sugar. It seemed to eat, then crawled back down the table leg. Soon two black ants crawled up the table leg to the sugar. They ate and left. Soon a steady stream of black ants moved up and down to enjoy the sugar. The missionary thought to himself, "They must have some system by which they communicate, 'I have found something good and I want to share it!'"

That's exactly what every believer in Jesus desires to communicate.

The prophets dug down to find out, "What does it say?" They concluded, "Some One is coming!"

The preachers dug up to find out, "What does it mean?" They concluded, "Some One has come!"

The angels stoop down to find out, "How can these things be?" They conclude, "Some One is coming again!"

The believers stand up to find out, "How can we use it?" They conclude, "Some One is inviting you!"

CONCLUSION:

What does Jesus want you to do?

First, repent of your sins.

Second, receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This Advent season, will you make that most important decision and receive Christ? Let Him fill that emptiness in your heart. Take my Jesus. Let Him be your Jesus, too.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Ps. 78:1-4
Hymn	"Tell Me the Old, Old Story"
Words of Praise	A selected layman
Duet	"I Will Not Forget Thee"
Prayer Chorus	"Jesus Never Fails"
Pastoral Prayer	
Welcome to Our Guests	
Praise Chorus	"Something Beautiful"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Lighting of Advent Wreath	
Hymn	"Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
Choir	"So Gently He Came"
Sermon	"LOOKING UNTO JESUS"
Invitation Hymn	"Jesus, I Come"
Benediction	Isa. 60:1

Pastoral Prayer:

This is my church; I enter prayerfully,
Aware of all I owe the Christ of Calvary,
And that our fathers lived in dungeons bare
That, unmolested, we might worship here.
This is my church; I sense anew today
The sacrifice and prayers of yesterday
Of those who worshiped in this sacred place,
And spoke of unknown depths of love and grace.

This is my church; I come adoringly,
For God is here, and He may speak to me.
My cares will vanish when I kneel to pray
In this Thy sanctuary, Lord, today.
This is my church; I pledge my life, my all,
That generations yet unborn may call
Upon Thy name. May holy fire burn
Upon its altars until Thy return.

—Unknown

Offertory Idea:

In a recent issue of *National Geographic*, an article on Dallas caught my attention. In it were these words: "Dallas revolves around the dollar: getting it, spending it, using it to keep score."

How like the bumper sticker: "The one with the biggest pile of stuff wins."

That is not Jesus' view of money nor the Christian concept of stewardship.

Offertory Prayer:

Dear Father, it's not possessing extraordinary gifts that makes us extraordinarily useful, but the dedication of what we have to Your service. Amen.

LIGHTING THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE:

Today is the beginning of Advent, the preparation time for celebrating Christ's birth and the Christian insights into God and life. As the prophet Isaiah said, "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (60:2).

(While lighting the candle): As we light this first Advent candle, we begin our anticipation of Christ's birthday celebration. We light the flame of hope in our hearts. We shall strive to make this a season of joy that places Jesus at the center. Let this candle remind us of Christ and our commitment to His kingdom here and now!

"THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS"

John 1:1-18

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 10, 1989

INTRO:

A skeptic argued, "Why would God have to come to earth in the form of a man? Why should that be necessary?"

One Christmas Eve a wintry storm blasted. A flock of birds beat against the skeptic's window trying to get warmth. The compassionate man tried to lure the birds into his barn for safety but to no avail. He said to himself in frustration, "If only I could become one of them! I could talk their language, get right in there with them, get them to trust me, and lead them to life!" In a flash he realized the meaning of Christmas! God has spoken to us in the only way we can comprehend: He became man himself.

John answers three important questions about the Christ of Christmas.

I. Who is Christ? (see vv. 1-5)

"In the beginning." Doesn't that ring a bell in your memory? "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Christ participated in God's creative and redemptive work flowing through history.

John equates Christ with "the Word." The Good News is that God has spoken and intervened in history. Advent is an event—an actual, historic event—Christmas! God's meaningful event is the person of Christ.

Christ was also identified by John as "the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (1:5, NIV). It speaks of Christ the Victor. All the darkness of the world cannot snuff out a single candle. Light always wins against darkness!

ILLUS. In Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities* is a heart-moving scene. The French Revolution resulted in daily beheadings of France's aristocracy. The guillotine is kept busy. A cart carrying two prisoners rattles along on its way to the place of public execution. The man is bravely giving his life to protect a friend. He had exchanged places with the political prisoner in order to save his friend's life. Beside him in the cart is a young woman, scarcely more than a child. She had observed him in prison and sensed his brave spirit. That morning she asked, "If I may ride with you," thinking of that last dread journey, "will you let me hold your hand? I am young and weak, and I think it will give me more courage."

As they ride together to the guillotine her hand is in his, she can hold up her head—and courage looks out from her eyes. Turning to the man, she says, "I think you were sent to me by heaven."

Jesus has come to us in our human predicament—sent from heaven—and He gives us courage and hope!

II. Why did Christ come? (see vv. 9-13)

ILLUS. Nathan was creative in his excuses for staying up past his bedtime. When the three-year-old discovered that his old "I need a drink of water" routine had gotten threadbare, he started experimenting with other excuses. He crawled up on his mother's lap, rubbed his head, and said, "I bumped my head on a pillow." Surely he could gain a few more minutes' reprieve!

One night his father put him to bed, turning aside all attempted delays. Nathan's bedroom light was out, but a little light shined in from the hallway. He said, "Daddy, I don't want you to leave me alone."

His father made a great theological statement: "You won't be alone. Jesus is right here with you."

Nathan responded, "But, Daddy, I want somebody here I can see!"

In our limited vision and wisdom, we often feel overtaken by the darkness of our world, our culture, our situation. We have felt alone and unsure about God—but then Jesus came. He is the God we can see. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV).

John adds one of the most beautiful statements in the Bible: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, NIV). John's concept of faith is wrapped up in that word, *received*. Faith reaches out to accept God's gift of Jesus.

When God's love was made flesh, then we beheld His glory!

III. What did Christ do? (see vv. 14, 16-18)

The meaning of Christmas is condensed: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John wrote this to refute those first-century pseudo-Christians—the Gnostics. To them, the idea of God becoming flesh was a scandal! Gnostics thought of God as too far removed to have anything to do with men in the flesh. But John insists, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us!"

Jesus is God come down to our level of understanding and experience.

ILLUS. In the middle of London's Trafalgar Square stands a tall column. On top is the life-size statue of Admiral Lord Nelson. Like others thronging the Square, I couldn't make out the features of Nelson—he was too high up. The sculptor, attempting to exalt his hero, placed him too far above the people until he is not discernible from the pavement below. His elevation hinders revelation.

In 1948, during an exhibition, an exact replica in plaster was placed at street level. People came to see for themselves what Lord Nelson looked like. For the first time they could discern his features.

Jesus brought God down to our level so that within the range of our dim, finite vision, we could see Him face-to-face.

CONCLUSION:

In Nice, France, a varied assortment of people sat dispirited in a little restaurant on Christmas Eve—tourists, an unhappy French family, a cold flower lady, a listless piano player. An American sailor entered with a buoyant spirit, bought some flowers from the old flower lady, and distributed them happily among the people, and walked out exclaiming, "Merry Christmas, everybody!"

The mood changed instantly to a spirit of cheer—Christmas family atmosphere pervaded the little restaurant. The isolated people joined the piano player singing Christmas carols.

Later, an American tourist wrote to the admiral of the fleet:

"Somewhere in your forces is a young sailor who gave a very special gift to my family, to me, and to the other people in that restaurant. Because your young sailor had Christmas in his heart, he released the love and joy that had been smothered within us by anger and resentment. He gave us Christmas."

That's what Jesus did for our sad, old world! "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory)!" Now we can sing from our hearts transformed by His love: "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!"

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Psalm 81
Congregational Response	Chorus, "Fill Me Now"
Invocation	
Hymn	"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"
Words of Praise	A selected layman
Special Music	"O Holy Night"
Welcome to Our Guests	
Advent Candle Lighting	
Hymn	"The First Noel"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Prayer Choruses	"O Come Let Us Adore Him" and "O Come to My Heart"
Pastoral Prayer	
Responsive Reading	John 1:1-14
Choir	"Cherish That Name"
Sermon	"THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS"
Hymn	"Joy to the World"
Benediction	Gal. 1:3-5

Pastoral Prayer:

Praise God for the miracle of Jesus' coming to each of our hearts, bringing love expressed by joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Offertory Sentence:

I read once that in our economic times, the way to stay in the black today is to make and sell red ink.

Said the robin to the sparrow:

*"I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so."*

Said the sparrow to the robin:

*"Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no Heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me."*

Offertory Prayer:

Dear Father, my stewardship is what I do after I have said, "I believe!" In Jesus' name. Amen.

LIGHTING OF SECOND ADVENT CANDLE:

As we prepare to light the second Advent candle today, the Bible reminds us: "Turn from your sins" (Matt. 3:2, TLB). "For the kingdom of heaven is near. . . 'Get the road ready for the Lord; make the paths straight for him'" (vv. 2-3, Williams).

We light this candle to remind us how the way to our hearts is to be prepared for Jesus' coming. As Advent light is increased, let our readiness increase.

Prayer:

O God, as You prepared the minds and hearts of people for Your Son's first coming, may Your Spirit work to light up our darkened lives with the glow of Your good news. Prepare our minds and hearts so that Christ may dwell within us and not be ill at ease but feel wanted, invited, exalted. Lord, let Jesus reign in our thoughts and affections as King of Love and Prince of Peace. Amen.

Benediction:

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Gal. 1:3-5, NIV).

Pontius' Puddle



Joel Kaufmann

"FORGIVE US OUR CHRISTMASSES—"

Luke 1:68-79

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 17, 1989

INTRO:

A short time before Jesus' birth, John the Baptist was born. John's father, Zechariah, "was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (v. 67, NIV). In his prophecy, Zechariah anticipated the coming Messiah who would "enable us to serve him without fear" (v. 74, NIV).

During the events leading up to Jesus' birth, an angel made an odd statement. He said to Zechariah, "Do not be afraid" (1:30, NIV). The angel cautioned Joseph, "Do not be afraid" (Matt. 1:20, NIV). On the night of Jesus' birth, the angel surprised the shepherds on the Judean hillside, "Do not be afraid" (Luke 2:10, NIV). Those statements may seem out of place until you begin to see the chaos and confusion that first Christmas caused.

Even today, activities increase and demands seem to grow with each Christmas season. A little girl felt the pressure one Christmas Eve. Her father was loaded down with worries and packages. Mom's anxiety had reached the breaking point several times during the day. No matter where the little girl went, she seemed to be in the way. All around was hustle and bustle—so many trying to do so much, all in getting ready for Christmas.

By the time she was pushed off to bed, the feverish planning for Christmas had unnerved her too. As she knelt to pray the Lord's Prayer, she got mixed up: "Forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmases against us."

In the midst of all the pressures, God's messenger keeps saying, "Do not be afraid!" I wonder why?

I. Stress enters the Christmas season

A. *The coming of Jesus added stress by disrupting plans.*

Zechariah was in the midst of performing long-awaited religious service—and the angel's announcement disrupted it.

Joseph and Mary's wedding arrangements were disrupted. The advent of Jesus' birth threw a wrench into their dreams and plans.

The angelic announcement disrupted working schedules for the shepherds. Their rotating job assignments got disturbed. Necessity forces some people to work when others celebrate special occasions.

B. *The coming of Jesus added stress by causing inconvenience.*

Jesus came at a time of family reunions. The family was gathering from everywhere and coming home. Imagine all the pressures caused by preparations for large family gatherings in those days!

Jesus came at a time declared set apart by the government. Caesar Augustus set up a census on the day God became a man—the day Jesus was born. His birth was squeezed into a legal holiday. That's one reason it was largely unnoticed.

Jesus came at a time when commercial enterprises were overloaded. Hotels were overbooked! Marketplaces buzzed with excitement as the influx of visitors haggled with merchants over prices. It seemed everything was in short supply as the demands increased. "There was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7, NIV).

C. *The coming of Jesus added stress by producing crisis.* Mary faced the risk of rejection by her family and community.

Joseph faced the fear of betrayal—all because of Jesus' coming.

Zechariah faced the frustration of broken communication—when he needed it most!

The shepherds faced the jeopardy of job security. Jesus, God's Lamb who would someday take away the sin of the world, would replace the Bethlehem sheep raised to be slaughtered in the Temple.

You think our modern Christmases create crises and stress, but it's nothing new! Jesus invades as the great Disturber.

II. Stress can be handled by proper response

ILLUS. The Christmas rush jammed the streets of London. Drivers were losing their tempers. One fellow who had decorated his car by putting a bunch of holly on the hood seemed to think that everyone should make way for him. When a taxi blocked his progress, he leaned out and shouted abuse. The taxi driver replied, "What's the use of having holly on your bonnet if you ain't got holly in your heart?"

Without our heart's response to God's love and grace in giving us Jesus, our celebrations are, as Shakespeare said, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Seasonal stress can be managed if you choose to put Christ at the center. You choose your own reactions and responses.

Mary responded with acceptance and adoration.

Joseph responded with trust and obedience.

Zechariah responded with expectation and patience.

The shepherds responded with curiosity and praise!

ILLUS. In a lodge on top of Mount Tom in Massachusetts, a window has four panes of glass. Each pane is a different color. Through the brown glass, you see the panorama of the Berkshire Hills as in the beauty of autumn. Winter is suggested by looking through the blue pane. The green pane gives the hills the youthful look of spring. A summer sunset is the impression as you look through the pane of red. In each case, the same Berkshire Hills are in view.

So it is with Christmas!

Christmas can be what you make it. He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find Christmas under a tree! What is your response to Christmas stress?

III. Stress is overcome in divine Presence

It's Christmas and our world breathes a sigh of relief! In spite of all the pressures, Jesus is come—and we're better for it.

A. *The announcement of the angel spoke assurance:* "Fear not." Stress springs from fear—fear of inadequacy, fear of the unknown, fear of missing something. The message of Christmas is the antidote for fear.

B. *The arrival of Jesus made it worth it all!* To have Jesus come and live among us pushes the stress to the back-

ground. When God revealed himself to us, He didn't come as a philosopher but as a baby. A baby always means a new chance and new hope. That's what Christmas brings! Our new beginnings and our hopes are in Jesus Christ.

This week, savor the excitement and noise and confusion and colors of the Christmas season.

