

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E



What People
Remember About
Your Ministry

Is Your Passport
Ready?

Restoring Gently
the Fallen
Minister



Speaking the truth in
love... "Eph 4:15"

PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

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A tribute: Randal E. Denny's ministry is a model for us today.

N e i l B . W i s e m a n

5 Is Your Passport Ready?

Words have the capacity to bless or to blast.

R a n d a l E . D e n n y

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Instead of shooting our wounded, we need to restore people.

R a n d a l E . D e n n y

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Cover Photo by Michael Lewis
 The cover photo is Randal E. Denny preaching at Los Angeles First Church
 on the occasion of the congregation's centennial celebration.
 First Church at Los Angeles is the church founded by Dr. Phineas F. Bresee.
 The text of Denny's sermon for that historic milestone,
 "Celebrating Our Heritage: A Church with a Mission" is published on page 44.

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Thanks, Brother, for Shaping Our Ministry

Editor Randal Earl Denny's home-going at age 61 on September 9, 1998, shocked *Preacher's Magazine* readers around the world. He was by human standards much too young to die. And his heavenly summons came so suddenly, readers and colleagues had no opportunity to offer support or say good-bye.

All of us were inspired, however, to learn that Randy was involved in the thick of ministry to the last minute. On Thursday, he told Ruth he had finished his Sunday sermon, "Is Your Passport Ready?"—a sermon he also planned to use as the final chapter of his next book. He looked forward to officiating at a wedding scheduled for Saturday. Then, on Friday evening, at the precise moment of his heart attack, he was giving pastoral care by phone to a grieving widow.

Randy never regained consciousness, though he lived until Wednesday. And as a heavyhearted church gathered for worship on Sunday morning, their pain was lessened when a staff member read his last sermon, "Is Your Passport Ready?" even as their pastor was losing his fight for his earthly life in a Spokane, Washington, hospital.

We regret the fact that advanced publishing deadlines kept us from producing a tribute issue of the *Preacher's Magazine* earlier. Randy understood such publishing realities, as we hope you will.

Randal Denny's death came af-

ter more than 16 years of service as beloved pastor of Spokane Valley Church and after 9 years as effective editor of the *Preacher's Magazine*. His impressive earlier pastoral service has been outlined elsewhere. In this issue, however, we especially wish to underscore Randy's impact on ministers through the pages of the *Preacher's Magazine* and through his books. Though that impact is huge and eternal, it is difficult to fully comprehend and measure. But we know that for the *Preacher's Magazine*, it involved producing 36 issues, developing approximately 3,200 printed pages of material, writing 36 editorials, reading and processing more than 2,700 manuscripts, making hundreds of phone calls, originating unnumbered memos with the Nazarene Publishing House team, and responding to extensive correspondence with readers.

I have known and appreciated Randal Denny for many years along this ministerial journey. Thus you will understand my joy when Dr. Brannon asked me to express our combined thanks to Randy's family. Gratitude to his wife, Ruth, and their daughters—to Shannon and her husband, Guillermo Berghusen; and to Shelley and her husband, Rich Pedersen, and their three-year-old son, Kaston, whom Randy affectionately called "the little guy."

Crafting this issue reminded me again and again that Randal Denny was a competent pastor

who loved ministry. His satisfactions showed in his editorials and his selection of articles and themes. Preaching held a high priority for him; conscientious, lifelong sermon preparation made him an interesting biblical preacher. His sermon files are models of resources, thought, and innovation. Denny loved people, and they knew it. Worship from his perspective was supposed to glisten with encouragement, hope, and the power of the gospel. Since his home-going, I was privileged to attend a worship service at Valley Church that had his fingerprints and commitments all over it—especially in the variety and quality of the music.

Randy and I used to serve neighboring Nazarene pastorates in Denver. Though nomadic church members sometimes transferred between our churches, their frivolous spats never affected our friendship. We worked together in youth camps, where I learned firsthand what a formidable competitor he could be. When we were younger and trimmer, we went to the YMCA together. Once we drove to Bethany Nazarene College, now SNU, to recruit Christian teachers for our communities. On the Colorado District, we worked on the same district committees, shared workdays at the Lakewood District Center, tested our district superintendent's patience with our questions and our eagerness to make everything more up-to-date. I cherish those memories.

While serving as academic dean at Nazarene Bible College, I nominated Pastor Denny as a professor of preaching—an assignment he would have graced. I helped edit his fine book on the Lord's Prayer, *The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory*. As preparation for this issue of the *Preacher's Magazine*, I recently had copies of all his books in my hands—quite a body of literature for one minister to create.

Though our paths did not cross often enough in recent

BY NEIL B. WISEMAN
Interim Editor
COLORADO SPRINGS



MAY 20 '99

years, we always picked up our friendship where we had left off the last time.

Randal Denny understood ministry and did it well. His balanced concepts of ministry show in the articles reprinted in this tribute issue. As I combed through back issues of the *Preacher's Magazine*, recurring ideas were frequently addressed. Let me share several:

- Preaching is primary. When preaching is done right, God miraculously transforms the preacher's word into His message to congregants.
- Pastoral care informs preaching, produces eager hearers for preaching, and keeps a pastor in touch with what is really important in church, community, and culture.
- Pastoral ministry creates extraordinary satisfaction, provides a fulfillment of calling, and makes us partners with God in human redemption.
- Leading worship as a parish priest is among the noblest privileges a mere mortal can ever experience. Real worship, our amazing welcome into God's exalted presence, must never be trivialized by divisive attitudes about style, form, or musical preferences.
- Fallen ministerial colleagues need gentle care from us.
- Our Holiness heritage is well worth understanding, cherishing, and proclaiming.
- The love of a congregation is among life's most delightful possessions.
- Disappointments and hindrances are almost always temporary.
- Creativity, imagination, and high standards are pivotal components of effective ministry.
- Allowing people to see your heart and share your affec-

tion authenticates ministry. Pastor Jeff Jeffries, Denny's lifelong friend and collaborator, connected the joy and sorrow of our human loss and the heavenly homecoming when he wrote in a tribute:

Randy Denny was one of the best men I've known. He's now where he toiled for a lifetime to be . . . sharing thoughts with the Wesley brothers . . . Martin Niemöller . . . Spurgeon . . . Paul . . . probably getting permission to conduct a men's choir . . . and most likely helping Peter update his filing system. But most of all, I know he wants to spend time with Jesus, whom he loved with all his heart and served faithfully all his life.

To the Head Shepherd of the Church, the *Preacher's Magazine* staff and readers offer thanks for Randy Denny's friendship and service. We are grateful and better for his ministry, life, friendship, and editorial talents. Since resurrection is central to the gospel we preach, we expect to meet again—maybe soon. Therefore, let's live and do ministry as

our Brother Randy did, energized by this incredible sentence from Paul: "It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live" (1 Cor. 15:32, TM).

Concerning the future of the *Preacher's Magazine*, I have been asked to serve as interim editor. I am pleased to be a pinch hitter. Old-timers may remember I was editor once before—years ago—before many of our present readers were born. Randal Denny's inspiring imprint, however, will continue. My task will not be too difficult because Randy had already completed much work on several upcoming issues.

If you have suggestions for the future design or format of the *Preacher's Magazine*, write or fax Dr. Wilbur Brannon at Nazarene Headquarters. He is a genuine friend of ministers. He is also our devoted advocate, effective listener, and a trend-setting leader. Dr. Brannon is eager to make the *Preacher's Magazine* an effective resource for contemporary ministers and will welcome your concerns and comments.

Every blessing.

PM



What People Remember About Your Ministry

Editorial note: In this Randal Denny tribute issue, the focus is his modeling of ministry rather than a sentimental memorial. That's the way Randy would want it. I have tried to underscore important lessons from his pastoral ministry that demonstrate competence, balance, and anointing. What follows are remembrances of Denny's ministry from colleagues and church members that other pastors might wish to emulate. The question "What will people remember about me?" calls every minister to great commitment. —Neil B. Wiseman

A HEALER OF HURTS

"This big man remembers walking into the Valley Church years ago carrying too much baggage from past experiences. There I was met warmly by another big man, a man I would later call 'Pastor,' and still later, 'Friend.' The pastor allowed time for gentle healing and encouraged this big man. The big pastor had quick humor and a hardy laugh that reflected a big soul. The big pastor knew from a past ministry hurt how to be healed by a loving God. It's not hard to walk in step with a pastor who walks in step with the Master."

MINISTRY TO HIS FAMILY

"Randy considered it a great honor that he was able to baptize both of his daughters, take them both into church membership, perform both their marriage ceremonies, and perform the dedication of his grandson, Kaston."

KEEP-IN-TOUCH MAIL MINISTRY

"Randy consistently wrote cards

and letters to his flock, never missing an anniversary or birthday. While his desk was being cleaned, six cards were found already addressed and waiting to be mailed to people in the church."

FAMILY NIGHTS AT THE PARSONAGE

"Shannon and Shelley (Randal's daughters) reminisced that there was lots of laughter in their family while growing up. The family usually spent Monday evening together as family night. They would get into their pajamas, pop popcorn, play games, and watch home movies."

EXTENSIVE AND CREATIVE SERMON FILES

"Randy had a well-developed file system, which he gladly shared with his staff. Debbie Weisen, the children's pastor, said, 'I have gone into his files to find just what I needed for my children's work and material for helping parents. It is a gold mine to draw from.'"

STAFF SELECTION

"The pastor had assembled a unique staff. None was a clone of the pastor but, rather, was encouraged to be an individual who shared a common passion for Christ and for biblical principles. And it worked."

REFLECTIONS OF A TEENAGER

Chrissy Murphy, the first baby born in the Valley Church after the Dennys arrived, is now in high school. Thus Pastor Denny is the only pastor she has ever known. In a high school English essay, she wrote about her memories of his

ministry in the following ways:

1. God's incredible love. "He taught us, 'There's nothing you can do to make God love you more; there's nothing you can do to make God love you less.' Though each Sunday would bring a new and captivating sermon, the always clear and unchanging heart of each message would remain the same: No matter what, God loves you just as you are."

2. Help for everyone in every sermon. "As Pastor Denny would preach, his caring yet convincing voice would give each soul enough inspiration to make it through the upcoming week, no matter what lay in store. Although some sermons were intended to reach a certain crowd specifically, our pastor always made sure to put something in each sermon for everyone."

3. Listening was a key skill. "Throughout my life, Pastor Denny has been a prominent mentor and a figure of morality. Even during his own tough times, he would put his problems aside to lend a listening ear."

4. Pastoral care is remembered forever. "When I was six years old, an overwhelming tragedy struck my family. A plaguing disease ripped through my home, hurting one, yet capturing us all. Though I could not fully comprehend our encounter with this brutal disease, I was forced to watch my mom helplessly endure a tremendous amount of pain as the cancer slowly took its course. And though my mom was a strong woman, with time, the cancer defeated her strength, leaving her with only medications and God's mercy to rely on. Amid all our suffering, pain, and strife, Pastor Denny was always there with a soothing message of faith and hope."

5. Worship energizes action. "Pastor Denny showed me what worshiping God is truly about. He taught me that in order to fully believe in God, I must be willing to stand up for my beliefs no matter what is at stake. Therefore, I must be accountable and stand firm. After all, if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." **PM**

BY NEIL B. WISEMAN



Is Your Passport Ready?

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Everything was planned and prepared and paid for. Frank Scheibe, our Work and Witness team coordinator, handed out our tickets with written instructions concerning our baggage and information on what we would need. Then he remarked, "Don't forget your passports—or the airplane will leave without you."

I went home, got out my passport, rechecked the expiration date, glanced painfully at my passport photograph—and remembered that if you look like your passport photo, you desperately need the trip!

Getting in line for our flight and, later, passing through customs in Guatemala, we were instructed, "Have your passports ready!" In other words, our relationship with the United States government had to be kept up-to-date and officially certified on the pages of our passports.

Paul has just written about the believers who died "in Christ" (4:16). He explained that they will be resurrected to meet Jesus when He returns. Now Paul seems to prod the believers in Thessalonica to have their passports ready when Jesus returns. Their relationship to God must be kept up-to-date and have "his seal of ownership on us, and . . . his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:22). Like Jesus' disciples, they too wondered, "When will these things happen?"

And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7). Obviously Christians in Thessalonica expected an immediate return of Jesus. So, when will He come?

Curiosity seems to provoke people to construct timetables instead of getting their passports ready. Every era since Jesus' ascension has experienced events by which sincere people predicted Jesus' return. Studies of the end times are referred to as "eschatology," from the Greek word *eschaton*, meaning "last things." Apparently Timothy's report brought back to Paul carried a request from the Christians, "What are the times and dates of Jesus' return?" And, "What is going to be happening?"

Perhaps rephrasing their question, Paul wrote, "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you" (v. 1). He had explained Jesus' position on that subject already. With a tinge of impatience, he wondered, "How many times do I have to tell you?"

He adds, "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (v. 2). In other words, "You know precisely that we cannot know precisely!" Moments before ascending into heaven, Jesus said emphatically, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). In the clearest possible language, Jesus said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in

heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). It is disobedience to Jesus for us to set dates and construct timetables for God to follow. Many sincere but immature Christians have been duped by purveyors of false prophecy.

I have a cartoon of a scraggly fellow holding a sign that says, "The World Is About to End." Onlookers hear him as he looks at his wristwatch, saying, "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six . . ."

Friends, don't trust anyone who insists, "I know when Jesus is coming." Nobody but God knows! Self-styled prophets "think they are the center of the universe and God's purpose is to serve and bless them. As these one-dimensional people get older and haven't long to live, they become convinced the end is near. 'If I'm gone, what's the purpose of keeping the world around? The last days must be coming.'"¹

Since Jesus is coming and since we don't know when, how are we to live as Christians? We must be prepared to meet Jesus at any time. Is your passport ready?

To Have Your Passport Ready, Be Alert (vv. 1-7)

Jesus warned His disciples, "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:33). In light of Jesus' warning, Paul tells us three things.

First, Jesus will come for us in suddenness and surprise: "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (vv. 2-3).

A preacher said to some friends, "Do you think Jesus will come tonight?"

One after another responded with the idea, "I don't think so."

Then he quoted, "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Luke 12:40).

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Public opinion echoes secular skepticism, crooning, "Peace and safety." However, public opinion makes a poor substitute for truth. Through the preaching of Noah, God warned the world of the coming Flood. Yet the truth of it never reached beyond eight persons—until the rain got out of hand. God warned Sodom, but they wouldn't listen either—until the brimstone and fire spilled out of the sky with destruction. Now Paul writes, "Destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman." Their final separation from God will occur in an instant. The Greek grammar indicates that the destruction not only "will come" but also is in the process on its way now. The wheels are in motion. Jesus referred to the process as "the beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8).

Paul warns, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." Under the cover of darkness, Jesus will unexpectedly come—one awesome surprise.

In his first letter sent back home from Swaziland, Jan Weisen told of a conversation at a missionary's home. It centered on the topic of a recent break-in by thieves—even while the missionaries slept. Jan commented, "In Swaziland, it is no longer 'if the thieves break in,' but 'when the thieves break in.'"

Paul's warning is not "if Jesus comes again" but "when He comes again." In Revelation Jesus said, "I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (3:3). Is your passport ready?

During the Easter season of 1949, a woman took her son to the movie theater in Tacoma, Washington, to see Cecil B. DeMille's film *The King of Kings*. The Crucifixion scene dramatically showed the sky getting dark, the earth shaking, and rocks falling. She whispered to her boy, "That is the way it will be when Jesus comes back." At that moment, a quake jolted the

"You know
precisely
that we
cannot
know
precisely!"

Puget Sound area. The walls shook and the seats trembled. That mother cried out, "Oh no! Not yet!"

Are you ready? Be alert!

Second, Jesus will find some people unprepared and unaware: "Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert. . . . For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night" (vv. 6-7). Paul's word for "sleep" suggests people who are insensitive and out of touch with reality. Unprepared to meet the Lord, they procrastinate—"some other time"! He characterizes them as "drunk"—having lost control of making good decisions and proper responses.

A man went to get his friend out of a motel. The friend was coming out from a drunken stupor. Breaking the silence, the drunk said, "My problem is not whiskey. I use whiskey to run away. My trouble is the nothingness I find when I take a serious look." Grabbing his friend's arm, the drunk added, "I have lost God! Where can I find Him?"

Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark" (Matt. 24:37-38). Don't get caught unprepared and unaware. Be alert!

Third, Jesus will receive the ones watching and waiting: "But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (vv. 4-6).

The children of "the light" have offered their lamps to Jesus, the Light of the World. The Lord has given the flame. The camp flickers with prepared soldiers waiting for the break of

day. When the time comes, they are ready. Jesus says, "What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (Mark 13:37). Paul urges those Christians at Thessalonica to keep on watching and waiting for the day of the Lord's return. They should avoid the arrogance of setting times and dates as though they know something no one but God knows. And they should avoid living without the readiness to meet Jesus whenever God chooses to send Him for us. Be alert!

**To Have Your Passport Ready,
Be Armed (vv. 8-10)**

Following the imagery of a military camp on alert, Paul portrays the soldiers as equipped for the demands facing them.

First, enjoy your perfect protection in Christ: "Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (v. 8). In this first letter of Paul, he makes use of the virtues of faith, hope, and love. He will develop the thought more fully in his later letters. We remember his eloquent "Hymn of Love" in which he concludes, "Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

Still later, Paul will develop the imagery of the soldier's protective armor in Eph. 6. But here, early in his ministry of writing, Paul portrays "faith" and "love" as protective armor for the Christian's spirit and emotions—his heart. Until Jesus returns, "hope" is the helmet that protects the Christian's mind and thoughts as he faces tough circumstances. Because of Jesus and in Jesus, we have it made. He equips us for the difficult times of these last days. We are perfectly protected in Christ. Be armed!

Second, enjoy your abundant provision through Christ: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our

Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 9). This program of serving Jesus until the Lord returns is not an "iffy" plan—if you can hold out, if you can endure enough suffering so God will like you, if you can build up enough points to win God's favor. J. B. Phillips translates, "For God did not choose us to condemn us, but that we might secure his salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). God has proposed and planned and provided for your ultimate salvation. Meanwhile God equips you, not only for survival but for winning!

Toward the end of his life, experience had taught Paul a valuable lesson: "My God will supply all that you need from his glorious resources in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, PHILLIPS). Therefore, you can give your best service and best efforts for Jesus and trust patiently that God will see you through until Jesus comes.

An old ranch hand applied for a job. His oral résumé simply stated, "I sleep well when the wind blows." The rancher was puzzled by his words but needed help badly, so he hired him.

A few nights later, high winds swept across the prairie. The rancher got up quickly and went out to check. The windmill was properly adjusted to ride out the storm. The gate was tied with an extra rope. A canvas tarp was tied securely over the haystack and anchored down firmly with pegs. Everything remained in fine shape. At the bunkhouse he found the old ranch hand sound asleep. Then he understood those words, "I sleep well when the wind blows."

Paul is not calling us to a nervous, twitchy, fearful watch until Jesus comes—hoping somehow by might and by perseverance to put up with everything. No, our readiness comes by depending on our ongoing, personal, up-to-date relationship with Jesus. God does not expect us to just get by: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with

him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Drawing on the resources of God through Christ, you can go home and "sleep well when the wind blows"! Be armed!

Third, enjoy your continuing presence with Christ:

"He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (v. 10). William Barclay noted, "The man who has lived all his life with Christ is never unprepared to enter the nearer presence of Christ."² Many people in the church as well as outside the church need to learn that vital Christianity is neither a creed nor a ceremony, but a life connected with Jesus: "We may live together with Him."

Dr. Paul Orjala's daughter, Jeannie, was a small child when she asked, "Does Jesus have to stoop down to get into our hearts?"

Moved by the profound thought, Paul replied, "Yes, Jeannie. Jesus does have to stoop down to get into our hearts."³

That's the Good News—Jesus **does** stoop all the way down to the level of our deepest needs—and sets up camp there. With His inner energizing presence, we are armed and equipped to continue until He returns in person!

The royal chaplain thought he should read verses to Queen Mary of Orange as she was dying. She responded, "I have not left this matter till this hour." And we can have our spiritual passport ready for that parting hour. Be armed!

To Have Your Passport Ready, Be Assured (v. 11)

Paul concludes, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (v. 11).

First, inspire assurance by encouraging one another.

Encouragement is a tremendous ministry! We do that best by pointing one another to God's Word: "Encourage others by sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9). Paul

later instructed Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). We enjoy assurance the more we are brought to understand God's perspective.

I have counseled and prayed with people struggling over the idea that God demands perfect performance as a condition of His continuing love. That attitude promotes discouragement—for who can give perfect performance? I can do nothing to make God love me more; I can do nothing to make God love me less. When that biblical truth revamps my perception of God, I find great encouragement. Do you know why I love Shannon and Shelley? I love them, not for what they do, but for what they are. They are my children! We Christians need to keep reminding each other of who we are—God's children. He loves us, not for what we do, but for what we are!

Encourage one another. The Bible says, "Each helps the other and says to his brother, 'Be strong!'" (Isa. 41:6). We all need encouragement.

Bart Starr, the great quarterback of the Green Bay Packers football team, made a deal with his son to encourage good grades. For every A that Bart Jr. brought home, Dad would give him 10 cents—that was back in the 1960s.

One Sunday the Packers had a terrible game. Bart Starr didn't do well. It was a long plane ride home. As he arrived home, he found a handwritten note from Bart Jr.: "Dear Dad. I thought you played a great game. Love, Bart Jr." Taped to the note were two dimes!

There are times when we all need a little encouragement. Be assured!

Second, inspire assurance by building up each other.

This became one of Paul's favorite expressions for inspiring spiritual growth and maturity.

Public opinion makes a poor substitute for truth.

The Greek word for "build up" is made of two words put together—"house" (*oikos*) and "build" (*demo*). It portrays the building up of a house, a row of blocks at a time. Isaiah talked about the "word of the LORD" as being "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line" (28:13, KJV). By adding God's Word truth upon truth and words of encouragement upon words of encouragement, we learn to build up one another. One believer linked to another believer and to another believer builds up the unity we share in Christ: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Words have the capacity to bless or to blast. In a country church of a small village in Croatia, near the beginning of the 20th century, an altar boy assisting the priest at Mass accidentally dropped the glass of wine. The village priest struck the altar boy and gruffly shouted, "Leave the altar and don't come back."

He never did come back to church. He became Tito, the atheistic Communist leader of Yugoslavia after World War II.

At about the same era, an altar boy served Mass in St. Mary's Cathedral, Peoria, Illinois. He, too, dropped the wine glass. He wrote later, "There is no . . . explosion that can equal in intensity of decibels . . . the sound of a wine [glass] falling on the marble floor of a cathedral in the presence of a bishop."⁴

The bishop that morning, John Spalding, with a twinkle in his eye, whispered gently, "Someday you will be just what I am."

That boy grew up to become Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for Jesus Christ. I remember seeing his program on television during the 1950s, *Life Is Worth Living*.

What a difference the words of those two celebrants made in the lives of those boys!

Sigmund Freud said, "By

Words have
the
capacity to
bless or to
blast.

words one of us can give another the greatest happiness or bring about utter despair." Nearly 3,000 years earlier, the Bible said, "Some people like to make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise soothe and heal" (Prov. 12:18, TLB).

Enduring persecution and difficulty, but anticipating the day of Jesus' return, Paul would have us be filled with assurance: "So go on cheering and strengthening each other" (v. 11, PHILLIPS).

Is your passport ready? Be alert! Be armed! Be assured!

In 1979 my passport had expired. It was no longer valid and up-to-date. Unexpectedly I got a surprise phone call from the Los Angeles District office. I was offered a free trip to go on a Work and Witness project in South America. I was thrilled until I got out my passport and discovered it was inadequate, and time had run out. I missed a wonderful opportunity of service and fellowship and experience—all because I had been careless and neglected keeping up-to-date. I said, "Never again will I be caught without my passport up-to-date." But I have become careless once again—and I don't have my passport ready today. Neglect is a sad thing!

I wonder how many people have grown cold and careless toward the Lord. Jesus condemned the church in Ephesus: "You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Rev. 2:4-5).

Is your passport to heaven up-to-date and ready to go? Don't let anything hinder or stand between you and Jesus. Peter writes, "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

While making plans for our Work and Witness team to go to Guatemala in 1991, everything

sounded so good and exciting that Buster Moore wanted to go also. Buster ran into a problem. He did not have a passport. And he did not have a birth certificate upon which a passport is founded. Strangely enough, Buster Moore wrote to Texas for a birth certificate—and Texas has no record of him being born. Since Buster Moore has not been officially born, he could not get a passport to join us in the sky, flying to Guatemala.

And I wonder how many people yearn with expectancy to join the excitement when Jesus meets us in the air—but who will miss it all because they have never been born again! Nicodemus had been a fine person, schooled in religion and selected to the governing board of his religious community; but Jesus said to him, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

The Bible tells us that Jesus will come to take His people to heaven: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). Is your name written down? Have you come to Jesus to admit that you are a sinner? Have you believed on Jesus as your Savior? Have you confessed your sins to Him? What must you do to be saved? The Bible says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

In the last chapter of the Bible, Jesus announces twice, "Behold, I am coming soon!" (Rev. 22:7, 12). Is your passport ready? **PM**

1. Bruce Larson, *Luke*, vol. NT3 of *The Communicator's Commentary*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 249.

2. William Barclay, *The Letters of Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 238-39.

3. Paul R. Orjala, *Get Ready to Grow: A Strategy for Local Church Growth* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978), 46.

4. *Treasure in Clay* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 10-12.

The Most Neglected Ministry in the Church

What is the most neglected ministry in the church? Ministering to ministers. Out of deep gratitude, Paul spoke of "Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me" (2 Tim. 1:16-17).

During a very disappointing time during my early ministry, two pastoral friends took me to lunch, Maurice Palmquist and Neil Wiseman. They taught me that day that we need each other in the ministry. Too often we get so busy that we neglect building networks among our peers. Unfortunately, when a pastor is hurting, we either don't know it, or we avoid getting involved. Either way the deep loneliness feels like neglect and rejection.

Many years ago I resigned my church with no place to go. When I attended the district assembly, I was shocked that I had suddenly become invisible among my colleagues. No longer did I fit in. I felt very much alone. However, I learned to appreciate the much-needed ministry of Onesiphorus—and have tried to join his clerical order.

We need to minister to the former pastor. He has invested a part of his life in the place we now serve. He knows the rules of the game: stay away and don't interfere. However, as a successor, I have tried to express love

and appreciation and open the door for former pastors to come freely anytime. Following Wayne Hagemeyer became a special joy. For 14½ years he served as pastor. He stepped aside to retire. I knew what he didn't know: after being out for a few months, he would feel isolated. So I invited him to stay in our congregation and be part of our family. We celebrated his birthdays and anniversaries with gifts of appreciation. His close friends became our close friends. Pastor Hagemeyer was one of my best supporters. I love him!

We need to minister to the unassigned pastor. The unassigned pastor feels like "neither fish nor fowl"—he often feels ill at ease among pastors and certainly does not feel like a layman. One pastoral family visited our church, having been voted out of a church in a distant city. Fellows from our church got a truck and moved the family to our community. They are among our most faithful families, having contributed much to the ministry of our congregation. The unassigned pastoral families in my church are some of my closest friends and best supporters.

We need to minister to the retired pastors. Never have they been threats to me or my churches. But I have met many who feel pushed aside, unsure of where they should fit in. Many have found meaningful service on church staffs and have given

far more than they have received. Seek them out for your church family.

We need to minister to the wounded pastor. Remember again: "Onesiphorus . . . searched hard for me until he found me," Paul rejoices. Often a wounded pastor pulls away from pastors and people—but I urge you to pursue him or her. That pastor is worth salvaging to the church. Befriend him or her. Three neighboring pastors and two neighboring youth pastors have found encouragement and emotional healing and a lot of love from my congregational family. Some eventually moved on to successful ministries, and others have joined the ministry of my church. Reach out to your wounded pastoral friends.

A ministerial friend got a fatal case of "staff infection." We were able to reach across the miles by telephone to join hands in prayer and encouragement. The Lord has brought him through the desert time and given him a beautiful place in which to serve as pastor once again. And I know he would be there for me also.

A retired pastor of long-standing friendship wrote a letter about a pastor who had left his church under some kind of pressure. He had been a fellow pastor and friend long ago. Again, by telephone, we shared and prayed. He told me, "You are the only person who has called me."

Wounded pastors need some-

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

one to help them through the devastating experiences. I believe, also, that wounded pastors need time for emotional and spiritual healing to take place before they take their next assignment. That healing can be assisted by careful, loving, sensitive friends who can join with the hurting colleague in seeking the touch of the Healer of broken hearts. Would you join me in the Order of Onesiphorus?

What can we do?

First, we must take time to genuinely care.

Second, we must listen without a censorious spirit.

Third, we must keep utter confidentiality.

Fourth, we must let them return to service at their own pace. Do not push them into ministry,

but give them time and space needed for healing.

Fifth, open your church family to them. Encourage the wounded pastoral family to find and establish friendships within your healthy congregation.

Sixth, teach your congregation to minister without reservation to ministerial families.

Seventh, help them to feel loved and welcomed in your personal and ministerial life.

Eighth, use your influence to introduce them to district leaders.

Many district superintendents are overloaded with letters of application. Most of them would welcome your recommendation and personal word of introduction. I have found district leaders to be eager to help if possible.

Ninth, and most important,

pray with the wounded pastor and his family—and pray for them! Jesus is the Master of new beginnings.

Last spring during the riots in the Los Angeles area there were many tragedies, but one of the bright spots was a young Black man named Greg Williams. When asked why he risked his life to save a Hispanic man from a group of Black rioters, he said simply: "It wasn't a racial thing . . . it was just a matter of human dignity."