ILLUS. A wealthy Boston family held a christening party after the baptism of their baby. Guests and friends swarmed into their palatial home. Soon the party was in full swing. People were having a wonderful time, enjoying one another, eating, drinking, and being merry. Somebody asked, "By the way, where's the baby?"

Instantly the mother's heart shuddered! In questioning panic, she left the room and rushed into the master bedroom where she had left her baby asleep in the middle of their large bed. She found her baby dead, smothered by the guests' coats!

Don't let Jesus be smothered by the coats of guests as we busy ourselves running here and there.

CONCLUSION:

I wonder how Jesus is treated as we celebrate His birth? Let's take time to bask in His presence! Let's approach Christmas with an expectant hush, not a last-minute rush! "For he himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14, NIV).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	"O Come, All Ye Faithful"
Scripture	Ps. 125:1-2
Hymn	"The Solid Rock"
Words of Praise	A selected layman
Lighting of Advent Candle	
Hymn	"The Light of the World Is Jesus"
Welcome to Our Guests	
Choir	"There's a Song in the Air"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Hymn	"O Little Town of Bethlehem"
Chorus	"His Name Is Wonderful"
Pastoral Prayer	
Duet	"Away in a Manger"
Sermon	"FORGIVE US OUR CHRISTMASSES"
Choral Benediction	"His Name Is Wonderful"

Offertory Sentence:

A senator's wife went into the ham business. She borrowed \$100,000 for capital from a trust company. The business finally made \$3 million in annual sales.

The chairman of the trust company said to the senator, "I'm glad the ham venture is doing well."

The senator asked, "What makes you think it's doing well?"

The chairman replied, "You used to call it 'Betty's business.' Now you call it 'our business.'"

That's not far off from church business. Nontithers call it "their church." Tithers lovingly refer to it as "our church."

Offertory Prayer:

Dear Father, Jesus gave us this word of praise or warning: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In Jesus' name. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer:

Thank and praise God for the powerful influences of the "Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Seek God's guidance in increased awareness of Jesus during the season of Christmas.

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLES:

Read Isa. 9:2, 6-7.

As we light this candle, may our preparation for Him be quickened. May we be saved from being overly absorbed in the materialism and commercialism of the season so that our hearts will be filled with the spirit and hope of Christ.

O Lord God, keep us watchful for ways that we might ready the world and ourselves for Your rule. In Jesus' name. Amen.



R. GREEN



"WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM"

Matt. 2:1-12
4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 24, 1989

INTRO:

Matthew alone recorded the visit from the eastern sages who came to bow before the Christ child. Little is known about them, but their coming to Jesus was the firstfruits of multitudes of Gentiles who through the ages will kneel before Jesus as Lord.

Who were they? Matthew simply states, "Magi from the east" (v. 1, NIV). Originally, the magi were a religious sect of Medes who worshiped God under the emblem of fire or light. They were students of astronomy. Later, the Persian reformer, Zoroaster, restored the magi system of thought and practice. He introduced the principle of one supreme God.

There's something calming and boundless in sitting full of deep thoughts watching the velvety night with stars gliding silently as symbols of eternity. No wonder men associated the stars with their highest thoughts! No wonder the touch of the Eternal challenged men's minds. Astronomy was the religion of history's youth.

An ancient philosopher expressed, "I am but a child, picking up pebbles on the shore of the great sea of truth." Daniel, the Old Testament prophet, was a chief over a similar group of wise men in Babylon: "The king placed Daniel in a high position . . . He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men" (Dan. 2:48, NIV).

What happened to the magi after they left Bethlehem? Out of the mystery of their past, they stepped upon the stage for only one short scene and then disappeared from record forever.

However, these ancient seekers of truth left behind some simple, practical principles to help people today in their quest for God—for eternal life! Theirs was not a quest for creeds or ritual but for the Person of Jesus. And wise men still seek Him!

I. The wise men looked up for guidance to Jesus

A modern translation of the magi's remark says, "We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him" (v. 2, Williams). Intuitively, they followed the star. They knew it heralded some great event. Wise men have always looked up in the face of circumstances and events and the unknown.

The upward look has provided direction when lost. If the world seemed cloudy and dark, when the winds cleared the sky again, the upward look has fastened on Jesus and found encouragement. And wise men still seek Him!

II. The wise men moved forward step by step to Jesus

Each step of their quest was motivated by their search, "We . . . have come to worship him."

The Old Testament leans forward toward the coming of God's Anointed One. The expectation spread everywhere. A Roman historian wrote, "An ancient and settled persuasion prevailed throughout the East that the Fates had decreed some one to proceed from Judea who should attain a universal empire."

Wise men with hungering hearts ask everywhere today, "Where is Jesus?" They hear the words and songs of Christ-

mas. They see the forms of Christmas and its varied customs—and miss Jesus! Will the yearning heart find Jesus in it all? Wise men still seek Him!

III. The wise men were brought by Scriptures to Jesus

Very likely the Persian magi were versed in certain Old Testament prophecies. They might have pored over the scroll containing Balaam's prophecy: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17, NIV). The wise men seemed to know to travel to Judea.

As Herod and Jewish leaders looked for an answer to the wise men's question, the Scriptures became the guidepost: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (v. 6). This answer lie unheeded in Mic. 5:2. Again, the Scriptures directed the feet of the wise men to Jesus.

As streams eventually lead to the ocean, all Scripture leads to Jesus. David sang, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV). If you are seeking, look into the Bible. By it, God shall guide you to His very best!

ILLUS. As Sir Walter Scott was dying, he said to his son-in-law, "Bring me the Book."

"What book?"

"There is only one Book," Scott replied. "Bring me the Bible." Wise men still seek Him!

IV. The wise men were overjoyed at the light revealing Jesus!

After leaving Jerusalem, the wise men "went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed" (vv. 9-10, NIV).

Scholars and scientists have debated or debunked the phenomenon of the guiding star. But speculation is useless. The reality of God's guidance is plain and paramount. How God did it, we'll find out later. When people are eager to learn of Jesus and meet Him, God will provide the signs and occasions that lead at last into His presence! He shall give every seeking heart reason to rejoice "with exceeding great joy."

Wise men still seek Him—and God promises, "'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 29:13-14, NIV). God promises to give you light to lead you to Jesus.

V. The wise men bowed in submission to Jesus

"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him" (v. 11, NIV). Don't let the glitter of their gifts obscure the fact of their worship! Jesus was the object of their search and worship. They bowed in submission to Him. Though probably not in the fullest understanding of His Lordship as we perceive today, but they still surrendered their allegiance to Jesus as much as they could comprehend. Can we do less?

Bowing in submission to Jesus Christ is the high point of our lives. All that follows glows with the luster of His presence and glory!

In response to the Lordship of Jesus, "They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh" (v. 11, NIV). They worshiped Him as King of life—and in response gave gifts befitting royalty.

ILLUS. A little African boy listened as the missionary teacher explained why Christians give gifts to each other at Christmastime: "The gift is an expression of our joy over the birth of Jesus and our friendship for each other."

On Christmas Day, the boy brought his teacher a seashell that was unusually beautiful. "Where did you find such a beautiful shell?" she asked, graciously accepting his gift.

The lad told her there was only one spot where such ex-

traordinary shells could be found. When he named the place, the teacher knew it was many miles away. She exclaimed, "It's wonderful, but you shouldn't have gone all that distance to get a gift for me!"

His eyes brightened as he answered, "Long walk—part of gift!"

CONCLUSION:

The wise men had come a long way to present their gifts to the Christ child. The whole quest was part of their gift to Jesus. Don't get discouraged if your quest for Jesus has taken a long time. He's worth it! Keep on seeking Him until He is real in your own heart. That honest quest is part of your gift (see Rom. 12:1-2). Wise men still seek Him!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	"Good Christian Men, Rejoice"
Invocation	
Hymn	"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"
Solo	"Silent Night"
Hymn	"The First Noel"
Prayer	
Welcome to Our Guests	
Lighting of the Advent Candles	
Hymn	"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
Tithes and Offerings	
Choir	"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Sermon	"WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM"
Benedictory Carol	"As with Gladness Men of Old"

Pastoral Prayer:

Allow the people to participate in voluntary prayer, emphasizing praise to God for His most precious gift—the gift of Jesus His Son and our Savior.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Offertory Sentence:

A little girl brought home a note from Sunday School requesting the family to let her contribute an item of canned food. The class was collecting food to fill Christmas baskets for some needy families.

Scanning the pantry shelves, the mother suggested, "You can take these cans of mustard sardines. None of us like them."

The child's face fell. "But that means the poor people are helping *us!*"

The appropriateness of a gift has to do with our motivation. Emerson said, "Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only true gift is a portion of thyself."

Offertory Prayer:

Dear Jesus:

Teach us to

Give, for the years are passing.

Give freely; all too soon

The noonday follows sunrise,

The sunset follows noon.

Teach us to

Place love lamps in the window;

Bless others while we may.

Today the door stands open;

Tomorrow—who can say?

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES:

Read Isa. 52:7.

We bring our Advent wreath to full blaze in hope that we may see clearly all that is made known to us in the coming of Christ.

Eternal God our Father: for long generations You prepared a way in our world for the coming of Your Son. By Your Spirit You are still bringing the light of the gospel to darkened lives. May we be prepared to welcome Jesus Christ to rule our thoughts and claim our love, as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

"NEW BEGINNINGS"

Matt. 2:13-23
December 31, 1989

INTRO:

People often say, "If only I could begin again; have a fresh start!" That desire lies deep in the heart of almost everyone. And God wants you to have new beginnings. He is the God of new things—a new heart, a new spirit, a new name, a new covenant, a new song. His mercies are new every morning!

A new year holds up the possibility of new beginnings. As long as we are alive we can change. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NIV).

At Christmastime we focus our attention upon the Nativity narratives in Matthew and Luke. After Christmas we turn our thoughts to the new year. Thus, the Gospel narratives telling what happened after Christmas get overlooked. "All Scripture is [inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). Athanasius wrote, "All Divine Scripture is a teacher of true faith!"

In the obscure event of the flight of Jesus and His parents into Egypt, there are some truths for us entering a new year. Let these simple but profound principles work out in your life! Three principles guide us in our quest for new beginnings.

I. Trust God's prompting

After presenting their rich gifts to the Baby Jesus, "And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they [the magi] returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him'" (Matt. 2:12-13, NIV).

Two things stand out about Joseph. First, he lived close enough to God to be sensitive to His prompting: "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt" (v. 14, NIV).

The Lord ordered Joseph to escape with his family into Egypt and to remain there for further instructions. Many times in biblical history, Egypt had been a land of refuge for God's people.

Joseph awaited further prompting from the Lord "until the death of Herod" (v. 15, NIV).

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom's sister said, "Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see." God enriches our lives by His promptings.

ILLUS. Albert Schweitzer was trying to settle on his life's work. He had so many abilities—music, medicine, teaching, and religion, holding earned doctoral degrees in each of those fields. Untold opportunities lie before him! What should he do? What was God's plan for his life?

One day he was cleaning off his cluttered desk. Among the papers was a little magazine from the Paris Missionary Society. Addressed to a neighbor, it had been mistakenly put in his mailbox. Glancing through it, Schweitzer noticed an article titled, "The Needs of the Congo Mission." He read the article. When he finished, he said, "My search is over." He felt God's prompting and went to the Congo to serve the Africans for Jesus' sake.

We must be willing to be guided by God—not just now and then—but as a way of life. We cannot expect light in a crisis if we are not willing to continuously "walk in the light as he is in the light"! Will you let God interrupt with His promptings in this new year?

II. Trust God's providence

"So he [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (vv. 14-15, NIV).

The usual Christmas story ends with the magi presenting expensive gifts—gifts that a poor carpenter's family was unaccustomed to. I never before stopped to ask, "What did Joseph do with all that gold, frankincense, and myrrh?" Here's the amazing providence of God. Joseph and Mary had come from Galilee to Bethlehem for the tax registration—and you know what shape your finances are in after April 15! God, in His wisdom and providence arranged adequate financial resources through the magi from the East in order for Joseph and his family to make the journey to Egypt and to have money to start all over again! God timed it perfectly, providing financial resources for their survival in a foreign land.

God's protection is wrapped up in His providence.

ILLUS. Peter Marshall was a popular preacher of the 1940s and 1950s, pastoring the historic Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. During his boyhood in Scotland, Peter visited a friend who lived some distance away. As boys often do, he lost track of time and stayed too late. Dusk came and Peter started for home. To save time, he took a short-cut across the moors. Darkness fell.

Lost and terrified, Peter began to run. Suddenly he thought he heard a voice call his name, "Peter!" He ran on. Again the voice called, "Peter!" Turning to see who was calling as he ran, he stumbled and fell in the darkness.

Reaching out to raise himself, Peter touched nothing but air. Groping fingers examined the ground. Suddenly he knew where he was—at the edge of an old stone quarry. A few more steps and he would have fallen to his death. Peter Marshall always felt God had saved his life by calling out to him!

As you make new beginnings this new year, trust God's providence. He loves you!

III. Trust God's presence

"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead'" (vv. 19-20, NIV).

Throughout the whole episode, God is not a disinterested observer. His presence overshadows the little family in exile from beginning to end. At all times they were under the watchful eye of the Lord! The Psalmist exclaimed, "You know when I sit or stand. When far away you know my every thought. You chart the path ahead of me, and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. . . . You both pre-

cede and follow me, and place your hand of blessing on my head" (139:2-3, 5, TLB).

In God's presence, Jesus was sheltered in Egypt—and exile there gave Jesus room to grow! We are never alone on life's detours. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

ILLUS. Thornton Wilder depicted the relationship between a popular concert hall singer and her discoverer and tutor, Uncle Pio. The singer was content with mediocre work if she

received the crowd's applause. But after each performance, she had to face her teacher, Uncle Pio, who was always standing in the wings.

The Lord stands in the wings of life's stage.

CONCLUSION:

Trust God. He has His hands on the controls of this new year. Keep your lamp burning, and let God place it where He will!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Psalm 23
Hymn	"The Lord's My Shepherd"
Duet	"Surely Goodness and Mercy"
Hymn	"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"
Sermon	"NEW BEGINNINGS"
Prayer Chorus	"I Know the Lord Will Make a Way for Me"
Pastoral Prayer	
Welcome to Our Guests	
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Choir	"He Lifted Me"
Benediction	2 Thess. 2:16-17

Pastoral Prayer:

Heavenly Father: Thank You for waking us to see the light of this new day—the beautiful beginning of a new year.

Help us to waste none of its hours, to soil none of its moments, to neglect none of its opportunities, to fail none of its duties.