Mr. Williams went on to explain, "That Hispanic man was 'me.' I could identify with him because I, too, know what it is like to be treated unjustly. If I am not there for him in his need, who will be there for me in my need?" (Editors, *Clergy Talk*, October 1992, 4).

A Word of Encouragement

To Randy's Family

To be a fount of blessing now
was Randal's chief desire,
To love the Lord and preach His
Word
and childlike trust inspire,
To lead saints to the cleansing
stream
that flows from Christ above,
He met this call, inspiring all,
with faith and hope and love.

Faith that is free from worldly
care,
faith that brings tranquil rest.
Faith that will share our sister's
care,
faith that will meet the test;
Faith in the fiery furnace there,
faith in the prison cell,

Faith while the mighty billows
roll,
faith shouting, "All is well!"

Hope that abides forevermore,
hope that is fixed and free,
Hope for a crown of glory soon,
hope for eternity;
Hope that is sure and steadfast
now,
hope that will never fail,
Hope in the Rock of Ages here,
anchored within the veil.

Love for the widows and or-
phans,
love that will dry their tears,
Love that brings calm and cour-
age,

love that will vanish fears;
Love for the lost and lonely,
love full of pure intent,
Love, perfect love like Christ
above,
His sweet encouragement.

Soon Christ will bring Randy to
meet you,
transformed beyond compare,
With his passport stamped and
ready
for that meeting in the air.
Ruth, Shannon, and Shelley, take
courage,
the victory bell now rings;
The Sun of Righteousness will
rise
with healing in His wings. **PM**

BY NEIL M.

ROBERTSON

SUNRIVER, OREGON

We Preach Christ Crucified

The birth of Jesus brought God to us, but it took the cross of Jesus to bring us to God. The telling of Jesus' crucifixion sounds gruesome and gory, but in those terrible hours God opened the way for you and me to come to Him. You may wonder, Why not emphasize Jesus' life instead of His death? Paul would say, "You don't know what you're asking. That would tear the heart out of the gospel. 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'" (Gal. 6:14).

Samuel Rutherford said, "There are some who would have Christ cheap; they would have Him without the Cross. But the price will not come down." The Cross shows us how terrible sin is to God and how powerful Jesus' vicarious suffering is in liberating us from sin. Paul insists that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19).

We must preach the priority of the Cross. Paul wrote, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17).

We live in an era that views Jesus as bad or mad. Surprising numbers of people see Jesus and the message of the Cross as the enemy—someone to despise and ridicule. Others pronounce Jesus as irrelevant—a crazy man with illusions of grandeur and without meaning today. We must proclaim that Jesus is the unique, eternal Son of God. Paul de-

clared, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Too many preachers and churches have let the mighty cross of Jesus drift into symbolism without relevance. People admire the simple life of Jesus, but they avoid the death of Jesus. They nod assent to the example of Jesus but deny the demands of Jesus. They do not object to the cradle of Jesus, but they vigorously oppose the cross of Jesus. Why? "The cross means death to human effort."¹

We must preach the superiority of the Cross. Paul wrote: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Cor. 1:25).

The message of the Cross takes you beyond the limits of intellectual evidence and impeccable logic. The message of the Cross came as a revelation from God's wisdom, while philosophy is an invention of human wisdom.

The message of the Cross has never fit with the American dream. The theology of the Cross doesn't sell well in an ascending economy. However, since our culture is in dark travail, we can offer hope through the cross of Christ. It reaches beyond human wisdom.

People who expected God to prove himself and enhance His credentials with visible power felt disappointed with the Cross. To them the Cross demonstrated weakness

and failure—a loss of dignity. So, to this day, people are attempting to defy God and deify man. However, people are discovering that we do not have the moral resources within us to live out our ideals. Only persons who come to Jesus, the Christ of the Cross, find moral and spiritual ability.

We must preach the reliability of the Cross. Paul writes: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:18, 21).

Paul didn't raise doubts and questions. He didn't peddle probabilities. He delivered the message of the Cross revealed from God himself. Naturally it doesn't fit the preconceived ideas of the non-Christian. Therefore, he despises the message at first. He would rather try to save himself than to let Jesus save him.

Pastor Dave Wilson was asked by a bride who wished to be married in his sanctuary, "Would you put a drape or a veil over the cross in your sanctuary? The young man that I am marrying comes from a family to whom the Cross is offensive."

His mind flooded with scriptures and hymns of the Cross. Finally he explained, "No, I can't cover the oak cross in the sanctuary. It stands for the Calvary cross." Pastor Wilson prayed, "O God, let nothing in my life and . . . church hide Your cross—not attitudes, not ambitions, not programs, not plans. To the cross let me be true."²

Whoever believes our announcement of the Cross will be saved! God takes great pleasure in saving whoever believes. People may think the message of the Cross is crazy, but God says it is His power at work. **PM**

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

1. Roy L. Laurin, *First Corinthians: Where Life Matures* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987), 30.

2. Dave Wilson, "Would You Cover Up Your Cross?" *Wesleyan Advocate*, July 17, 1989, 7.

At Your Service, Lord!

A pastor met a little boy and asked, "Who made you?" The lad replied, "To tell the truth, sir, I ain't done yet!" He was still growing. The longer he would live, the more opportunity life would give for growth.

At the end of Acts 9, Peter isn't done yet—he is still being made over by God's grace. He is in a strange place for a Jew—staying in Joppa with "a tanner named Simon" (v. 43).

Peter is a follower of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, but eight years after Pentecost still a victim of prejudice against Gentiles. All changes do not happen suddenly and automatically when a person is filled with the Spirit. For example, prejudice experiences a slow, lingering death. It is deeply embedded into one's mind during formative years. Prejudices keep people separate from those they fear or do not know.

Peter lived in a world of prejudice. Deep emotional barriers existed between Jew and Gentile, between men and women, between Roman and non-Roman (the conquerors and the conquered), between Greek and non-Greek (the cultured and those considered barbarians), between freeman and slave, between the ignorant man and the wise man. Everywhere in the ancient world barriers labeled people "common" or "unclean."

For a Jew, entering a tanner's home marked defilement. Since a tanner handled dead skins and car-

asses, his trade was considered "unclean." His house must be located no less than 75 yards outside the city limits. In fact, a girl engaged to a tanner without knowledge of his business, upon discovery could obtain an annulment.

Residing in a tanner's house, Peter gives evidence that prejudices were being broken down gradually. In Joppa a good Christian man traditionally considered an outcast was kind enough to entertain Peter. That was unsettling to Peter's preconceived ideas. His Jewish exclusiveness was melting away.

Amazingly, God was preparing Peter for the next important step of the Church of Jesus Christ. The following episode (Acts 10:23-48) finds Peter going to the home of a Gentile Roman officer and welcoming him into God's family. That had never been done before!

In writing the Book of Acts, Luke treats this coming event as one of the great crises in Early Church history. Luke described Cornelius's vision four times and Peter's vision twice. Not only is Acts 10 devoted to this major development, but also Acts 11:5-18 contains a summary of the whole encounter, and Acts 15 settles the issue. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this event. The break between Judaism and Christianity is signaled. Judaism was the religion of a nation. Christianity is a religion for "whosoever will." The break had to come!

The meeting of Peter and Cor-

nelius marks a new era. For the first time, a Gentile is publicly and officially welcomed into the Christian family without being required to conform to Jewish law. It has the echo of prophecy from Peter's sermon at Pentecost: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17).

While Peter stayed in Joppa, God was dealing with a Gentile Roman centurion named Cornelius more than 30 miles north in Caesarea. Located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Caesarea was the official capital of the Roman governor over the province of Judea. Under the governors Pilate, Felix, and Festus, Caesarea was the headquarters for the Roman occupation army.

The Roman army was organized by legions (6,000 men), cohorts (600 men—10 cohorts to a legion), and centuries (100 men—6 centuries to a cohort). A centurion was a noncommissioned officer over 100 men. Centurions were called "the backbone of the Roman army." New Testament writers looked upon them with favor and respect.

Cornelius, centurion of the Italian regiment, became a man who disdained pagan deities prevalent in his culture. Luke says, "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (v. 2). One day an angel appeared and explained, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea" (vv. 4-6). The angel gave Cornelius directions and, by mentioning that Peter was staying with a tanner, gave a clue that Peter wasn't all tied up with usual Jewish rigidity.

God was setting the stage for a remarkably new era in the Church. He wasn't through making Peter yet. The Lord was

BY RANDAL DENNY

preparing him for an important new lesson. God was going to use Peter in ways he did not suspect. God was working in His man and through His man!

The Master isn't done with us yet. He still desires to prepare each of us for a more effective ministry and wider influence than we can see at the present moment. God is at work, making some things happen, preventing some things from happening, and allowing some things to take place.

How can we be more effective for God? By learning to be sensitive to His guidance and by responding to His leadership. God will not guide us where His grace cannot keep us. We can learn from Peter's experience.

We Must Be Responsive to God's Lessons

God gave Peter these important lessons during his prayer time. "About noon the following day . . . Peter went up on the roof to pray" (v. 9). The flat roofs of Oriental houses were often used as places of meditation and prayer, quiet places away from the noise of crowded houses. God met Peter at his place of prayer.

The Lord unfolds His lessons to those who pray. Prayer is our communication with God by which we report our victories and failures, as well as receive our marching orders. Prayer must not become "using God" but rather should involve reporting for duty! To learn the lessons God is trying to teach us, we will need moments for our appointed times and places to meet with the Lord.

The great clock of St. Paul's Cathedral cannot be heard more than a block or two above the roar of London's traffic as the hour is struck. But in the silence of night, the clock can be heard striking over a great area. And we need times of silence, listening times, to hear the Voice so often disregarded in the busy walks of life.

All changes do not happen automatically when a person is filled with the Spirit.

Not everyone appreciates the silences. In the monastery where Leonardo da Vinci was painting his *Last Supper* masterpiece, monks grew impatient because he stood in silence by the hour staring at his painting without using his brush. They expected him to work feverishly to complete his work in the shortest possible time. Seeing him stand in silence for so long seemed unproductive to them. At their complaint, da Vinci replied, "It is when I pause the longest that I make the most telling strokes with my brush."

To learn God's lessons well, we must take time to meet with the Lord in our silent times and places.

God gave Peter a clear picture of His truth. Thomas A. Carruth commented, "Often the most important thing that happens in prayer takes place when you are not talking at all. The insight, the sense of guidance may come during a time of quiet listening. What God has to say to us is always more important than anything we have to say to Him."¹

"[Peter] became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance" (v. 10). During this wide-awake vision, God gave Peter an object lesson: "He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners" (v. 11). The "sheet" described is a nautical term for a "sail." Perhaps Peter had been watching the large sails of fishing fleets from his seaside rooftop, and it became suggestive to his vision.

"It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat'" (vv. 12-13). Jewish law had declared ceremonially "clean" those animals that chew their cud and have cloven hoofs. In Peter's vision, animals considered "unclean" were mixed in—not permissible for a Jew to eat. And,

being mixed together, all were then considered "unclean."

The Lord gave Peter this visual object lesson to illustrate that the animals, symbolic of the Church, had originated in heaven. After the vision, "immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven" (v. 16). The destiny of the Church is also heaven. God's Church is broader than Jewish legal limits, beyond traditions and cultures and confines of any nation or race or institution. Those men and women reclaimed by God's grace cannot be discounted or excluded!

God had to change Peter's thinking before He could change Peter's behavior. Previous to his vision, Peter would never have traveled with three Gentiles to visit another Gentile's house. God was still at work remaking Peter. The Lord's instructions were: "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (v. 13).

With all his acquired background and prejudice, Peter argued, "Surely not, Lord! . . . I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (v. 14). In the King James Version, Peter's words are: "Not so, Lord." Ray Stedman pointed out: "Obviously you cannot be consistent and say, 'Not so, Lord.' If you say 'Lord' then you must not say, 'Not so.' And if you say 'Not so' then He is not Lord!"²

Sometimes there is inner conflict between God's guidance and one's cultural backgrounds. But Christianity will burst the wine-skins of offending culture and prejudice! If we take the Lordship of Jesus seriously, there will be profound conflicts with our cultural value systems. God changes our hearts in an instant of conversion. But the Lord works at changing our thinking in order to change our behavior. Many of our thought patterns and responses have to be brought under subjection to the Holy Spirit. A perfect heart before the Lord is not equated with perfect judgment or insight. God helps us change the thought life

so deeply embedded in our learned responses.

"The voice spoke to [Peter] a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean'" (v. 15). God was teaching Peter that His love and mercy extend beyond all barriers. The voice spoke with rebuke to quit calling "no good" what God has redeemed. We must not treat with disrespect or disregard anyone for whom Christ died!

And sometimes we treat ourselves as unclean or worthless. "Every pastor has heard good people say, 'I just can't forgive myself. The things I've done are so bad that even though I know God has forgiven me, I can't accept myself.' It often helps if we can see that by this attitude we are calling God a liar. We are calling unclean what God has called clean."³

At a distinguished civic dinner, an elderly man was disconcerted to find himself seated next to a quiet Chinese fellow. Wanting to be courteous, however, he leaned toward the visitor and asked, "Likee soupee?"

The Chinese looked at him, nodded, but said nothing. Later, during the dinner, the Chinese was called upon to speak. He rose, bowed, and made a 15-minute speech in impeccable English about the sociological significance of the European Common Market. Amid polite applause he sat down, turned to his embarrassed Anglo neighbor, and asked quietly, "Likee speechee?"

Let us never be condescending to anyone in the great human family. It is such an important lesson to Peter and to us that the whole drama was repeated three times, a threefold witness fulfilling the Mosaic Law: "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut. 19:15). The threefold reminder may have jogged Peter's memory of Jesus' threefold command to him: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). The repeated vision illustrated God's loving patience with the infirmities

of human weakness and slowness to learn.

We Must Rest in God's Timings

Peter didn't have to wait long. God's timing was perfect: "While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there" (vv. 17-18).

God is at work behind the scenes. The Lord was making all the arrangements in order to accomplish His purposes. God gave the vision and instructions to Cornelius in Caesarea at precisely the right time for the men to travel more than 30 miles, look up the address of Simon the tanner, and locate Simon Peter—as He had instructed. And they arrived at precisely the right moment!

People speak of "chance" and "coincidence," but I believe in God's timings. The psalmist expresses that confidence: "O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit or stand. . . . You chart the path ahead of me, and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment, you know where I am. . . . You both precede and follow me, and place your hand of blessing on my head. This is too glorious, too wonderful to believe! I can *never* be lost to your Spirit!" (139:1-3, 5-7, TLB).

God has His times and places and people and purposes. The Lord brings together those He has been preparing separately; He does this by the leadings of the Holy Spirit. The man in Caesarea is the product of God's light given to Gentiles apart from Judaism. The man in Joppa is the product of Judaism and his living encounter with Jesus. Peter had the background of institutional religion but needed to be set free from its confinement. Cornelius had the background of Gentile freedom but needed discipline and direction. God was beautifully preparing to bring

them together for the benefit of both!

The Bible says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Ps. 37:23, KJV). The Spirit guides those who listen. When we are near enough to God to hear His voice, the Lord's directions are always clear enough to follow!

The eight-year-old son of a New York pastor made an appointment to see his father. It embarrassed his father to think his son had to make an appointment to see him—that's being too busy!

At the appointed hour, the boy arrived, marched into his father's office, and sat down in the big chair. After a pause, he said, "Dad, tell me: Just what do you know about God?"

It was a testing moment. Finally the father answered, "Not much, Son; but enough!"

That answer is hard to improve on. If we're talking about the infinite Creator of the universe, "not much." But through Jesus Christ we know enough to rest in God's care and His perfect timing.

William Cowper ordered a carriage to take him to the Thames River; he was so despondent he intended to commit suicide by leaping from the bridge. However, the London fog was so dense the driver got lost. Finally, after an hour of tramping through the cold, swirling fog, Cowper demanded to be let out. As the lines emerged out of the thick night fog, he discovered that he was standing right at his front door! Moved by the caring providence of God, he went in and wrote these words:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take.

*The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

Prayer must
involve
reporting
for duty!

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

God can be trusted with the
timetable of our lives!

**We Must Respond to
God's Opportunities**

God provides opportunities to minister and serve. "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them'" (vv. 19-20).

In Oriental custom, the three men stood outside and called for Simon called Peter. God provided Peter an immediate opportunity to put this amazing object lesson into action!

Any learning program or lesson must find application in the arena of real life. Biblical concepts are given to make a difference in how we live. The Bible is not an ivory-tower tourist guide, but a manufacturer's handbook on how to operate in real life. The Lord provided homework for Peter in Lesson No. 1 immediately. When opportunity knocks at some folks' door, they are in the backyard looking for a lucky four-leaf clover!

God helps His people to recognize opportunities when they come. He sensitizes each disciple to opportunities for service. Many fail to recognize opportunity because it often comes disguised as hard work!

A cartoon shows a pastor sitting on his associate pastor's desk. The poor associate is stretched out wearily. The pastor says, "As my associate, the first thing to learn is that vexations and frustrations are always called 'challenges' and 'opportunities'!"

God interprets His lessons

Sometimes
there is
inner
conflict
between
God's
guidance
and one's
cultural
back-
grounds.

through opportunities to serve: "Peter went down and said to the men, 'I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?'"

"The men replied, 'We have come from Cornelius the centurion. . . . A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say'" (vv. 21-22).

The Lord put flesh on the lesson outline. Peter could unmistakably see that the Lord was in it all. To love God is to serve Him. How often God places before us opportunities to practice real Christlikeness! How often He makes our lessons spring to life.

A church building in Europe was bombed during World War II. In the explosion, a statue of Jesus was damaged—the hands were blown off. The statue has not been restored but remains with missing hands. Beneath the statue of Jesus these words are now engraved: "Christ has no hands but yours!"

God awaits a response to opportunities He gives. "Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests" (v. 23). These men had walked more than 30 miles. Peter invited these Gentiles to be his special guests—a big first step, coming from his background. Legalism would protest, "I have never done this before!" The language of liberty in Christ rejoices, "I have never done this before!"

What a fantastic picture! Inside the house of an outcast tanner, the apostle of Jesus hosts two Gentile servants and a Roman soldier—all residing together in fellowship. The Spirit of God was bringing them together, breaking down barriers, sweeping out prejudices, and opening doors to a whole new era in the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit of love draws believers together. The angel in one of Thornton Wilder's plays says,

"In Love's service only the wounded soldiers can serve."

Edwin Markham trusted a banker with the settlement of an estate. As a result, the banker betrayed him and left him penniless. Markham became bitter and ceased being productive as a poet.

One day, thinking and doodling with his pen, Markham found himself drawing circles. Making a large circle, he thought about how God's great circle of love takes us in—though undeserving! As his mind tried to grasp God's great love, inspiration hit him once again—after several years of deep resentment and bitterness. He began to write these familiar words:

*He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.*

Love reached across the gulf of hatred; forgiveness showered that banker. The joy of the Lord flowed through Markham, and once again he was able to write. Some of his greatest works followed.

God would have His people reach out to love across barriers, forgiving, helping, encouraging, lifting. He promises to give opportunities for unlimited love.

An old physician told a friend, "I've been practicing medicine for 30 years, and I have prescribed many things. But I have learned that for most of what ails people, the best medicine is love."

The friend asked skeptically, "But what if it doesn't work?"

He replied, "Double the dose!"

PM

1. Thomas A. Carruth, *Total Prayer for Total Living* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 29.

2. Ray C. Stedman, *Birth of the Body* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House Publishers, 1974), 171.

3. *Ibid.*

Pastoral Ministry: A Front Seat in Human Experience

Riding home alone at midnight, I reflected on the day. The morning hours were spent working on a sermon in the Psalms—one of six favorites selected by my congregation. By noon I sat with good friends who proudly showed me their new baby—born at home. They rejoiced with broad grins over the arrival of a girl to complement their three sons. A beautiful family sharing with me a beautiful event.

By two o'clock I sat with a retired couple in their front room. She had fallen down a flight of stairs—at the church. The bruises and bumps and cuts proved the harshness of her tumble. This couple have been faithful supporters of the church and of me, their pastor. If the doors of the church swing open, they are some of the first to arrive. Do you need a Sunday School teacher? She's tremendous! Do you need a room painted? He's a professional—the fastest I've ever seen. We prayed for her soon recovery.

At eight o'clock I stood on the platform of the sanctuary with a groom and his best friends as we watched the bride and her father march with delight down the aisle. The couple were upper-class students at Northwest Nazarene College. It seems God is directing them toward urban ministry. Eight years ago when I came to my church, she was a giddy, talkative, energetic junior high girl. I've had the privilege of watching her grow into Christian womanhood with a sense of mis-

sion in life. Inwardly I rejoiced in the powerful symbolism as bride and groom lit the unity candle together—an enactment recalling God's intent for marriage: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). After completing the legal marriage documents and obtaining all the proper signatures, I excused myself from the wedding reception and got in my car.

I arrived at another home by 9:45 P.M. Unexpected death had stolen away a mother. She had been found dead, alone. Official estimates placed her death as having occurred three days earlier. The son and daughter, both married, had gathered with their families awaiting my arrival. There is often that mixture of emotions—sorrow over bereavement and delight in reminiscing over a life that had influenced the family in special ways. I listened. Death is reality. People hurt. But, once again, the human experience of death and bereavement has given me opportunity to build bonds of love with my people. I'm not so good with answers; but having experienced loss myself, I am comfortable just being with them. Probably I never *feel* more like an agent of God, His personal representative, than when entering into the dark night of grief to stand beside the people I love.

In a sense, that was not a typical day. I've been a pastor long enough to learn that there are no typical days. Yet that one day had

brought me into the arena of human experience—from birth to death. Do you know what powerful thought struck me as I drove home at midnight? I'll tell you! I felt honored to be selected by God himself to tell the best news my people will ever hear. The good news of Jesus brightens the whole arena of human experience, from birth to death—and beyond! I don't have enough Sundays left to answer questions nobody is asking. The Bible says,

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, . . . a time to be silent and a time to speak (*Eccles. 3:1-2, 4, 7*).

My involvement in the arena of human experience gives meaning to God's call to preach the good news of Jesus. Seeing the faces of my people in need helps me prepare the message from God's Word. I am not interested in "making the Scriptures relevant," but in helping my people see the tremendous relevance of the Scriptures in the arena of human experience.

During my days at seminary, Dr. V. H. Lewis spoke in chapel. A line he quoted from Milton has stuck with me for all these years: "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed." With God's help, I have tried with diligence to feed my "hungry sheep" on the nourishing Word of God. Richard Baxter lectured at Yale University long ago with this admonition: "Boys, preach to broken hearts and you will always be up-to-date!"*

Perhaps you'll join with me in the prayer Harry Emerson Fosdick said before getting up to preach: "Somewhere in this congregation is one person who desperately needs what I am going to say; O God, help me to get at him." PM

*Robert Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1974), 131.

BY RANDAL E. DENNY

Sunday School Is More Important than We Think

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

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

During the Friday night of our citywide crusade, Dad and I sat in the balcony of the church. While people sang a beckoning invitation song, Dad asked me if I wanted to accept Jesus as Savior. We walked together down the stairs and down the aisle to the altar of prayer. The first person kneeling beside me was Perry Dunn, my junior high Sunday School teacher. That white-haired gentleman loved me into

the kingdom of Christ. We had worked side by side since I was a boy, building our little church with our own hands. I can't remember a single lesson from his quarterly, but his fond memory graces the walls of my inner sanctum. Later, he and his wife showered friendship on me and my young bride.

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

The church where I serve as pastor has been in double sessions for eight years, thus preventing me from going to Sunday School. However, our classes are building a network of strong

family ties. The people enjoy lively debate and discussion over the lessons, but those classes form the basic framework of our local church family. The Sunday School class serves as the point of contact and personal support that people need in an impersonal society. I do not feel we have completed the process of integrating a new family until we have helped them find the fellowship safety net of a Sunday School class.

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

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

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Theology of the Church

We Are Family

Inscribed on the porch of a parish church outside London are these words:

To all who are weary and seek rest;
 To all who mourn and long for comfort;
 To all who struggle and desire victory;
 To all who sin and need a Savior;
 To all who are idle and look for service;
 To all who are strangers and want fellowship;
 To all who hunger and thirst after righteousness;
 And to whomsoever will come:
 This church has opened wide her doors and, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, says to all of you,
 Welcome!

That inscription belongs over the door of my church as well. Today I am finishing my pastor's report to the congregation and to the district assembly. I have been reflecting on the church—that volunteer, redeemed family of God. Born as an only, lonely child, I have inherited a wonderful family—the church. The church has wrapped itself around me in love and support and encouragement like a big family. My people give me a sense of belonging. My goal is that no one will feel out of place among us as we gather at the feet of Jesus.

I have a dream for my church family:

1. That we glorify God in praise and obedience.
2. That we have an eager hunger to know the Bible as God's Love Letter to our world.

3. That we indeed love one another as Jesus models for us.
4. That we accept everyone as significant because Jesus died for each one.
5. That we encourage one another in spiritual growth by a balanced participation in celebration, class, and cell—public worship, Sunday School classes, and small-group discipleship units.
6. That we be true to our mission: "To make disciples of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and to exercise God-given spiritual gifts for building up the Body of Christ."

How do we accomplish our mission?

1. We must encourage one another to make conversation with God a way of life.
2. We must practice the prayer of intercession.
3. We must train our people in how to lead someone to Jesus Christ.
4. We must be sensitive to and dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. We must give our people opportunity to serve others and make full use of their spiritual gifts.
6. We must be Christ-centered by learning to obey and teach "everything I have commanded you," as Jesus said (Matt. 28:20).

I cut out an advertisement for church steeples from a religious magazine. The advertisement had emblazoned in big letters: "THE CROWNING GLORY OF YOUR CHURCH." But the glory

of the church is *never* in steeples or buildings or preachers or musicians or programs. It is in the reflected glory of Jesus, who said, "Love one another. . . . All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

Even church families have problems in an atmosphere of love. Dr. Walt Lanman, our district superintendent, read the following lines at a preachers' meeting:

Live churches have parking problems; dead churches don't.

Live churches change methods; dead churches don't.

Live churches have lots of noisy youth; dead churches don't.

Live churches evangelize; dead churches don't.

Live churches are deficient on workers; dead churches have surplus.

Live churches move out on faith; dead churches operate totally on sight.

Live churches' expenses exceed their income; dead churches take in more than they spend.

Live churches are filled with tithers; dead churches with tippers.

Live churches grow so fast you forget people's names; in dead churches everyone knows everybody's name—for years.

Live churches support missions enthusiastically; dead churches care only for themselves.

I'm glad for problems—even within the church family!

An appropriate prayer for any church comes from the doorway of the old rectory at Crowhurst, Sussex, England: "O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship, narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block, but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power. God, make the door to this house the gateway to Thine eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

The Secret of Victorious Living

A young man said to his pastor, "Religion for my grandfather was an experience, for my father it was a tradition, and for me it is a nuisance!"

Somewhere between the first and second generation, the joyful note of victory was lost. The victorious life faded into the traditions of keeping the church going. The dynamic Spirit of God was lost in the shuffle.

Dr. Alan Redpath, British pastor and Bible teacher, spent 10 years in the United States as pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. He traveled widely as a popular speaker at Bible conferences from coast to coast. When he returned to Scotland, he shared his impressions of American Christianity. While impressed favorably with evangelistic outreach and missionary giving, Dr. Redpath noted:

I must have observed a very real hunger of heart among a great number of Christians in this land for the fullness of the blessing that God has for them in Jesus Christ. Many Christians are highly dissatisfied with their lives; are conscious of defeat and frustration and long to enter into a deeper experience of what union with Christ . . . really means in terms of practical daily conduct.

[He added,] Far too many Christians have lived exceedingly long on the right side of Easter but on the wrong side of Pentecost, on the right side of forgiveness but on the

wrong side of fellowship, on the right side of pardon but on the wrong side of power.

To use an Old Testament allegory, they are "out of Egypt" but not yet in the "land of full salvation." Many have wandered in the wilderness—and in the carnality of Romans 7 instead of in the conquest of Romans 8.¹

Missionary Paul found the same situation when he began his ministry in the city of Ephesus. The busy seaport and western terminal of the trade route to the Euphrates had about 250,000 people. Ranked with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the three great eastern Mediterranean cities, Ephesus eventually disappeared when the river silted up. The harbor became a marsh, and the people relocated to escape malaria. In Paul's time, Ephesus contained one of the Seven Wonders of the World—the temple of Artemis, or Diana. The glory of pagan Ephesus is but a dim memory with only a few fragments of broken marble left in the dirt.

After leaving Corinth, Paul visited Ephesus on his way to Antioch, concluding his second missionary tour. Paul left his friends Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and promised to return. He was gone about a year. During that year something happened in Ephesus—the coming of Apollos:

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way

of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue (*Acts 18:24-26a*).

Apollos had gone through formal training in Alexandria about Jesus and the Scriptures. He may have studied some of the Christian writings that had begun to circulate. Apollos was an eloquent speaker.

"When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (*v. 26b*). Apollos knew about the life and teachings of Jesus, about His death and resurrection; but he had either not known or not experienced the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. He had not yet encountered a personal Pentecost. That's the secret to victorious living! From that moment on, Apollos's ministry was never the same. Encouraged by the brethren and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Apollos went on to Corinth to preach.

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus" (*19:1*). Paul stayed in Ephesus from autumn of A.D. 52 until spring of 55. He remained in Ephesus longer than at any other place during his active ministry. As a result, Paul used Ephesus as the center of his third missionary tour. The Roman province of Asia was so thoroughly Christianized by Paul and his team that for centuries the churches there were among the most influential in the world. In fact, their churches survived Turkish conquest until the Greek-Turkish war in 1923, when populations were exchanged.