Guide us through this coming year undefeated by any temptation, at peace with ourselves, at peace with our fellowmen, at peace with You.

We are grateful for any glimpse of beauty we shall see, any echo of Your truth we shall hear, any kindness that we shall receive.

We ask for Your forgiveness for anything that has spoiled and marred this past year; for any word that now we wish we had never spoken; for any deed we wish we had never done; for everything that makes us ashamed to remember.

We call Your forgiving love, mercy.

We call Your caring love, providence.

We call Your understanding love, kindness.

We call Your proven love, Christ's passion and death.

We call Your encouraging love, joy.

We call Your unerring love, the will of God.

We call Your rewarding love, heaven.

We call Your unending love, eternity.

We praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Offertory Sentence:

Two preachers were discussing the financial situation of their churches. One, whose congregation numbered about 100, mentioned the amount of total giving by his church for the past year.

The other, pastor of a liberal church that ran three Sunday morning services totaling around 900, was astounded. The flabbergasted minister said, "Your little church takes in more money than my big church!" Wistfully, he added, "If it weren't for the bingo parties, our church would never make it. How do you people do it?"

The simple reply, "My people practice tithing."

Tithing is the biblical method of support and the biblical method of developing strong, obedient stewards whom God loves to bless.

Offertory Prayer:

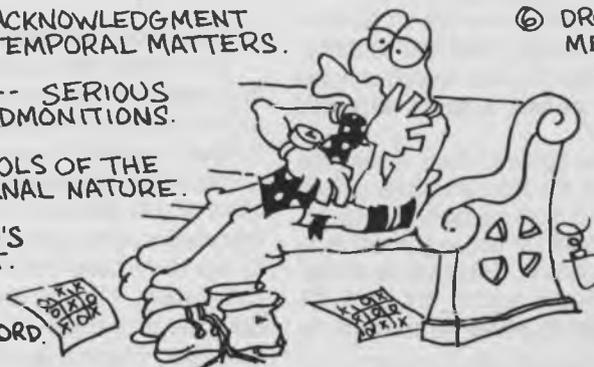
Dear Heavenly Father: Help us give according to our income, lest You make our incomes match our gifts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Benediction:

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thess. 2:16-17, NIV).

Pontius' Puddle

- ① GLANCING AT WATCH-- ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S GUIDANCE IN TEMPORAL MATTERS.
- ② SOMBER EXPRESSION-- SERIOUS RESPONSE TO GOD'S ADMONITIONS.
- ③ X'S AND O'S -- SYMBOLS OF THE CROSS AND GOD'S ETERNAL NATURE.
- ④ ELBOW ON BIBLE-- GOD'S WORD IS OUR SUPPORT.
- ⑤ SHOES REMOVED IN HOLY PRESENCE OF OUR LORD.



- ⑥ DROOPEDEVELIDS-- A MEDITATIVE SPIRIT, INTROSPECTION.

- ⑦ SLUMPED POSTURE-- HUMILITY, MAKING ONESELF LOWER THAN ONE'S BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

7 SIGNS OF WORSHIP

January/February 1990

prepared by Holland Lewis

INTRODUCTION

When society is at its worst, God wants His church at its best. In fact, He would be more than a little pleased if His church were "amazing" in its impact on the surrounding world.

The world will never get the help it really needs from any other source. Not from politics, not from education, not from a healthy economy, and not even from medicine. All of these have their place. But it is the churches of America that have the real potential for bringing hope for a life of peace, joy, and true love.

This is true because THE ONE WHO is the author of peace, joy, and true love presides in the church—or does He?

That is the stirring question Jesus raises as He addresses the churches of Revelation and as He addresses our church today.

What Christ thinks of the church should be vitally important to each professing Christian. We do well to say (1) to those outside the church, "What do you think of the church today?" "What do you believe the church is all about?" (2) And to those inside the church, "How are we doing from your perspective?" "Do you believe the church is accomplishing what God put it here to accomplish?" And then we should listen.

Still, the most important inquiry should be made of Christ himself, who is the Lord of the Church. We should ask and then listen, "Lord, how are we doing?" "How do we rate?" "Do You see us as 'hot or cold'?" O Lord, please don't say "lukewarm."

Jesus has not become bashful. (1) He still has a clear word to the churches; (2) He still calls to repentance and renewal; (3) He is still capable of enabling us with fortitude, faithfulness, and perseverance.

The One who walks among the churches is ready to help us be worthy of the title "God's Amazing Church."

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission.

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH—LOVING DEEPLY"

Rev. 2:1-7

January 7, 1990

INTRO:

Is there still a place for the good news of God's love in computerized America? And what about the city or town in which we live? It is still in the fermenting, frightening, and often frustrating circumstances of the communities in which we live, that Jesus would have His disciple be "the church."

No one knows the church like Jesus does. He knew the church at Ephesus. He knew where they were effective and where they fell short. He understood the degree of their commitment. He knew their intolerance of many forms of false teaching. And, He knew them well enough to know they had not arrived, that they had drifted, and that they needed revival. The bottom line is this: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first" (v. 5).

Jesus has that same knowledge of us today. And that same hope, too. He wants us to have "good days." He wants us to remember that "the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day" (Prov. 4:18).

Be assured as we begin this first year of the last decade of the 20th century, God can help us be our best. As God spoke through John, He also spoke through Jeremiah, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope'" (Jer. 29:11).

God appealed to His people, individually and corporately, to be at their best for Him. His church can clearly and joyously reflect the life-changing truth about Jesus Christ. We may help others come to know Him personally.

I. Jesus offers a compliment

A. *It's a great thing to be complimented by Jesus.* His compliment was not a "set-up." He really meant it.

B. *Jesus was specific with His affirmations* (v. 2).

1. "I know your deeds." You have reached out in love and concern and caring for other people.

2. "... and your toil." You have worked hard and invested time.

3. "... and perseverance." You have been faithful long after most people would have quit.

4. "... you cannot endure evil men." You have been so faithful to hold up the standard of goodness and underscored your convictions.

5. "... you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not." You are so discerning that you would never let an ungodly person get into a position of leadership in the church.

Jesus is genuinely complimentary toward these people. After all, it is His church. He cares. He watches. Others may forget or overlook, but nothing escapes His notice. He even

observes (v. 3) that you have done all of this and still you "have not grown weary."

C. *Jesus also commends their doctrinal purity* (v. 6). The Christians in the Ephesian church had the distinction of hating the same kind of false teaching that Jesus hated.

The apostle Paul previously warned the Ephesian church of an invasion of heresy. The church was ready.

D. *Is our church worthy of such compliments? Are we busy helping others? Is there any room for "toil" in our ministry? Do we hang in there when the going gets tough? Are we prepared to stand up to evil that would invade the church? Do we have the courage to put only godly persons in leadership? Do we remain strongly dedicated to the name of Jesus? Are we worthy today of these profound compliments?*

II. Jesus expresses concern

A. *Jesus was direct with His concern*: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (v. 4). Jesus was the ultimate "one-minute manager." He knew how to speak the positive, helpful, encouraging word, but He was absolutely ready to be honest in His personal evaluation, both of the individual disciple and of the church. His affirmation of the strengths of His people opened the door for His expression of concern.

B. *Jesus appealed to their memory* as He does to ours, saying, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen . . ." (v. 5). **Jesus wants to take us back to that first spark of devotion.** He asks us to remember when we were saved, when we came to Christ, the influences, the circumstances, our response in the moment of baptism, our enthusiasm for service, our availability for stewardship.

ILLUS. Remember the courtship and marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning? Robert persuaded Elizabeth to leave her invalid's couch and elope with him. In the sunny warmth of Italy, she regained strength. During this time she wrote (not for publication, but for her husband) enchanting words wherein she declared that she had loved him from the first time she heard the footsteps of his soul.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

C. *Love is essential.* William Barclay observed, "It may be that orthodoxy had been achieved, but at the price of fellowship. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love."

ILLUS. Ralph Barton was a popular cartoonist for *The New Yorker*. He is reported to have committed suicide, leaving behind this well-known and revealing confession: "I have had few real difficulties. I have had, on the contrary, an exceptionally glamorous life, as life goes, and I have had more than my share of affection and appreciation. The most charming, intelligent, and important people that I have known have liked

me. I have run from wife to wife, from house to house, and from country to country in a ridiculous effort to escape myself. No one thing is responsible for this [suicide] and no person except myself. I did it because I am fed up with inventing devices for getting through twenty-four hours a day."

It is a wonderful expression of Christ's love that He tells us the truth about ourselves. Jesus desires that we deal honestly with where we are in our journey today.

III. Jesus gives a command (v. 5)

A. *"Repent and do the deeds you did at first."* Jesus addresses the need within His own family when He says, "Repent." The message of repentance appeals to you and me who are already a part of the Body of Christ (1 John 2:1).

B. *The name "Ephesus" means "the desirable one."* Jesus says to His church, at one time thought to be the "desirable one," "Return to me, repent, get back on track. Remember what you once were. Stir up that gift in yourself again."

ILLUS. A professor at Yale University stated, "I never consciously gave up religious belief. It was as if I had put my beliefs in a drawer and when I opened it, there was nothing there at all."

CONCLUSION:

The love of Christ for His church causes Him to present to us a compliment, a concern, and a command. Even today He waits for our response. Make a fresh start today. Remember who you were when you first came to Christ, and now ask Him to renew that spirit within you.

ILLUS. Dr. E. Stanley Jones tells of a girl who, frustrated by the city, entered a house of prostitution. Learning of her daughter's plight, the mother desperately sought to rescue her. Not having her child's address, she left a photograph of herself in each house of ill fame visited. One day, the errant girl saw on a mantle in a reception room, a familiar picture. It was the likeness of her first love—mother. Beneath were the words, "come home."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	
Pastor's Call to Worship	2 Tim. 1:7
Scripture Reading/Lay Reader	Rev. 2:1-7
Choruses	"We Are One in the Bond of Love" and "In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified"
Theme Chorus for Series	"Open Our Eyes, Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	
Moments for Friendship and Announcements	
Offering	2 Cor. 9:6-7
Special Music	"The Love of God"
Message	"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH—'LOVING DEEPLY'"
Closing Song	"Open Our Eyes, Lord"
Benediction	1 Cor. 16:23

Pastoral Prayer:

Introduce prayer time with Scripture reference: Matt. 11:28-30. Take a few minutes for "directed prayer":

Make an altar in your own heart. Strike up conversation with God.

... Pray for those on either side of you.

... Pray for each member of your family by name and need.

... Pray for those who minister to us today.

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —FAITHFUL IN TOUGH TIMES"

Rev. 2:8-11
January 14, 1990

INTRO:

Smyrna was one of God's "super" churches. In fact, it was only one of two churches among the seven churches of Revelation that received no criticism from Jesus. Referring to Smyrna as a superchurch, we mean something quite different from the meaning attached to superchurches in the 20th century.

Such churches today are generally characterized by a strong, sometimes flamboyant leader, large adequate facilities, an impressive budget, a supermarket of programs for people of all ages and interests, and large numbers of people in attendance.

Perhaps none of those characteristics describe the church at Smyrna. However, in Jesus' eyes it was special. It was super. It demonstrated in full measure the quality of "faithfulness."

The key verse signaling Jesus' confidence in this church is "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (v. 10).

Faithfulness never appears in an individual or in a local church by accident.

I. Faithfulness is born under fire

A. Jesus understands the stress they suffered. He says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty . . . , and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not . . . the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation" (vv. 9-10).

B. Poverty enriches. How could Christians living in a powerful and wealthy city be poverty-stricken? According to Paul, "There were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Cor. 1:26-27). Perhaps the reason for their poverty could be found in:

1. The simple fact that they belonged to lower ranks of society.
2. They were extremely generous with what they had (2 Cor. 8:2 ff.).
3. They resolved to be honest in their business dealings, renouncing dishonesty and easy profits.
4. Many Jews of that day would not do business with them. They did not enjoy the luxury of placing the "fish sign" on their stationery or on their door.
5. Perhaps they could not find employment in that unfriendly atmosphere (Heb. 10:32-36).

C. They felt the impact of slander. Jesus understood the tremendous impact of slander against one's personality. He experienced it in His own earthly ministry. Now He seeks to encourage these Christians being mistreated by persons claiming to be followers of God but who, in fact, were a part of the "synagogue of Satan."

Jesus showed them how to respond (1 Pet. 2:23).

ILLUS. It was February 22, 156 A.D. The great bishop who had fled from the city at the urging of his congregation, was tracked down to his hiding place. He made no attempt to flee. Instead, he offered food and drink to his captors and asked permission to retire for prayer, which he did for two hours. As they drove into the city, the officer in charge urged him to recant. "What harm can it do," he asked, "to sacrifice to the emperor?" Polycarp refused.

On arrival, he was roughly pushed out of the carriage and brought before the Proconsul in the amphitheatre, who addressed him: "Have respect to your old age . . . Swear by the genius of Caesar . . ." And again, "Swear, and I will release you; revile the Christ."

To which Polycarp replied: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

The Proconsul persisted: "Swear by the genius of Caesar. I have wild beasts; if you will not change your mind, I will throw you to them. Bid them be brought. As you despise the beasts unless you change your mind, I make you to be destroyed by fire." Infuriated Jews and Gentiles gathered wood for the pile.

Polycarp stood by the stake, asking not to be fastened to it, and prayed, "O Lord. Almighty God, the Father of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received a knowledge of Thee. I thank Thee that Thou has thought me worthy, this day and this hour, to share the cup of Thy Christ among the number of Thy witnesses!" The fire was kindled, but as the wind drove the flames away from him and prolonged his agony, a soldier's sword put an end to his misery (*What Christ Thinks of the Church*, John R. W. Stott, I.V.P.).

II. Faithfulness is developed in relationship with Jesus

Faithfulness is best developed when we spend time with one who is "faithful."

A. Jesus is the Faithful Friend. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He speaks comfort, "Do not fear" (v. 10). And He offers this in the face of the severest testing, including a prison term.

B. Jesus gives strength to stand. Jesus had not a word of criticism for these people. The prominent words for this church were *tribulation, poverty, suffer, and prison*.

C. Jesus enabled them to cope. The context indicates that the people of this church were sufficiently strong inside where it counts. They could face this challenge.

Spiritual strength develops in a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. It develops in a daily quiet time with Jesus.