During Paul's stay, he wrote at least four important letters to Corinth from Ephesus, two of which exist in our New Testament. Paul founded a great church to which Timothy later was appointed as pastor. According to tradition, the apostle John brought Mary, mother of Jesus, to spend her last days in Ephesus.

As far as Luke's record goes,

BY RANDAL E. DENNY

Ephesus was Paul's last work as a free man. Shortly after leaving Ephesus, we'll find Paul imprisoned or under guard to the end of the Book of Acts.

What did Paul find when he arrived in Ephesus?

There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when [or 'after,' margin] you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in ["other languages," margin] and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all (19:1-7).

Probably these 12 disciples were the imperfect results of Apollos's incomplete preaching. Like Apollos, they had not received the Holy Spirit: "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (19:2). These 12 good men were saved. If Abraham was justified by faith hundreds of years before Jesus came (Rom. 4), those who repented of sin and believed on the coming of Messiah, as John the Baptist had preached, would be saved. Luke calls them "disciples," a common term for Christians.

Christians today resemble the 12 disciples in Ephesus more than they do the 12 disciples in Jerusalem after Pentecost. We know the facts, the history, the Bible, and the traditions. We have a grateful sense of forgiveness—but where's the power? Where's the dynamic Spirit of God? Where's the added dimension of the Holy Spirit instead of the "falling down" believer? It's sad that powerless Christianity sits around debating whether or not one can lose his or her salvation instead of asking,

"Far too many Christians have lived exceedingly long on the right side of Easter but on the wrong side of Pentecost."

"How can I receive the power of the Holy Spirit?"

Paul didn't ask about their standing in the community. He didn't ask if they liked their preacher or had adequate buildings. He never asked about their records or financial stability or membership list. Paul didn't even ask if there were any spiritual "Achans" in the camp or if they were straight theologically. Uppermost in Paul's mind was the question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit [after; since, *κν*] you believed?"

Dr. William Greathouse noted,

This question underscores the theme of the Acts. . . . For this reason Acts has been . . . called by some the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. Within the few pages of this earliest church history we are confronted by no less than fifty-seven references to the Spirit; the entire book is a commentary on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.²

Maybe you have wondered, "Why has my religion not made a more vital difference to me? Why don't I ever see any results of being a Christian?" God's Word asks you today, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit [since] you believed?"

Perhaps you are saying, "But I've tried and tried to be a good Christian. Something's missing!" Personal striving, "trying harder," is not the answer. Apollos and others before him had left those good men in Ephesus straining and striving, an achieving type of sub-Christianity! That's not the full gospel of grace through Jesus Christ.

James S. Stewart said, "Wasn't it too bad of those who taught them the rudiments of the Christian faith—to leave those poor innocents in their little boat with nothing but oars! Not telling them that they might step a mast and let loose a sail, for there was always a favoring breath on the face of those waters!"³

To you straining on the oars, trying to be "Christian," the most important question the Bible raises for the disciple of Jesus is this: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit [since] you believed?" That's the

secret of victorious living. I have three important questions.

For Victorious Living, Have You Received the Holy Spirit?

Those 12 Ephesian disciples had repented of their sins: "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance" (19:4). Apollos and the 12 men had been baptized unto repentance. They might have been baptized by John the Baptist, and if so, it had been 26 years earlier. However, it may mean they were baptized into John's emphasis on repentance. According to Ray Stedman,

John declared three great truths: First, . . . forgiveness of sins is possible before God only on the basis of repentance. . . .

[Second] John had the people express their repentance in baptism . . . a symbolic act of cleansing. . . .

Third, John announced that One was coming who would complete the work he had begun. Repentance is just a beginning with God.⁴

John's ministry brought people to "repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47, *κν*). Baptism is the outward symbol that our sins have been washed away.

Apollos and the 12 men were eager to learn about Jesus. They believed in the Christ John preached. They held no resistance to learning more about Jesus. But they had not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit. George Mueller said that the night God's Spirit filled him, he learned more in four hours about the Scriptures than he'd learned in the preceding four years since becoming a Christian.

Apollos and the 12 men were living for Jesus. They possessed Christ but were not possessed by Christ. Imitating the life of Jesus is not adequate. It isn't enough to know something about Jesus and to try to follow Him. That's why the Sermon on the Mount seems to many people to be impossible!

The Holy Spirit is not optional equipment. He is the Secret to victorious living. Apart from the

Holy Spirit, these disciples were simply enthusiastic advocates of Jesus. They could speak with feeling about the Carpenter from Nazareth, the great Teacher, the best Man who ever lived. They knew all about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; but they had no comprehension of the indwelling Christ at Pentecost. These men had walked in all the light they had received, had repented and believed, had separated themselves from the world, and may have suffered persecution.

However, they had not received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Until you have your personal Pentecost, you can only partially understand what God has done through the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian disciples had only an inadequate and incomplete grasp of God's grace. Perhaps Paul noted the inadequacy and incompetency in their assignment in pagan Ephesus. They had obviously made no significant impact for Christ.

How tragic to stand in the pulpit like that Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, with nothing vital to say; to teach a Sunday School class without firsthand experience to draw upon; to head up a young people's organization, yet live a morally defeated life; to be the father of a family and a leader in the church, but behave at home so that his children mock religion!

Churches abound. Religious activity goes on. Never has the church had better facilities and more people. But our great need is the power of the Holy Spirit—the living, energizing, revolutionizing power that moved so mightily in the disciples after Pentecost! "Did you receive the Holy Spirit [since] you believed?" Millions of Christians are good, but empty! How about you?

**For Victorious Living,
Did You Know That the
Holy Spirit Is Available?**

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit [since] you believed?" One writer noted, "The grammatical construction of this question (in the original Greek) permits it to

be translated either 'since you believed' or 'when you believed.' Translators therefore tend to follow their theological bias."⁵

It's interesting that theological debates rage over whether Paul said "since you believed" or "when you believed." As Dr. J. B. Chapman pointed out, "In either case their answer was No. . . . They knew nothing of the infilling and indwelling of the divine Comforter. . . . The gift of the Spirit is the lost note in modern Christianity."⁶

The 12 Ephesian disciples, as Apollos, did not know that God had given the promised Holy Spirit: "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (19:2). John Henry Jowett said, "How imperfect their equipment! How inadequate their resources! . . . The day of Pentecost had come; the marvelous promises had been fulfilled; the wonder ministry had begun; but these disciples were still in the pre-Pentecostal days; they were behind the spiritual times." It's impossible to imagine the Early Church without Pentecost!

Christian proclamation is no longer "only the Messiahship of Jesus, but the indwelling power of the Lord. The Christian life [is] not just living for Jesus, but Christ living in the believer."⁷

Those Ephesian believers did not know of any divine enablement. While John baptized with water, he pointed to the day when Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The first baptism was the washing away of a sinful past; the second baptism was God's gift of power to lead a pure life. That's why divine enablement is necessary. The Christian needs the internal presence of God to experience victorious living.

A gospel based on human striving rather than divine enabling devastates the child of God. We must have Him who is God's great Gift!

The Ephesian disciples did not know that the Holy Spirit was available. If they had heard of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles many years earlier at

Pentecost, they had no idea He was available for them.

They were like many people today for whom Christianity is similar to courtship. It is always trying to put its best foot forward; it is striving toward some desired future goal. That's the stage in which we awaken to our own inadequacies. The more we try to do better, the more we invariably fail because we're attempting victorious living in our own strength. Courtship is an inner struggle.

However, God intends Christian experience to be similar to marriage. We are the Bride of Christ, resting in a relationship already attained. No more timidity and tension and uncertainty; we belong to Him. There's the joy of exploration and development in the secure commitment of marriage. That's the stage when we discover that our condemnation is taken away. We are enabled to do in the power of the Holy Spirit what we could never do or be in ourselves. That's victorious living!

The Holy Spirit is available to all disciples of Jesus. We can partake of His Spirit and nature, which makes holiness of heart possible. We love and appreciate the Jesus of history but need to experience "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

The Holy Spirit is as available to us as He was to the disciples in Jerusalem and to the disciples in Ephesus. When the Ephesian Christians heard about the Holy Spirit, they were eager to receive Him.

**For Victorious Living, Will You Be
Filled with the Holy Spirit?**

Paul took the disciples of Apollos's incomplete ministry and unfolded the full dimension of God's plan in the Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost. "On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them" (19:5-6).

Suddenly those 12 disciples experienced an Ephesian Pentecost. And a new outpouring of the Holy

A personal
Pentecost
is the
secret to
victorious
living!

Spirit will come to any people who ask and seek for Him. It's one thing to believe in the Holy Spirit, but quite another thing to receive the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is available to you today. Jesus made it clear: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

Will you be filled with the Holy Spirit? If you are a Christian, you are eligible to receive the Holy Spirit.

First, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must desire Him. The Ephesian disciples obviously wanted Him.

Harold Ivan Smith told of a friend who had custody of his two sons after an unpleasant divorce. The boys spent a weekend before Christmas with their mother and her family. They were showered with gifts. When the boys returned home, they noticed a barren Christmas tree. They asked, "Dad, what are you going to give us?"

The father, with his boys in the middle of their lavish gifts, had to search for the right words. It was an awkward moment. "Boys, the only thing I have to give you is myself. That's not much, but it is all I have to give. I promise I'll never leave you. I'll always try to be here when you need me, in July as well as at Christmas."

After a moment of thoughtful silence, both boys climbed over the gifts and hugged their father: "We love you, Daddy. You're all we want!"⁸

Do you want the Holy Spirit's gift of himself? He'll never leave you nor forsake you. He'll be there all the time—"for richer—for poorer, in sickness and in health."

Second, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must surrender to Him. Churches today are filled with people who know the gospel of Jesus and who try to live good, moral, Christian lives; but they have never given up directing their own lives. They are saved but not surrendered. That stifles God's Spirit working through His people.

Augustine said, "I don't know whether I have lost my will, or whether at last my will is so much like God's will that I cannot tell which is my will and which is God's will. But I know that I will do God's will."

That's surrender. That's submission at its best. That's complete consecration. That kind of total surrender to God's will brings His response in cleansing power.

Third, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must accept Him by faith. Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Trust Him to keep His promise! Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). You need nothing more than the promise of Christ. Take Him by faith!

Fourth, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must be receptive to Him. The Holy Spirit never forces himself into your life. He awaits your response. You either accept Him or reject Him. The Ephesian disciples eagerly received Him, and "the Holy Spirit came on them" (19:6).

Catherine Marshall described her need of the Holy Spirit and her response to Him: "My heart needs to be cleansed and set in order for such a royal Guest. I give You permission now to prepare my inner being. And, Lord, help me to be open and receptive!" That must be your attitude toward the Holy Spirit.

Open your heart to the light of God's Spirit. Let Him show you what He will. Flowers don't open because they try hard. It's the natural result when exposed to sunshine and rain. The life of holiness is not by straining and struggling, but by openness to God's Word and being receptive to the Holy Spirit. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit [since] you believed?" Today, the most important question remains, "Will you be filled with the Holy Spirit?"

When the Ephesian disciples were given opportunity, they had the greatest revival recorded in

the New Testament since the Day of Pentecost. A three months' revival shook the synagogue (19:8-9). "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul" (v. 11). Paul opened a holiness school for two years (v. 10). "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly" (vv. 18-19). God's Word began spreading and gaining power in their part of the world (v. 20). Christians took Ephesus so completely for Christ that the idol makers supplying the tourist trade coming to visit the temple of Diana suffered a lack of business. The silversmiths held a protest rally (vv. 23-41)! What a revival it must have been! Ephesus became the outstanding New Testament church of that era.

Paul wrote back to them later, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The Greek text does not simply mean, "Be filled with the Spirit once for all, and that's the end of it." It suggests, "Remain continuously filled." Keep on living the Spirit-filled life! That's the secret of victorious living. Let this prayer fill your heart:

*Hover o'er me, Holy Spirit,
Bathe my trembling heart and
brow;
Fill me with Thy hallowed presence,
Come, O come and fill me now.*

*Thou canst fill me, gracious Spirit,
Though I cannot tell Thee how,
But I need Thee, greatly need Thee,
Come, O come and fill me now.*

—Elwood H. Stokes **PM**

1. An unidentified periodical source.
2. William M. Greathouse, *The Fullness of the Spirit* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, n.d.), 28-29.
3. James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 129.
4. Ray C. Stedman, *Growth of the Body* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House Publishers, 1976), 145-46.
5. Arnold E. Airhart, *Acts*, vol. 5 in *Beacon Bible Expositions* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 218.
6. Greathouse, *Fullness of the Spirit*, 34.
7. Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Drumbeat of Love* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publishers, 1976), 235.
8. Harold Ivan Smith, "Time for Advent," *Herald of Holiness*, n.d.

Just a Parish Priest

When asked what I do, I usually reply, "I'm just a parish priest." In the five months between my last two churches, I came to appreciate what a wonderful thing that really is: "Just a parish priest!" It speaks of a precious relationship, not just a job. Something special happens when you look out over that crowd and relish the fact, "These are my people. And I belong to them!"

As a man serves faithfully as a parish priest, he notices his congregation changing from an audience into real, live persons. As he enters into the stream of their hopes and hurts, he finds himself changing from only a preacher to a pastor of his people. Someone once said, "To love to preach is one thing. To love those to whom we preach is quite another." Jerry Vines noted, "The preacher may say nearly anything he wants to say to the people if they are convinced he loves them, is interested in them, and wants to help them."¹

The parish priest often feels torn between his hours of preparation and his hours of parish care. I confess that I have never learned either to totally dismiss the pressing problems of my people clamoring for immediate attention during my time for prayer and preparation, or to totally dismiss my obvious need for prayer and preparation while I am tending to the people of my parish. A. C. Craig wrote, "A very wise old pastor once

told me of two equal and opposite errors a preacher can fall into. One was to neglect his study for his people. The other was to neglect his people for study. Both errors are tragic. People and study are in constant tension and competition with each other but both must be attended to."²

Parish priest, you must learn about the world of the Bible. It points to Jesus.

Parish priest, you must also learn about the world of your people. That is also an unending task.

I believe with John Stott that to "expound the Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and His people obey Him." The pastor's heart of Joseph Parker exclaimed, "Preach to the suffering, and you will never lack a congregation. There is a broken heart in every pew."

In a recent interview, William L. Self said,

Preaching is worth the effort. It is the greatest thing in the world if you are called to do it.

Furthermore, the Church is worth it—it really is. Don't despair over the Church or give up on it. Every preacher is tempted to do that at one time or another. But the Church is where the action is. If God is going to do anything in this world, He is going to do it through His Church.

The work of the parish priest marches on unendingly. The hours

grow long. Emotions dip and soar. Bodies grow weary. There's an occasional "payday" when a sinner is converted or a weak saint bears a resemblance to Jesus. And there is an occasional "glimpse of glory"! I'm just a parish priest, but I agree with Joseph Parker: "Sunday is my festival day. I love Sunday. All the days of the week lead up to it, and I hold high festival with my God and my people every Sabbath!"

Arthur John Gossip served as pastor of St. Matthew's Church in Glasgow. One week was filled with parish emergencies. He had spent hours in hospitals with sick parishioners. He had stood by the bed of the dying. He had immersed himself in the suffering and heartbreak of his people. The pressure of many things had made it difficult to prepare his sermon as thoroughly as he should. William Barclay heard Dr. Gossip say,

"You know the stairs up to the pulpit in St. Matthews? You know the bend on the stair? Jesus Christ met me there. I saw Him clearly as I see you. He looked at the sermon in my hand. 'Gossip,' He said to me, 'is this the best you could do for Me this week?' Thinking back over the business of that week, I could honestly say, 'Yes, Lord, it is my best.'

"Jesus Christ took that poor thing that Sunday morning, and in His hands it became a trumpet."³

"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant. . . . For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 3:5-6; 4:5). **PM**

1. Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 76-77.

2. James D. Berkley, ed., *Preaching to Convince* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Christianity Today, 1986), 155.

3. William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 13.

BY RANDAL E. DENNY

Precious Moments of Worship

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 Glasel 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 the 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.

R 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-renowned 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 the 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." **PM**

BY RANDAL E
DENNY

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What I Learned from Receiving Pastoral Care

Unlike some professions, pastors remain on call 24 hours a day. Most of us have been jarred awake in the middle of the night to face emergencies with our parishioners. We wouldn't want it any other way. The Lord we serve has grace to fit every crisis. He has commissioned us with the privilege of standing in for Him when people suffer distress, illness, and bereavement.

Summoned into some situations, I have felt unsure about what to say, or what to do, or what to expect. However, in the worst of those times, God enabled me to bring encouragement and hope. The Lord set me free when He taught me the invaluable lesson that just being there and caring for people was a ministry He could use.

Pastoral care, with all of its facets, calls for a general practitioner with a person-to-person ministry. In an age of specialization, people still need pastors with a compassionate common touch.

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul referred to three persons of whom he exclaimed, "They refreshed my spirit" (1 Cor. 16:17-18). In his last letter, Paul expressed gratitude to Onesiphorus "because he often refreshed me" (2 Tim. 1:16).

The "refreshing spirit of encouragement" shines more brightly from the receiving end. In fact, having been refreshed by the pastoral care from others has served to make me more effective as a pastor.

My first memory of pastoral care focuses on Orville Jenkins, our minister. Though I was only a second grader, my pastor stood beside my bed as I recovered from an emergency surgery. From then on, I always felt he loved me.

Early in my ministry, on the day I received bad news of my father's stroke, my district superintendent, E. L. Cornelison, came to my home. After sharing my sorrow and uncertainties, he prayed for me and my family. Being there when I needed him, he refreshed my spirit.

During my tenure as senior pastor at Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, I ended up in the hospital. My own associate, Victor Peters, ministered to me faithfully. He told me that my presence at church was missed and that he loved me. He read a few reassuring verses of Scripture and prayed for my recovery—and left in less than five minutes. Dr. Peters was a master at refreshing my spirit.

Passing through a career crisis 10 years ago, my wife and I had nowhere to go. After my resignation, we faced an uncertain future. However, our spirits were refreshed by ministerial friends who cared about us. Bill Draper, the late president of Point Loma Nazarene College, gave us a safe retreat and his personal attention. Respected pastor Maurice Hall prayed with us over the phone long-distance. General Superintendents William Greathouse and Jerald Johnson of-

ferred encouragement and support by phone and in person. In our lonely time of transition, fellow pastor Jack Eyestone spent time with us and encouraged us in the Lord. Forrest Stone turned his pulpit over to me for a month—I suspect more for my benefit than anyone else's. We felt the safety net of pastoral care, the refreshing spirit of encouragement.

As the black clouds of death gathered around my parents' home in Fresno, John Payton and Doug Samples moved beyond friendship and ministered to my family and me. In those days of bereavement, I received from them words of our hope in Christ, words of confidence in God's heaven, and words of strength to face life's changes.

From the receiving end of pastoral care, I have realized what a profound difference it makes. One no longer feels so alone in crisis. Reminders of truths one already knows help to keep a balanced view of life and beyond. The Bible reassures, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

I am a better pastor today for having received the touch of loving hands. I know better how to listen and reflect the emotions of hurting people. I know much more eloquently the supporting role of just being there when needed. I am far more sensitive to the high privilege of representing Jesus. Where human words fall short, I am more confident in sharing the Word of God—it's always the right word at the right time. From my pastoral friends who were there when I needed them, I have learned to be more lavish in expressing my love.

It is my prayer that our parishioners could say of you and me, "He often refreshed me." **PM**

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

To Be Used of God

Acts 16:1-15

The way many Christians equip themselves for serving God reminds me of the small boy saying to his father, "Tomorrow I am going fishing with Bill."

Pointing to a compost pile in the yard, his father asked, "Would you like some bait, Son?"

The lad replied, "No, thanks, Dad. We don't use bait. Where we're going, there aren't any fish."

God called His people to be fishers of men, but amazingly we don't go where the people are, nor do we know how to use our bait!

Though called to a life of service, many Christians pray, "Use me, Lord—especially in an advisory capacity!" While we would prefer to dictate the time and place for our service to God, we should ask with Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6, κλν).

After dissolving partnership with Barnabas, Paul took Silas and toured the young churches in Syria, Cilicia, and the Galatian area. "He came to Derbe and then to Lystra" (v. 1). Though Luke gives more space to pioneering churches than to the development of churches, Acts 16:1-15 portrays how God provides a place of service.

God Gives Helpers

The Lord knew the large vacancy Barnabas would leave in Paul's life. As Paul stubbornly, but sadly, walked his separate

way, the Lord began providing new helpers. God knows how much we really do need each other. Augustine once said, "One loving heart on fire!"

The appointment of fellow workers in the church remains under God's authority. He can bring the right ones together to do a great work for His kingdom. Silas became Paul's number one assistant. He possessed a good reputation, important ties with the apostles in Jerusalem, Roman citizenship, and the mark of God's calling upon his life.

As Paul and Silas toured Galatia, a second helper joined their group—Timothy. In Acts 14, during the first missionary journey, Paul had been dragged out of Lystra, stoned, and left for dead. One of the witnesses that day was a young boy, 14 or 15 years old, named Timothy. His mother and grandmother became Christians then. The impact of Christ was written indelibly on Timothy's heart. Now, years later, he joined Paul and was loved as a son. One day this trusted helper would receive two of Paul's most personal letters—immortalized in the New Testament for all to read.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy ended up in Troas—the ancient city of Troy. There, the group is joined by the author of Acts—Luke the physician. He became the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. As Paul's helper, this historian and scholar was a bright addition.

God knows we gain insight and strength and encouragement

from our coworkers and helpers. One writer commented,

Spiritual growth occurs best in a caring community. There are spiritual truths I will never grasp and Christian standards I will never attain except as I share in community with other believers—and this is God's plan. The Holy Spirit ministers to us, in large measure, through each other. This is what Paul is talking about when he says, "We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" [Eph. 4:15-16].¹

Sometimes one of us will be able to see spiritual truths and directions for Christian living when someone else cannot. Thank God, the Lord enables us to serve together—helping, encouraging, praying, caring!

At this point, Luke slips in his fourth progress report of the Church: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (v. 5).

God Gives Guidance

As we seek to serve God, He has promised to guide us. If we are divinely guided, we shall be divinely guarded.

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas (vv. 6-8).

God can effectively close doors. They wanted to go into the southwestern part of modern Turkey known then as Asia, but God stopped them. They wished to enter Bithynia, one of the richest provinces, but God would not let them. Paul had planned

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

on Bithynia but ended up in Troas! It was not his first choice.

Knowing how persistent Paul could be, I'm sure he tried hard to get into Bithynia. He never did anything halfway. But his way was blocked! His plan was broken! The Bible says, "The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them"—a vivid description of God's closed doors in life. Paul may have arrived at Troas discouraged or confused: "I wanted to go to Bithynia, and here I am in Troas. What's going on?"

We don't know how God closed the doors—whether health or wealth or bureaucratic red tape or hostile people or a deep inner compulsion to halt. To Paul's credit, he was sensitive enough to recognize the Spirit's restraint.

In later years, Paul would be allowed to go into those forbidden areas—but not now. God has His timing. At times He seems very slow, but we must pay attention to the Spirit's restraints. Learn to wait for God's timing. There is a certain tide of the Spirit. Don't miss it! God works to accurate timetables. Don't push ahead when the Spirit tries to check you. The Bible says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7, KJV). The stops—as well as the steps—"of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (v. 23, KJV)!

Missionary Adoniram Judson faced closed doors in Burma. He suffered humiliation and disappointment. Could Judson see God's leadership? Of course not; he was human. Do you think as he lay in the emperor's prison he could always sense God's purpose? Of course not; he was human. But God eventually revealed His direction for Judson's ministry.

The famous artist Whistler started out as a soldier at West Point Military Academy. Unfortunately, he felt, he flunked out because he could not pass the chemistry course. He noted, "If silicon had been a gas, I should have been a major general." Having failed, he halfheartedly attempted engineering. Almost

accidentally, he tried painting and became famous. God reveals His area of service to us in many different ways.

A customs officer in Mexico was converted. When the missionary had to leave, he left the man a Bible and told him to let the Holy Spirit guide. Thirteen months later the missionary returned. The young Christian was doing fine but was puzzled. He pointed to 13 attractively bound religious books he had bought from a salesman. He said, "I started to read, but something in here [pointing to his heart] said to me, 'Don't read those books!'" They were Jehovah's Witnesses books. Though he had never heard of the cult, the Holy Spirit protected him.

God can effectively close doors for our own good!

When we live in the realm of the Spirit, God's no becomes part of His ultimate yes! Learn to be grateful that God says no when it's for our good.

God can explicitly open doors. An old Italian proverb says, "When God shuts a door, He opens a window!" Many barriers in life have led to broader fields of service. Paul's great scheme to evangelize Bithynia fell in ruins. Paul and his companions came to Troas unemployed, frustrated, and puzzled by the closed doors all around them.

Wanting Bithynia and getting Troas! What a common experience! But Paul takes Troas—his second choice—and it became the door to greater opportunity. Though his dreams were shaken, Paul still believed God had a purpose for his life. Paul's attitude was, "If God has led me here, there is something here worthwhile to do!" God never leads a person into any place where all the doors are shut.

God can exalt second choices. His plan is always better. God's will for your field of service is the best plan and the most effective use of your abilities, talents, and spiritual gifts. Though God's plan appears to be second

choice, it has a way of being most fulfilling and exciting.

God knows where and how we can serve best. William Carey planned to go to the South Sea Islands, but the Holy Spirit sent him to India. Barnardo felt directed to China, but God kept him in England. Judson aimed at India, but God directed his steps to Burma.

At Troas, God began unfolding the open door of Paul's service. Out of Paul's frustrations, a dream was born! God directs our lives that way. Isaiah wrote, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you," usually a sense of peace, a quiet inner confirmation (30:21).

God guides us in at least five ways. First, God sometimes guides by a strong conviction or deep certainty of some specific assignment. Second, God sometimes guides by closing doors, by unexpected developments that hinder your immediate goal—progress suddenly blocked. Third, God sometimes guides by opening doors, providing opportunities. Fourth, God sometimes guides by His inner voice, a distinct impression or communication in the inner man. Fifth, God often guides by His voice in the Bible, His revealed Word of promise and direction.

Trusting God to guide rests on the fact that He has a wonderful plan for your life and that He will guide you to it. Theology calls that "providence." God's providence is neither fatalism nor accidentalism. Fatalism says everything has been arranged beforehand. Accidentalism says nothing is arranged beforehand. But God's providence follows His great strategy in which there's room for personal freedom and response. God's providence is flexible enough to include free moral choice and forceful enough to overrule the possibility of ultimate failure.

God's purposes do not always make themselves plain each day. Things often happen that seem to

The appointment of fellow workers in the church remains under God's authority.

make no sense at all—to add nothing to God's ultimate plan and purpose. But keep in mind: there's more to come! The story isn't over yet! There is another chapter!

The cross of Jesus made no sense on that terrifying Friday. It took a Resurrection to make sense out of it.

For Phillips Brooks, his Bithynia was a career as a college professor. Plunging into his chosen profession, Brooks failed miserably. He wrote about his students in a letter: "They are the most disagreeable set of creatures without exception that I have ever met. . . . I really am ashamed of it, but I am tired, cross, and almost dead, so good night!"

After Brooks failed and dropped out of his teaching profession, he wrote, "I don't know what will become of me, and I don't care much." He wanted Bithynia and got Troas. Fortunately he found God's area of service for his life. Phillips Brooks became one of America's greatest pulpiteers. As pastor of one of Boston's historic churches, he got this cherished letter:

Dear Mr. Brooks:

I am a tailor in a little shop near your church. Whenever I have the opportunity I always go to hear you preach. Each time I hear you preach I seem to forget all about you, for you make me think of God.

Had Phillips Brooks gotten Bithynia, he would have gotten buried in academia, but through Troas came God's open door to service throughout the English-speaking world.

Many years ago a lad longed for his Bithynia as a concert musician. However, he couldn't play or sing very well. A friend named Amati, a skilled violin maker, told him, "There are many ways of making music. What matters is the song in the heart."

Arriving at his own Troas, the song of his heart was expressed. Antonio Stradivari became one of the world's greatest violin makers.

G. Campbell Morgan summed it up brilliantly: "It is better to go

to Troas with God than anywhere else without Him."

God Gives Inspiration

"So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (vv. 8-9).

There's the inspiration of the Divine Presence. Paul knew he had been given a vision by God. In his time of perplexity, God was near. God would enthuse him—meaning "God in you." That's genuine inspiration. One has said, "The visions of God are only seen through the lens of a pure heart."² God inspires a person beyond himself.

On August 22, 1741, George Frideric Handel shut himself into his room. Working at his desk, he labored for three weeks like a man divinely possessed. He rarely ate or slept. When he did eat, he worked with one hand and ate with the other. Though he had no commission and might never hear his composition performed, he heard a higher voice than the public. He was composing the oratorio *The Messiah*.

One day a servant found him weeping at his desk. Handel turned to him, his face shining through his tears: "I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God himself!" He had just completed the "Hallelujah Chorus." Handel had the inspiration of the Divine Presence.

In our areas of service, even in mundane tasks, God's presence is the glory of our day. He is our inspiration—God in you!

There's the inspiration of holy purpose. Suddenly Paul knew God's direction for him. As an old Quaker once said, "God can teach thee more by one flash of His light than thou canst learn in a lifetime without it!" It was in Troas that Paul caught a vision of an open door only 60 miles across the water—Macedonia. God's vision to Paul leaped across the straits into Greece, on to Europe, and from there around the world.

Let God's vision lift your hori-

zons. You'll catch a glimpse of His holy purposes.