III. Faithfulness has its reward

A. There is the crown of life. Jesus gives His word: "You remain true and I will give you the crown of life."

ILLUS. The name "Smyrna" comes from the word *myrrh*, one of the spices used in the ritual of Israel. It was a fragrant

spice but had to be crushed and beaten small in order to give forth its full fragrance and perfume. What a perfect figure for the church of the persecution of those days. The Christians, too, were crushed and persecuted. But the more they suffered, the more fragrant was their testimony.

B. There is the great escape. Jesus promises victory. Not only do we gain heaven as the crown of life, but we escape hell, which is the second death (v. 11).

CONCLUSION:

Jesus knows that the way of "obedience to the point of death" is not defeat. He himself "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8, KJV). He overcame that death: He "was dead, and has come to life" (v. 8). Christ "in us" who overcame death will enable us to overcome any difficulty. Thus He calls on us to be faithful in every challenge and each situation.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship	"It Will Be Worth It All"
Pastoral Call to Worship	Matt. 11:28-30
Hymns	"How Firm a Foundation" and "My Jesus, I Love Thee"
Scripture Reading/Lay Reader	Rev. 2:8-11
Choruses	"Through It All"; Theme: "Open Our Eyes, Lord"; and "It Pays to Serve Jesus"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	"And Can It Be?"
Moments for Friendship and Announcements	

Offering	1 Chron. 16:29
Special Music	"Follow Me"
Message	"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —FAITHFUL IN TOUGH TIMES"
Closing Song	"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"
Benediction	Gal. 6:18

Pastoral Prayer:

Lead the people into a time of waiting before God in quietness. Encourage them to use these moments for personal confession of failure, omissions this past week, and encourage confession of sin, if that has occurred in their lives.

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —STANDING TALL FOR TRUTH"

Rev. 2:12-17
January 21, 1990

INTRO:

Commitment to truth is a sure foundation for a Christian church. When the world is at its worst, God wants His church at its best. So, He stays on top of the situation in His churches. HE KNOWS HIS CHURCH.

A. *It was the best of times in Pergamum.* The city was wealthy, cultured, and literate. Pergamum had the second largest library in the world at that time, having amassed a collection of 200,000 volumes.

ILLUS. The city of Pergamum had one of the greatest libraries of its day. In fact, the second largest in the world at that time, with 200,000 volumes. And that number is all the more significant when we understand that these volumes were scrolls. The city desired to make the library even greater, so it invited Aristophanes, who was then director of the great library in Alexandria, to come and head up the library in Pergamum. Aristophanes responded positively and accepted the invitation. But, when the leader of Egypt received the news that Aristophanes planned to move to Pergamum, he arrested Aristophanes and he put an embargo against Pergamum. And the result was that they could not attain the papyrus from Egypt that they needed for writing material. However, this hardship produced something very good. It was then that the people of Pergamum developed what we came to know as parchment, or vellum. Eventually, this material would replace papyrus as the primary writing material all around the world. This is important because it tells us how cultured and highly educated this city was as a setting in which God's church was challenged to stand tall for truth.

B. *It was the worst of times from Christ's perspective.* Jesus looked at the moral tone of the city of Pergamum and called it the "place where Satan dwells."

C. *That's a good place for a church.* Jesus said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick" (Matt. 9:12). Where the night is darkest, the light must shine brightest.

I. God wants bright lights in dark places

A. *God knows "where [we] dwell"* (v. 13). God challenges our Christian faith: Many Christians live in homes, work in shops, attend schools, live in neighborhoods or apartment complexes where it is difficult to be Christian, where temptation runs rampant, where faith is challenged day by day. Jesus understands this: "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (v. 13).

B. *God knows our hearts.* He distinguishes between spiritual shallowness and spiritual depth, as He did in Pergamum (vv. 13-14). It is sobering to know that God searches His people. If I'm not living where I should be, He knows. He calls me to a new level of commitment.

C. *Light shines through devotion.* We declare by our lives whether we believe "Jesus is Lord" or "Caesar is Lord" (Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 6:14; John 12:35).

II. God wants His church to be pure

A. *If the church is to "stand tall" for truth, it must speak out of a pure heart.*

1. Truth will be challenged by society: "You dwell, where Satan's throne is . . . where Satan dwells" (v. 13). "You have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak" (v. 14).

2. False teaching existed. "The teaching of the Nicolaitans" (v. 15). Alexander Maclaren said, "They wanted the best of two worlds so they ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds."

B. *They had an inappropriate tolerance.* God reserves His greatest wrath for those who lead others astray. Therefore, He desired that the Nicolaitans and those who allowed for the teaching of Balaam to be confronted and challenged severely.

Someone challenged halfhearted Christianity with these words, "They're praising God on Sunday; they'll be all right on Monday. It's just a little habit they've acquired."

C. *Purity is our choice.* Christ strongly confronts His followers, calling them to repentance (v. 16).

III. God provides enablement today

A. *The context suggests that God will supply the needed power: "To him who overcomes"* (v. 17). In the most difficult of circumstances the Christian will be given the power to stand firm.

B. *Jesus is pictured as sufficiently strong: He is "the One who has the sharp two-edged sword"* (v. 12). The songwriter says, "All that I need He will always be. / All that I need till His face I see, / All that I need through eternity, / Jesus is all I need."

C. *Jesus promises ultimate victory.* Jesus promises to the one who overcomes:

1. "The hidden manna" (v. 17). (See Exod. 16:23-24 and Heb. 9:4.) While Old Testament references help us understand this "manna," we also understand that the manna itself is Jesus Christ. We will feast forever on Him in heaven.

2. "The white stone."

ILLUS. Many interpretations are given to the "white stone." Some commentators suggest that these were the "jewels" that fell from the sky with the manna according to a rabbinical tradition. Others suggest the white ballot pebble thrown into a box by the judge when he acquitted a prisoner, while yet others remind us of the "tessara" given to winners in the games, entitling them to free access to the public entertainments. But whatever the stone may be, the new name to be engraved on it is undoubtedly the name of Jesus Christ who says later in His letter to the Philadelphian Church, "I will write upon him . . . my new name" (3:12).

Whatever the meaning of the "white stone," we can be sure that the "new name" written on that stone is the name of Jesus, the name that will be written upon all of us who know Christ (Rev. 3:12).

CONCLUSION:

Today you may live in a community where life is at its worst.

Society may appear to be a moral cesspool. But, don't forget, that's a good place to have a church. And that's a good place to have a Christian who stands tall for God's truth.

Curtis Jones said, "Declared believers in Pergamum were too tolerant, permissive, lax, too closely identified with Satan's legions to be effective servants and contagious Christians." May God find us faithful today.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Choral Call to Worship
- Pastoral Call to Worship Ps. 150:1-6
- Hymns "The Church's One Foundation" and "The Solid Rock"
- Scripture Reading/Lay Leader Rev. 2:12-17
- Choruses "Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet" and "Standing on the Promises"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Choir Special
- Moments for Friendship and Announcements
- Offering Prov. 3:9
- Special Music "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name"

- Message "GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —STANDING TALL FOR TRUTH"
- Closing Song "A New Name Written Down in Glory" Eph. 6:24
- Benediction

Pastoral Prayer:

Invite the people to a FAMILY ALTAR. Tell them the altar is as open as they want to make it with the bringing of their needs. Give them opportunity for quiet confession and personal praise. Guide them to pray for family members, brother/sister Christians, and the names of persons in the congregation with specific needs, requests.



Pontius' Puddle



© Joel Kaufmann

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —BELIEVING THE BEST FOR THE WORST"

Rev. 2:18-29
January 28, 1990

INTRO:

Thank God for great churches. Thyatira seemed to be one of those churches. Thyatira First Church was thriving, but the investigation of Jesus produced new information not visible to the undiscerning eye. The church had insufficient power and purity for effective evangelism in the darkest corners of that community.

A. This church had great promise. Jesus noted, "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first" (v. 19). Is this not one of the superchurches of that day?

This church's program was a great drawing card to people. This church definitely "had it." I would sign up for their newsletter. I would want to learn from them.

B. This church demonstrated the insufficiency of human power.

1. They had a good heritage.

2. They had a lack of depth. The eyes of Jesus were "like a flame of fire." He looked beneath the surface and saw the lack in the church at Thyatira. There is no way to cover up or avoid Jesus' view of things. He looked into their hearts and their defenses crumbled. So must ours.

C. This church had the problem with Jezebel. Jesus found fault with this church because the influence of "Jezebel" was greater than the influence of the church. I wonder, "Can that influence be reversed? Can Jezebel be won to faith in Christ?"

I. Yes—if she sees the power of purity

A. Jezebel represents unbelief

B. If there's no purity, there's no power. This community of faith was weak inside where it counts. Jesus found this wonderful church guilty of tolerating the woman Jezebel, being led astray, committing acts of immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (v. 20).

ILLUS. Dennis, with his lovely wife and young children, had attended our church for several months. He had been raised in a solid, conservative Christian home. He had drifted from that life-style of his upbringing. God had convicted him and drawn him back to himself through the ministry and people of the local church. This successful naval officer stood to give his testimony in a public service. His words rang out with gratitude, "I want to thank this church for not allowing me to live a mildly committed Christian life. God has drawn me back from my halfhearted commitment to a full giving of myself to Him. And I thank this church body for leading me to that commitment."

II. Yes—if she meets up with a living witness

A. The vilest of sinners can be saved if they can meet up with someone who has a vital, personal relationship with Jesus and is willing to tell about it.

1. Have I taken time to develop my own personal testimony so that it can be simply, briefly, and clearly shared?

2. Have I sufficiently developed a salvation plan or

learned a salvation plan (i.e., *Four Spiritual Laws*, etc.) so that I can lay out the path of the Savior for my unsaved friends?

3. Does my life reflect the reality of Jesus' life in me?

ILLUS. Harold had been a good man and a faithful husband for over 30 years. He never resisted his wife in her commitment to the church. He even occasionally attended with her. He showed increased interest in what was happening in the church when his wife and teenage daughter hosted the youth group in their home for "afterglows." On a very normal Sunday evening, he made his way down the center aisle, knelt at the altar of prayer, and gave his heart to Christ. He could no longer resist the reflection of Christ's love that had shined faithfully through the life of his daughter and of his wife for more than 30 years. The "living witness" of his wife had done the job.

B. There is opportunity to repent. Perhaps all Jezebel needs is to meet someone who really cares about her at the heart level. Jesus models this concern: "I gave her time to repent" (v. 21).

1. We dare not prejudge the sinner's willingness to respond to the gospel.

2. The Spirit of Christ is stronger than the spirit of Jezebel. Our challenge is to provide opportunity for the Jezebels of our day.

III. Yes—if Christians will celebrate her repentance

A. Jesus obviously wanted "Jezebel," the Thyatira Church, to come to repentance. We do not really know who she is in that church or in your church. Jesus invites her to repent.

B. We must recognize the consequences. Obviously there is trouble at the end of an unrepentant life: "She does not want to repent." "Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation." Note Jesus' next words: "UNLESS THEY REPENT." Jesus holds out for repentance.

C. Am I more willing to celebrate the repentance of the lost than I am to announce their damnation?

D. There is the announcement of hope. How did Jesus invite "Jezebel" to repent? He did it through men and women, young people, boys and girls like those of us gathered here today. We are to:

1. Live a life of holiness and purity.

2. Share our own story of victory.

3. Open the Scriptures to their understanding.

4. Exercise compassionate patience while remaining true to Christ.

CONCLUSION:

God's church will be amazing when His people answer the midnight darkness of our society with a brilliant light of a holy life, when His people are believing the best even for the worst of people, and when His people take seriously the call to holiness evangelism.

Will you open your heart today to the cleansing, purifying power of God's Spirit and take that first step toward becoming the brilliant light that sets on a hill for all to see?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

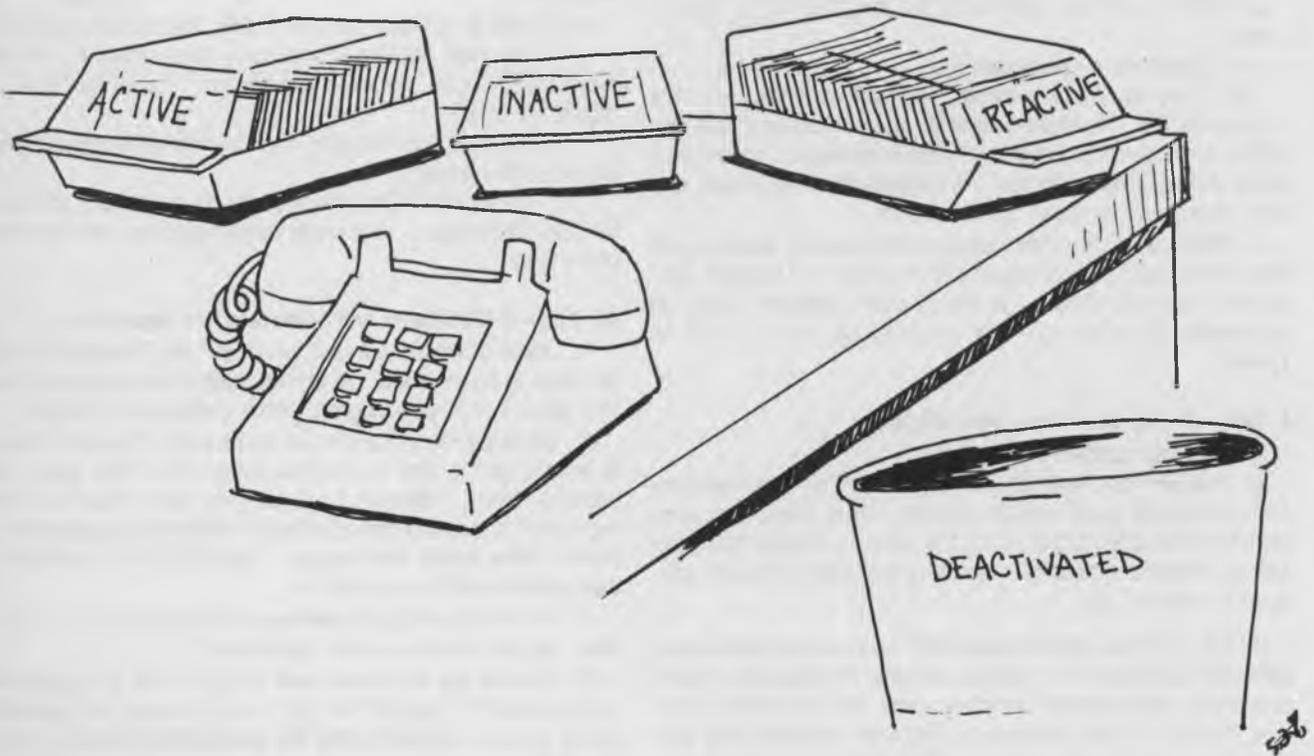
Choral Call to Worship
Pastoral Call to Worship John 3:16
Hymns "A Glorious Church"; "There Is a Fountain"
Scripture Reading/Lay Reader Rev. 2:18-20
Choruses "O to Be like Thee";
"In My Life, Lord";
Theme: "Open Our Eyes, Lord"
Pastoral Prayer
Choir Special "Whiter than Snow"
Moments for Friendship and Announcements
Offering Ps. 116:12-14

Special Music "The Place of Beginning Again"
Message "GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH
—BELIEVING THE BEST FOR THE WORST"
Closing Song "The Cleansing Stream"
Benediction Phil. 4:23

Pastoral Prayer:

Pray openly before the people regarding the agenda on your own heart today. Be real, honest, confident (Phil. 1:6).

Give opportunity for all to be honest before God with their need, and confession.



"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —MAKING A DIFFERENCE"

Rev. 3:1-6
February 4, 1990

INTRO:

How would you like to have the sensation of really being alive today? How long has it been since you had an inner sense of enthusiasm and joy in being alive? When did you last feel like saying, "It's a great thing to just be alive!" And really mean it?

This is God's promise for all who come into a genuine, vital relationship with Jesus Christ. In Gen. 2:7, God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and he became a "living being." Ever since then, God has wanted His people to be vibrant and fully alive.

A. *The Bible makes incredible statements regarding this "life" to which God calls His people:* "That . . . you might have life" (John 20:31); "I came that [you] might have life, and might have it abundantly" (10:10); "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4); "He who has the Son has . . . life" (1 John 5:12).

B. *Jesus emphasized life—and why not?* The Bible explains that He paid an incredible price to provide this life. He paid with His own blood. He experienced the Cross.

C. *This life becomes the real test for our profession of faith in Christ.* It is also the test of the profession of God's church. He wants His church fully alive so that it may make a difference in the world. Jesus was thinking about this "life" when He visited the church at Sardis. He wasted no time in coming right to the point of His evaluation: "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die" (vv. 1-2). What happens in our church when Jesus holds us up to the standard of evaluation He used in Sardis?

I. Reputation is an inadequate measurement of spiritual strength

A. *What is in a name?* The name "Sardis" meant "remnant or that which remained." Good things were happening in Sardis but not enough to maintain the life of Christ's Spirit. The church may have been written up in the newspapers, observed by church growth experts, followed with interest by community leaders, but it was not a true reflection of who they were.

1. What about our denominational names? Are we what those names suggest?

2. What about the name of our ministry group (Sunday School class, choir, age-group ministries)? Are these names a true reflection of who we are?

ILLUS. In the town of Norco where I pastored, I was invited to address the leaders of the junior high schools and senior high schools at a banquet sponsored by the local service club. Their theme was "Laurels for Leaders." In my preparation, I turned to my wife, who had been student body president in her California high school. I asked, "If someone had come to speak with you and the other leaders when you were a high school student body leader on the subject "Laurels for Leaders," what would you have hoped they might say?"

She thought a moment and responded, "I wish they might have said, 'Forget your laurels and get on with life.'"

B. *God sees through our profession* (Matt. 15:8-9). Words are not enough. Form and ritual will never replace godliness and power (2 Tim. 3:5).

II. Reality is a matter of the heart

A. *The beehive of activity was no cover-up for the condition of the heart.* Jesus observed that they were lifeless and moving rapidly toward spiritual death.

1. Their works were unfulfilled . . . empty (v. 2).

2. They had soiled garments—secret sin (v. 4). The church had the problem of sinning Christians.

B. *They were also surface Christians.* Jesus condemns religion lived as a "show" for others (Matt. 23:5, 27-28). This life-style received the greatest condemnation from Jesus.

ILLUS. It is altogether possible for a person to go on with the motions of Christianity when he has slipped out of relationship with Jesus Christ. This was brought home to me as a child when we visited the country and I watched my mother help in the preparation for dinner. She showed us how she used to help prepare fried chicken when she was a girl on the farm. She took one of the hens up in her arm out in the barnyard. She got a good grip on its head, then she hurled it into the air and spun it round and round, holding tightly onto its head. I knew what it meant to "wring a chicken's neck." She got its body back under her arm and quickly pulled its head from its body. Then she dropped the chicken to the ground. For a full minute or so, without a head, the chicken flopped about in the yard until dead. This reminded me of what can happen in the church. Long after we have separated from Christ, we can be very, very active and busy with religious activities.

III. Revival follows closely after confession

A. *Jesus gives guidance.* "Wake up . . . strengthen what remains" (v. 2). "Remember . . . keep it . . . repent" (v. 3). Revival is not far off when we obey this instruction.

B. *Jesus gives the life.* This is something we cannot do for ourselves. "Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" (Ps. 85:6).

C. *Jesus will not beg us to surrender, and He will never forcibly break the stubbornness of our will.* He simply appeals in love.

CONCLUSION:

O breath of life, come sweeping through us;

Revive Thy church with life and power.

O breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,

And fit Thy church to meet this hour.

A. *To refuse God's appeal opens the possibility of my name being erased from the Book of Life* (v. 5).

B. *Obedience to God's appeal assures me that my name will be spoken in the presence of God* (v. 5).

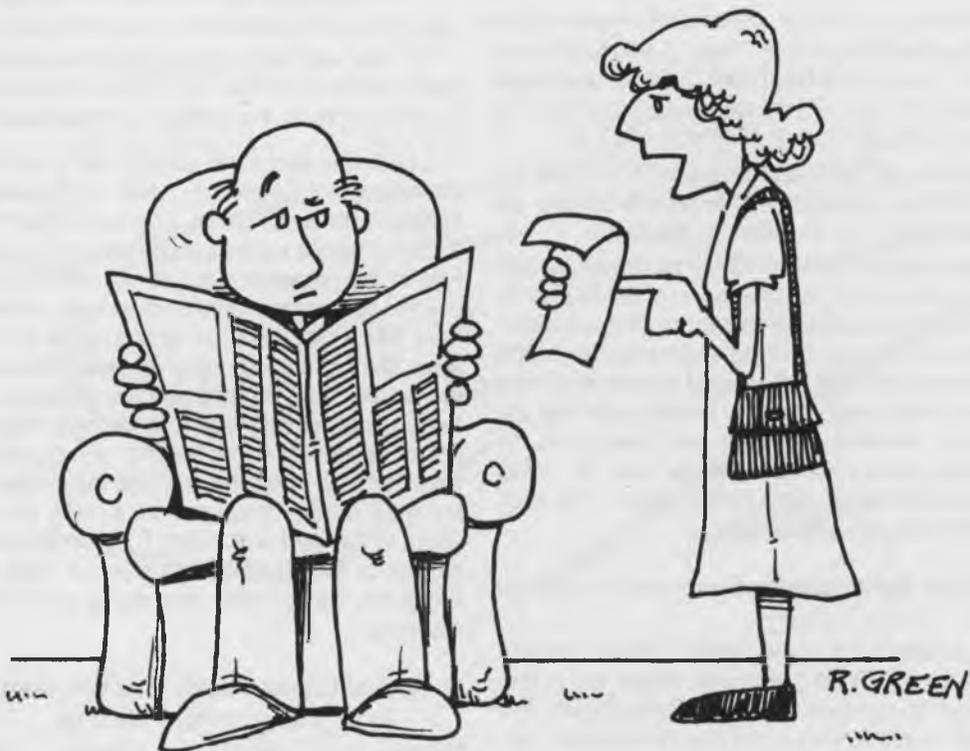
SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Call to Worship
Pastoral Call to Worship 2 Tim. 1:7
Hymns "Lead On, O King Eternal"
and "He Is Able to Deliver Thee"
Scripture Reading / Read in Unison Rev. 3:1-6
Choruses "O to Be like Thee";
"Open Our Eyes, Lord"; and "Thou Art Worthy"
Pastoral Prayer
Choir Special "When He Shall Come"
Offering Heb. 13:16

Special Music "You Want to, Now Will You?"
Message "GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH—MAKING
A DIFFERENCE"
Closing Song "Is My Name Written There?"
Benediction Col. 4:2

Pastoral Prayer:

Invite the people to the FAMILY ALTAR during the singing of the chorus and lead them in directed prayer for: The ministries of our church, the missionary of the month, Sunday School teachers, and those who minister to us today.



HONEY, WILL YOU LOOK AT THE BUDGET WITH ME SO I CAN SEE HOW MUCH I'M GOING TO SURPRISE YOU FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY?

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —ANSWERING THE CALL"

Rev. 3:7-13
February 11, 1990

INTRO:

"Open door" is God's gift of opportunity. This "opportunity" knocks at the door of every Christian life. How we answer that call determines the measure of our satisfaction, happiness, and effectiveness.

What are you doing with the "open doors" in your life?

A. *What light has been lifted, what moral concern in society has been addressed, what personal need is being met, what broken relationship is being mended because you are walking through God's gift of an "open door"?*

B. *The church at Philadelphia had an open door. Jesus put it there, not to look at, not to admire, and not to avoid, but to walk through and help the Master finish His earthly ministry.*

ILLUS. Occasionally, ministers will use the word *opportunity* in reference to a church they have pastored or have been invited to pastor. I'm afraid sometimes we use the word with tongue in cheek, with the actual meaning of the word being "there is little if any hope at all" in that situation or setting.

The church today needs to be revitalized, so that it has courage to walk through "open doors" of ministry set before it by Jesus.

ILLUS. Tony Campolo, well-known sociologist and communicator of our day, recently said in one of his talks, "We will soon see a sweeping revival across this land. This is not a preacher's word, but a fact. When I go to the American Society of Sociologists, we see the reasoning behind this. I could give a good talk on fifteen reasons why we are going to experience revival. It will be a work of Almighty God and Satan will do everything in his power to prevent it."

C. *The name "Philadelphia" comes from two words meaning "brotherly love."* This is another church for which Christ has no criticism. Let's see how they walked through the "open door" set before them. The open door was there, and it is here.

So, what will we do with our "open doors"?

I. Open doors are arranged by God

A. *It is God's gift.* See the description of who opens the door: "holy . . . true . . . key of David." This is none other than Jesus himself. The door is not opened by the denomination, the church board and leaders, nor by the pastor.

Jesus has set before us the open door. We dare not think twice before walking through it: "Behold, I have put before you an open door" (v. 8).

B. *Opportunity is our response to service.* Jesus has granted the skills and abilities to us. He calls us to make faithful use of these gifts. Unless a man's faith saves him out of selfishness into service, it will certainly never save him out of hell into heaven.

C. *Opportunity is God's placement program.* By His sovereign power, God has placed these believers in Philadelphia.

They faithfully accepted their "placement." God can keep them, and He can use them to accomplish His purposes in that city.

ILLUS. Clarice was a special education teacher at the elementary level. She saw her teaching as something more than a job. She saw herself as a minister in the marketplace. She arrived at church one evening burdened for a six-and-one-half-year-old boy in her class. It wasn't the first time she had shared a burden for one of her students. But this was exceptional. Authorities had declared that he must be "demon possessed." He had attempted to kill the family cat, to drown his little sister, and most recently he had tried lying down in front of cars in front of his home. He informed the therapists who evaluated him that there were "voices in my chest telling me to do bad things." Clarice brought the need to church, believing that she had been placed in that educational program by God himself as His minister.

II. Open doors are for walking through

A. *Opposition brings challenges.* Philadelphian Christians faced great difficulty in living out their Christian faith. Most open doors for Christians carry their own challenge. But let's not be reticent to walk through open doors.

B. *There may be inherent insecurities of the open door.* Not only is there opposition to challenge our willingness to walk through the open door, but also there is uncertainty about what we will find when we walk through it.

We are tempted to "close the door" for fear something might come in that we can't handle. Isn't that why we tell our children to "shut the door" when they leave it open at home?

Imagine what may enter through the door of the church if we leave it open: broken lives that can hardly be mended, marriages that need to be restored, unattractive people with lifestyles unlike our own.

Jesus' strategy is to have us go back and forth, in and out, through that "open door," finding people, finding situations that need His healing touch through our lives.

The apostle Paul understood this "open door." He said, "For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9).

Paul pledged to remain in Ephesus and face the challenge of the open door.

III. Open doors will not always be open

A. *Opportunity may be concluded.* Verses 11 and 12 point to a time when there will be no going in and out at the door.

B. *God is sovereign.* When He shuts the door, none will open; just as when He opens the door, none can shut. There is a cutoff time. He is in charge.

C. *Now is the time.* Let's take advantage of the open door now. The apostles hungered for an open door: "Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ

for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak" (Col. 4:3-4). Imagine that—Paul was asking for more opportunity even though in prison.

CONCLUSION:

There are people, communities, homes, and circumstances that need exactly what God has placed in your hands and in your heart to give. Will you give it? Will you walk through the open door?

ILLUS. Ralph McClintock was an engineer with General Motors and wanted to support the cause of World Missions. God began to speak to him when Dr. Jones from our South African field told him that there was a need for an engineer. At 37 years of age, he accepted the call to minister in that field. Now, many years later, he is testifying, "I thought I would not go back for another term. I would like to have had time to get acquainted with my four granddaughters and my 17-year-old daughter. I thought I would die when I sent her back to the States for her education."

So he interviewed for a job here in the States. When asked about his experience, he told the interviewer what he had done for the past 20 years as a missionary in Africa. The response, "We don't have anything to offer you to match that."

McClintock then remembered the words of the king of Ciskei, a field recently opened by the Church of the Nazarene. The king, conscious of the ministry of McClintock, had said, "I want the people of Ciskei exposed to the spirit of that man."

McClintock, moved by the Spirit of God, made his choice to return once again and use what God had placed in his hands and in his heart.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Moments for Friendship and Announcements	
Choral Call to Worship	
Pastoral Call to Worship	Phil. 1:6
Hymns	"Jesus Saves"; "Ready"
Scripture Reading	
Choruses	"I'll Say Yes"; "Open Our Eyes, Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	"People Need the Lord"
Offering	2 Cor. 8:12
Special Music	"Ordinary People"
Message	"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH— ANSWERING THE CALL"
Closing Song	"Only One Life"
Benediction	1 Thess. 5:23-24

Pastoral Prayer:

Prayer for the deep needs of individuals, homes, and our nation. Remind the people that we are encouraged in Scripture to pray for those in authority over us.

BEYOND BELIEF



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"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —HOLDING NOTHING BACK!"