Let human need inspire you. So often when we get to our Troas, we pity ourselves. Wallowing in disappointment, we miss the vision of that man from Macedonia crying, "Come over and help us!"

Dr. Karl Menninger was asked what to do if one felt a nervous breakdown coming on. The famous psychiatrist replied, "If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone in need, and do something for him."

A young woman in New York gave up a prized position in a school attended by children of wealthy homes. She took an assignment in a squalid district on the East Side. She explained, "These East Side kids have so little. School is the one bright spot in their lives. The children in my other school had everything. They even rode to school with nurses and chauffeurs. There was no 'kick' in it for me."

Life's richest rewards, Jesus taught, are the joys from helping others.

Macartney said it eloquently:

The man from Macedonia . . . wears every kind of clothing. . . . Sometimes this man of Macedonia is a Greek, sometimes a Roman or a Jew or a Frenchman, a German or an Englishman, sometimes an African . . . an Indian . . . a Korean, a Japanese, a Chinese (even an American). . . . This man from Macedonia speaks every language under the sun. But wherever and whoever he is, whatever his color and whatever his speech, there is one thing about him . . . always the same—he . . . needs help; he needs Christ. . . . Wherever you find him, the sentence is the same: "Come over . . . and help us" (v. 9).³

God Gives Ministry

God can use the person with instant obedience.

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to

If we are
divinely
guided, we
shall be
divinely
guarded.

The stops
—as well
as the steps
—of a
good man
are ordered
by the
Lord!

leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia (vv. 10-12).

The vision was neither wasted nor debated. The vision that leads to no action is not a vision—only a daydream.

The dean of the agricultural school asked the freshman, "Why have you chosen this career?"

The freshman replied, "I dream of making a million dollars in farming like my father."

The dean was impressed.

"Your father made a million dollars in farming?"

"No," said the student, "but he always dreamed of it!"

Paul's vision moved him to action: "Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia" (v. 10, κλν). As soon as daylight came, they checked passage for the first available ship to Greece. God didn't need to call twice. They were ready to obey.

A member of my church said to me, "I promised the Lord I would do the first thing I was asked to do!" He did—and God used him. God uses people who are ready to serve.

"From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight" (v. 11). The Greek sailing term for "sailed straight" means "running with the wind." With one stop, the voyage only took two days. Later, upon their return, it took five days to sail upwind. Sometimes when we go on the King's business, the wind is with us—things go easy. But sometimes it's against us—and in sailing, going upwind is more invigorating! God's timings are just right—He overcomes any circumstances that hinder.

Paul's missionary band arrived and went right to the capital city, Philippi. Twenty years after the birth of the Church at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Paul took the good news of Jesus to a capital city on

the European continent. Philippi stood on the site of the battle between Antony and Octavius against Brutus and Cassius. It had been founded by Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. They were right where the action is—and that continued to be Paul's philosophy of missions.

God can use the person with intentional service. Paul went there on purpose: "On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there" (v. 13).

Since there were no synagogues in Philippi, when the Sabbath day came, they went down near the river. Jews often held prayer meetings near water in absence of a synagogue, since many Jewish ceremonies include rituals of washing. Paul sought out opportunities to talk about Jesus. When do you?

Too many Christians are like the fellow of whom it was said, "He served the Lord off and on for 40 years."

However, Paul the tentmaker was like William Carey, of whom a friend said, "You are running around preaching, witnessing to people, and you are neglecting your shoe repair business. Don't you think you should give more time and attention to your business?"

Carey replied, "My business is extending God's kingdom. Shoe repairing just pays the expenses!"

Dr. Albert Schweitzer personified service: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve!"

Of the two boys in the Taylor family, the eldest determined to make a name for his family. He became a member of the British Parliament in his quest for fame.

The younger brother followed Christ to China. Hudson Taylor, the missionary, died beloved and known on every continent. A student of history looked in the en-

cyclopedia to see what the elder son had accomplished. He found only these words: "The brother of Hudson Taylor."

Service for Jesus makes life worth living.

God can use the person with immediate availability. "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home" (vv. 14-15). Amazingly, when Paul made himself available to God, the Holy Spirit led him right to those whose hearts were ripe and ready. God introduced him to strategic converts.

Lydia was the first Christian convert in Europe. Years later, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi from a Roman prison, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:3-5). What was the first day? The day Lydia opened her heart to Jesus Christ. What a joyful occasion that was! The Philippian church became the healthiest, happiest church to whom Paul wrote. It was always his special crowning joy.

God will give each of us a ministry of joy. As we determine to serve Him, to respond with instant obedience, and to make ourselves available to Him, God will use us greatly!

A visitor who came into the sanctuary late whispered to the person in the pew beside him, "When does the service begin?"

The reply was, "Sir, the service begins as soon as the meeting ends." **PM**

1. Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 75.

2. John D. Drysdale, *The Price of Revival* (Liverpool, England: C. Tinling and Co., 1946), 19.

3. Clarence Edward Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), 236.

It took a Resurrection to make sense out of the Cross.

What Is Success in Ministry?

In a conversation at a recent staff meeting, I asked my friends, "Do you know what I would like to have on my tombstone?" I replied in jest, "He isn't here yet!"

One staff member asked on a more serious note, "What would you really like your tombstone to say?"

Though I didn't answer then, many thoughtful moments later I decided on what I hoped would fit with spectators' memories: "He loved much and faithfully pointed to Jesus."

In June of 1990, the Consultation on Clergy Preparation met in beautiful Breckenridge, Colorado. During our discussion times the same question kept reappearing: "What is success in ministry?" Church administrators, professors, and pastors sincerely avoided giving glib answers torn from the success catalog of worldly kingdoms. We seek the model of servant leadership revealed in Jesus. In God's kingdom, success in ministry builds on the consistent character of Christ being revealed in the servant leader. Success is being faithful to God and serving His people.

My understanding of success in ministry was recently en-

hanced by a book I was asked to review: Leslie B. Flynn, *How to Survive in the Ministry*, by Kregel Publications. Leslie Flynn retired after 40 years in one church. He said, "Forty years is a long time! Forty years without fireworks, though not without flare-ups!" (p. 7). The book is full of personal experiences and reflections by a good and godly man who loved his people and served God faithfully. He felt the rapture of rising tides of attendance and enthusiasm. He held steady when the disappointing downturns inevitably came. Flynn's book echoed the thoughts of a well-balanced minister who continually worked at improving his ministerial skills and insights.

Reflecting on his lengthy tenure in one church, Leslie Flynn concludes: "When a church blossoms, the credit may not totally belong to the pastor, for there may be other contributing factors. Contrariwise, when a church fades, the blame likely does not rest fully on the pastor either, for other factors probably enter in. What we call success is relative, but if one has been called to the ministry, faithfulness is what the Lord requires" (p. 29).

In a five-page section of chap-

ter 11, Flynn gives five suggestions on "How a Pastor Helps Build a Supportive Congregation." Though each is elaborated one senses the heart of a faithful loving, successful pastor:

"Regard Your People as Friends, Not as Enemies."

"Treat Everyone Alike."

"Make Few Demands on Your Congregation."

"Encourage Members to Have Concern for Each Other."

"Never Nurse Resentment."

In his last chapter, Flynn reminds us: "A pastor should be the first to recognize that any seeming success comes from the Lord. When all goes well—increasing crowds, growing budgets, building programs, souls won and edified—a mature leader knows where the credit should go. . . . Samuel Chadwick summed it up well, 'If successful, don't crow; if defeated, don't croak'" (p. 144).

This week I celebrate 10 years as pastor of my church. Most of my contemporary peers have been "promoted" from pastoral ministry. It seemed over the past several weeks that I, too, might have a career-changing "promotion." The final phone call never came. However, the process extended long enough for me to reevaluate God's call to preach and to appreciate deeply my placement by Him as a long-term pastor among an eager, warmhearted congregation. If the Lord tarries and He allows me to continue serving in my present assignment, I seek to please Him and to love my people.

Perhaps someone someday would review my ministry and conclude, "He loved much and faithfully pointed to Jesus." **PM**

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Serendipities of Work and Witness

From childhood I wanted to be a missionary. God never gave a clear call or opened missionary doors. With great joy I took teenagers to work on the Navajo reservation. Later my wife and I were excited to work for a few weeks in Honduras with pioneer missionaries Stanley and Norma Storey.

Since then I have traveled with my church on two Work and Witness projects. A recent project in Guatemala centered on construction of the Mexico and Central America regional office building. We did the things you expect to do—work, preach through interpreters, sightsee, and some shopped. After the dust has settled now, certain serendipities stand out to me. (*Serendipity*: an apparent aptitude for making fortunate discoveries accidentally.)

You experience genuine appreciation. One weekend our team of 22 visited the city of Quezaltenango, where we had built a church building a few years earlier. The people of that church expressed deep and genuine appreciation in many ways. They lavished their gratitude on us for being a part of a great church that brought them the good news of Jesus.

You experience gracious generosity. A church in Puerto Barrios heard that our Work and Witness team was coming through their town. They insisted on providing us a welcome. Even though many of the con-

gregation are presently out of work, pastor and people shared with us a delicious feast. A spontaneous evening service began—and I was spontaneously notified that I would preach! The people hugged the whole team, knelt behind us at the altar, and prayed for us with fervent spirit. We who intended to be givers received much from them.

You experienced family fellowship. Though you would expect to be strangers, there is almost instant bonding with fellow Christians. Language barriers and cultural differences and economic strata all seem to fall before the common bond of following Jesus. In Christ, we have an instant extended family. You could see it in their eyes. You could hear it in their singing. You could feel it in their prayers. Even though I can only “baby-talk” in Spanish, I rejoice in Jesus’ family—new friends that touched my heart without successful conversation.

You experience refreshing enthusiasm. Anglo worship services in North America are tame in comparison to the lively, joyful expressions of worship in missions areas. You readily sense that their Christian walk has touched all of life—not just the reserved sections for religious duties. We pastors who are tired of coaxing testimonies out of reluctant saints bask in the enthusiasm of a holy love caught on fire! Since Latin culture is not tied so tightly to time schedules,

they have the time for something good to happen—and they are excited about it!

You experience enlightened respect. For example, I have known missionaries Harold and Emily Ray of Guatemala longer than they want me to tell. Through the many years since our school days, we have had them in our churches to tell their story. Their selfless ministry has always provoked love and respect from me. But seeing them in action among their people and hearing the vivid experiences on the spot, I have *profound* respect for their contribution to the kingdom of God. In conveying to my family my deep, enlightened respect for the Rays, I was so moved to tears that I could not finish my explanation.

Watching Regional Director Jerry Porter provide instant interpretation during a meeting of Dr. Robert Scott, World Mission director, and the district superintendents of Guatemala, I was dumbfounded. Seeing our missionaries, national leaders of the church, and dedicated pastors and wives, I am reminded of the parenthetical phrase in Heb. 11: “the world was not worthy of them” (v. 38). As a pastor with exposure to Work and Witness projects, I can never be the same!

But neither can my church be the same. Some pastors wonder, “Will Work and Witness take money away from our local church?” Here’s another serendipity! A few days after returning from our Work and Witness project, our church voted to build an addition to provide room for more growth. Two weeks after raising building pledges, our church surpassed its goal for faith promise for world missions. It won’t be easy, but it will be inspiring!

A word of caution: one fellow who went on our first Work and Witness team to Quezaltenango four years ago has just gone to Swaziland as a missionary. Well, you can’t win all the time! **PM**

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Victory Through Surrender

Matt. 26:36-46
cf. Mark 14:32-42;
Luke 22:39-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:36-39).

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:43-44).

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and

prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Matt. 26:40-46).

In transoceanic flight there is a point pilots refer to as the point of no return. When this particular spot is crossed, it is closer to continue on ahead than to turn back. At that moment there is nothing left to do but go forward.

For Jesus that moment came in the Garden of Gethsemane. That hour of decision would mark the destiny of His life. He had reached His point of no return!

Preaching on this Gethsemane experience, Dr. John Henry Jowett commented to his con-

gregation: "And now I lead you by a path that I almost fear to tread."

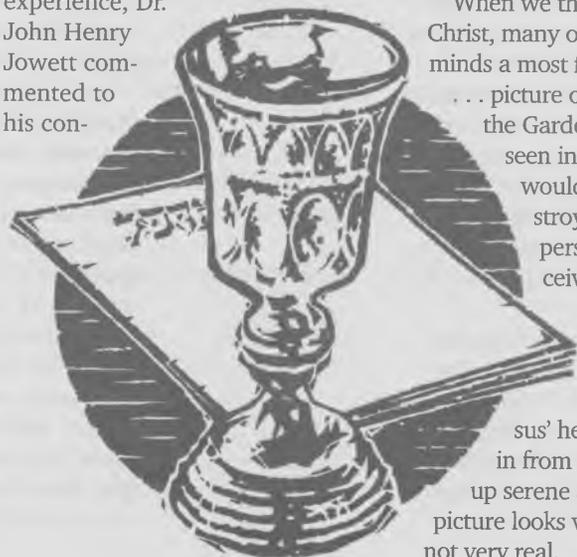
When an old church building in Richmond, Virginia, was torn down, workmen found a stained-glass picture of Jesus praying in Gethsemane. An earlier generation had covered the window with organ pipes, and the brick wall of a neighboring structure obscured it on the outside. Nearly everyone had forgotten it was there.

But for the students of the Bible, Jesus praying in Gethsemane remains holy ground. There is mystery about it. An awesome atmosphere makes us catch our breath lest we disturb the sanctity of that moment! We feel that more has gone on than meets the eye. Jesus utters the most important prayer we can offer: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). It is not the cry of defeat, but the declaration of total submission: victory through surrender!

Dr. E. Stanley Jones observed, "Everybody surrenders—surrenders to something, someone or [the Savior]." Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane wrestled over the issue: would He bypass the Cross, or would He willingly take up His cross? Would He shun the shame of bearing the world's sin, or give himself sacrificially in love? At Gethsemane, the Master kneels at the crossroads of eternity!

One preacher said:

When we think of the praying Christ, many of us hold in our minds a most familiar picture, a . . . picture of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, seen in many churches. I would not wish to destroy any inspiration a person may have received from it, but the next time you see it, notice something. A halo is about Jesus' head. Light streams in from above. He looks up serene and calm. The picture looks very holy, but it is not very real.



BY RANDAL E.
 DENNY

The halo makes Jesus different from us! So does the light. We have no halos. We are ordinary people. We have no light streaming at us from above, not in that way. Prayer for us is effort, exertion, struggle. Was it not that for Jesus? What actually happened in Gethsemane when He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood—was that not struggle? Effort? He had no halo! The moment Jesus receives a halo and light, He is no longer the human Jesus of the Gospels. We destroy the whole gospel story. We deny that Jesus is man, actually man, so completely man that He *needs* to pray!²

The Bible says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7).

Gethsemane is the place of openness, brokenness, and yield-
edness!

The Place of Openness

Leaving the comforting presence of His special friends, Jesus opened himself to God. On the eve of crisis, Jesus prayed alone, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus was as human as you and I. The tragedy of suffering and dying loomed ahead. Jesus spoke honestly with God: "What are You saying, Father? I don't like it—but I am listening!"

Sometimes God's direction for us demands high cost. Persecution has taken many forms. It hurts to suffer over one's own mistakes and sins, but it is agony to suffer for the mistakes and sins of *others!* Through it all, we must keep open to God. We must not shut Him out or drown out His voice with our objections.

It is not sin against God to question Him, to lament misfortune, to doubt the rightness of a

situation. To express our hesitancy, to verbalize our fears, and to struggle over our limited understanding underlines our dependence upon a great and powerful God.

Like Jesus, we must realistically face whatever God calls us to. There's no reason to pretend that genuine discipleship is light-hearted and easy. The high cost of discipleship is exceeded only by the high cost of low living!

My friend C. S. Cowles said, "Jesus faced the cup. He did not try to pretend that its bitter contents did not exist. Nor did He seek mystic flights of spiritual escape. The cup had come to Him, not by His choice or decision, but in the course of faithfully doing the Father's will. He shrank from its implications."³

As He struggled with God's will, Jesus got up three times and went back to look at His sleeping disciples, so weak and weary. It gave Him a perspective on God's purposes: He must accept God's will for their sakes. Even though sleeping, they believed on Him, trusted Him, and put their fortunes on Him. Jesus knew He must drink the cup of death in order for His men to drink the cup of life!

Jesus based His openness to God on a trusting relationship. He prayed, "My Father." Even in the face of suffering, Jesus knew that God was no distant, hostile God—but His intimate, caring Father. Our view of God makes a great difference in how we face tough places in life.

I love my two girls. Suppose that when I came home when they were small, they said to me, "Daddy, we missed you. We've decided to do anything you desire. You tell us, and we'll do it."

If I had answered the way many people view God's reaction to our consecration, I would have grabbed them, shaken them hard, and shouted, "I've been waiting for this chance! I'll make you regret this decision as long as you live. I'm going to take all the fun out of your life. You'll eat

turnips three times a day if you serve me!"

No—not at all. You know what I would do: because I'm their father, I would put my arms around them and love them. I would do my best to demonstrate my love. I would guide them into the best possible, most fruitful life. And I'm only a man with limitations and poor judgment. I can't even express my love as adequately and completely as God does.

Our God reaches down with His infinite compassion, helps us in our deepest needs, and demonstrates in a thousand ways that He loves us. We have nothing to fear by opening ourselves to Him: "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42, *KJV*)!

We must learn to be open to God's will. God is not controlled by His power. He exercises His power, but He is guided by His wisdom. If we remain open to God, we allow His wisdom to work in our lives. We are enriched by the wisdom of our Father.

As we pray, "Not my will, but yours be done," we are saying, "Lord, I am available!"

The Place of Brokenness

Even the name, "Gethsemane," is a clue to what happens there. The Hebrew word "Gethsemane" means "olive mill" or "olive press." Not only was it the Mount of Olives where olives grew in silver-green orchards beneath sunlit skies, but also it was there ripe olives were broken and crushed. Out of the experience of brokenness flowed precious olive oil for food and health, for lamplight, and as an ointment for healing.

In this place of brokenness, Jesus passed through crushing agony. "It pleased the LORD to bruise him" (Isa. 53:10, *KJV*) and crush Him so that the fresh oil of the Holy Spirit might soon flow to all who believe on Him. His oil of blessing nourishes our spirits, gives light to those in dark-

Gethsemane
is the
place of
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brokenness,
and
yielded-
ness!

ness, and brings healing to the heartaches of humanity.

Gethsemane, the place of brokenness, brings to mind the words of the Lord to Isaiah: "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. . . . I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support" (63:3, 5).

Jesus left eight men near the gateway to the Garden of Gethsemane. He took three men up the hill a little farther: Peter, James, and John. Why did He select them? Had not all three recently boasted of their willingness to suffer or serve for the Master? If Jesus had asked them to perform some great heroic duty, they would have done it. Yet they got drowsy when Jesus only asked them to "watch with me for one hour" (Matt. 26:40). I think Jesus yearned to have them near for comfort and support in His lonely hour of spiritual battle.

Earlier, Jesus had taken these same three fellows up the Mount of Transfiguration. They witnessed His glory on the mountaintop. And now Jesus knows they must prepare to share in His suffering. If you and I expect to reign with Him, we should not be surprised to suffer with Him (2 Tim. 2:12, KJV).

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for ev'ryone,
And there's a cross for me.*
—Thomas Shepherd and others

The apostle Paul exclaimed, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). He will give us grace and glory!

Jesus demonstrated that there is a place of brokenness before God. Matthew described it: "And he began to be sorrowful and troubled" (26:37). A spirit of heaviness pressed on Him like a lead weight. He would be broken by the weight of bearing the sins

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of the world! Already it was crushing Him. Jesus bore my sins—every one of them. He was taking on yours too. The Master cried out to His intimate companions, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (v. 38).

In that Eastern culture, the usual position for prayer was standing, but Jesus, broken before God, fell to His knees! It was not the religious curtsy performed so mechanically, but rather the violence of His personal struggle. Jesus agonized over our sins. How can we be so nonchalant about them?

God can't fully use us until our proud self is broken. The unyielding, unteachable self justifies itself. It demands its own way, stands up for its rights, and seeks its own glory. That self within must be broken before the Lord. We must die to self-will. Brokenness is our humble response to God's conviction in our hearts. Jesus, having enjoyed heaven's splendor, gave it all up to come down among us, being "obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8). He was willing to be broken for us. Paul admonishes, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (v. 5).

A man said to his Christian friend, "I've absolutely hit bottom. All my strength is gone!" For nearly 30 minutes he told of all the things that had knocked him down. Then he added, "I've hit bottom. I can't go any farther down. I have to admit I can't handle my life any longer."

His Christian friend asked, "Is that it? Have you really hit bottom?"

"Yes," the discouraged man replied. "Isn't that awful?"

"Awful?" his companion responded. "Not on your life! That's wonderful. I congratulate you!"

"What do you mean? I just told you I've hit bottom. Why do you congratulate me?"

The Christian explained, "Be-

cause there's no place quite like the bottom. You can't go down any farther. That's it. That's the stopping place. Good, firm, substantial bottom—and you're right smack on it! Congratulations, because the only direction ahead of you—up! So, thank God you've hit bottom, and you're not going any farther down!"

The startled man asked, "But what about not having any more strength? I can't handle my life anymore."

The friend added, "That's simply wonderful too. It means you're at the place where you're ready to put your life in the hands of One who can take charge of it—Jesus Christ."

In his desperation and brokenness before God, that man was introduced to a Heavenly Father who began to help him put life back together.

If you will be open and honest with God, He will show you your real self. When we admit that God is right about us, we find ourselves at a place of brokenness! Then, and only then, comes His healing touch.

When we pray, "Not my will, but yours be done," we are saying, "Lord, I am dependent."

The Place of Yieldedness

Jesus prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42, KJV). His was a prayer of surrender, of relinquishment to God.

Jesus' prayer of yieldedness contains a special note hidden in translation. The grammatical construction of the verb "be done" means literally, "Thy will keep on being done." In other words, this prayer of surrender wasn't just for that moment—the present crisis—but it is a yieldedness as a way of life. When I pray it as Jesus said it, I mean, "I surrender or yield it all now and will keep it surrendered and yielded day in and day out." A person doesn't say, "Not my will, but yours be done" only in the great Gethsemanes of life but

must learn to pray it through all of life's trials and decisions.

The attitude in which you say "Your will be done" makes a difference. You might say in an attitude of helpless submission, caught in the jaws of fate, "Thy will be done." Or you might say it as one whipped into line as an admission of total defeat! Or you might say "Thy will be done" in utter frustration that your dream will never come true, that all hope is gone, that you are left with only bleak regret. Perhaps with bitterness in surrender, you feel you can't do anything else.

However, you can say "Thy will be done" with the joyful assent of perfect trust and obedience. That's how Jesus said it—as one talking to His Father, whose "everlasting arms . . . underneath" held Him steady (Deut. 33:27). Jesus yielded to a love that would never let Him go! God will mend your broken heart if you will give Him all the pieces!

Jesus' prayer did not express a passive submission to His Father. He prayed with determination to allow God's will to take precedence. Jesus yielded in order to follow God's purposes for His life—and ours.

When Julius Caesar sailed across the English Channel with his Roman legions, they were turned back at first by the Saxons. They made a second attempt to conquer the British Isles, but the Saxons, looking down from the cliffs, drove them away. The third time, however, once the Roman soldiers arrived on shore with all their equipment, Caesar ordered every one of their ships burned behind them. The men watched their own ships burn to the waterline and sink.

With the last hope of retreat gone, the soldiers, though greatly outnumbered, marched straight ahead into the fury of the Saxons. The Saxons ran away. Total commitment—yieldedness without retreat—left them with great determination to win. The Ro-

mans had no choice but to advance—and conquer!

Our Gethsemane experiences demand that kind of yieldedness and submission to God's purposes. I like the spirit of the gospel song that says:

*Thou didst hear my plea so kindly;
Thou didst grant me so much grace.
Ev'ry bridge is burned behind me;
I will ne'er my steps retrace.*

—Johnson Oatman Jr.

The place of surrender is never easy. We must face the fact of the Cross in our lives. It demands sacrifice. However, the victory of Jesus' cross was won in prayer during His Gethsemane experience. His actions on the morrow, facing trial, disgrace, and crucifixion, merely carried out His decision made in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42; cf. Luke 22:42).

Did God answer His prayer? True, God did not remove the cup of suffering and death. But God did hear Him and answered His prayer: "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). God enabled Jesus not to be overwhelmed with discouragement nor to fail. From this point on until His death, you can sense that Jesus was strengthened and calmed. He is obviously in control. Jesus had the regal bearing of a king—even in death!

A musician commented on Chopin's Nocturne in C-sharp Minor: "In this piece all is sorrow and trouble. Oh, such sorrow and trouble! Until [Chopin] begins to speak to God, to pray; then it is all right!"

So it was with Jesus. He walked into Gethsemane in the dark. He came out in the light—because He talked with God. "He went into Gethsemane in . . . agony; He came out with the victory won, and with peace in His soul—because He had talked with God."⁴

We can know that our surren-

der is complete. We shall experience inner peace and rest and the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit strengthening within. Our struggle with surrender is tempered by Jesus' victory. His victory was our gain! Charles Allen noted, "The prayer of our Lord, 'Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done' (Luke 22:42 [κλυ]) is not insurance against some Calvary, but it is a guarantee of an Easter. That prayer is no protection against struggle and pain, but it is assurance of final triumph."⁵

My friend Maurice Hall, former missionary to Africa, wrote in his Bible many years ago: "Dear God: Anything, anywhere, anytime, somehow!" And Maurice signed his name. This was his vivid reminder of total submission to God for life and eternity.

E. Stanley Jones concluded, "Whether it is a once-for-all surrender in a life crisis or a day-by-day surrender of the problems of life as they come up, the way out is—victory through surrender."⁶

As we pray, "Not my will, but yours be done," we are saying, "Lord, I am Yours!"

Will you make this your sincere prayer?

Not my will, but Thine; not my will, but Thine;

Not my will, but Thy will be done, Lord, in me.

May Thy Spirit divine fill this being of mine.

*Not my will, but Thy will be done, Lord, in me.**

—Hugh C. Benner

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4. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 283.

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Jesus
agonized
over our
sins. How
can we
be so
nonchalant
about
them?

Warmhearted Uplift for the Downhearted

The complete letter was printed in the *Preacher's Magazine*, December—February 1990-91. Here are some excerpts:

Dear Editor:

... It's gotten so that I hate Sundays and dread going to my church. I usually cry before, during, or after the service—or all three.

You see, my church is dead. . . . There's only a handful of members. Most of them are senior citizens. . . . And I am the only young mother.

... Often I'm too tired or discouraged to take [my girls] on Sunday and Wednesday nights, but I feel guilty when we stay home.

The pastor is very nice, but his sermons are rather shallow. . . . Our small church can't pay him much, so he must work at two other jobs.

I long for deep preaching . . . and spiritual fellowship. I have some friends who go to the Baptist church. . . .

... I have considered looking for another church, but that is not feasible, you see. I'm married to the pastor.

The letter came anonymously. Its message broke my heart. I could not sleep that night. The heartache expressed haunted me. I knew she was not alone in her plight. Readers of the *Preacher's Magazine* wrote, giving warmhearted uplift for the downhearted lady of the parsonage.

Love Was Expressed in Their Reactions

David Edwards of Culver, Oregon, said, "Your letter could have been written by me—and I'm the pastor." Bruce Knorpp of Kingwood, West Virginia, noted, "I am concerned about pastors' wives because I am married to one. What an awesome responsibility it is to be my wife's pastor." From Oskaloosa, Iowa, E. L. Wisehart wrote, "I would tell this weary traveler that my heart breaks for her."

An anonymous writer suggested,

I feel as if each active pastor has a "story" that he can tell of extreme frustration concerning unavoidable circumstances of ministry. I remember a visit to the Arlington National Cemetery, where I watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Perhaps there will someday be a memorial to the "Unknown Pastor" and "Unknown Pastor's Wife."

Daniel Alger of Denair, California, remarked, "Obviously this pastor's wife feels that she and her husband are at a dead end, and no one knows or cares." To counteract that feeling, Alger added,

Bernie Hertel told of a district superintendent who regularly met his pastors and wives in their homes for a time of encouragement and prayer. Bernie said that he "always felt 10 feet tall afterward." [Dis-

trict] administrative responsibilities have increased so much that such pastoral care is [now] impossible, and that leaves large cracks for parsonage families to fall through.

Retired District Superintendent Raymond C. Kratzer suggested, "It would be good if they could take a leave of absence from pastoring, join some alive and caring church, while he works in the secular arena temporarily. His ministry could be continued through activity in the local church."

Some reactions reached with empathy to the lady's pastor-husband. Edwards said,

Your husband probably feels the same way you do. He's tired. He knows his sermons are shallow, but without time to prepare, what else can he do? He must balance work, ministry, and family. He probably doesn't get much visitation done. As a result, his self-esteem is in the pits. . . . Your husband is frustrated with complacent saints, the lack of young families and children, and the tremendous burden of ministry he must place upon you.

Johnnie Childress, pastor's wife in Meridian, Mississippi, empathized, "My heart went out to you as I read your story. But also my heart went out to your pastor-husband."

Love Was Expressed in Their Recommendations

Knorpp asserted,

When your church doors are open for services, you must be there regardless of the church's condition and regardless of being tired or discouraged. Why? Your husband needs your supportive spirit, and you need to practice a disciplined life. . . . You need an exceptionally strong personal devotional life. Dig into the Scriptures. Listen to tapes of good sound gospel music and sound preaching. Borrow all the tapes you can. Childress reminded, "God

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promises to supply all of our need and give us strength. Read Phil. 4:13, 19." Knorpp also suggested visiting the revival meetings of neighboring churches, especially churches with a Holiness orientation.

The ministry of intercessory prayer is a powerful resource for spiritual changes. Begin praying that God will open doors so that "your husband won't have to work those two other jobs and be able to have time to study and pray and preach to feed his flock," urged Childress. Intercessory prayer reaps dividends: "Complacent laymen need to be rekindled, a tired and discouraged pastor needs a fresh anointing from God, and a parsonage first lady needs a glorious new touch of fire on her soul. Prayer can change things at your house and at your church," wrote Knorpp.

Wisehart suggested two things. "Find a mentor. What is a mentor? A faithful counselor. Find a Bible study in your area. Ask God to help you locate a mentor—probably a lady older than you, a mature Christian in whom you can confide. . . . You want someone who knows and talks Jesus—someone in whom you can be accountable." His second point is a strong biblical principle: "Find a ministry. Find someone with whom you can build a friendship, someone you could win to Christ. When she knows Jesus, you become her mentor. You disciple her." W. Russell York of Greens Fork, Indiana, agreed: "Maybe she should get acquainted with some young mothers her age and try to change her situation." Childress added, "You could start a ladies' ministry, Bible study, craft class, or a fellowship to visit nursing homes or hospitals with some of your elderly people. They would love this."

One pastor visualized the lonely lady with her children. What could they do to make a difference? He gave creative recommendations:

[1] Take your children to

visit each senior citizen. . . . Have the children crayon pictures for these older friends, giving them as presents.

[2] You yourself give a short three-to-four-minute sermonette twice each month during the Sunday morning worship. Use your children as "props." Have a child sing or recite a Scripture verse or poem. Tell a story from family life involving the children. Some senior citizens have not been around households with children for a long time; they delight in hearing what is going on with youngsters.

[3] Offer an encouraging prayer for the older folk once a month in the evening worship. Could you share with them a homemade muffin after service tied up pleasantly in a Baggie? Do you remember their birthdays with a poem remembrance in worship?

[4] Plan a monthly Sunday evening service so that your husband will not have to prepare a sermon. You may accent testimonies, prayer around the altar, sharing Scripture promises, inviting an Evangelical friend from another church to share music or life stories. Cap it with light refreshments. Keep the evening simple, warm, and friendly.

[5] Ask God for His special graces in dealing with the struggling church. Keep your thoughts faith-filled. Take note of anything positive. . . .

[6] Become a pen pal with a pastor's wife in another small church. Keep your letters free from complaining. Be an encouragement to one another by lifting up Scripture's practical promises that you have seen fulfilled in your life. If such a pastor's wife lives nearby, ask the Lord if you can become her friend. . . .

[7] Keep in touch with the Baptist church in town. Go to their socials and special week-night events, and get to know

their people. Would that parsonage family become your friends in ministry? . . .

[8] You long for "deep preaching." When you come upon an excellent illustration from magazines or book, clip it for your husband. Point out to him real-life illustrations from your family, newspaper, and community that he could use in sermons. . . . You can aid him in broadening the scope of his sermon contents.

[9] See God standing in the center of your sanctuary. He is indeed there. . . . Instead of scanning empty pews, lift your eyes to Jesus' face. Then He will show you the good in the hearts of people around you—particularly the good in the man behind the pulpit.

Love Was Expressed in Their Responses

Wisehart commented, "I do not mean to suggest that your situation is simple or easily handled. But I do believe that finding a mentor and ministry will make a positive difference. P.S. Why do I suggest this to you? Because it has worked—for me."

Pastor Knorpp addressed the lady of the manse who is downcast: "I am adding you and your husband to my personal prayer list." Another pastor expressed the same caring response: "Please assure this unknown pastor's wife that she will remain in our prayers."

I have heard people accuse the church of being the only army that shoots its own wounded. The response of readers to this wonderful woman's plea has been an uplifting, warmhearted, caring attempt to express love, to give support, and to let her know that she is not alone.

"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).

PM

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Making the Church a Family

During the late 1970s, the Pittsburgh Pirates won the National League baseball pennant. Veteran player Willie Stargell served as the captain and leader. Stargell rallied his team with the slogan "We are family!"

After all the accolades, Willie Stargell still insisted that the difference was the attitude "We are family!" They had learned to laugh together, to cry together, to work together, supporting, feeling, and living together as family.

I see the church in similar light: "We are family!" In our mobile, changing, lonely culture, having a family is extremely attractive. Often rootless people today have nothing left but the church. Let's teach our people how to be a family.

If we love one another, we are obeying God's command. Jesus repeated His orders: "This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:17). Christian love is not a manufactured feeling. Christian love is learning to treat each other the same way God treats us. It remains a matter of the will, not of emotions. Jesus insisted, "Love each other as I have loved you" (v. 12). How does Jesus love us? He forgives us; He's kind to us.

We choose to love. By a conscious act of our will, each must determine, "I will put her first. I will be kind to him. I will be patient." The more we deliberately will to love one another, the more our emotions begin to change.

Worship then becomes more meaningful when we are family.

If we love one another, we are fulfilling God's law. Paul wrote: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).

In Old Testament times, God gave laws to govern the land—they guided relationships to property and neighbors and worship. In the New Testament, loving one another naturally covers all the important bases of God's law.

When you love your neighbor, you do not break up his home, you do not violate his property, you do not defame his reputation. John wrote, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands" (2 John 6). Love does not substitute for the law, but love fulfills the law. If we love each other as family, we shall meet the law's requirements.

If we love one another, we are following God's teaching. Paul wrote, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you" (1 Thess. 3:12). Paul added in the same letter, "For you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other" (4:9). God the Father taught us to love one another by giving His Son. Jesus taught us to love one another by giving His life. The Holy Spirit also teaches us to love one another: "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5).

Anyone can carry a Bible. Nearly anyone can sing a religious song. Anyone can attend religious services. So how do we know if a person is a real Christian? Jesus said we shall have the evidence needed: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

What an important teaching from the triune Godhead! We pastors must learn how to show our people to follow God's teaching. We are family!

If we love one another, we are expressing God's nature. The Bible teaches us, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). God puts His nature into us, His children: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22).

When I was three years old, my father did something that shows his heart. Dad bought a used furniture store in Wasco, California—a building, furniture, and a Model T Ford truck for delivery. Poor people came into the little storefront during the *Grapes of Wrath* era. They had migrated from Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. The poor folk arrived with nothing, having no money. I remember Dad helping them load furniture into the old truck. In four months, Dad had given it all away. He had nothing left but the Model T truck, which he promptly drove over the mountains to Pasadena College and traded for tuition. It was my greatest inheritance.

I see the same giving, loving, caring qualities in my daughters. I never know what or who they'll drag home. They are quick to give to people in need. Being born into my father's family, they share in the same nature.

While no one can see God, they can see God's family. People are hungering to be loved today. If God's family loves one another, then the world will know how wonderful it is to know God. He will be recognized through us if we are family!

BY RANDAL E. DENNY

Restoring Gently the Fallen Minister

The church has been accused of shooting its own wounded. However, I witnessed the opposite today. A group of ordained elders to which I belong has brought a brother through the process of restoration. Appropriate disciplines guided him back to a place of wholeness. He willingly submitted to his peers. His passage progressed through stages of repentance, loneliness, submissiveness, emotional and spiritual healing, and loving guidance by a superior officer and the gentle, caring touch of a loving pastor. As the elders prayed with words of encouragement, I felt the delight of seeing restoration made complete. My brother in the Lord hugged me, letting me sense the intimacy of his deep joy in that embrace. Restoration is beautiful—a profound celebration of God's grace.

Paul wrote, "You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand" (Gal. 6:2, CEV). He said that in the context of restoring a Christian brother who has been tempted and failed. Paul urges the Christian family to assume responsibility to help him bear that heavy burden. Three principles guide us in carrying the burden with someone who has stumbled and fallen.

First, we should carry one another's burdens in order to restore. Paul instructed, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (v. 1). A carpenter who has hit his thumb with a hammer gets very protective of that injured

member. He grabs that sore thumb and sticks it in his mouth. Other fingers curl around that injured member to help ease the pain. His feet head for an ice pack or cold water. His tongue and lips form sympathetic sounds! When one member hurts, it should bring no joy to the other members.

Let the church family resist the urge to reveal the hurting one who has stumbled. When Noah got drunk and stretched out naked on the ground, his son Ham laughed at his father's error. But the other two sons took a garment, backed into his tent, and covered Noah.

Let the church family resist responding with rejection. Instead, Paul says, "Restore him gently." The Greek word for "restore" describes a doctor setting a broken bone. When a brother stumbles and falls, it's like having a bone broken. It needs to be reset tenderly. Fishermen used the word to describe "mending their nets" (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19, κλυ). If nets aren't mended, you can't use them successfully. You will lose a lot through the broken places. I wonder how many we let slip through the cracks because we failed to restore those who stumbled and fell!

Second, we should carry one another's burdens out of love. Paul said, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (v. 2). What is the law of Christ? Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34). Restoration is a family matter.

Third, we should carry one another's burdens with genuine humility. Paul said, "You who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong" (v. 1, TLB). The Greek word for "humility" or "meekness" (κλυ) is not a sissy, weak word. It describes "power under control." A doctor setting a broken bone restores gently. He doesn't use a crowbar or a pipe wrench. He uses power under control. In restoring a brother, if we lack humility—power under control—we may hurt him even more.

Jesus emphasized, "Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about" (Matt. 7:12, CEV).

"I could have sinned, too; it could have been me who fell or stumbled." If you can admit that, you will restore the person who has stumbled—with humility and gentleness.

"That could never happen to me! I would never do such a thing!" If you think like that, you will probably hurt the one who needs to be restored gently. You will never be able to restore a fallen brother until you gain a deep sense of your own unworthiness to be called a child of God. Paul wrote, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. . . . But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:3-5).

A little child strayed away. A search was organized, but after two days, the child was not found. Finally searchers joined hands and walked carefully through the open fields so that no area would be overlooked. They came upon the dead body of the child. When the mother received her dead baby, she cried out, "Why didn't you join hands sooner?"

We are family. Couldn't we join hands to help a fallen brother? **PM**

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Love That Stoops

1 John 3:11-18

Love is a Christian virtue—the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).

The comic strip caveman, B.C., opens a box. A letter in the box says, “Congratulations! You have just purchased the world’s finest fire-starting kit!” The next picture shows him reading on: “The flint is of the finest stone imported from the Orient. Your striker has been carefully selected by screened lumberjacks. Your kit was packaged and inspected by little old grannies working in a dust-free environment, and your fire kit dealer has sworn an oath of devotion to customers.”

In the next picture, B.C. is rubbing two sticks together. A cave woman asks, “What’s with the sticks? Where is your new fire-starting kit?”

He looks up, smiles, and says, “I built a shrine around it.”

Has the Church taken all the wonderful equipment God has given to us and made it into a shrine? Have we built shrines around God’s kind of love?

I cut out an advertisement for church steeples from a religious magazine. The advertisement had emblazoned in big letters: “THE CROWNING GLORY OF YOUR CHURCH.” The glory of the church is *never* in steeples or buildings or preachers or musicians or programs. It is in the reflected glory of Jesus, who said, “Love one another. . . . All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

BY RANDAL E. DENNY

Reformer John Knox said, “The [early] Christian community was not a memorial society with its eyes fastened on a departed master; it was a dynamic community created around a living and present Lord.” God never intended for His people to build a shrine around love. Thus John wrote, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (v. 11).

Someone gave me a handwritten note: “Love that goes upward, from the heart of man to God, is adoration. Love that goes outward, from one heart to another, is affection. But love that stoops is grace.” That’s the kind of love that John describes in 1 John 3:11-18—“Love that stoops.”

I. Love That Stoops Proves New Life in Christ

John wrote to combat the gnostics, who believed that life in the Spirit was obtained by secret knowledge. The Greek word *gnōsis*, “to know,” gave the gnostics their name. Knowledge was their key word. John did not reject knowledge; he used the word “know” 36 times in 1 John. But his dominant theme was the word “love”; he used it 43 times. To know was good, but to love was best!

John contrasts love with hatred: “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother [literally, ‘cut his brother’s throat’ (JB) or ‘butchered his brother’ (WILLIAMS)]. And why did he

murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous” (v. 12). As this incident vividly illustrates, the schism between the two brothers—Cain and Abel—centered in religious differences. In Gen. 4, Cain is not an atheist, but a worshiper bringing sacrifice to God. The real test is not a religious ceremony, but love for one’s brother. Cain resented his brother’s righteousness before God—the same kind of envy that drove the Jewish priests to demand Jesus’ death on the Cross.

No wonder John wrote, “Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you” (v. 13). The more Christlike you become, the more the world around you will hate and hiss at you! Our world resents righteousness and would destroy those who expose its unrighteousness. A good man’s life rebukes the way of an evil person.

Socrates embodied goodness. One of his peers—brilliant, erratic, debauched, wild, and reckless—said to him, “Socrates, I hate you, because every time I meet you, you show me what I am.”

As people persecute Christians by various degrees, they attempt to conceal their antagonism for Jesus. The individual Christian merely becomes the target for people’s animosity toward goodness. As Paul witnessed, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

Continuing his contrast between hatred and love, John wrote, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him” (v. 15). Hatred is sin. The question is not, “What did I do?” but “What did I *want* to do? What would I have done if I were free to do as I please?”

That’s why Jesus equates attitude with the deed. Your attitude portrays what you really are if uninhibited and unrestrained by

fear of consequences. Hatred is murder in embryo form.

John's point is that hatred is incompatible with the Christian life. God does not dwell in the heart filled with hatred. New life in Christ is proved by a love that stoops to human need: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (v. 14). Love for our brothers is the indispensable sign of our conversion to Jesus Christ. When I see a bird that looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, has webbed feet like a duck, paddles in the water like a duck, and prefers the company of ducks, I can't resist the conclusion that it must be a duck. "Birds of a feather flock together." We gravitate to what lures us most. We eventually show up where we belong. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers." If we don't love the brethren, we belong to the other crowd. Christians "have passed from death to life"—it sounds something like resurrection! No one grows into becoming a Christian. It takes a divine, spiritual re-creation. God plants spiritual life into a person who has been spiritually dead. Love proves that new life has indeed been given. Without love, we are "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

Spiritual life does not come by loving our brothers, but love for our brothers gives evidence of spiritual life. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Love for one's brothers proves the possession of eternal life. That's why it seems so strange to see people or groups who profess Christianity fighting and fussing between themselves. A person out of sorts with fellow Christians is out of sorts with God and himself.

We prove our love by doing good to our brothers. Isaiah

Has the Church taken all the wonderful equipment God has given to us and made it into a shrine?

wrote, "Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!" (1:16-17). J. B. Phillips paraphrased 1 Cor. 13:4, "This love of which I speak . . . looks for a way of being constructive." Our love for God is measured by our love for the brother we least like!

In an old, yellowed *Hutchings California Magazine* printed in 1860 was a story of two brothers traveling in Lapland. On a bitter, freezing day they were traveling in a sled, wrapped in furs from head to foot—yet nearly frozen. Along the way, they found a lone traveler numb and dying in the snow. One of the brothers said, "Let's stop and help. We must save his life."

The other brother argued, "We'll lose our own lives if we stop. No one but a fool would think of stopping on a day like this. I wouldn't give my cloak to save a hundred travelers!"

Said the first brother, "I can't see this stranger die. I must go help him." With great effort he wrapped the stranger in one of his furs and struggled, carrying him on his back. Nearly exhausted, he caught up with the sled. He called out, "Brother, look! I have saved this man's life—and I think my own. I'm almost hot with exhaustion."

But his brother did not answer. He was sitting in his furs on the sled, frozen to death. "Anyone who does not love remains in death."

II. Love That Stoops Patterns After Jesus

The English word "love" has been so abused, debased, and diluted that nearly everyone claims to love by his or her own definition. John defines his idea of love: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (v. 16). His word for "love" is the Greek word *agapē*. It is a love that stoops, that goes to work—with or without emotions. Most people define love in emotional terms: "For God so loved the world that He sat in heaven and had warm

feelings!" Nonsense! God so loved the world that He gave—a volitional commitment that stands firm when emotions fade.

Did you know that the Bible has two John 3:16s? Most Christians memorize John 3:16—"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (KJV). Those powerful words are important words. We cherish them. But how many Christians memorize 1 John 3:16? "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." That comes as quite a shock. That last part is not so popular. We would rather emphasize what God is doing than get involved—in what we should be doing.

In the Book of Acts, early Christians practiced two kinds of breaking of bread: the love feast, or breaking of common bread in daily fellowship; and the Lord's Supper, or breaking of Communion bread. In the Book of Acts, the breaking of common bread in fellowship was the most prominent one. As the years passed by, the bread of Holy Communion gradually took the place of prominence. Why?

Breaking the bread of Holy Communion commemorated what Jesus did in laying down His life for us. Breaking of common bread in daily fellowship emphasized our responsibility to love and share with our brothers in Christ. Gradually the idea of what we should do for others was dropped, and Christians preferred to celebrate only what Jesus did for us. People prefer to turn religion into rites and ceremonies instead of acts of service. We prefer to build a shrine around "love."

To understand a love that stoops, let's hear again what Jesus did: "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." Only John's writings use the words "laid down his life." It comes from a Greek

word that means "to place" or "to put aside." It implies "laying aside something—laying aside one's clothes, divesting oneself of something." In John 13:4 (CEV, JB) it describes Jesus laying aside His "outer garment" to stoop down and wash His disciples' feet. In what became an early Christian hymn, Paul describes Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8).

That's love that stoops all the way to our deepest need!

Here's the unpopular part: "And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." The Greek grammar suggests a present, ongoing, continuous laying down of our lives for one another. We are seldom called upon to die for another, but we need to learn how to live for one another. Love that stoops voluntarily surrenders its rights in order to minister to another person. This love stoops to do anything for another's benefit. What are you prepared to "lay down"?

John Henry Jowett wrote, "There is much spurious love about. It lays nothing down; it only takes things up! It is self-seeking, using the speech and accents of love. It is a 'work of the flesh' which has stolen the label of a 'fruit of the Spirit.' Love may always be known by its expenditures."

The first law of physical life is self-preservation. The Bible teaches us that self-sacrifice is the first law of spiritual life.

Reuben Welch said of 1 John 3:16:

I think I know a little bit about what it means to hold [life] back. . . . Sometimes I wonder what we are saving ourselves for. . . . We want to

save ourselves, and keep ourselves and hold ourselves back as though the highest goal in life would be to look good in our caskets. It's no special blessing to come to the end of life with love unshared, selves ungiven, activities unactivated, deeds undone, emotions unextended. . . . I have the feeling that when a person is middle-aged, he ought to be about half used up. . . . What am I saving myself for?¹

Our local newspaper had an article titled "Birmingham Samaritan Found Dead." Willie Perry had been known around Birmingham, Alabama, for driving his "Rescue Ship," a 1971 Thunderbird equipped with flashing yellow and red lights. He always stopped to help stranded motorists.

He was found dead in his garage from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. The mayor said, "Perry was a very special blessing to the city of Birmingham. He was one of the few people who disregarded himself completely in the name of others."

That's a good definition of love that stoops.

III. Love That Stoops Calls to Action

John lets us down with a thump in his next sentence: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (v. 17). We readily consent to the high ideal of laying down one's life—that is a remote possibility, so we can get enthused about it. We would be content to wait for that unlikely moment that calls for martyrdom and live our present comfortable life undisturbed. But John brings us to reality: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need."

If we are going to help our brother, we must meet three conditions.

First, *we must have enough to meet our brother's need.* Dr. E. V.

Hill of Los Angeles said, "When God blesses you materially, He seldom has you in mind. God gives it to you so that He can get it through you. If He can't get it through you, He'll stop giving it to you!"

Second, *we must care enough to know our brother's need exists.* John moved from loving "our brothers" in the plural to loving "his brother" in the singular. It's a lot easier to get excited about "humanity" than to love that person you know who's so uninteresting, exasperating, or irritating. C. S. Lewis noted, "Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

That's the point of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. The lawyer came to Jesus wanting to debate an abstract idea: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

But Jesus focused on one man in desperate need: To whom can I be a neighbor?

Many people refuse to do anything since they can't do everything. Because they can't set the world on fire, they won't light a candle. Because they can't save the world, they refuse to save a brother in need.

Third, *we must love enough to share with our brother.* Notice how practical the Bible gets: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16).

John has an interesting phrase, "but has no pity on him" (v. 17). The Greek idea suggests "close up [our] insides against him." If we try to protect ourselves from feeling our brother's need inside, "how can the love of God be in" us? God opened His great heart of love and compassion for us. How can we settle for closing our hearts against our brother?

"Dear children, let us not love

Your attitude portrays what you really are.

Continued on page 53

Smart Investing: Allocating Your Assets to Prepare for Market Changes

As every investor knows, markets don't go up forever. Inevitably, there will be periods of decline when investor assets shrink along with the market. The question is, how can we protect our assets against these declines? One solution is to sell off all our investments and go to a 100 percent cash position until the market resumes its upward path. This assumes, of course, that we know when to sell and when to buy back into the market.

An alternative (and more realistic) approach is to utilize the strategy of asset allocation (also called portfolio allocation). Under the concept of asset allocation, investors diversify their investment portfolio among the four major groups of investment assets: Stocks, Fixed Income Investments (bonds), Tangible Assets (real estate and other hard assets such as precious metals), and Money Market Investments (cash).

Through this diversification of investment assets, you mix both conservative and aggressive investments and arrive at a blended portfolio that is not as risky as it would be if you were to put all your money into aggressive investments. On the other hand, it gives you more upside potential than if you were to go totally conservative. This blended portfolio also has the advantage of giving you something positive to

work with in nearly every kind of market scenario. While one investment is performing poorly, another may be doing well.

The value of asset allocation is its ability to decrease your exposure to significant losses in any single market. The level of risk reduction you can achieve is dependent on how you allocate your portfolio and how the various markets perform. A conservative portfolio would be weighted most heavily toward Fixed Income and Money Market Investments. A more aggressive approach would focus on Stocks and Tangible Assets.

Further refinement of the process is achieved by diversifying among conservative and aggressive investments within each investment group. For example, you could invest in both blue-chip and small-company stocks in the Stocks category. Or, you could split your Fixed Income Investments between lower-rated and higher-quality bonds.

Even if you pursue a rather aggressive strategy, the use of asset allocation will put you at less risk than the investor who loads up in one investment area. An example will illustrate:

Investor A believed he could turn a quick profit in the stock market and invested his entire fortune of \$100,000 in common stocks. Investor B liked stocks, too, but she practiced the princi-

ple of asset allocation and committed only 50 percent of her \$100,000 in assets to the Stocks group, with the remainder split among bonds, real estate, and Money Market Investments.

Much to the surprise of both, the stock market plummeted by 30 percent. The result? Investor A's assets shrunk in value by a full 30 percent to \$70,000. Investor B suffered a paper loss as well—but her loss was just 15 percent of her total portfolio, or \$15,000, since only half of her assets were affected by the stock market tumble. In addition, her bonds and Money Market Investments performed positively, helping her to offset the 15 percent loss in the stock market.

How you allocate your personal portfolio is determined by your individual investment profile—your goals, your risk temperament, and your time horizon. Current market conditions also play a role. No matter how you initially allocate your portfolio, chances are it will change over time as your personal situation and the market change. It's a good idea to review your portfolio at least once a year, reallocating if necessary. **PM**

The information in this article is of a general nature, offered for educational purposes only. It is not offered as specific investment advice. Personal investment decisions should be made in consultation with professional investment advisers.

SUBMITTED BY
PENSIONS AND
BENEFITS USA,
CHURCH OF THE
NAZARENE

Celebrating Our Heritage: A Church with a Mission

Editorial Note:

Randal Denny was privileged to give this address at the centennial celebration of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, the congregation founded by Dr. Phineas F. Bresee. The founding of First Church of the Nazarene was a significant event in the history of the Holiness Movement. Denny was served as pastor of this historical church.

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

Dr. Phineas F. Bresee had been a pastor and presiding elder in the Methodist Church. He found himself frozen out of the conference by a bishop who opposed the preaching of holiness. Dr. Bresee served his last Methodist church in Boyle Heights of Los Angeles, the neighborhood where I was born. Dr. Bresee felt an urgency to bring the gospel to the poor of lower Los Angeles.

Soon he joined with Rev. and Mrs. T. P. Ferguson as a coworker in the Peniel City Mission among the poor and homeless. While preaching at a camp meeting in Bennett, Nebraska, Dr. Bresee re-

ceived shocking news. He had been abruptly dismissed from the Peniel City Mission.

So, Dr. J. P. Widney, a physician and president of the University of Southern California, and Dr. Bresee gathered with a group of Spirit-filled believers. On October 6, 1895, Dr. Phineas F. Bresee and Dr. J. P. Widney preached at a new mission in a hall at 317 South Main Street. The *Los Angeles Times* told of it under the news heading: **“New Denomination. Drs. Bresee and Widney Will Found a New Church.”**

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

Today we celebrate the centennial of First Church of the Nazarene—100 years of service for Jesus in the city of Los Angeles. By evangelistic fervor and by mergers with like-minded Holiness groups across the land, the

shadow of influence from the Church of the Nazarene stretches into 111 nations of the world.

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene and Pastor Ron Benefiel have kept the vision of our founder. Dr. Bresee said:

We seek the simplicity and the Pentecostal power of the primitive New Testament Church. The field of labor to which we feel especially called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever also may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive to personally walk with God and to incite others so to do.³

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

Jesus returned to His hometown, Nazareth. On the Sabbath day, He made His way to the synagogue, according to His habit. That day, the keeper of the scrolls handed the scroll of Isaiah to Jesus for the Scripture

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

reading. Jesus stood to read the day's lesson:

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

Jesus sat down in the customary position of Hebrew oratory. Everyone leaned forward in anticipation of what He had to say. Then He added, "These Scriptures came true today!" (v. 21, *TLB*).

That day Jesus of Nazareth revealed God's mission for Him and His people. Will we, the Church of the Nazarene, continue to follow Jesus the Nazarene? Methodist bishop Richard B.

Wilke wrote a book analyzing his own denomination, titled *And Are We Yet Alive?* Church of the Nazarene, if we keep Jesus central, we will enjoy His anointing upon our beloved church! However, Jesus warns us, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (*John 15:5*).

Surveying the past 100 years and standing on the threshold of the next century, let's look at our high and holy calling.

I
If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Preach Good News to People Without Hope

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

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

Bishop Wilke observed in his

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

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

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

Los Angeles First Church has not forgotten its mission to serve people without hope. The church responded to immigrants coming from distant lands and different cultures. Around 45 years ago, Dr. Kimber Moulton led the church to sponsor a Chinese congregation.

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

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

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

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

II
If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Bring Wholeness to Wounded People
Jesus shares with us His mis-

sion, "to heal the brokenhearted."

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

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

A demographic study showed 35,000 single young adults living within a mile of Los Angeles First Church. So, 20 years ago I assigned Dr. Ron Benefiel to the singles ministry—that proved to be divine providence! With his "fellowship houses" as a base of operations, Ron began a ministry of wholeness to lonely, hurting people.

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

III
If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Offer Freedom to People in Bondage
Jesus shares with us His mis-

sion, "to announce that captives shall be released."

Jesus read the text from Hebrew but spoke His words in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonian Captivity. The words were recorded for us in Greek, the commercial language of the Mediterranean world at that time. The word for "captives" literally meant "captured at the point of a spear." These prisoners of war alluded to the Babylonian Captivity, but the term applies to all who are captive to sin and Satan. We live in a society teased by sin, but soon in bondage by moral and spiritual failure. People without Jesus become enslaved to passions, to pleasures, to habits of dissipation and impurity. Yet we have the Good News—Jesus sets people free from the spearpoints of Satan and his crowd.

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

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

Dr. Roy Mellert died in late November of 1977. Hugh Salsbury and I were in Hong Kong when we got the news. Hugh had already received his own death sentence from the doctor. Upon return, our sanctuary choir sang Dr. Mellert's favorite anthems, honoring his many years as music director of First Church.

On Easter Sunday, 1978, we presented Dr. Mellert's favorite Easter cantata. Hugh Salsbury sang the same solo he had sung for many decades—but this time he was sick unto death. This would be Hugh's last solo. It was a dramatic moment I will never forget, as he sang the words of faith: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? . . . Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55, 57).

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

IV

If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Shine the Light of God's Truth to People Who Cannot See Beyond Themselves

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

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

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

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

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

He responded, "I see people; they look like trees walking around" (v. 24). Many persons are like that—people just look like objects, part of the landscape, pieces of flesh along the roadside, something to manipulate for selfish reasons. But when Jesus does His complete work in your heart, your sight will be restored, and you will see "every-

thing clearly" (v. 25). You will see your neighbor and recognize his needs as opportunities for you and God's great grace. Jesus' touch helps us see people, not just problems!

In Los Angeles First Church, more than most Nazarene churches, the singing of anthems and strong hymns was a preferred musical diet. The music of the church had a great mix of sophistication and joyful enthusiasm with Dick Willis at the pipe organ. Yet one Sunday I scheduled Ron Salsbury to sing a solo—with his long, golden hair and beard, a member of the JC Power Outlet. With gifted talent, Ron strummed his guitar and sang a song he had written; his tempo and text moved beyond the usual bounds. Afterward, Harold Bell commented to me, "Pastor, I don't always care for that kind of music, but I really do love Ron Salsbury!"