Rev. 3:14-22
February 18, 1990

INTRO:

Enthusiasm lost can be regained! No one needs to remain in a state of defeat or depression. God stands ready to ignite you again, to renew you, and to revitalize you.

A. *God, who created you, has a big purpose for your life.* It can't be lived out on the "downer stage." He wants you encouraged, enthused, fully alive, and ready for action. Jesus never left any of His churches in the dark regarding His purpose for them.

B. *The aching need of the church in Laodicea was for enthusiasm.* Oh, they got excited about some things, but not the right things. Jesus confronted their comfortable ritualism.

Vance Havner described the typical atmosphere in many churches: "A mild mannered people, exhorting everybody to be more mild mannered."

Jesus was lovingly direct.

I. The casual Christian is a contradiction

A. *Notice Jesus' opinion: "Be hot or be cold."* Jesus would have nothing to do with "fence riding."

G. Campbell Morgan said: "Lukewarmness is the worst form of blasphemy."

B. *Notice the New Testament standard: "Fervent in spirit"* (Acts 18:25; see 1 Pet. 4:8). "Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit" (see 1 Tim. 4:7-8).

C. *Notice the halfheartedness.* The Laodicean church was halfhearted in its commitment to Christ. It looked good to the community. It was respectable, sentimental, nominal, and unwilling to commit itself to the extremes.

What happens to our society, to our children, to our homes, if we cease to be extreme in our commitment to Christ?

D. *Notice Jesus' response: "Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth"* (v. 16). In other words, "You make me sick." How does my commitment and the commitment of our church affect the inner feelings of the Lord Jesus?

II. The casual Christian is confused

A. *Jesus gave a diagnosis:*

1. Complacency is the cause of halfheartedness. When lukewarm, we are blind to our own true condition. The Laodicean Christians saw themselves as rich and wealthy, having need of nothing.

2. Christ gives a second opinion. He saw them quite differently, as wretched and miserable, poor and blind and naked. What a contrast!

3. He saw the true self. Jesus said, "I know thy works . . . thou knowest not." We tend to flatter and deceive ourselves while Jesus sees and knows us as we truly are.

ILLUS. Vance Havner tells the story of having spoken in a small country church. Following the service, a man who attended the church for many years was driving Havner home. He thought the preacher had been too hard on the saints that night and said, "Well, we're not so good, but we're not so bad. We make an honest living. We pay our debts, and we behave ourselves. We're not so bad, and we're not so good."

Havner responded, "But don't you remember Jesus and His statement that it was that kind of people who made the Lord sick?"

The contrast between our self-estimate and God's estimate is striking (vv. 17-18).

III. The casual Christian is confronted

A. *We see the power of God to change a human life.*

1. Jesus gives advice: "I advise you" (v. 18). Jesus gave advice, not insistence.

2. Jesus offered hope: "Buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see" (v. 18).

B. *We see the love of Jesus.* Had Jesus not loved them, He would have left them alone. His reproof expresses His love. "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline" (v. 19). And so He disciplines.

ILLUS. The renowned piano player Paderewski on one occasion when asked about his disciplines in rehearsal replied, "If I miss one day of practice, I notice it. If I miss two days of practice, my associates notice it. But, if I miss three days of practice, my audience notices it."

C. *Jesus makes a generous offer: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock"* (v. 20). Jesus offers to enter into close personal fellowship with these who have walked away from Him, these who have been wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus says to His people, "You are everything that I have said you are, yet I love you still."

A. *Jesus was saying, "I can change you. I can help you. I can revitalize you."* If you will "open the door, I will come in to you, and will dine with you and you with me" (see v. 20).

B. *There is the danger of complacency.* Alexander Maclaren said, "A numbed limb feels no pain. As cold increases, the sensation of cold and of everything else goes away."

Eleanor Roosevelt declared, "When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die."

Let God ignite, refresh, and revitalize you today. Let Him equip you to "make a difference."

"GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH —READY FOR ACTION!"

Rev. 3:21-22; 4:1-2

February 25, 1990

INTRO:

These can be great, even amazing days in ministry for God's Church on earth. When the world is at its worst God wants His Church at its best.

Jesus has perfect knowledge of His Church. How quickly He lets us know exactly how He feels and thinks about His Church. You can readily sense His earnestness as He communicates His concerns to the churches.

We recognize that:

A. *The time is short.* There is a sense of urgency in Jesus' words: "Remember . . . and repent . . . or else I am coming to you" (Rev. 2:5). "Do not fear what you are about to suffer" (v. 10). "Or else I am coming to you quickly" (v. 16). "What you have, hold fast until I come" (v. 25). "If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (3:3). "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have" (v. 11). "Be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (vv. 19-20).

To hesitate when His directives are so urgent would be to miss the opportunity to be all that God needs in this hour.

B. *The need is great.* While pressure on Christians is often tremendous, the world stands hopeless and helpless until it meets the Savior through your life or mine.

The objective is not simply survival for our own sake, but to help others find Christ while it is still "day."

I. God has a checklist for the church

A. *Review our lessons.*

1. Ephesus—return to your first love.
2. Smyrna—be faithful in the face of persecution.
3. Pergamum—be pure in life and in doctrine.
4. Thyatira—be finished with your tolerance for sin.
5. Sardis—wake up to life in Christ inside where it counts.
6. Philadelphia—walk through the "open doors" of opportunity.
7. Laodicea—be wholehearted and enthused for Jesus.

B. *Jesus is mighty.* Christ is strong enough to help any church develop these characteristics.

1. Note what Jesus says of himself: "The One who holds the seven stars [churches] in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands [churches]" (2:1).
2. "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life" (v. 8).
3. "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword" (v. 12).
4. "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze" (v. 18).
5. "He who has the seven Spirits of God" (3:1).
6. "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7).
7. "The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God" (v. 14).

Jesus is able to help us meet the challenge of our day.

II. There are pressures on the church

The security of the believer concerns the loving and living Lord.

A. *We are pressed from within.* The church faced its own problems of sin, error, and laziness. Jesus repeatedly challenged the church by telling them, "I have something against you." In all but two of the churches, Jesus found it necessary to offer criticism:

1. Ephesus: "You have left your first love" (2:4).
2. Pergamum: "You have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam [and] . . . of the Nicolaitans" (vv. 14-15).
3. Thyatira: "You tolerate the woman Jezebel" (v. 20).
4. Sardis: "Wake up . . . I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God" (3:2).
5. Laodicea: "You are neither cold nor hot" (v. 15). "You are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (v. 17).

Jesus makes it clear that repentance must begin inside the church. Only then will a positive impact be made on the world. Only then will the church be ready for our Lord's return.

B. *The attack comes from outside.* Jesus knew that the church had many enemies and that the attack would be severe at times.

Jesus faithfully affirmed His people for their achievements, for the good things that had happened in the life of the churches. Ephesus (2:2), Smyrna (v. 9), Pergamum (v. 13), Thyatira (v. 19), Sardis (3:4), Philadelphia (v. 8), Laodicea (v. 7). (Jesus offers no commendation at all. He did not observe any outside pressure, only lethargy from within.)

III. Jesus has a promise for the church

A. *God is our sovereign shepherd.* Christians have plenty of reasons for trembling, both in the churches of Revelation and today. But "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Cor. 10:13).

B. *Jesus is our authority to overcome opposition.* Jesus is the One who himself overcame death and cross. With great authority, He repeatedly says to the churches of Revelation, "HE WHO OVERCOMES . . ."

C. *Jesus gives abundant promise.* Consider His promises to each of the churches: Ephesus: "to eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7). Smyrna: "not be hurt by the second death" (v. 11). Pergamum: "I will give some of the hidden manna, and . . . a white stone, . . . and a new name" (v. 17). Thyatira: "to him I will give authority over the nations" (v. 26). "I will give him the morning star" (v. 28). Sardis: "Clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life and I will confess his name before My Father" (3:5). Philadelphia: "I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God" (v. 12). Laodicea: "I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me" (v. 20). "To sit down with Me on My throne" (v. 21).

So Christ assures us that, ultimately, after the fight of faith is finished, after the suffering is past, even if death has been demanded in order to remain true to Him, there comes another day. We are assured that "we shall overcome" (Rev. 4:1-2).

CONCLUSION:

God's hands are outstretched to our world today. But they also reach out to His Church. Can you hear Him call His Church today?

1. Do an honest evaluation of yourself.

2. Remember, return, and repent.

3. Give Jesus first place in every part of your life, and give effective ministry to a hurting world.

4. "Come up here," says the Lord! (Rev. 4:1).
Let's be one of God's amazing churches.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Announcements
 Choral Call to Worship
 Pastoral Call to Worship Rev. 3:20
 Hymns "Jesus Shall Reign"; "He Giveth More Grace"
 Scripture Reading/Lay Reader Rev. 3:21—4:2
 Choruses "Thou Art Worthy"; "Grace, Grace";
 and "Open Our Eyes, Lord"

Pastoral Prayer
 Choir Special
 Moments for Friendship
 Offering Deut. 16:16b-17
 Special Music "No More Night"
 Message "GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH
 —READY FOR ACTION"

Closing Song
Benediction

"We Have Overcome"
2 Thess. 3:18

Pastoral Prayer:

Invite the people to a GREAT FAMILY ALTAR as we come to our final day of focus on GOD'S AMAZING CHURCH.

Allow time for silent confession of sins, failure, errors, omissions. Encourage praise for God's good blessings and for lessons learned in tough situations. Pray our church will be READY FOR ACTION.

Share the theme chorus, "Open Our Eyes, Lord," before leaving the altar area.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



Music and Worship

Continued from page 11

not. The novel will draw attention to the performer or the medium. (However, it may sell music and/or recordings!) Variety will draw attention to the message.

In some instances, it seems to me that the prevalent use of taped accompaniment indicates that we may be taking our cues from the secular entertainment industry more than we realize. The secular world may be influencing us far more than we are influencing it. Contemporary popular music may be affecting our worship more profoundly than Scripture and tradition, and that concerns me.

The use of taped accompaniment has been reinforced by the extensive commercialization of music in the church. Religious music publishers fulfill an important role in that they provide us with many useful and helpful products. However, I'm concerned that at times the question of "Will it sell?" may be given more attention than questions like, "Is God or His work in Christ the focus of this text, and does the music enhance the text?"

A second caution regarding the extensive use of taped accompaniment involves the element of participation. We do not encourage as effectively our young people to learn to play keyboard and nonkeyboard instruments, when taped accompaniments are used extensively. It might be better to invest some of the money now spent on taped accompaniments in music lessons for some of our junior high and senior high young people. That's an investment in the future. By encouraging our young people to play instruments in church services, we train them in churchmanship. We teach them to participate, not to "spectate." We show them that worship is active; it costs something; it is not passive.

As a church musician, I would rather live with a few intonation problems and a missed cue or two for the sake of involvement and the excitement of recreating "live" music.

I'm not saying that taped accompaniment is wrong. Many churches use taped accompaniments wisely and with effectiveness. However, I don't think that taped accompaniment should become the norm. It should be the exception, not the rule.

C. How and where do we find contemporary music that honors God rather than human problems, potential, and experience?

How to find contemporary music that honors God is an important question that must be addressed. The key, I'm convinced, is to place more attention on the text than on the musical "packaging." Does this text clearly direct attention to God, His attributes and/or actions? Particularly, does it speak of Christ and His atoning work? Songs of personal experience and testimony, of course, are appropriate. However, even in these subjective expressions, there the emphasis must be clearly that it is God whom we worship and praise, not each other. Even in the most subjective songs/ hymns, there should be some objective reference to God.

One of the most graphic examples of a hymn that combines the objective and subjective is hymn 12 from *Worship in Song*, "O for a Thousand Tongues!"

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!*

*My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread thro' all the earth abroad,
The honors of Thy name.*

*Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears;
'Tis life, and health, and peace.*

*He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin;
He sets the pris'ner free.*

*His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.*

The first stanza is an objective statement of praise for who God is ("the glories of my God and King") and what He does ("the triumphs of His grace"). God's attributes and actions are the focus.

Stanza 2 is a request for God's assistance in our efforts to proclaim the gospel.

The third stanza becomes more personal in that it speaks of what God does in the heart and life of the individual. He calms our fears, helps us in times of sorrow, and poetically, His name is "music in the sinner's ears; / 'tis life, and health, and peace."

Finally, stanza 4 becomes intensely subjective and testimonial, Christ's work shatters sin's canceled power, sets the prisoner free. No one is beyond His grace, the "foulest" can be made clean; and in the final phrase, we find an intensely personal testimony, "His blood availed for me."

Publishers must show a profit to stay in business. They bear considerable risk in publishing and making products available to us. Of necessity, I suppose, they must be concerned about what will sell. Much of what is published by evangelical music publishers is God-honoring and can assist us in worship. However, some music, in my opinion, does tend to focus our attention on each other and not on God. The performer may be praised more than the Creator. Because of this, our own good judgment must be exercised.

The following considerations may be of help as you look through hymnals, chorus books, and music samples.

1. Does the text clearly and without mistake direct attention to God? Could the non-Christian or non-churchgoer clearly understand who is being praised?

2. Does the music fit the text? Are we impressed and will we remember more of the novelty of the music than the text?

3. Does the text use commonly accepted grammar? Perhaps there are exceptions to this, but I'm not sure that poor grammar brings praise to God.

4. Is it appropriate? Is this music so much like a particular secular style that, because of association, the text will not be communicated?

In conclusion, music enhances or intensifies worship when it assists us in focusing our attention on God and His atoning work in Jesus Christ. We must be careful that this objective is kept clearly in mind, or we run the risk of only entertaining and perhaps only making people "feel good" without their lives being changed. 🙏

Francis Asbury's Contribution to Our Way of Worship

Continued from page 23

beech trees. The ministers of God, Methodists and Presbyterians, united their labors and mingled with the childlike simplicity of primitive times. Fires blazing here and there dispelled the darkness and the shouts of the redeemed captives, and the cries of precious souls, struggling into life, broke the silence of midnight. The weather was delightful; as if heaven smiled, while mercy flowed in abundant streams of salvation to perishing sinners. We suppose there were at least thirty souls converted at this meeting.

Asbury immediately saw the camp meeting as an evangelistic method for reaching great masses of people and adopted it as an integral part of his program. He had a great vision for the camp meeting. "God has given us hundreds in 1800. Why not thousands in 1801? Yes, why not a million, if we have faith?"²² The development of the camp meeting may be traced by following Asbury's *Journal* from 1800 onward. The other denominations divided rather quickly into "those who were for it" and "those who were against it."