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

V

If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Reach Out to Lift Up Downtrodden People

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

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

The recent racial riots came right up to the doorstep of Los Angeles First Church. Neighboring stores were looted. But the church chose not to react with fear and flight, but to seek how to help. This church looked be-

Will the Church of the Nazarene continue to follow Jesus the Nazarene?

yond the anger and saw people in great need. The church became a channel of help and restoration to this part of the city. Pastor Benefiel's approval and signature opened the purse strings of humanitarian organizations, bringing relief in the midst of pain.

For 100 years this great church has reached out to lift up the suffering, downcast people of the city. Names like Ada Bresee and Esther Bresee bring back memories of aid to mission fields. Each pastor and layman has a long list of stories of restoration that only eternity will have time to record. But it is all to the glory of God!

VI

If We Continue to Follow the Nazarene, We Must Invite All People to Come Now and Enjoy the Grace of God!

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

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

For 100 years, missionaries have gone out from across the Church of the Nazarene to an-

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

In 1985 I took 30 people on a tour of the Holy Land. We stopped by the shore of Galilee at a sacred spot that commemorates Jesus giving the Beatitudes. Buses crowded the parking lot. Groups of pilgrims from all over the world surrounded the eight-sided chapel. I read the Beatitudes to my people and asked them to spend time alone, meditating on Jesus' words. Slipping inside the chapel, I listened as a priest spoke to his people in Italian. Upon dismissal, I walked around the porch and heard a man reading in French to another group of travelers. On the ground below me, a large gathering of Japanese people listened intently to a Bible reading in their own language. Just beyond them I heard Portuguese and German. Going to the other side of the chapel, I watched Black people from London singing from their hearts. The joy of the Lord was carving great, beautiful smiles on their faces. All around me people gathered to hear once again the wonderful words of Je-

sus in their own languages.

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

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

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

PM

1. Paul T. Culbertson, "What's in a Name?" *Herald of Holiness*, March 1, 1984, 7.

2. Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960), 135.

3. *Ibid.*, 133.

4. Richard B. Wilke, *And Are We Yet Alive?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 40.

5. Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 153.

6. Wilke, *And Are We Yet Alive?* 72.

We must keep on sounding the message of holiness.

Pontius' Puddle



DON'T WORRY. I'M PLANNING SOMETHING WITH A LOW-TECH TRUMPET THAT WILL RENDER Y2K IRRELEVANT.



God Wants Our Attention

Jim Cymbala, in his book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, quotes a devotional writer who said, "The main thing God asks for is our attention" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, 57). If we have any history with God, we know that when He wants our attention, He has something good for us. So, pastor, be encouraged—God wants your attention, and He has something good for you.

One, God wants our attention to His Word. Any pastor will confess that he or she has too often gone to the Word seeking something for the next sermon or a coming devotional. On occasion, if we are real honest, we would have to admit we were seeking a word for another person—a word to set them straight or to convince them we were right. God wants our hearts and minds to bring attention to His Word. Where we bring such focus, there the Word speaks and spreads its message to our hearts. We are graced by His Word when He has our attention.

We must go to the Word in all our circumstances. The Word is a gold mine of resources, waiting to comfort, inspire, and instruct us. God wants our attention when we read the Word because He knows what life needs and knows the Word can resource our needs. Dr. Otto Piper said, "There is enough undiscovered truth in the Scriptures to produce a Reformation and an evangelical awakening in every generation." (Dennis F. Kinlaw,

Preaching in the Spirit [Wilmore, Ky.: Francis Asbury Press, 1985], 15). If there is that much truth in the Word, then there is certainly something in it to meet our individual needs.

We, as pastors, need the Word for our circumstances. We need its instruction and inspiration. We must bring ourselves to the Word with full attention to its feast potential. Before we are ready to help our people, we must let the Word help us.

Two, God wants our attention to His care, His grace, and His encouragement. Pastor, be encouraged—God is on your side. He is doing more than we realize, for too often we are focused on the problem and not on the power. God wants our attention, for He wants to show His love for us; He wants us to observe His care and feel His presence. When we focus on our hurts and anxieties, we can easily miss His care and healing.

Max Lucado has a good lesson for us in his book *Let the Journey Begin*. He captions one chapter with these instructions: "Occupy yourself with the nature of God, not the size of your biceps." He goes on to describe God's meeting with Moses on the back side of the desert—"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). With these 14 words, Moses is enrolled in a class on God. Immediately the roles are defined. God is holy. Approaching Him on even a quarter inch of leather is too pompous. No time is spent convincing Moses what he can do,

but much time is spent explaining to Moses what God can do.

Later, Lucado observes: "The strength of Moses is never considered. . . . But many words are used to reveal God. This strength of Moses is not the issue: the strength of God is" ([Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998], 3). When God has our attention, we can observe His love and His care. We can see what Dr. Earl Lee describes as the "tracks of God." Only when we take our focus off the problems—and there will always be problems—will we see the hand of God weaving His purpose in our lives. When and where we see it, it will be an eternal point of reference for our journey. It will build our confidence in the care of God, and it will make every problem seem a bit smaller. It will be by the "tracks of God" that we are encouraged and resourced to deal with the ministry.

What all this boils down to is this—God wants our attention so He can unfold His will in our ministries! He does not want us to get so absorbed with the problems and events of ministry that we miss His Word and His care. Sometimes it is a fine line to walk; but, as pastors, we need to see the things of God—His love, His care, His purpose—before we are adequate to minister and to be shepherds.

Eugene H. Peterson, in his book *Subversive Spirituality*, makes this observation:

I want to simplify your lives. When others are telling you to read more, I want to tell you to read less; when others are telling you to do more, I want to tell you to do less. The world does not need more of you; it needs more of God. Your friends do not need more of you; they need more of God. And you don't need more of you; you need more of God ("Classic and Contemporary Excerpts," *Christianity Today*, April 27, 1998, 93).

So, pastor, be encouraged. God wants our attention so we can have more of Him—for more of Him is what our ministries need, and more of what our people need.

BY C. NEIL STRAIT
District
superintendent,
Church of the
Nazarene
VICKSBURG, MICHIGAN



Enjoying Your Road to Emmaus

If I could keep only one page of my Bible for personal devotion, it would be Luke 24. The meaning of the resurrection of Jesus and our passion for ministry is embodied for me in Luke's description of the encounter with Jesus on the Emmaus road. That intimate, personal glimpse of our living Lord walking the dusty, common road with His disheartened disciples makes Jesus our Contemporary. He cares. He touches people. He walks and talks with them.

The longer I live, the more I have come to view the Christian faith as a journey, a pilgrimage in which Jesus increasingly reveals himself—and we're really headed toward a more complete fellowship with Him. Someone declared, "The darkest road with Christ is better than the brightest road without Him."

Our risen Lord draws near (vv. 13-16). Jesus' encounter with the two discouraged travelers ranks as one of the immortal short stories of the world. Their conversation had locked in on the tragedy of the Cross. They traced over the circumstances and events in a morbid circle of self-pity. Despair fed despair. While they returned to their village, "Jesus himself drew near" (v. 15, *KJV*). Even in our desperation and confusion, Jesus draws near—whether or not we recognize Him.

Our risen Lord opens the Scriptures (v. 27). Luke wrote, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Je-

sus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (v. 27). Jesus began an exposition of Scripture from each individual prophetic book, giving the first correct lesson on messianic teachings of the Old Testament. He showed them the golden thread of grace running through the whole fabric of Scripture. It could not be separated from the scarlet thread of atonement.

What a sermon that must have been! Jesus opened the Scriptures—developed, illustrated, and applied in himself. How I wish that lesson from the lips of Jesus had been preserved. Someday, in heaven, I hope Jesus will preach that sermon once again!

Our risen Lord enters into fellowship (vv. 28-30). Arriving at Emmaus at dusk, Jesus courteously "acted as if he were going farther" (v. 28). He does not force himself on us. He awaits an invitation.

With the compulsion of courtesy and kind words of hospitality, the travelers compelled Jesus to remain with them: "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over" (v. 29).

In 1847 Henry Francis Lyte preached his farewell sermon to his congregation. His fond flock sent him to the French Riviera for rest and recuperation. Henry Lyte did not come to breakfast after the first night at sea. His body was found on his bunk, his Bible open to Luke 24. He had underlined the words: "Abide with us: for it is toward evening,

and the day is far spent" (v. 29, *KJV*). His hand clutched a poem in his writing:
Abide with me! Fast falls the even-tide.

*The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!*

Jesus seeks unhurried, intimate fellowship with you and me.

Our risen Lord reveals himself (vv. 30-35). Perhaps the way He broke bread or His intimate way of saying grace triggered their memories of Jesus. Suddenly "their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight" (v. 31). Jesus dramatized that communion with Him now must be by faith, not by sight. In the breaking of bread at an ordinary meal in an ordinary home Jesus revealed himself. With Jesus, life's most common moments become sacred and special.

The enlightened travelers exclaimed, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32). Those burning hearts now rejoiced, "The Lord has risen" (v. 34).

On the slow bus ride to Emmaus, I soaked in the quiet sights. For me it was a holy moment to retrace their steps and to remember their experience. But the Emmaus road is more than a geographical location. It's your road—and my road. Though we don't always recognize Him, Jesus is here—walking and talking with us along the way.

Hanging on the wall of my office is a gift from my wife—a painting of three figures walking along a pastoral lane. It reminds me to look for Jesus today. He is always there. C. Austin Miles exclaimed:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known. **PM***

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Serve in Love

I remember seeing in some recent magazine a piece on volunteerism in America. Happily, I recall one statistic: "Of places Americans volunteer to work, rank of the church: Number One."

That doesn't surprise me, however, because serving one another springs from the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, the Bible says, "Serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13).

Dealing with the intruding telephone calls of a parsonage, I vacillated from delight to despair, perhaps in some proportion to frequency. While I was trying to learn how to adjust to that disturbing demand, I happened to visit in the study of my friend, Rev. Maurice Palmquist. He had taped to his telephone this simple reminder: "**This is an opportunity for cheerful Christian service.**" That jolted me back to reality—we who were called, prepared, and ordained into ministry have been set apart especially to "serve one another in love."

If we follow Jesus at all, He will lead us into "opportunit[ies] for cheerful Christian service." That's who we are, and that's what we do. The Lord has equipped us to serve one another. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

I have been a pastor for nearly 37 years. I have listened to many

ministerial conversations and visited many parsonage families. Most pastors seek to serve their church, but a few seek to have the church serve them.

The spirit of legalism drives some—the "oughts" and "shoulds." Any service rendered is given out of duty or expectation, maybe even according to "job descriptions."

The spirit of license affects some—independent of their people, chafing under the pastoral role, feeling trapped by some "system." Any service is given grudgingly, tinged with rebellion.

Yet, most pastors and their precious families are driven by love—eager to serve one another, wishing somehow to be more effective, to reach farther to touch more people, to be more like Jesus in giving encouragement and help. Any service is given as to Jesus himself from a heart of surrendered love. When you love someone enough to serve him or her, you don't want to hurt or disappoint, to exploit or backbite, to devour or compete. The Holy Spirit works through us, enabling us to "serve one another in love."

During a horrible famine in India, a young Swedish visitor wrote a letter from India. The closing words described the forlorn situation from his perspective: "It is so awful that it is a denial of God."

Another letter was sent from a traveler visiting the same area of

the famine. Observing the sad scene, he closed his letter: "In the midst of so much pain, your volunteers seem like the face of God." He had seen volunteers—servants of Jesus, serving the most unfortunate out of love for the Lord. "Serve one another in love."

Pastors, if we have a servant's heart, our people will catch on and minister way beyond our own reach. One of our ladies serves away from public view by giving free haircuts. Another lady serves a family enfeebled by the cruel tricks of aging. Yet another knitted caps for the cold homeless of our city. One man and his wife give away thousands of Bibles around the world. One man paints houses of people who need help. Another has spent many hours caring for our church buildings. Still another teaches a class of eager, lively pupils. One lady sends cards of encouragement to the sick and shut-in. On and on the list goes and grows—seen and unseen, but all known to Jesus!

Marian was born and raised in European aristocracy. Her marriages took her to Vienna, Hollywood, Germany, and Paris as a socialite. Through meeting Dr. Albert Schweitzer, she ended up in Lambarene, in the heart of Africa, as a servant of Jesus. Born to luxury, Marion changed bandages, bathed babies, fed lepers—and found herself in Christ. Nothing had satisfied her until she met Jesus and gave everything to Him in service.

When Marian died in 1979, the *New York Times* carried her obituary, which included her statement: "Albert Schweitzer said there are two classes of people in this world—the helpers and the nonhelpers. I'm a helper."

What a great obituary! We find ourselves by losing ourselves in service for the King of Kings. Why shouldn't we serve one another? After all, we are family!

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

PM

Courage for Ministry

Christians in the young church at Thessalonica felt the awful sting of persecution. Paul wrote back to encourage them with a profound sense of security: "To: The church of Thessalonica—kept safe in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:1, TLB). Let Paul's words bolster your sagging spirits. **First, when you pass through the tough times, hold steady in the Lord.**

Keep faith growing: "We . . . thank God for you . . . because your faith is growing more and more" (v. 3). Faith is more than a passive reception of God's grace. Faith acts on the basis of commitment to God. This "growing" faith increases with each passing episode and experience. In Heb. 11 stands a mighty list of great men and women of faith. Every one of them faced obstacles that required a growing faith.

Keep love increasing: "because . . . the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (v. 3). The tough times drew them more closely together. This "increasing" love spread like a prairie fire. Nothing is more attractive to the good news of Jesus than Christian love that reaches out to include more and more people.

Keep patience enduring: "We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" (v. 4). "Persecutions" are those sufferings we endure because we are Christians; "trials" are those sufferings we endure because we live in a hostile world.

Corrie ten Boom, imprisoned

by the Nazis, said in a letter: "Once I asked to be freed, but the Lord said, 'My grace is sufficient for you.' I am continuously looking at Him and trying not to be impatient. I won't be here one minute longer than God deems necessary. Pray for me that I can wait for His timing."¹

Second, when you pass through tough times, let God use your sufferings. Keep two facts in mind.

Remember that God is right: "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. . . . He will . . . give relief to you who are troubled" (vv. 5-7). God will not waste your suffering. Ultimately our trials work for us, not against us. Often out of your greatest suffering will come your greatest ministry! God promises relief. Paul's word for "relief" means "not under pressure"—the opposite of his word for "trials." It describes the slackening of tension of a taut bowstring, a loosening of the strain from persecutions and trials. Paul declared, "Therefore we do not lose heart. . . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

Remember God is just: "He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you" (v. 6). God holds everyone accountable for his or her actions. The fact of divine retribution and reward says that life is significant. Our actions have lasting consequences. Jesus is coming back to settle the accounts

and "to receive praise and admiration because of all he has done for his people, his saints" (v. 10, TLB).

Third, when you pass through tough times, depend on prayer. Paul added, "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you" (v. 11).

Pray that God will make you the person He desires. Our spiritual advancements come through prayer. That's why the devil never bothers to say, "Don't pray." He merely suggests, "Don't pray now!"

We pastors should pray that God may count us worthy of His calling—not out of duty, but out of gratitude that exclaims, "Thank You, Father, for loving me!" Only as God is at work in us can He deem us worthy: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

Pray that God will be glorified in you: "We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 12). Pray that you don't have to wait until you get to heaven to glorify the Lord. Ask Him to transform you until your life brings glory to Him in this world. Like it or not, people judge Jesus by how we live.

A. J. Gossip preached in a sermon to his congregation in Glasgow: "When the saints go marching in, the angels will look at one another and exclaim, 'How very like Jesus these people are!'"² Paul affirmed, "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

When you pass through the tough times, you are "kept safe" in the Lord. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear" (Ps. 46:1-2). **PM**

1. Corrie ten Boom, *Corrie ten Boom's Prison Letters* (Carmel, N.Y.: Guideposts ed., Fleming H. Revell Co., 1975), 18-19.

2. Sydney Martin, 1, 2, 3 *John, Jude, Revelation*, vol. 10 of *Beacon Bible Expositions*, ed. William M. Greathouse and Willard H. Taylor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 74.

BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

Ministry—a Passion, Not a Profession

Samuel Chadwick declared, "Preaching must never be a profession: it must be a passion." Many of us have concluded that the Christian ministry must be the worst profession but the highest calling. One minister insisted, "A minister is a prophet of God. He is under orders. If no agonizing, terrifying convictions impelled him to enter this holy office, he had better never touch it."

Bishop Simpson explained in his *Lectures on Preaching*:

Even in its faintest form there is this distinction between a call to the ministry and a choice of other professions; a young man may wish to be a physician; he may desire to enter the navy; he would like to be a farmer; but he feels he ought to be a minister. It is this feeling of ought, or obligation, which in its feeblest form indicates the Divine call. It is not in the aptitude, taste, or desire, but in the conscience, that its root is found. It is the voice of God to the human conscience saying, "You ought to preach."

With deep conviction, Paul Scherer wrote:

We should . . . clear out of the road all the nonsense we have picked up . . . in the matter of the call of the Christian ministry. There is such a call; and when it comes, it comes straight from God. I believe with all my heart that a man must hear it and feel its imperious constraint before he can

ever give himself with any wholehearted devotion and abiding wonder to this stewardship of the Gospel.

John Henry Jowett exclaimed, "The call of the Eternal must ring through the rooms of his soul as clearly as the sound of the morning bell rings through the valleys of Switzerland, calling the peasants to early prayer and praise." The powerful pastor G. Campbell Morgan spoke from broad experience:

No man can go unless the Spirit calls him. . . . Unless he hears that call sounding in his soul, ringing like a trumpet night and day, giving him no rest until he is compelled to say: "Woe is me, if I preach not," then, in God's name, let him stay where he is, in his present calling. But, if he hears the call, then let him remember that it is his business to go forward within the fellowship and under the guidance of the church.

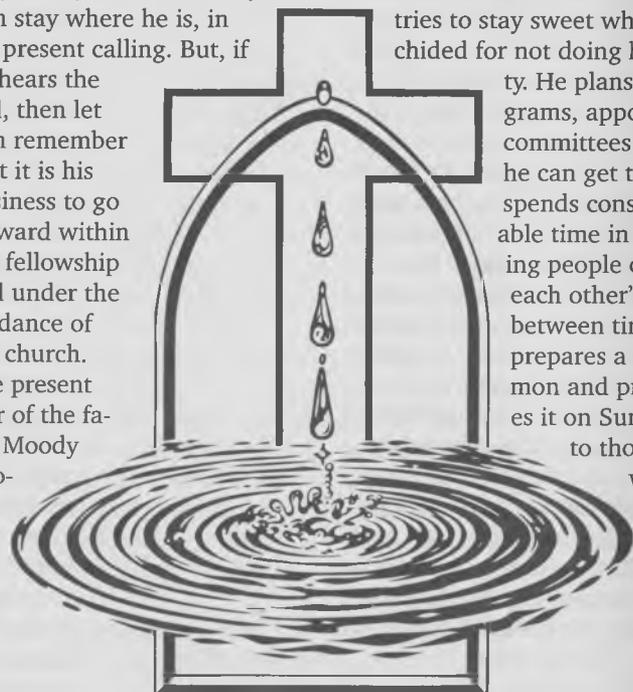
The present pastor of the famous Moody Memorial

Church in Chicago, Erwin Lutzer, defines a call: "God's call is an inner conviction given by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by the Word of God and the Body of Christ."

An anonymous writer answered the question, "What Does a Pastor Do?"

The pastor teaches, though he must solicit his own classes. He heals, though without pills or knife. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of a philosopher, an entertainer, a salesman, a decorative piece for public functions, and he is supposed to be a scholar. He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow, and to admonish those who sin, and tries to stay sweet when chided for not doing his duty.

He plans programs, appoints committees when he can get them; spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other's hair; between time he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday to those who don't



BY RANDAL E.
DENNY

happen to have any other engagement. Then on Monday he smiles when some jovial chap roars, "What a job—one day a week!"

The Christian ministry is a special calling of God to serve as shepherds. If a shepherd is allergic to the sheep, it must be a terrible task. But if he loves the sheep, what could be a higher calling? To love them is to open himself to the possibility of being hurt by them. Paul Rees said, "Prophets are offered no immunity from misfortune. Sooner or later most of them seem to get hurt. A call to the ministry is more than a call to service; it is a call to high courage." The only preacher to serve as president of the United States, James A. Garfield, admitted he had to step down to become president.

Since coming to Spokane Valley Church, I have read 24 of E. Stanley Jones's 28 books in chronological order. The discipline rejuvenated my ministry. In more than one book, Dr. Jones related:

I have a sense of being sent. This verse was given me in my early ministry: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father . . . hee may give it you" (John 15:16, KJV). Before I speak I ask the audience to bow their heads in silent prayer with me. I really do not pray; I repeat this verse to God, to remind Him that I am not here by my choice, but by His. It gives me a sense of mission and commission, with divine backing, not on my own resources, but on His resources. So preaching is a joy.

And so I say to you, fellow pastors, what Paul said to Pastor Timothy: "Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). **PM**

Love That Stoops *continued from page 42*

with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (v. 18). Let's resist the temptation to be superficial in love. Let's do more than talk about a need; let's love "in deed"—let's *do something!* Barclay noted, "Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and not all the talk of Christian love in the world will take the place of a kindly action to a man in need, made at the expense of some self-denial and some self-sacrifice, for in that action the principle of the Cross is operative again."² An act of love opens people's hearts to hear our words of love.

People are just like us. People hurt in the same ways we hurt. We can be God's answer to one another within the fellowship of His family: "Love . . . with actions and in truth." "Love" is not simply a word to write on a wall plaque. "Love" is what we do to people who irritate us, when we are upset and angry and feel like striking back. "Little children, let us stop just saying we love people; let us *really* love them, and *show it* by our *actions*" (v. 18, TLB, italics in original).

As brothers and sisters, we love one another at first sight because we are Christians; and then we move toward getting acquainted. Out in the world, people first get acquainted and then move cautiously into love—sometimes. Even the skeptical philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "Of all forms of caution, caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to human happiness." As a result, most people have many acquaintances and only a few friends—but they are dying from a lack of love.

Would you begin to love one another with a love that stoops and lifts in Jesus' name? **PM**

1. Reuben Welch, *We Really Do Need Each Other* (Nashville: Impact Books, a division of John T. Benson Publishing Co., n.d.), 70-72.

2. William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, in the Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 100.

Randy Denny, Servant of God

BY MARVIN J. PACE

He walked as a prince
among men
"in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake."

He devoted his life to family
and to his church.

He persevered until his final days.
And then, like Enoch of old,
he "walked with God:
and he was not; for God
took him."

Randy Denny . . .
Servant of the Most High
God!

*In loving memory to Ruth
and family.* **PM**

Worship and Preaching Helps

INTRODUCTION

The months of June, July, and August present special challenges for the thoughtful preacher. Many of the congregational members find themselves pulled to family reunions and vacations. Such a situation makes the preaching of a tight-knit series ill-advised. The hearer returning from vacation will feel lost as you tie your message into the one preached the Sunday he or she was absent. One solution to this problem is to preach from one book of the Bible. This provides unity in your preaching because you are drawing from one book. At the same time it provides flexibility, since you are dealing with various topic matters dictated by the text itself.

While I was preaching the series of sermons that follow, my congregation eagerly looked forward to another draught from the historical river found in 2 Chronicles. To start each sermon, I typically invite the congregation to "turn with me to. . ." and then announce the text. One Sunday about midway through the series, I announced the text as I usually do. Amazingly, my congregation filled in the blank, saying, "2 Chronicles," while waiting for me to finish by directing them to the right chapter and verse. From that Sunday to the end of the series they took great delight in filling in the

blank when I announced the text with the words, "2 Chronicles." 2 Chronicles has proven to be a fascinating quarry from which to mine sermons. It is filled with great battles, murder, suspense, and intrigue. The congregation enjoyed the guided tour through the book, since much of it was unfamiliar to them.

As you read these sermons, you will discover a certain philosophy of mine regarding preaching. My primary goal is not to educate or entertain. The goal of serious preaching must be to change lives. If someone learns something and is entertained in the process, that is an extra bonus. But if preaching fails to focus on changing lives, it has failed. Since the goal is to change lives, you will notice that most of the following sermons are geared for an altar call. Certainly people can pray in their pews or at home, but there is something special about finding help at the altar. Early in my ministry I feared the altar call. Now, I view it as the crowning moment where we can visibly see God at work. During the altar call I have learned to fully expect people to respond. Rarely am I disappointed! Of course the response is not a reflection of preaching ability but rather of God's faithfulness to prick the hearts of thoughtful listeners.

The suggested orders of worship have been arranged to follow a theme for each month. For

example, the worship format for June is built around the family of God, July is built around the Word of God, and August focuses on the theme of worship itself. Naturally the same elements of worship are found in all formats. When it comes to the music, you know your congregation best. For the special singing you may have access to a children's choir, while others may need to rely upon a solo from a child bribed to sing with the promise of ice cream! Feel free to use or discard what works best for your crowd. The Creative Worship Ideas are exactly that: only ideas. Perhaps, as you read them, you will suddenly think of a better idea. If the ideas only serve to generate your own ideas, they have served their purpose.

May God bless you as you faithfully preach the Word! **PM**

June
July
August
1999

PREPARED BY
RANDALL K.
HARTMAN



A Startling Proposition

by Randall K. Hartman

2 Chron. 1:6-12

INTRO

ILLUS. About 35 years ago, my favorite television show was titled *The Millionaire*. It was about a rich man who weekly wrote a check for \$1 million to someone he had never met. He would send out his employee to make contact with this unsuspecting recipient. It was great fun to see the reaction on his or her face when handed the check.

Today I am going to do something even more astounding than handing you a check for \$1 million. Today's truth is worth much more than a mere \$1 million. The Lord God of the Universe is handing you a blank check and asking you to fill in what it is that you want.

In the text God does something astonishing. He hands Solomon a blank check, asking him to fill it out according to what he wants. What astonishing words are found in verse 7: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." It is a blank check. As incredible as it sounds, God also comes to you, saying, "Here is your blank check. *Ask for whatever you want me to give you.*"

Let's look at this passage carefully and see what we can learn about the blank check God gives to each of us.

I. FIRST, WE LEARN GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU THE DESIRE OF YOUR HEART (V. 7)

A. Too many people think God really does not want to give us the desires of our heart. They have come to understand that He has a certain agenda of things to give us. He will give us grace, mercy, and patience.

In the view of many people God gives to us as the army gives to new recruits. When you join the army, you do not go and tell them that you would like a three-piece suit and a color TV for your room. Rather, when you arrive, they tell you exactly what they are going to give you. So many people think that when you join God's family, you wait in line, and God comes to you and says, "Here is the list of standard things that all recruits get." Of course there are some things that God does give to all who become part of His family. But it doesn't stop there. He comes to you and asks a great question: "What is the desire of your heart?"

B. Are you surprised by that question? If so, then it indicates you do not yet know God very well. He is One who wants to give us good things. Matt. 7:11 reminds us that God wants to give good gifts to His children. He wants the best for you. Remember, He has already given us His best: His Son. He is not the mean old man who waits for you to step out of line so He can club you in the

head. Not at all. He has your best interests at heart. The Scripture tells us there is a blank check in your hand. He invites you to take a pen and fill out the blank and indicate to Him the desires of your heart.

C. Naturally, we ought to qualify our understanding regarding His desire to give you good gifts. There will be times when His judgment will fall upon the wicked. He is not the kind of God who will look at sin and shrug His shoulders and say, "Oh, it doesn't really matter." Having said that, there are still those times when God comes and hands you the blank check and asks, "What do you want from Me?"

II. SECOND, WE LEARN GOD WANTS YOU TO ANSWER THE QUESTION CAREFULLY (VV. 11-12A)

A. God finds pleasure in Solomon's answer. Solomon wants "wisdom and knowledge" to "lead this people" (v. 10). What might you have expected Solomon to ask of God? Verse 11 records God's view of what Solomon could have asked for. He could have asked for the death of his enemies. Also, we would not be surprised to see that Solomon would ask God for a long life. It is surprising, however, as we read the text to discover Solomon lays aside all of the natural things you might expect him to ask for as he fills in his blank check. He simply asks for wisdom and knowledge.

B. The beginning of verse 12 reveals how important it is to ask for the right thing. Those words indicate that if Solomon had asked for the wrong thing, he might have received nothing. It is exactly because he asked for noble things, not selfish things, that God smiled and cashed the check that Solomon had filled out.

Do you see that what he asked for is a reflection of the condition of his heart? If he was selfish, he would have asked for riches. If he was power hungry, he would have asked for power. If he was self-serving, he would have asked for long life. But when he asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead his people, a window to his heart opens. As the window cracks open, we see goodness, kindness, and a love for others.

C. It is safe to say that a wrong request usually nullifies the blank check. As you hold the blank check in your hand, you may be tempted in the same manner as Solomon. You may be tempted to ask for selfish things. You may want to write in the blank a certain sum of money. You may want to have God give you the power. Pause and think carefully how you use this wonderful opportunity.

Why would God stamp "Void" across the check if you ask for the wrong thing? It is simply because God wants to give you what is best for you. If you ask for something that is not good for you, God usually will not allow you to receive your request. For example, if you ask for money, and it is not in your best interest for God to grant that request, the request goes unanswered.

Think carefully. What is the best request you could make of God? Would He have you ask for wisdom and knowledge? Would He have you ask Him to reveal His will to you? Would He want you to ask Him to help you to influence someone else for Christ? Fill in the blanks of the check carefully.

III. THIRD, WE LEARN GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU EVEN MORE THAN YOU ASK FOR (VV. 11-12)

A. Here is my favorite part of the story. God gave Solomon much more than he requested. Solomon asked the right things when he asked for wisdom and knowledge. But then God came along and said, "Guess what I will do for you? I will give you even more than you asked for." At that point God promised that Solomon would become the wealthiest man the world had ever known. Scripture bears out the fact that God kept His promise. Even at the end of this very chapter we see that Solomon had accumulated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. He made silver and gold as common as stones. He built the Temple in rich splendor. It was as though everything he touched turned to gold. He was the Midas man of the Holy Land. All of that happened, not because Solomon asked for it, but because he was first concerned about asking for true and noble things.

B. This principle is also found in the New Testament in these words: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).

ILLUS. A king said to a treasured friend, "Ask what you will, and I will give it to you." The friend thought to himself, "If I ask to be made a general, I will easily be a general. If I ask for a certain sum of money, I will receive only the money. I'll ask something to which all these things will be added." He then said, "Give me your daughter to be my wife." Do you see his wisdom? He did this, knowing that all of the kingdom would be added to this gift.

Seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else will be added to you. It isn't that we seek the kingdom of God just so all else will be added. We are not out to do the impossible by trying to trick God. We are not to fill out our checks, asking for one thing, but hoping for another. Rather, we are to be truly interested in asking for what is best for us and what would please God. We do so, knowing that God will then come and give us more than we had ever dreamed.

ILLUS. Years ago, I struggled to know God's will for my life. I got to the point that all I wanted from God was to show me His will. It was then that I filled out the blank check as God came, asking the desire of my heart. I filled it out with these words: "To know Your will for my life." The answer was both surprising and frightening because it was then that He called me to preach. But out of that, He added "all these [other] things." You are my friends. My work is challenging and fulfilling. I am far happier following God than I would have been following myself. God gave me far more than I ever dreamed.

C. As you prepare to fill in the blanks on your check, be confident that by asking for what is right and noble, God will give you far more than you ever dreamed. Dare to ask for what is best for you. Dare to make your request pleasing to God instead of to self.

CONCLUSION

Now the blank check is before you. God has given you this opportunity. What words will you write in the blank? Perhaps you need to ask God to come and forgive you of sin. Perhaps you need to ask Him to come and take full control of your life. Maybe it is time to ask God to take control of a situation in your life. Maybe you need to ask Him to bring revival to your heart.

Take the pen and fill out the check carefully and prayerfully. As you do, watch Him give to you more than you could have ever dreamed!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GATHERING THE FAMILY

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Chorus "The Family of God"
- Responsive Reading "Let His People Praise"
Pss. 149:1b-2, 4, 6a; 67:4-5

THE FAMILY SINGS

- Hymns "To God Be the Glory"
"How Great Thou Art"

THE FAMILY PRAYS

- Pastoral Prayer/Open Altar

THE FAMILY RESPONDS

- Offering
- THE FAMILY HEARS**
- Special Song "All Because of God's Amazing Grace"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 1:6-12
- Message "A STARTLING PROPOSITION"

THE FAMILY REACTS

- Open Altar
- Song "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

- Chorus "Yes, Lord, Yes"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Invite the congregation to worship by promising them that God has a startling proposition to share with them.

Have someone in the congregation write and present a brief skit on the responses people would have to receiving a check for \$1 million.

How to Start a Revival

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 7:14

INTRO

ILLUS. At a young age, my brother and I learned how to start a fire without matches. There were several key elements that allowed success. We needed to have the right ingredients, such as leaves and small twigs. Also, we needed the ingredients to be very dry. Last of all we needed a sunny day so we could focus our magnifying glass upon the energy of the sun. When those three elements are working, we could start a fire in no time.

Starting a revival is similar to starting a fire. We need to have the right elements. This is not to say that we can start a revival without God. As in starting a fire, the sun is needed; we need to focus on God to start a revival. We cannot do it alone. We can, however, do our best to put together all the necessary elements of revival. Once we have done that, it is up to God to ignite our efforts. Verse 14 shows all the elements needed for a genuine revival.

I. IN ORDER TO HAVE A GENUINE REVIVAL, YOU NEED THE ELEMENT OF HUMBLING YOURSELF

A. Perhaps the number one cause for failing to have revival is a proud and haughty spirit. It is an attitude that thinks that revival is for someone else. It is the attitude that thinks that revival is for my mean old neighbor down the street. It is the attitude that keeps us so busy looking at everyone else that we have no time to look at ourselves.

ILLUS. The famous evangelist Gypsy Smith was once asked how to start a revival. He answered: "Go home, lock yourself in your room, kneel down in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk mark all around yourself, and ask God to start the revival inside that chalk mark. When He has answered your prayer, the revival will be on."

Why is it that a spirit of pride can keep revival from coming to your heart and even to the heart of a church? When you have such an attitude, you do not need God. You are counting on yourself instead of counting on Him. Why, even if you did need revival, you can do it on your own if you pray a little harder. That's revival without God, and revival without God is not revival. It is simply an act of pride.

B. It is only when we humble ourselves before God that we can have revival. The word "humble" means to be brought down or to be brought into subjection. When we allow God to do that, we can have the beginnings of revival. As we come to understand that it is not my brother or my sister but me that needs prayer, then God can come and start a revival in our heart. Once we humble our-

selves before Him, then we can begin to worry about the needs of others during revival. Naturally we want many new souls won to the Kingdom during a revival meeting. But the text says, "If my people . . . humble themselves."

ILLUS. The story is told of a prominent minister who was driving in southern California. It was in the days when that area had fewer people than it has today. As he approached the town of Vista, he saw a sign that read: Population 17500. He decided that some trickster had added a zero to the sign. Mentally he whittled the village down to the "correct" size of 1,750. After arriving at the church where he was scheduled to preach, he met with the board to pray the Lord's blessing on the service. The first to lead in prayer said, "Lord, we thank You for our guest speaker and for his reputation; but let us remember that no matter how big men are, they still need You." The preacher's mind flashed back to the sign he had seen earlier. He said to himself, "This man is rubbing out any zeros of pride I've added to my life."

As you think about revival, you may need to knock a few zeros off your life and realize revival is for you. Genuine revival comes as we humble ourselves before God.

II. IN ORDER TO HAVE A GENUINE REVIVAL, YOU NEED THE ELEMENT OF PRAYING AND SEEKING GOD'S FACE

A. One of the key thoughts in our verse is to "pray and seek" God. Prayer for revival is nothing new. But notice the text does not simply say we should "pray." To have genuine revival, we dare not pray the routine prayers of "Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub." To have revival, we do not pray on autopilot.

That is not how we are to pray for revival. What does the text say? It says we should pray *and* seek His face. In the original language the phrase "seek [His] face" means that we desire and require His presence. It is acknowledging that we cannot do it on our own. We acknowledge that in order for revival to happen, we must have His presence.

ILLUS. On a gloomy day in 1857 a man in New York City by the name of Jeremiah Lanphier read the morning newspaper. He was distressed to read that the depression gripping the nation was causing fear and panic. Factories were stopping production, and thousands were unemployed. Although Lanphier was only a clerk, he was a man who had great faith in God! Concerned with the troubling economic situation, he sent a note to all his business friends. The note invited them to a daily prayer meeting to be held at noon in his office. With high hopes he arranged 20 chairs in a circle, but the first day no one came. All alone he prayed that God would bring about a change in him and in the troubling economic condition. The second day he was encouraged when a few friends joined him. Before too long all 20 chairs were occupied. Several weeks later a similar gathering was started on Wall Street, another on Williams Street, and finally a fourth on Roadway Street. Then like wildfire the movement spread to all parts of the country. The entire nation felt the impact. There was a great upsurge in the spiritual life of the people. It all happened because one man dared to not just pray but to seek God's face.

B. You just might be having revival if you find yourself praying *and* seeking the face of God. The coming revival might be the one that will change you, your family, and this church. If we would dare to pray and seek His face, perhaps the entire community would feel the impact of revival!

This means praying diligently for revival. It means praying with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. You just might have revival if you pray like that!

III. IN ORDER TO HAVE A GENUINE REVIVAL, YOU NEED THE ELEMENT OF TURNING FROM YOUR WICKED WAYS

A. A preliminary glance at this verse may convince you that the idea of turning from your wicked ways applies to those sinners who need to come to Jesus. Again, however, let me pull you back to the context. The verse begins, "If my people . . ." There is no way to analyze or dissect this scripture and come up with any conclusion other than this turning from our wicked ways refers to the people of God. It referred to the chosen people of God, the Church. Some church folk will be indignant that this verse implies there might be sin in their life. If that is the case, it takes us right back to the first part of this verse: "humble" yourself. You need to humbly admit that there may be sin in your life. Pastor, if there is a wicked way in you, turn from it. Board member, if there is a wicked way in you, turn from it. Sunday School teacher, if there is a wicked way in you, turn from it. Longtime benchwarmer, if there is a wicked way in you, turn from it. Visitor, if there is a wicked way in you, turn from it.

B. Revival will not come to a church where there are church people who are hanging on to sin in their lives. It will not come to those who sweep it under the carpet and hide it from themselves and others. Revival will not come if there is sin in your life that you have decided to call everything else but sin. We need a spirit of openness in our lives that will allow us to bring that sin to the Lord. Only then can revival take place.

ILLUS. Earlier in his life Augustine prayed, "Lord, save me from my sins, but not quite yet." Later he prayed, "Lord, save me from all my sins—except one." Finally he prayed, "Lord, save me from all my sins, and save me now!"

The last prayer of Augustine's is the kind of prayer that ought to be on the lips of everyone who seeks real revival. It is, in fact, one of the key elements for revival.

C. Did you notice there is progression here in the text? We must first humble ourselves and get to the place where we want revival and God's presence more than we want to protect our saintly image. Then we must get on our knees and earnestly seek God's face. We require and desire His presence. And then, and perhaps only then,

can we hear the news from God that it may be we have unconfessed sin in our lives. Only when we have humbled ourselves, and gotten on our knees before Him, are we ready to face the reality of sin in our lives. Once we, the people of God, are ready to do that, then we might be in the midst of an old-fashioned Holy Ghost revival.

CONCLUSION

Every Christian heart and church needs to experience a genuine revival. We do not need to settle for substitutes. Only the real thing will do. God will gladly bring such a revival if you follow the words of 2 Chron. 7:14. Humble yourself. Seek His face. Confess your sin. When you have those elements firmly in order, stand back and watch God send the one spark that is needed to ignite a revival.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GATHERING THE FAMILY

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Chorus "The Family of God"
- Responsive Reading "Revival and Renewal"
- THE FAMILY SINGS**
- Hymns "Sweeping This Way"
"Revive Us Again"

THE FAMILY PRAYS

Pastoral Prayer

THE FAMILY RESPONDS

Offering

THE FAMILY HEARS

- Special "Thou, Whose Purpose Is to Kindle"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 7:14
- Message "HOW TO START A REVIVAL"

THE FAMILY REACTS

Open Altar "Change My Heart, O God"

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

Prayer

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PRIOR TO THE SERVICE

Find several in the congregation who have personally experienced times of great revival in the church. Give them a few moments in the service to share their memories.

THE FAMILY REACTS

Open the altar for those who would like to pray for God to start a revival in their own heart.

BENEDICTION

As the congregation prepares to leave, have them sing "Send a Great Revival," followed by a brief prayer.

Defeating the Enemy

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 13:1-18

INTRO

ILLUS. In my last pastorate I had the joy of helping members of the congregation re-roof the church. We worked hard all week long. Those of us who were not accustomed to such labor ended up with smashed fingers, bleeding blisters, and aching backs. On Sunday morning it was almost amusing to see all of the bandages and limps as the people filed into church. It reminded me that the church is a hospital. During the week the enemy attacks, sometimes causing damage. At the end of the week the walking wounded come to the church for comfort and aid against the enemy.

Our scripture for today shows us how we can defeat the enemy. It does not guarantee immunity from the enemy. He will still attack, sometimes causing us harm. But 2 Chron. 13 does show us how to assure defeat of the soul's enemy.

King Abijah of Judah and his army goes out to face the army of the rebellious northern nation of Israel. He faces overwhelming odds. His forces are outnumbered two to one. Yet, he wins a decisive victory! How does he defeat the enemy in face of such odds? How can we, too, face and defeat the enemy of our soul? To defeat Satan, you must make sure that you possess and use certain key weapons in your defense. Let's take a look at these weapons, which will assure you of victory.

I. TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY OF YOUR SOUL, YOU MUST USE THE WEAPON OF ALLEGIANCE (V. 10)

A. As the armies prepare to do battle, Abijah announces to the enemies that they of Judah have not forsaken the Lord. Their allegiance is to the one true God. They have faced temptations along the way to abandon their allegiance to God. They have had a history of forsaking Him. But at least at this point in their history they are firmly allied with Him. The fact that they have remained true to God gives them a weapon to use against the enemy.

The same cannot be said of the enemy army, which Abijah addresses. This is the army of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They have abandoned God. Verse 8 even notes that they are carrying into battle with them the gods of the golden calves. As a result, they are fighting a battle they would never win.

ILLUS. Lt. Col. William Travis addressed the weary defenders of the Alamo. "Men, the Mexican dictator, General Santa Anna, has demanded our surrender. But this fort is essential to the defense of Texas. My orders are to hold it. There is no help coming to reinforce us. The Mexicans are about 5,000 strong." As the 232 American soldiers watched, Colonel Travis drew a line on the dirt floor with his sword. "Any man who wants to escape is free to go

now; any who are determined to stay and die in defense of the Alamo will cross the line." One by one they crossed the line to certain death. Lieutenant Colonel Travis sent the fateful message: "We refuse to surrender." The Mexicans attacked on March 6, 1836. The Americans fought with determination, but inevitably all lay dead. When news of their bravery arrived at the American forces, the defenders were inspired to advance. Gen. Sam Houston gave the battle cry: "Victory is certain! Remember the Alamo."

B. In order to defeat the enemy, you must have sworn complete allegiance to God. It is possible, like the men of the Alamo, that you will lose a few battles along the way. But if you will cling to God, you will ultimately find allegiance to be a powerful weapon to help give you victory. With allegiance you will never become sidetracked by temptation. With allegiance you can remain focused on God. With allegiance to God you will ultimately experience victory.

II. TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY OF YOUR SOUL, YOU MUST USE THE WEAPON OF OBEDIENCE (VV. 10-11)

A. These two verses are loaded with examples of obedience to God. The people of Judah have been instructed by God to follow certain rules concerning their worship. They have followed God's command to use only legitimate priests in their worship. They obediently present sacrifices to God. All of their implements of worship have been carefully cleaned for use according to God's instructions. Every evening the lamps in the Temple are lit as God had required them. They have taken the commands of God seriously. As a result, they are using the weapon of obedience.

ILLUS. Major General Montgomery came into command in North Africa to rescue the Allied forces from a terrible situation. Major General Montgomery expected his commands to be carried out. Years later he commented on his expectations: "Orders no longer formed the basis for discussion, but for action. . . . Previously orders had generally been queried by subordinates right down the line. I was determined to stop this state of affairs at once."

Major General Montgomery knew that obedience was the way to victory. Without obedience the forces would flounder in disunity. A lack of obedience would have meant chaos on the battlefield. He knew that obedience was a tremendous weapon.

B. As you face the enemy of your soul, our Commander in Chief expects full obedience. If the order is given to attack, then we must attack. If He says to retreat, then we must retreat for the moment. Even if the order seems inconsequential, we must obey.

It ought to be easy to be obedient to such a great Leader. He sees the complete battlefield. He knows the mind of the enemy. He is aware of our weaknesses and knows the strengths of the enemy. What else could we want in a leader?

A pastor friend told me that the people of his congregation had so much confidence in him that they would charge hell with a squirt gun if he asked them to do it. If

we are so eager to follow frail human leadership into battle, why wouldn't we follow God with the same enthusiasm? Obedience is a key weapon in defeating the enemy.

III. TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY OF YOUR SOUL, YOU MUST USE THE WEAPON OF RELIANCE (V. 18)

A. When the smoke and dust cleared, the enemy had suffered 500,000 casualties. How had an army of 400,000 done this? Was it clever human leadership? Was it due to a secret weapon? The text gives us the surprising answer. Victory came because they had relied upon God.

You might expect a much different answer than the one found in the text. Our human minds cry for some tangible reason for victory. We would love to think that it was something that the warriors had done to bring about victory. But that is not the case. They simply relied upon God. Reliance upon God was a major reason for defeating the enemy.

ILLUS. Sir John Franklin lived a life of adventure in the British navy, which took him to many parts of the world. He was a devout Christian and found great strength in reading the Bible. His crew said they would rather have him hold a service than most ministers. In 1845 he was put in command of two ships to look for a way across the polar seas. The last communication from them came through their contact with a whaling ship. Many expeditions were made in the next 10 years to learn the fate of Sir John Franklin and his crew. Finally wreckage from the ships was found on a beach, suggesting a shipwreck in the icy seas. Sir John Franklin's Bible was one of the books recovered. They found the following verses underlined: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:9-10, *KJV*). Sir Franklin was relying upon God for help and strength. Apparently, he lost the battle for life but won the most important battle of eternal life.

B. You can never go wrong relying upon God. In the dark night of the soul, He will see you through. It may not turn out exactly as we had planned, but victory is assured when we rely upon Him!

Too often we rely upon ourselves for victory. We use our own resources when we could rely upon God's. Strangely, we flex our own muscles instead of allowing God to use His strength. How odd that we often rely on our own ingenuity instead of God's! Such mistaken reliance earmarks us for defeat. Learning to rely upon God is another powerful weapon in your arsenal against the enemy.

CONCLUSION

You do not need to live a life of defeat. Victory can be yours if you use the right weapons. It is true that when we face Satan, we are overmatched. In our own strength we will fail. But we have a great Commander in Chief who wants to bring us victory. Use these weapons and defeat the enemy. They may not seem like enough to cause the enemy to fall, but that's what they said about David's slingshot.

Face the enemy of your soul with confidence. The enemy has no power over you. Bring the struggle to the place of prayer. Ask God to help bring the victory to your heart that you so desperately need.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GATHERING THE FAMILY

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Chorus "The Family of God"
- Responsive Reading Ps. 121
- THE FAMILY SINGS**
- Hymns "Arise, My Soul, Arise"
"Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary"

THE FAMILY PRAYS

Pastoral Prayer

THE FAMILY RESPONDS

- Offering
- THE FAMILY HEARS**
- Special "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 13:1-18
- Message "DEFEATING THE ENEMY"

THE FAMILY REACTS

Music "Only Trust Him"

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

Music "God Will Make a Way"

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

CALL TO WORSHIP

As you approach the moment of worship, acknowledge to the congregation that there may be some present who are weary and wounded from spiritual battle. Assure them that today they will find a plan for defeating the enemy.

THE FAMILY REACTS

Invite those who need spiritual victory to pray at the altar.

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

As the congregation prepares to leave, have them sing "God Will Make a Way," followed by a brief prayer.

A Godly Influence

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 17:1-13

INTRO

Did you know you have unseen power over other people? Such power is called influence. Our influence extends in ever-widening circles as ripples of water formed by dropping a stone in a pond. Christians must recognize and cherish their influence.

God needs people who do their best to have a godly influence wherever they find themselves. It is impossible to overstate the importance of such an influence.

Verses 5-12 show us the power of influence. We see in verse 5 that all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat. Again in verse 5 we see he had great wealth and honor. Verse 10 reveals that the kingdoms did not make war on Judah anymore. In verse 11 the Philistines and the Arabs, sworn enemies of the Jews, brought lavish gifts to Jehoshaphat. Verse 12 goes on to show us that he became more and more powerful.

How could this happen? Much of it happened due to Jehoshaphat's godly influence upon those around him. Oh, for influence upon others that has that kind of impact!

By looking closely at this story, we can learn from Jehoshaphat's example how we, too, can live lives of godly influence.

I. TO BE A PERSON OF GODLY INFLUENCE, YOU MUST LEARN TO CONSULT GOD AND NOT THE WORLD (2 CHRON. 17:3-4)

A. The reference to the "Baal" represents the worldly influence of the day in which Jehoshaphat lived. The Baals were the common god of the pagan culture that had to do with fertility. As you can imagine, most of the pagan people around Jehoshaphat felt the influence of Baal. In fact, the Jews felt the influence of Baal, and in many cases they allowed this false god to impact their lives.

Jehoshaphat, however, was a shining exception. That's why the end of verse 3 is quick to say, "He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father" (inc. v. 4a). Consequently, as he learned to seek God, he became a tremendous influence on others.

B. How sad it is to realize that many Christians have such a poor influence because they consult the gods of the world instead of the Lord God. They consult the horoscope to make their everyday decisions. They consult the wisdom of their friends. They embrace popular ways of worldly thinking. Sadly some Christians rarely consult God as to what He wants them to do and how He wants them to act.

C. This example from the life of Jehoshaphat shows that when you consult God concerning decisions, you have a godly influence on others. As you consult Him, He

will show you the right thing to do. In short, you will become a godly influence on others when you seek God and allow Him to show you how to live your life.

II. TO BE A PERSON OF GODLY INFLUENCE, YOU MUST LEARN TO FOLLOW GOD AND NOT THE WORLD (2 CHRON. 17:4B)

A. The words of verse 4 refer to a story with which the people in 2 Chronicles were familiar. During this time, King Jehu of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had gotten rid of Baal worship. Unfortunately, he did nothing about another sinful influence: the worship of the golden calf. All he did was get rid of one sin and settled for another. So he followed the world and not God. As a result, the Bible tells us that Jehu and his kingdom shrank. He did not prosper as a king.

B. If you are to have a godly influence on your world, you must learn to follow God and not the world. Do not consider taking the road that the world would have you take. Do not follow the world as it tries to give you insight on how to live your life. The world teaches us you can do whatever you want without regard to the impact upon others. Many follow the wisdom of this world. As a result they experience heartache.

C. But when you follow God, He will always lead you to the place where you will be a godly influence on others. He does not want to lead you into a situation where you have a negative influence on others. He wants you to succeed in this area of a godly influence. You can count on Him to lead you to say and do the right thing in every situation.

Follow God if you want to have a godly influence.

III. TO BE A PERSON OF GODLY INFLUENCE, YOU MUST LEARN TO BE DEVOTED TO GOD AND NOT THE WORLD (2 CHRON. 17:6A)

A. Jehoshaphat learned that to be a godly influence, you must devote yourself to God and not the world. The word translated as "devoted" means "to lift up." Jehoshaphat lifts up his heart to the holy influence of God. Living close to God impacts and improves our influence.

ILLUS. Try turning your stove burner on high; see how much influence it has upon your hand when it is four feet away. How much more influence does the hot burner have at one foot? But consider the influence at three inches! The closer to the burner, the greater its impact.

Jehoshaphat raises his heart to God through devotion. He does this because he knows that the closer he gets to God, the greater God's influence upon him. As a result he will have a greater godly influence upon others.

ILLUS. The United States President Woodrow Wilson describes his only contact with the famous preacher D. L. Moody like this:

I was in a barbershop when I became conscious that someone unusual had entered the room. A man had come in quietly and took a seat in the chair next to mine. Every word he uttered showed a vital interest in the one who was serving him. Purposely I lingered until after he left and noted the effect his visit had upon the barbers in that shop. Though they did not know his

name, his presence had greatly influenced them. I left there feeling as though I had been to a place of worship.

Why did Moody have such a godly influence on those barbers and the man who later became president of the United States? It was because he was a man dedicated to God. You can have a similar influence as you live close to Him.

B. Having a godly influence on others requires living close to God. As you get close to Him and allow Him to influence your life, you will then be able to strengthen your influence on others.

IV. TO BE A PERSON OF GODLY INFLUENCE, YOU MUST LEARN TO RID YOUR LIFE OF SIN AS GOD DIRECTS AND NOT ACCEPT SIN AS THE WORLD DOES (2 CHRON. 17:6B)

A. Jehoshaphat knew that to keep a godly influence, he had to deal with recurring sin. We have seen his commitment to God and how he followed Him. But now he gets word there are still some involved in sin in his kingdom. They have built platforms on top of the mountains surrounding Jerusalem on which they worship false gods. As a result, Jehoshaphat goes to work. He makes sure of their removal. What is the big deal? A godly influence and sin simply do not go together.

B. Sometimes, even as Christians we forget this truth. We take care of sin in our lives and make commitments to God. But if sin reenters our lives in some form or another, we often ignore it and refuse to deal with it. When we refuse to deal with our sin, we wonder why we have little influence on those around us.

ILLUS. A strange dog came to a preacher's house, and his three sons quickly became fond of it. It so happened that there were three distinct white hairs in the dog's tail. One day an advertisement appeared in the newspaper about a lost dog that fit that description perfectly. "In the presence of my three boys," said the minister, "we carefully removed those white hairs."

The dog's real owner discovered where his pet had found a home and came to claim him. Quickly the minister spoke up, "Didn't you say the dog would be known by three white hairs in its tail?" The owner, unable to find the three hairs on his tail, could only leave. The minister said later, "We kept the dog, but I lost my three boys for Christ."

C. When you commit a sin, you must confess it to God, or it will ruin your godly influence. Do not waste time wondering how others know; others can usually tell if there is something between you and God. When you commit sin, you can forget about being a godly influence to others. Do not allow one sin to remain unconfessed in your heart. Give it to God; and when forgiveness comes, you will be a tremendous influence for others.

CONCLUSION

What a difference we make when we are an influence for God. However, such an influence does not come automatically. You must work at it. Consult God, follow Him, be devoted to Him, and refuse to let sin undermine your influence. Others are counting on you to be a light in the darkness. God forbid that we should fail them.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

GATHERING THE FAMILY

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Chorus "The Family of God"
- Responsive Reading "The Mission of the Church"
(Matt. 28:18; Mark 16:15; Acts 17:24a, 26a, 27a;
Rom. 10:13-15; Ps. 96:1b, 2b-3; John 3:16)

THE FAMILY SINGS

- Hymns "Sound the Battle Cry"
"Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus"

THE FAMILY PRAYS

Pastoral Prayer

THE FAMILY RESPONDS

Offering

THE FAMILY HEARS

- Special "Living for Jesus"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 7:1-13
- Message "A GODLY INFLUENCE"

THE FAMILY REACTS

- Song "Lord, Lay Some Soul upon My Heart"

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

Prayer

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PRIOR TO THE SERVICE

Prepare a covenant card to be distributed before the service. Explain to them that they are to write on the card the name of the person they want to see saved. Design the card in such a way that those who carry the card will be challenged to positively impact the life of the one for whom they are praying.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Invite the congregation to share in worshipping a God who desires us to be the best possible influence to others.

THE FAMILY REACTS

Open the altar for members of the congregation to come forward to pray for the lost.

THE FAMILY DEPARTS

Before a brief concluding prayer, challenge the congregation to pray every day this week that they will be the godly influence they ought to be.

The Valley of Blessing

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 20:1-26

INTRO

Some of my favorite religious songs deal with the concept of blessing. But often we feel anything but blessed as we sing those songs. The money does not stretch far enough, or there are problems at home or work, or our soul has felt stagnant or empty for a mighty long time. So many of us trudge along in our Christian life and forget that God wants to bless His people including us. He wants the Christian life to be thrilling and victorious.

Here is the truth: there is something missing in your spiritual health if there is no joy in serving God. What if there is no joy or victory? There are steps you can take to put yourself in a position where God will bless you. You can travel to the valley of blessing and wait there for Him to inspire you.

ILLUS. Scholars tell us that in the time of the Old Testament patriarchs there was a strange custom behind the biblical phrase, "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10). The king would ask the honored guest to open his mouth. The king would then fill his guest's mouth with candied fruit. Occasionally the king would honor the guest by placing jewels in his mouth! When was the last time God filled your life with blessing?

We cannot force God to bless us. We can, however, go to the valley of blessing. As you tarry there, hidden joys will emerge. Today it is my goal to go with you to the valley of blessing. Let's look at the story and then highlight how you can make the journey.

I. HERE'S THE STORY

A. King Jehoshaphat had just turned out the lights for the night when an urgent knocking started at his chamber door. He went to the door and discovered it was his secretary of war and some of his generals. They were looking very grim. The king started to tell the men at his door that tomorrow would be better. Quickly they dared to interrupt the king. Collectively they shook their head no and told the king that they immediately needed to have a meeting of the war council. Word had been received of a massive three-nation army forming to the south. Their intelligence information revealed that this army was going to march on them. They needed to prepare for the attack.

The text tells us two things about this approaching army. In verse 2 the King James Version calls it a "great multitude." In Hebrew those two words have to do with sound and size—this army is so huge that the ground

rumbles as they march along the desert sands. Second, the position of the army is on the western side of the Dead Sea. This position puts them within two days' striking distance of Jerusalem.

B. Verse 3 tells us the king finds the news alarming. He calls the entire nation to a fast. Representatives of every town arrive in Jerusalem to seek God's help and direction. They all gather in front of the Temple, and King Jehoshaphat prays the prayer found in verses 6-12.

In verses 14-17, God answers. All they need to do is show up at the battle scene, and He will fight the battle for them. Sure enough, when they arrive at the place of battle, they are stunned. The entire thundering army is lying dead.

Verses 22-23 reveal what happened. The alliance of the three nations broke down. The enemy had destroyed itself. All that was needed was for the king's army to go down into the valley of blessing and pick up the plunder. There was so much blessing that it took the entire army three days to gather it.

C. It ought to be clear that if the Israelites had remained where they were, God would never have blessed them. If they had stayed cowering in Jerusalem, things would have been much different.

For the situation to turn around, they had to travel to the valley of blessing. There God went before them and brought them victory. There they received the plunder of the enemy. There they praised God for His blessing. In verse 26 we read: "This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah to this day." Beracah means "blessing" (KJV margin).

Some of us desperately need to travel to the valley of blessing. Discouragement and fear can do you in as surely as a huge thundering army could have done in the Israelites.

II. LET ME NOW GUIDE YOU TO THIS VALLEY OF BLESSING

A. To travel to the valley of blessing, you must first move past personal fear and discouragement. You must do this even in the face of overwhelming odds. But how? You start by remembering that the battle belongs to God (v. 15).