Though originating among the frontier Presbyterians in Logan County, Kentucky, in the latter years of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth centuries, the camp meeting was never recognized as an official Methodist institution, and the name "camp meeting" does not appear in the indexes of

Camp meetings closed with a Communion service.

the general Journals or in the Methodist Discipline. The camp meeting did become a widely used frontier institution but always an extra occasion in the economy of Methodism.²³

Gradually, definite ideas emerged concerning the regulation of the camp meetings. Camp meeting manuals and special camp meeting hymn books were published. During Asbury's years as a bishop, the camp meeting gained widespread acceptance and multiplied in numbers each year. Asbury never saw it wane. Every year of his life there were new camp meetings. The primitive, temporary buildings were replaced by permanent ones. The camp meeting became one of the strongholds of Wesleyan holiness preaching throughout the 19th century.

Asbury's circuit-riding preachers were powerful communicators who did the work of evangelists. They knew how to gain and hold attention with their simple, basic Bible preaching. These veteran preachers were also the preachers at the camp meetings, carrying the revival spirit with them as they traveled from one camp to another.

Although the system was working in all parts of the nation, Asbury continued to incorporate new ideas with the old. He inaugurated the midweek prayer meeting, which eventually replaced the class meetings. He organized the first Methodist Sunday School in 1786 in order to teach "poor whites and blacks" how to read. In 1790 he ordered the establishment of Sunday Schools at all preaching points.

The use of an altar call came into practice just prior to 1800. In a personal interview with Dr. Robert Coleman, Methodist historian, he stated that it is very difficult to determine the precise origin of the altar invitation. According to Coleman, the Methodist church had established the custom of inviting members to the altar to receive Communion. The practice of inviting seekers to the altar for prayer surfaced in a number of places by 1798, mostly on the East Coast and in New England.

Nathan Bangs, the distinguished Methodist historian, wrote in 1840 that the origin of the altar call was during the winter of 1806-1807 in an unusual revival meeting in New York City. Coleman considers this a late date and stated that, by 1800, the altar call was well established in America. The New York revival narrative does give a classic reason for the use of the altar. It was the intensity of conviction that caused the awakened sinner to want to pray immediately and kneel at the bench where he sat. Others would gather around to pray, sing, and exhort. Thus, there might be a number of such groups scattered over the sanctuary. The invitation to come to the altar was given "to prevent the confusion arising from praying for them in different parts of the church at the same time."²⁴

This is a radical departure from Wesley's plan. He seldom, if ever, gave an invitation to be saved on the spot. He closed his services with an invitation to join a class.

In Wesley's model, prayer, repentance, the quest for holiness, and testimonies took place either in the class or in private. The altar call is an American addition to the Wesleyan tradition. It became the pivotal point when a person was willing to surrender to Christ. The altar also became a designated place for intercessory prayer. Most camp meeting services began with intercessory prayer at the altar. The altar invitation for those seeking to be saved or sanctified became associated with revivals and camp meetings for the following century. The Church of the Nazarene has maintained the use of the altar as a place of prayer and the designated place for seekers for salvation. It is the hallmark of our church.

In summary, the major contributions made by the American Wesleyan movement under Asbury's leadership are four in number:

1. A less frequent observance of the Lord's Supper—from every Sunday, as ordered by Wesley, to once a quarter, or less
2. A more informal type worship service that eliminated the use of the *Sunday Service* ritual provided by Wesley for the Americans
3. An emphasis on evangelism and revivalism as provided by camp meetings and local church protracted meetings

Invitation to the altar—a radical departure from Wesley's plan.

"What must I do to be saved?"

4. The addition of the altar as a place of prayer and the altar call invitation

Upward and forward the Wesleyan movement grew in number and in spiritual influence. From a few hundred members of a nonchurch society to one of the largest and most influential denominations in America. All of this in the lifetime and under the leadership of Bishop Francis Asbury.

REFERENCE FOR TODAY

Today's minister should follow Wesley and Asbury in retaining the useful, meaningful ideas and concepts of the past and at the same time be open and creative in finding new ideas and methods.

How should today's pastor adapt Asbury's practices to meet contemporary needs? Perhaps it would be better to ask, "How would Asbury minister in today's world?" We can only conjecture those things he might change and those he might not.

The cultural change from 18th-century England to the American frontier was small compared to the cultural change in America since 1800. However, there are some basic principles that do not change—the sinfulness of man, the need for salvation, the changeless Christ, and the enduring Word. Fortunately, most of Asbury's time and effort were expended on these timeless principles and not on passing fads and trends. Perhaps this concept, itself, is relevant for today's ministry.

We should note that there were many areas where Asbury did change during these years. He came to America a loyal Englishman, and he died a loyal American. He changed in his political ideals. He came to America a devoted member of the Church of England; he died a devoted leader and member of the Methodist Episcopal church. He changed his church affiliation. He came to America a loyal disciple and follower of John Wesley in theology but not in church practices. He changed the ritualistic service to an informal, unstructured one.

I am suggesting five areas where I believe Asbury would concentrate his emphasis if he were ministering in today's world. These are based upon the time and importance he assigned to them during his 45 years in America.

Let's examine these five areas of emphasis:

THE PRIMACY OF PREACHING

In that Asbury neither altered nor deviated from preaching the Wesleyan doctrines during his 45 years in America, it seems safe to assume he would not change that today. He had experienced the truth of this message personally and had seen multiplied thousands of others rejoicing in the assurance of salvation. He would freely and gladly preach the message of grace—preventive, regenerating, assuring, sanctifying, keeping grace. Asbury was first, last, and always a preacher of

the Word, although he had many other responsibilities as the bishop of the American churches. His other interests—such as day schools, Sunday Schools, widows and orphans pension fund, printing/publishing, antislavery legislation, and prohibition efforts—were important but were secondary to preaching.

"I preached" is the most frequent entry in his *Journal*. Like Wesley, Asbury's sermons were saturated with the Word. He studied the Scriptures in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in order to understand their deepest meanings. He memorized most of the New Testament. He believed the best way to prepare for preaching was prayer. He was constantly at prayer, endeavoring to spend a part of each waking hour in prayer. His messages were theological to the extent that they covered the full range of Wesley's doctrines. Academically speaking, Asbury was not a theologian. Neither were his preachers. They were evangelists first, last, and always. The itinerant preacher rode into town to preach and to meet with the members of the society. He led the group in hymn singing, preached a message to the particular need of the group, gave an invitation, met with the society, and was gone to the next appointment. Most of his sermons were in answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

There are "some 700 of his texts noted in his *Journal* . . . also some 175 sermon outlines recorded in it. The topics of the sermon tended to come out the same no matter what the text. There was (1) conviction—under awful weight of sin; (2) repentance and justification—to be taken on now; (3) perseverance in good works—no backsliding; and (4) sanctification—going on to perfect love."²⁵ He believed devotedly in sanctification as taught by Wesley. "Asbury translated that system [Wesleyan doctrine] into Western thinking, transmitted without lessening its distinctive principles or losing its practical value and made it live in the experience of the men and women in the new world."²⁶

"As he grew older and the Methodist Episcopal Church grew larger, he focused more and more on the quest for sanctification."²⁷ He wrote, "Felt much power while preaching on perfect love. The more I speak on the subject, the more my soul is filled and drawn out in love. This doctrine has a great tendency to prevent people from settling on their lees."²⁸ "I am divinely impressed with the charge to preach sanctification in every sermon."²⁹ Although Asbury lacked the education and culture of the Wesleys, he made up for it through his passion and determination to be true to the doctrinal emphasis of their teaching.

The results of this type of preaching were effective. The hearers sought and found God in a real and personal experience. The preachers prayed and preached to "awaken" sinners to their need to be saved from the wrath of God and to seek grace and favor with God. People found assurance of their salvation in their homes, in fields, in class meetings, and in the regular services. Frequently people would join others in singing

"Felt much power while preaching on perfect love."

"I preached"—the most frequent entry in his *Journal*.

and prayer and yet others would join them. Prayers would continue until some would find peace and assurance in their souls. "The early years of the Methodist Society witnessed an almost continual revival. Scarcely a society was formed that did not grow out of a revival. The denomination grew, not because it was well organized, but because the people were well endowed with holy energy and an unction from on high."³⁰ The organized system did more to conserve the converts than it did to make them.

Singing, praying, and scripture reading were part of Asbury's worship service, but emphasis was always given to preaching the Word. This was not intended to imply the other means of grace were less sacred. For example, the Lord's Supper was offered less frequently. Instead of observing it weekly, as directed by Wesley, it was provided quarterly. This did not diminish its significance, however. Instead, it probably increased its meaning. The quarterly observance gave more time and opportunity for the participant to prepare.

Wesley's balance between ritual and freedom in worship was maintained on the American shore but in a

God and man must meet—to Asbury the meeting was during the preaching of the Word.

different manner and degree. This was evidenced in every area of the church from the camp meeting to the local church. The camp meeting represented the expression of unstructured, informal service. Soon the day and evening services took on separate character. The day services were given to edification and worship, and the evening services were evangelistic and usually had an

altar invitation. However, the camp meeting closed with a large Communion service. The hymn book used for these services had a printed formal order of service on the front page. The American church was never far from Wesley's shadow.

In our day, as in Asbury's time, it is vital for people to know through Spirit-anointed preaching the character of God, His commandments, His will and pleasure for their lives, here and hereafter. Asbury, according to those who heard him, was always prepared through study and prayer. His preaching was his best sacrifice—always addressed to his congregation but, in reality, offered to God. God and man must meet somewhere. To Asbury, the meeting was during the preaching of the Word. Jesus, through His Word, still has something to say to modern man. All the aids to worship put together are not sufficient. The congregation that prays, praises God, and gives thanks to Him still needs to hear the eternal Word preached.

THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC

The saintly John Fletcher once stated, "One of the greatest blessings that God bestowed upon the Methodists, next to the Bible, is their collection of hymns." Historians agree that Methodism never could have be-

come what it did without its unparalleled hymn book. "That, perhaps, has been more effective in preserving its evangelical theology than *Wesley's Sermons and Notes on the New Testament*. Where one man reads the homilies and the exposition, a thousand sang the hymns."³¹ The affect of singing these Wesleyan hymns filled with scriptures, theology, and testimony of the joyful Christian experience was indescribable. A worship service could be held in almost any location, with as few as a dozen people and two books—the Bible and the hymnal.

And still today—next to the Bible, the hymnal is the most important book in our worship of God. Anne Ort-lund writes, "Do you know the power of a hymn? Brother, between those two hard covers in your hands, you've got dynamite. Play your classical repertoire, of course—as lofty and intricate as your skill allows—but for connecting people with God, HYMNS ARE WHERE THE POWER CONNECTS."³²

For centuries hymn singing had been limited in England. However, the Wesleys saw the importance of it from the beginning and gave it an emphasis that insured success. When Charles Wesley was converted, his soul burst into song and soon all of England was singing with him. He took the popular tunes that were sung in taverns of his day and wrote lyrics to get his message across. They did not deal with calm, quiet, abstract themes but with the common experiences of believers, such as "soldiers of Christ," "fighting," "watching," "suffering," "working," and "seeking more grace." The Wesleys verified Martin Luther's statement, "The devil can stand anything but good music and that makes him roar."

In 1808 Asbury had an American hymn book printed—*A Selection of Hymns from Various Authors, Designed as a Supplement to the Methodist Pocket Hymn Book*. It contained various hymns from Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts with a special section of 39 hymns on "Sanctification of Believers and Gospel Perfection."

The singing of these hymns had a very favorable response in America. People gathered—especially at camp meeting—and sang between the scheduled services. The invitational hymns helped many souls make the decision to surrender to Christ.

REACHING THE UNREACHED

John Wesley used field preaching to reach those untouched by the gospel. He was introduced to this method by George Whitefield in March of 1739. Wesley wrote,

I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he [Whitefield] set me an example on Sunday; I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have

"One of the greatest blessings . . . their collection of hymns."

—John Fletcher

"The devil can stand anything but good music."

—Luther

Every service was a memorable event.

thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.³³

Even though Wesley preached to crowds as great as 30,000 in number gathered in the open air, he still wrote, at 69 years of age, "To this day field preaching is a cross to me, but I know my commission and see no other way of preaching the gospel to every creature."³⁴ Field preaching was Wesley's "public event" by which he reached the unreached—the untouched—and recruited converts for his classes and societies.

In about the same manner, Asbury was introduced to camp meeting evangelism at a Presbyterian camp in Tennessee. In reference to camps, he said, "This is fishing with a large net." Camp meetings drew thousands of people and became "public events" for reaching the unreached, and they provided a constant stream of converts for classes and church membership.

What would Asbury do today to reach the unreached? He would no doubt be a booster for the Billy Graham Crusades and the Gaither Praise Gatherings. He would use every legitimate means to get the attention of the unreached.

In more specific ways, he would continue to make much of the special events of the Christian calendar—Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter. Moreover, he would probably increase the number of special days used for public events. To him there were no ordinary, regular services. They were all special. The prevenient grace of God was always drawing people to God. The Holy Spirit, like the wind, could not be seen. However, the results were evident as he presented Christ. He traveled with an entourage of colorful preachers, such as William McKendree, Peter Cartwright, and Ezekiel Cooper. "The native preachers of America cannot be classified. They were not made after a common pattern. Herein lies one glory of the early Methodist pioneers—they were individual almost to uniqueness."³⁵ Every service was a memorable event.

Asbury would probably broadcast the regular Sunday morning service in order to reach those not attending church. He certainly would be seeking the lost in every segment of society—senior citizens, single adults, single parents, teens, children, people in prisons, residents of rest homes, the deaf, and the minorities.

It mattered little to Asbury how few or how many were in a service. He would deliver his soul and then move to the next appointment. He wasn't seeking popularity. He was seeking the unreached. He preached "behind the barracks to a number of soldiers," "at the gallows to a vast multitude," "from a wagon at the execution of a criminal," "at Widow Bond's to black and white, rich and poor," "in a tavern," "in a paper mill," "Cul-pepper's court-house," "in a tobacco-house," and "in a playhouse." He was after souls wherever they could be found.

In Asbury's strong fight to emancipate the slaves, he was forced to make a decision to either continue to

press the issue of antislavery or to continue to evangelize the South. He felt slavery would continue for years, and he shifted from attempts to free the slaves to efforts to evangelize the whole South, including the blacks. His first interest was evangelism. In 1810, the number of blacks in full membership in the Methodist church had grown to 34,724.

If Asbury were with us today, he would not abandon the revival meeting. However, it would not be the revival meeting we have come to accept in recent years. With the prayer bands, class meetings, and the cooperative support of others (as he had in the camp meetings), plus interesting, colorful evangelists and good music, Asbury's revival would reach the unreached with the gospel. Competition for the attention of the unreached is far greater today than it has ever been, but it has never been easy. There have always been hindrances to revival. Today, more than ever before in modern history, there is keen competition for the attention of people on Sunday morning. Yet, we find ways to attract people to our services. This same type of effort will produce attendance at revival services.

Evangelism is not a method. It is the belief that all men are lost apart from Christ and that all men are redeemable in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing and preaching. Our plan is planning, training, and proclaiming. Evangelism is the fulfillment of the

Great Commission. There is mass evangelism, personal evangelism, lay evangelism, friendship evangelism, and an unlimited list of ways to reach the unreached.

Some interesting statistics have recently surfaced in a Ph.D. dissertation by Tom Albin now being completed toward a degree at Cambridge University. Albin points out that, according to his extensive sampling of early Methodists, nearly 70 percent of those convinced of sin, nearly 60 percent of those converted, and nearly 80 percent of those sanctified were led into those experiences by laymen or laywomen.³⁶

This leads us to ask, "What would happen if we too were to mobilize the laymen of our churches?" It is relevant to our study to suggest that Christians turn their casual contacts at work, at play, and in their communities into occasions for witnessing and reaching the unreached for Christ. Total mobilization of the laity for reaching the unreached is the greatest challenge facing the church today.

CONSERVING THE CONVERTED

The heart of Asbury's system was the class. The class meetings were not Bible studies, prayer groups, or fellowship meetings, but a body of committed believers pursuing a life of holiness. They were specific groups (about 12 per group) within a society, or local church, and a number of these were made into a circuit with one preacher. Asbury would meet with the groups on his rounds.

Visitors "window shop" at the worship service.

"Hymns are where the power connects."

—Anne Ortlund

"A gap between 'getting a decision' and 'making a disciple.'"

—Win Arn

There were conditions a person had to acknowledge to join a class—a desire to "flee the wrath to come," "to know God's acceptance," and "to live a higher life." To awaken a sinner and not give him an opportunity to join a class was considered leaving him worse than when he was found.

At the class meeting, the leader, a man of real significance, served as pastor without pay. Other members assisted with the service. The leader would call each name on the roll and inquire about the spiritual state of the individual. A testimony would be given by each. It was in this meeting that a testimony to holiness was given. Public testimonies were not given until a later date. People promised to do good, avoid evil of all kinds, and pursue regularly the means of grace—reading the Bible, daily prayer, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and regular attendance of church. (They were called Societies until 1816.)

Three reasons are commonly given for the growth of the early church: biblical preaching, hymn singing, and a good organization. The organization was more effective in conserving the converted than in promoting and attracting people to attend services.

If Asbury were ministering today, he would be as much concerned about what happens to a person after he comes to the altar as he would be in getting him there. He would not lessen his efforts in getting a commitment but would increase them in bringing the convert into a discipling group. "Follow up" would be imperative.

Dr. Win Arn points out a weakness in our evangelism.

Evangelism focuses on decision-making rather than disciple-making. Most mass and local church evangelism approaches today have a significant shortcoming. Attention is centered, and success judged, around the goal of getting a "decision." That brief verbal commitment is seen as the ultimate response to the Great Commission. Unfortunately, there is often a great gap between "getting a decision" and "making a disciple."³⁷

There are a number of good follow-up plans available today. This effective ministry can be done by laypersons, properly trained. Follow up is absolutely necessary.

The Sunday School has changed its purpose over the years. However, it remains a very effective tool in reaching new people, in nurturing the believers, and in preparing people for the worship service, which usually follows. Visitors "window shop" by attending the worship service. However, if they can be placed in a Sunday School class where they are welcomed, accepted, and acquainted with members, they will usually remain. Sunday School can provide fellowship, teaching, and a type of evangelism that is "felt." The history of our church reveals that most of our converts come through the Sunday School. It is still true that Sunday School enrollment and attendance indicate the pattern for church attendance for the next three years. A growing Sunday School attendance means a growing church attendance and membership. Asbury, who organized the first Meth-

odist Sunday School in America, would say, "Don't neglect the Sunday School!"

COMMITTED TO CHRIST

The one word that best describes the membership of this early church is *committed*. The basic meaning of the word *commit* implies the delivery of a person or thing into the keeping of another. The truth about Jesus was conveyed not only by flesh and blood but also by the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They had experienced God in being awakened from their sins. They had assurance, given by the Holy Spirit, of their relationship with God. They were effective in winning others through the work of the Holy Spirit. Their all was fully committed to God.

Asbury believed he was a man of destiny in evangelizing America. His preachers, too, felt they were divinely chosen messengers for this assignment. They had a royal message to announce to men—a message of life and liberty from God to dying men. They were motivated by this conviction. They had no time to debate religious issues. They did not insist that they were theologically right and others were wrong. They did not originate the message. They had personally found Jesus Christ. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ was the key to understanding the Scriptures. They were compelled to tell others. They were committed to Jesus Christ and to the advancement of His kingdom. A ministry with this commitment was effective in 1890 and will be in 1990 as well.

This commitment was found throughout the church from the bishop to the class leader. The first priority was the Kingdom. Perhaps one of the best illustrations of this was found in the lives of the circuit-riding preachers.

At the time of Asbury's death, there were about 700 circuit-riding preachers, in addition to the local pastors. These dedicated young men made the system work. They were as tireless and as self-sacrificing as Asbury himself. Halford Luccock wrote,

There is one thing about that early itinerancy which should not be overlooked. It was as merciless a calling as ever challenged brave men. We have spoken of mobs, of jails, of long rides through the rain, of nights in the open, of days in the malaria-soaked swamps of the new frontier. "How did they ever stand it?" someone asked. The answer is that they didn't stand it. They died under it.

They had a life expectancy of but 34 years.

There were few things "on time" during this period in our young nation, except the circuit-riding preacher. You could be sure that he would appear at the scheduled time to conduct services. When the weather conditions seemed to make traveling impossible, the early Americans joked, "Nothing out tonight but crows and Methodist preachers." Only, it was a fact and not a joke. Their annual salary was fixed by General Conference at \$64.00 a year and remained there. The nature of their work requiring constant travel, coupled with small sal-

Asbury's preachers felt they were divinely chosen messengers.

ary, made marriage, if not impossible, at least difficult, so only a few ever married. They were required to spend three hours a day in prayer, Bible study, and in reading. Although there was not a college graduate among them, what they lacked in formal education, they made up for in commitment. Is it any wonder that the work grew in great numbers with such devotion displayed by these preachers?

The pattern of commitment set by those pioneers is perhaps too severe to ask of us today. However, it is good to know about these holiness preachers who were totally committed to Christ, who paid an enormous price in sacrifice to plant the Wesleyan message of full salvation on our soil. Without them, there would be no Church of the Nazarene today.

What commitment will it take to see a revival of Wesleyan holiness? It may take an equal commitment by this or another generation of people.

Great men, such as John Wesley, are rare. There is only one Wesley. All mankind has seen only a few who could be compared with him. Men like Whitefield, Asbury, Finney, Moody, Bresee, and Billy Graham are scattered across the decades of time—they do not come in bunches. However, the Kingdom continues through lesser personalities equally committed to Christ.

The challenge of our day is for preachers and laymen alike—at home, at work, and at church—to be totally committed to Christ and the building of His kingdom.

THE LAST DAYS . . .

Asbury, although in poor health, continued moving among the churches until 1815. In Philadelphia he wrote, "I groan one minute with pain, and shout 'Glory!' the next." The Tennessee Conference in October 1815 was the bishop's last session. His appearance at this time seemed more like that of a moving skeleton than a living man. In the afternoon of March 24, 1816, he insisted that he must once more deliver his public testimony. He spoke for nearly an hour. This finished his public labors on earth, which had begun 54 years before. His rheumatism bothered him more and more. At times he could not wear shoes. Often now he was hobbling about on crutches. After his last public appearance, he was carried from the pulpit and taken to his lodging place. Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday of that week he traveled, hoping to reach Fredericksburg, but the weather was inclement, so he had to rest in the home of his old friend, George Arnold. He passed the night with much uneasiness. His cough increased and by three o'clock Sunday morning he remarked that the end was drawing near. It was suggested that they send for a physician, but Asbury gave them to understand that no physician could reach him before death.

About eleven o'clock on Sunday, he inquired if it was not time for meeting, then in a moment recollecting himself, he requested that the family might be called in his room for worship. What a memorable scene that was! . . . John Wesley Bond . . . sang a hymn, offered a fervent prayer, and then read the twenty-first chapter of Revelation . . . He must have listened with great joy . . . A little later, Bond asked him if he felt the Lord Jesus to be precious, and the valorous saint, now unable to speak, with much effort lifted

both his hands in token of complete triumph. A few minutes later . . . without struggle and with great composure, the old warrior entered into rest. As the shadows of that Sabbath were falling, Bond sent a messenger to announce to Methodists everywhere the sad news: "Our dear father has left us, and has gone to the Church triumphant. He died as he lived—full of confidence, full of love—at four o'clock this afternoon, Sunday, March 31, 1816."³⁸

Finally the man who lived for 45 years without a home and, on many occasions, wanting to go home, was home at last.

On May 10, 1816, his funeral was held in Baltimore, with a company of some 20,000 people to escort his remains to their resting place. The text Asbury used when he preached a memorial service at the time of John Wesley's death was most appropriately read at his funeral. "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience" (2 Tim. 3:10).

"With the death of Asbury passed away the man who had exerted a mightier influence over America than any other who had ever lived in it. His place in the history of American civilization has not been accorded."³⁹ 

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THE ARK ROCKER

KEEPING THE PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Some things just make you proud of your church, don't they? Consider the very first news release from the recent Universal Luau of the Planet's Largest Holiness Denomination. Pardon me if I don't quote it precisely, but it went something like this: "Some 45,000 PLHD's from around the world gathered for the opening session of the UL in the Convention Center in Aboriginal City (ed. note: never use Greek when you can use English) on Sunday morning. Retiring Percher on the Top Ethereal Rung preached, and while only 700 elders assisted in serving, the entire crowd partook of the elements of Communion in only four minutes."

Marvelous! Just the news we were looking for! Apart from some news about some elections, this was it. Who cares about worship, who cares about the concrete expression of such abstract notions as catholicity and unity, and who even cares what Retiring Percher said? The question we were all asking ourselves was, "How long did it take to serve Communion?" And the second question was like unto the first: "Did we beat the record?" (Eight minutes, set under the shadows of Disney's Fantasyland in 1985.)

Just think! Someone was actually designated—maybe only informally this time—to look at the clock just as serving began, and then, after partaking, to look again, in order to be able to announce the Official Speed of Communion. I tell you, I was impressed. The news release told me three things that I needed to hear: the shakers and movers really know what we are most interested in, this UL would be efficient, and this UL could be trusted not to monkey with our focus or our priorities.

And, we must laud the sacrificial spirit of the designated timer. He/she gave up his/her time for meditation to keep an eye on the clock, and doubtless has to write a report suggesting ways to be even more efficient so that we can beat four minutes at the next UL.

I do have some suggestions, all of them based on the fact that it's the time for meditation that slows things down. Maybe we could instruct the preacher at the next

UL to say nothing that might cause us to meditate. Or, maybe we could leave off reading Scripture, since it tends to clutter the mind with thought and preoccupies the heart. We've got to get that time down to as near zero as possible, without omitting Communion, of course. (Don't want to offend tradition!)

All of this delights and challenges us, of course. But purity of focus and clarity in priority almost always create some tensions that must be undone. And we have found that the best way to undo them is simply to underline the priorities. Thank goodness we know what to do with the public announcement, made by a highly placed source, that 1990 will be a year of "sabbath rest" as denominational offices cool their programming and we devote more time to prayer and meditation. The *Pastor's Calendar and Plan Book* for 1990 puts all of that in perspective. It shows that no one intended that we should go overboard on the suggestion. Twenty-four of the 52 Sundays have at least one special designation that will demand special promotion. Again, we've broken the record. There are more special designations for 1990 than ever before! For instance, October 7 has five of them for the Canadians, three for the Yanks. Each month except July has a special list of "Primary Events" and there is a "Primary Focus" for each month.

I like that word *primary*. It leaves so little doubt about what's important. It helps us maintain consistency in our priorities—and that is how we have grown. For instance, for April, the "Primary Events" are Nazarene College Day and Denominational Membership Sunday; the "Primary Focus" is "Easter Offering—General Budget Support." Perhaps we should express the consistency of our focus for April by a slight alteration of the ancient liturgical exclamation: "It has risen!"

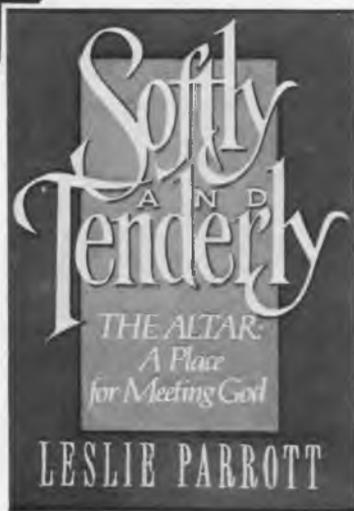
Perhaps we could use July, which has no "Primary Events," as a sort of time-out for doing and thinking about things secondary and nonessential. The 22nd, for instance, is Mary Magdalene's Day. Wouldn't it be neat if we could find something in her story to ponder?

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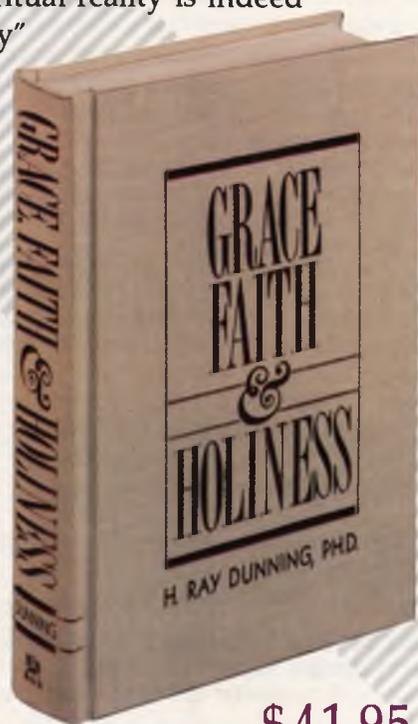
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