God will not likely bless you while you are having a pity party. It is difficult for Him to work in your life when problems trouble your mind and dull your faith. As long as you are mumbling and grumbling, how can you expect God to bless you?

Why would people rather complain instead of trying to do something to correct it? Recently the phone rang in my office—a call from a distant friend who grumbled about his situation. It is not surprising that God had not blessed his soul lately! God will not flood your heart with joy as long as you are grumbling and complaining. To get to the valley of blessing, you must learn to look beyond the troubling circumstances to the faithfulness of God.

The way to get to the valley of blessing is to move past fear and discouragement that drags you down and keeps you discouraged.

B. Next, to get to the valley of blessing, you must take the exit marked Do Something for God (v. 17a).

The Israelites had to leave their pity party and go to work. They had to do something positive for God. It would have been easy for the soldiers to sit around and complain about their leaders. Many of us can identify with the soldiers who just grumbled to each other about their situation. But they will never get to the valley of blessing as long as they do nothing constructive about the situation. Here they received instructions to take up their positions and stand firm.

A Chinese proverb sums it up well: "Dig a well before you are thirsty." Do something positive for God while you still can. Purposely take the exit ramp off the highway of fear, pity, and discouragement. God can bless you when you start to do something for Him.

C. Next, you must then refuel your faith (v. 20b).

Remember the Israelites were on a journey to face the enemy. They would likely be outmanned. They are uncertain about the future. Consequently, as they set out for the valley of blessing, they must refuel their thoughts with faith. They had to remind themselves that God had never let them down. They are to be thinking about how He has promised to take care of the battle.

In the midst of your present situation, remind yourself that God has never failed you. It was Rev. Stan Toler who made the comment that God had never failed him but He sure did scare him a few times. If you are ever to make it to the valley of spiritual blessing, you need to stuff yourself with faith. Review the promises of His Word. Remind yourself He keeps His promises. Go forth toward the valley, knowing that He has never let you down.

D. Last of all, if you are to reach the valley of blessing, you must start to praise Him even before you arrive at the valley (vv. 21-22).

Remind yourself that they had little idea of what they were going to see when they arrived at the valley. Yes, they were sure God was going to fight the battle for them; but how would it be done, and what part would they play in the divine plan?

During this time of uncertainty the king appointed the people to praise God, and that's exactly what they did. As they praised Him, the enemy fell to defeat. The passage clearly indicates that it was as they began to praise God that He brought their victory.

Before you get to the valley of blessing, God wants to hear your praise. He wants you to tell Him that He is the Lord God Almighty. He wants to hear from your lips that there is none other like Him. As you journey down the road, it is praise that brings the blessings to you.

As you turn from your own problems and cares, and see His majesty, your heart begins to warm and eventually will catch on fire.

CONCLUSION

This message has not been an attempt to artificially fan the flame of emotion. There does come, however, a time in our lives when we need to rejoice just to know we are

still spiritually alive. Such a blessing will not happen until we stop grumbling, until we do something positive for Him, until we have faith in Him, and until we start praising Him.

Perhaps He will bless you in these closing moments. Or maybe He will bless you at work as you praise Him. Maybe the blessing will come as you are driving home in your car. Whether it is today or tomorrow, I want to meet you in the valley of blessing.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

APPROACHING THE WORD

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Opening Prayer
- Chorus "Great Is the Lord"
- Responsive Reading "The Lord Almighty Is with Us"
(Ps. 46:7-8a, 10-11)

SINGING THE WORD

- Hymns "There Shall Be Showers of Blessing"
"Count Your Blessings"

SEEKING THE WORD

Pastoral Prayer

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORD

Offering

HEARING THE WORD

- Special Music "My Tribute"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 20:1-26
- Sermon "THE VALLEY OF BLESSING"

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

- Music "Spirit of the Living God"

TAKING THE WORD

Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

BEFORE THE SERVICE

Have someone with an artistic flair design an attractive bulletin insert titled "This Way to the Valley of Blessing." Use the directions given in the sermon to fill out the insert. The congregation could be encouraged to take this road map home. Let them know that next week you will ask people to share if the map was helpful.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Inform the congregation that during the worship hour they will be focusing on the blessings of God. Assure them that this will be an hour of true blessing for them.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Sing the chorus and invite people to come to the altar who need the touch of God to turn their lives into valleys of blessing.

BENEDICTION

As the congregation prepares to leave, sing the chorus "We Are So Blessed," followed by a brief prayer.

An Alliance with Sin

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 21:12-20

INTRO

ILLUS. In Colorado, several people begged a trucker to free the CB channel so they could put through an emergency call. They wanted to direct a doctor to the scene of a serious automobile accident involving a woman. He refused. As a result, help could not be immediately summoned. Finally the trucker came upon the scene of the accident himself. To his utter dismay, he discovered that the seriously injured person, now dead, was his wife. When a doctor finally arrived, he said that the woman's chances for survival would have increased if he had been notified 10 minutes earlier. Here was the trucker who suffered the consequences of his actions.

Today we are going to explore the consequences of choosing to go our own sinful ways. Yes, God is certainly a God of love, but He cannot tolerate sin. That is what is happening in 2 Chron. 21. King Jehoshaphat has died, and his son Jehoram has taken over. From verse 6 we quickly see that he has chosen to live a life of sin. He started doing sinful things like evil King Ahab of the north. He even married the daughter of Ahab.

Of all the things on the list, the marriage to the daughter of Ahab must have been what angered God the most. She was an ungodly influence on him his entire life. She led him down the wrong paths. When he married her, it was as though he made an alliance with sin. He and sin became partners.

A consequence of sin in our lives is that God always responds negatively to it. He cannot tolerate it. It sickens Him. He would not be a holy God if He did not respond in such a manner to sin. Let's look at these verses that show us how God responds when we join ourselves with sin.

I. SIN BRINGS GOD'S DISAPPROVAL (VV. 12-20)

A. It is clear from the passage God intended to send judgment to Jehoram. God was angry because of the king's alliance with sin and his own sinful acts. To show His livid displeasure before the judgment took place, God inspired the prophet Elijah to write a stern letter to the king.

Elijah lists God's charges against Jehoram, You have not walked in the ways of your fathers, you have led the people to prostitute themselves, and you have murdered your brothers. What a repulsive list of sins. But like all sins, Jehoram's rebellious attitudes and acts apparently took him further down a destructive path than he first intended. Sin always takes sinners farther away from God and satisfying living than they mean to go. That's why facing sin and seeking forgiveness must be done as soon as possible. To continue in sin is to multiply the sin and increase the consequences.

B. While the passage does not say the prophet's letter

was a warning, it is at least a statement of fact intended to get Jehoram's attention. Warning or not, the passage shows how much God loathes sin. Sin brings God's disapproval and finally His judgment because of what it does to the sinner and to others. I hope Jehoram had time to rethink his actions between verses 15 and 16. And though he could not undo his sins or their consequences, he could have confessed and sought the forgiveness of God.

Sadly, the record does not show that Jehoram ever considered his sin to be a serious offense against God. That view is prevalent in many periods of human history, including our own time.

C. This passage may be troubling to your concept of God. You may find it almost unthinkable that He would actually raise up an enemy army to come into the Holy Land, causing affliction and hardship to His people. But he did.

A couple of points need to be made regarding our view of God. First, it again underscores the seriousness of sin. God does not take sin lightly. It is such a serious issue that He may allow a disease to come to you. It is so serious that He may send an army to your door to help you wake up and return to Him. Second, if a disease or an army causes you to turn from sin, then God has done you a wonderful favor. Having God send you a warning is not an evil thing, as some might think. We tend to look at the small picture, while God looks at the big picture. The small picture wonders how God could be so unfair. The big picture says it was a small inconvenience to know the joy of sins forgiven.

D. What warning must God send to get you to come to your senses? I would not wait for God to send me some sort of warning. I would plan at the end of this service to kneel at the altar and ask God to forgive me of my sins, even before the warning comes.

II. SIN BRINGS GOD'S JUDGMENT (VV. 15-20)

A. God is not a God of empty threats. He will do what He says. He has promised to bring judgment upon those who sin. You can be sure that He will keep His promises.

It really is a heart-wrenching matter to see what God does to Jehoram. He stirs up the neighboring enemies to come and make war. The enemy attacks and is successful. They loot the king's palace. They even kidnap his wives and sons. God took from him everything he held dear. The story goes on to reveal that God afflicted him with the disease that He had promised would come. The disease is incurable and eventually takes his life. It was destructive and painful. Everything God has said would happen came to pass.

B. It is sobering to think that a loving God might send that kind of judgment if we do not repent. So often we think of judgment as being something we will face in the next life. Of course it is true that we will face judgment after death. But here we see that there is also judgment that can take place while we are still living. He may take away from us the precious things in our lives if we fail to follow Him. This is dangerous ground, and we must exercise caution.

ILLUS. I remember as a young boy being over at my friend's house for supper. He had a wonderful Christian family with godly parents. During that evening meal my friend demonstrated a bad attitude toward his mother. He said some things that he shouldn't have said in a sour tone of voice. It just so happened that his father was sitting to his right. His father gently reached over and gave the boy's mouth a little spank. Dad never said a word. He just kept on eating, but the message was abundantly clear. The point was driven home: you had better stop and stop right now. Anger was not the motive. It was done out of loving concern.

God sometimes does that to us. We are doing things we should not do. We seem intent on not changing our minds. So God spanks us. He does not do it out of anger or hatred, but out of love. He tries to get our attention.

C. Did you learn as a child it was better if you paid attention before your parents gave you the "This is going to hurt me a lot more than it is going to hurt you" routine? What must God do to get your attention? How far down must you go before you start to look up?

CONCLUSION

The end of the story is, frankly, a pitiful footnote. In verse 19 we see that the people whom he had ruled over did not make the traditional fire that honored the other kings who had passed away. In verse 20 we see that "he passed away, to no one's regret." Can you imagine that? The king has died, and it is as though no one cared. Verse 20 reveals that his people thought so little of him that they refused to bury him with the other kings who had gone before. It was the ultimate form of rejection. This is not a happy ending for someone who had such promise. It ended sadly because he refused to heed the warning that came to him from God.

Hopefully, if God is dealing with your heart, you will not ignore His warning. Come to Him now, and repent of your sin. It is the only reasonable thing to do.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

APPROACHING THE WORD

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Opening Prayer
- Chorus "Holy Spirit, Thou Art Welcome"
- Responsive Reading "Repentance"
(Ps. 51:1-2, 7, 10-12, 17; Ezek. 18:30b; Acts 2:38-39a)

SINGING THE WORD

- Hymns "He Is Able to Deliver Thee"
"Victory in Jesus"

SEEKING THE WORD

Pastoral Prayer

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORD

Offering

HEARING THE WORD

- Special Music "He Touched Me"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 21:12-20
- Sermon "AN ALLIANCE WITH SIN"

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

- Music "Just as I Am"

TAKING THE WORD

Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

Consider using a new Christian to testify to the congregation about the grip of sin. Encourage the one who testifies not to share particular details but to focus on sin's unseemly power.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome the congregation to the house of the Lord. Let them know that as we go through the worship process, God not only wants to bless us but also wants to change us.

BENEDICTION

As the congregation prepares to leave, sing the chorus "The Happy Side of Life," followed by a brief prayer.

Victorious Living in a Dirty World

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 22:10-12; 23:16; 24:14

INTRO

ILLUS. One day a young minister toured a coal mine. At the entrance of a dim passageway, he saw a beautiful white flower growing out of the black earth. "How can this flower blossom with such beauty in this dirty mine?" the preacher asked. "Throw some coal dust on it, and see what happens," his guide replied. As he did, he was surprised that the sooty particles slid right off the white petals, leaving the plant just as radiant as before. The surface of the flower was so smooth that the grime could not cling to it.

It is a daily challenge for the Christian to live a pure life in this sinful world. Wouldn't it be nice if we could be like that radiant white flower, which remained clean even in the middle of a dirty environment?

Here is the tremendous challenge: how do we live victoriously for Christ, over the long haul, in such a dirty world? The life of Jehoiada emphatically answers that question for us. In his life there emerges a key to victorious living in a dirty world. We find the key in the choices he made.

The life of Jehoiada the priest shows us what decisions we must make if we are going to live victoriously in this sinful world.

I. TO BE VICTORIOUS IN THIS SINFUL WORLD, YOU MUST DECIDE TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT (VV. 10-12)

A. The situation in these verses is very tense. Second Chron. 22:9 tells us that, due to foul play, a political vacuum exists. There is no one strong enough to be king, so the question of who was to be ruler was wide open. In verse 10, we see that royal family member Athaliah becomes politically ambitious. She begins to kill off all remaining members of the royal family so only she survives. When you read that verse closely, you will make a startling discovery. She is even willing to kill her own grandson to secure the throne for herself. According to verse 11, Jehosheba and her husband-priest Jehoiada conceal royal family member Joash in the Temple for six years from the ruthless ambition of Athaliah.

B. How easy and simple it would have been for Jehoiada to do the wrong thing. Very likely, if Athaliah had found out, she would have had him killed. He took an amazing risk to do what was right. It becomes apparent that he lived a life of victory because he chose to do the right thing.

C. To be victorious in this sinful world, decide now that

you are going to do the right thing. Like Jehoiada, you need to do the right thing no matter the consequences. There may even come a time when doing the right thing will cost you your life.

Some may think this is radical preaching and a radical way to live. You are right on both counts. The life of Jesus shows us that Christians are to live radically. As He prayed in the Garden, He wrestled with doing the right thing, knowing He would die. Of course, He did the right thing. Here, right now, make the decision you will do the right thing regardless of the consequences. When backed into a corner, decide you will do the right thing. When peer pressure threatens to break you, decide you will do what is right. Always do right. If you make that decision, you will be on the road to lifelong victory even in a dirty world.

II. TO BE VICTORIOUS IN THIS SINFUL WORLD, YOU MUST DECIDE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR WORLD (2 CHRON. 24:14C)

A. What a testimony these words of verse 14c are to a life well lived. Jehoiada made a difference in his world. Do not think it was just a coincidence that burnt offerings arose at the Temple during his lifetime. It was his job to see that the burnt offerings continued. Also remember that before he came on the scene, the people worshiped false gods. After he died, verse 18 tells us the first thing the people did was to return to their idol worship. It is easy to see that it was Jehoiada who made a difference in his world. It was his influence that kept others doing the right thing. He decided he would be different from some of the corrupt priests the nation had seen. In turn he would impact his world.

B. If you would live victoriously, you must make a conscious decision that you are going to make a difference in your world. Forget about others who turn their backs on God. Focus on doing something for God. Here is the secret. When you focus on making a difference in your world for God, you won't have time to get defeated.

It reminds me of the writer to the Hebrews, who talked about keeping your eyes on Jesus (12:2). When you have your eyes on Him, that's all you can see. When you keep your focus on changing your world for Christ, you will enjoy personal victory too.

C. Sadly, too many Christians try to coast through their spiritual life. They have no desire to make an impact. They do not feel as if they are on a mission from God. Fill up your life with a determination to make a difference for Christ in your world. Focus on that goal, and you will find that you will live victoriously even in a sinful world.

III. TO BE VICTORIOUS IN THIS SINFUL WORLD, YOU MUST DECIDE TO MAKE A COVENANT TO BE GOD'S PERSON (2 CHRON. 23:16)

A. Jehoiada decided to make a covenant to God. A covenant is nothing more than a fancy word for a binding agreement. Here Jehoiada is agreeing to God that they will be the Lord's people. It was a pledge to total commitment to God. The pledge was that there would be no other gods in their lives. The pledge meant that nothing else would matter more than God.

When you make a decision like that, you can be sure it requires serious thought. Would they be like the people of other nations and worship other gods, or would they pledge themselves only to the true God? Jehoiada helped the people make the right decision.

B. Here is where so many well-meaning Christians miss genuine victory. They want to get to heaven, but they do not want to make a full commitment to God. Instead of doing God's thing, they want to do their own thing. They have their own plans and agendas. They plan to get to heaven, but they never make a decision to make a full commitment to God. In fact, they often decide to do just the opposite. They decide not to make a full commitment to God.

ILLUS. The natives of Africa discovered a unique way of catching monkeys. They would cut a small hole in a gourd just large enough for the hand of a monkey to fit inside. Then they would place nuts inside the gourd. The monkey would reach inside and grab the nuts, making its hand too large to pull out. The monkey would refuse to let go of the nuts and allow the hand to be removed. Since the gourd was tied to a tree, the monkey was soon caught. The monkey foolishly committed to the wrong thing.

C. Jehoiada has shown us that if we are to live victoriously, we must make a commitment to God. Dare to go all out for God. Dare to see what He can do with your life when you give it to Him.

Let me make a suggestion. Do two things if you have not made a covenant of commitment to Him. First, come to the altar at the close of this service, and make the full surrender. Just decide that finally you are going to do it. Second, when you go home from this service, write up a covenant, an agreement, between you and God. Actually put it in writing. Tell Him how serious you are about living a committed life to Him. Put that covenant, that agreement, in a prominent spot in your home to remind you of your commitment to Him.

Victorious living means making a full commitment to Him, a commitment to be His man or His woman for as long as you live.

CONCLUSION

What is the option to all of this? It is simple. Without deciding to make a full surrender to God, you will continue to struggle spiritually. Your spiritual life will be one of

ups and downs. It is very likely that the sinful world will pull you down to its own level. Victory, even over the long haul, can be yours. You have a decision to make. Decide to do the right things in your life. Decide to make a difference in your world. Decide to make a full commitment to God. Now is the time to put those decisions into action.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

APPROACHING THE WORD

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Opening Prayer
- Chorus "All Hail King Jesus"
- Responsive Reading "The Church Victorious"
(Rev. 14:1-5; 3:11, 5; 2:7b)

SINGING THE WORD

- Hymns "Victory in Jesus"
"Faith Is the Victory"

SEEKING THE WORD

Pastoral Prayer

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORD

Offering

HEARING THE WORD

- Special Music "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 22:10-12; 23:16; 24:14
- Sermon "VICTORIOUS LIVING IN A DIRTY WORLD"

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

- Music "The Savior Is Waiting"

TAKING THE WORD

Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

Prepare the pastoral prayer with victory in mind. Thank God for the victories recorded in the Bible and other past victories. Thank Him for present victory. Of course, you will want to thank Him for the victories that you will experience at the end of the service.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let the congregation know that during the worship hour they will be focusing on victorious living. Urge them to start the service by claiming the victories that are to come.

The Profile of a Cultural Christian

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 25

INTRO

Have you thought about the impact our culture has on us? Depending upon your culture, you might be wearing a business suit with a tie or no shirt at all. Your culture even impacts the way you become married. Culture impacts every area of our life, including our spiritual lives.

Here in 2 Chron. 25, King Amaziah is an example of culture's impact upon a life. Amaziah, the king of Judah, comes from a long line of kings. From his earliest memories, his father the king had groomed him to become the next king. His early memories also contained stories about the God of Israel. Expectations abounded that he would grow up as a worshiper of this same God. Consequently, Amaziah seemed to accept the expectations laid on him. He became a king and a follower of God. Unfortunately, as you read this chapter in his life, you will see his relationship with God was based primarily on his culture. He followed God because his parents and the people of the kingdom expected it of him.

Perhaps some of you are only cultural believers like Amaziah. You come to church because your parents or friends expect you to do so. You attend out of habit but have little intention of getting serious with God. Motivation comes from your culture. How dangerous to be a cultural Christian.

As we look at the life of Amaziah, we make some important discoveries about the dangers of cultural Christianity.

I. FROM THE LIFE OF AMAZIAH WE DISCOVER THAT A CULTURAL CHRISTIAN IS HALFHEARTED ABOUT HIS OR HER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (2 CHRON. 25:2)

A. The words of verse 2 drip with condemnation. John Wesley said this of Amaziah: "He was not an enemy to religion, but a cool and indifferent friend." He went through the motions of having a meaningful relationship with God, but his heart was empty. As he played his role, the people thought they had a king with a solid relationship with God. They may never have suspected that he was a cultural believer. It may never have crossed their mind that when it came to religion, he was like an empty shell.

B. Does the label of a cultural believer apply to you? Let's ask the tough question: Why do you attend church? Is it because others expect you to be here? Is it because most of your friends are here? Here is another difficult question: Why do you drop something in the offering plate? Is it because the person next to you will wonder

what's wrong if you don't give? You see, cultural Christians do the things they do because they mistakenly think religion is acceptance. They approach religion the same way King Amaziah did: "not wholeheartedly."

C. Are you halfheartedly going through the motions with God?

Could it be you have been a part of this church a long time but are not wholeheartedly committed to God? Imagine placing big round gauges on each of our foreheads to measure our wholeheartedness. What would it reveal?

Whatever you do, do not settle for being a cultural Christian.

II. FROM THE LIFE OF AMAZIAH WE DISCOVER THAT A CULTURAL CHRISTIAN DOES NOT RELY UPON GOD (2 CHRON. 25:5-8)

A. In these verses King Amaziah readies for war. He does what every good king would do as he prepares his men for battle. Amaziah organizes the people into an army. He institutes a draft, calling out all the men over 20 years of age. The final count reveals 300,000 men ready to go into battle. Even by today's standard, that's a lot of warriors. What an impressive army.

It was not, however, enough for the king. Verse 6 tells us he hired 100,000 additional men from the Northern Kingdom to fight for him. Why does he do this? Verses 7-8 give us the disappointing answer. He hires these additional soldiers in case God doesn't come through.

It all boils down to trust. He doesn't really rely upon God but himself to bring the victory.

B. Why wouldn't a man like this rely upon God? After all, he has thousands of years of testimony concerning the faithfulness of God. So why doesn't he trust God to come through for him? The answer is simple. As a cultural believer, his relationship with God is basically flawed. He feels he has no right to ask God for help. He feels that God isn't really on his side. He apparently thinks, "Why would God help me when I am just going through the motions?"

Besides, any culture will tell you that you need to fend for yourself. That's exactly what this cultural king does. Failing to rely upon God, he looks to his own ingenuity and strength to meet the need of the hour.

C. Relying upon self is characteristic of cultural believers. They have not learned to rely on God to meet their needs. They look inside of themselves to meet the need of the moment. From their perspective their reaction makes sense. Why should they trust God to meet their needs when they really do not know Him very well?

Do you trust God to meet your needs, or do you depend on your own cleverness and strength? If you find that you are not trusting God, it could mean that you are a cultural Christian.

III. FROM THE LIFE OF AMAZIAH WE DISCOVER THAT A CULTURAL CHRISTIAN DOES NOT HAVE HIS OR HER PRIORITIES IN ORDER (2 CHRON. 25:9)

A. Here is a part of the story that makes you shake your head in amazement. Amaziah has done wrong. He has hired soldiers from the Northern Kingdom because of

his lack of trust in God. At that point a prophet of God tells him he should not go through with the plan because the Northern Kingdom is evil. Amaziah thinks about this message from the prophet. Remember, he wants to do what is right. He is playing the role of a cultural believer. As he thinks about doing what is right, he wonders what will happen to the money he has paid to the soldiers of the Northern Kingdom. Do you see how his actions signal to us misplaced priorities? He ought to be falling to his knees thanking God for protection from making a huge mistake. Instead he wonders, "What about my money?"

B. A cultural Christian does not have his or her priorities straight. A cultural Christian places greater priority on watching television than attending church. A cultural Christian puts a higher priority on his or her own interest instead of God's interests. Money is more important than God.

ILLUS. During the Revolutionary War, Colonel Rahl, the Hessian commander at Trenton, New Jersey, was playing cards when a courier brought a message stating that Gen. George Washington was crossing the Delaware River. The colonel put the letter in his pocket and didn't bother to read it until the game was completed. When he finally read the note, he realized the seriousness of the situation. He hurriedly tried to rally his men to meet the coming attack. He and many of his men died in battle. The remainder of the regiment was captured. Misplaced priorities were his undoing.

A cultural Christian may get messages from God but puts them in his or her back pocket. Such a person is too busy to hear God.

C. Do you see that when you are a cultural Christian, it messes up your priorities? Since you are culturally religious, you really don't understand what God wants. What matters to you is what you want. How dangerous to be a cultural Christian.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the life of Amaziah is typical of a cultural Christian. He became angry when God tried to speak to him (v. 16). Pleasing himself was his goal. In the end, some of Jerusalem's treasures fell into the hands of the enemy, and Amaziah died a failure.

Being a cultural Christian is risky and frightening. A sinner usually understands his or her predicament, but a cultural Christian has just enough religion to make him or her feel comfortable. This one may even be a good person who does good things. But he or she faces the prospects of judgment and separation from God, however, because of just going through the motions.

ILLUS. Many years ago I saw a gospel tract that, at the time, offended me. It pictured a group of church people sitting on a pew. One end of the pew was tilted up, and

its occupants were sliding into the lake of fire. The title of the tract said something like this: "going to hell riding on a church pew."

I have come to realize that the people sitting on the pew were cultural Christians. God forbid any here would ride the pews of this church into hell. If you are a cultural Christian, you are invited to come forward to this altar. Ask God to transform you into a genuine born-again believer.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

APPROACHING THE WORD

- Announcements
- Call to Worship
- Opening Prayer
- Chorus "Let the Redeemed"
- Responsive Reading..... "Christian Conduct"
(Col. 3:1-3, 5a, 9-10, 11b-17)

SINGING THE WORD

- Hymns "Dwelling in Beulah Land"
"I Would Be True"

SEEKING THE WORD

- Pastoral Prayer

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORD

- Offering

HEARING THE WORD

- Special Music
- Children's Choir "Dare to Be a Daniel"
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 25:1-9
- Sermon "THE PROFILE OF A CULTURAL CHRISTIAN"

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

- Music "Cleanse Me"

TAKING THE WORD

- Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

Two weeks prior to the service ask members of a teen Sunday School class to submit their drawings of what a cultural Christian might look like. This provides the teacher the opportunity to explain to them the subject and prepares them for the sermon. Then select one of the pictures that has the most meaning, and publish it in the Sunday bulletin. You may want to refer to it during the sermon.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Invite the congregation to be prepared to examine their own spiritual lives to see if culture has had a negative impact upon it.

BENEDICTION

As the congregation prepares to leave, challenge them to be alert for any signs that their culture has had a negative impact on their walk with God.

King Uzziah: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

by Randall K. Hartman

2 Chron. 26

INTRO

A popular Clint Eastwood film immortalized the words *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. This brief description applies to the life of King Uzziah found here in 2 Chron. 26. He had many good things going for him. Unfortunately, poor choices resulted in a good life turned bad. From there his life went to downright ugly. Uzziah took the prize for being the original one known as “the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

Looking at the good, the bad, and the ugly in his life reveals help for us in our walk with God.

I. VERSES 4-5 REVEAL THE GOOD IN HIS LIFE

A. He sought God. What a great thing to be able to say about anyone. In Hebrew that word “sought” means to frequent a place. Here is a king who frequented the place of prayer. He knew how to get alone with God and pour out his heart in prayer.

B. He learned about God. Verse 5 reveals he was instructed in the things of God. Zechariah, the priest, gave him special lessons about God. You can be certain a king takes lessons about God only because of an eagerness to learn. You must admire a king who is humble enough to go to a private Sunday School class.

C. He revered God. At least, he was taking special training on how to show reverence to God. Maybe it was his major while he went to school under Zechariah. How wonderful for a powerful king to be interested in having reverence before God.

D. Verse 5 sums up the good in the life of Uzziah. As he learns and grows spiritually, he discovers that God just keeps on blessing him. God gives him success after success. In the verses following verse 5 we see he overthrew Philistine cities, built towns in enemy territory, and defeated the Amorites and the Meunites. He “built towers in Jerusalem” and fortified the walls. He was a rancher, farmer, and great military leader all rolled into one.

E. When you go God’s way, you are going to have a wonderful life. You may not become rich or famous, but you will have a wonderful life. When you follow God, you can take verse 5 and put your own name into it and claim it as yours. “As long as [insert name] sought the

LORD, God [will give] [insert name] success.” Seek the Lord, and be the person God wants you to be.

Here is what we learn from the good in Uzziah’s life: if you live a godly life, God will make your life fulfilling and satisfying.

ILLUS. My grandfather was a Nazarene pastor. He started in the ministry later in life than most of his colleagues. He had no college degrees. His ministerial education consisted of graduating from the home course of study. Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, he was a man who mirrored the good in the life of Uzziah. He sought God, learned about God, and revered God. Consequently, he had a tremendous ministry. He touched lives and built churches. God gave him a wonderful life.

II. VERSE 16A REVEALS THE BAD IN THE LIFE OF KING UZZIAH

Pride acted like a toxic poison spreading through his entire life.

A. Pride resulted in unfaithfulness to the Lord. You can see how that might happen to the king. After all, many wonderful accomplishments resulted from his reign. Few kings had so much success. People began to talk of his greatness. Soon he began believing his own press. He believed that all of what had happened was because of what he had done, not because of what God had done.

Verse 16 records his unfaithfulness to God by going into the Temple and burning incense. This task belonged only to the priests. He is so full of pride that he decided the rules no longer applied to him.

How we need to be careful. Guard your heart so you may never say, “I am above this rule of Christian living. It is just for other Christians.”

B. His pride resulted in irreverence (v. 18). His entering into the Temple to burn incense shows a complete lack of reverence for God. It seems his degree in Bachelor of Reverence does him no good.

Spiritual pride can take us to the point that we only revere ourselves. Pride can set us up as our own god, which we worship and adore. Pride causes us to kneel at the altar of self.

C. Pride also produced anger. Pride causes you to be angry at others when you ought to be angry at yourself.

When the priests told Uzziah to get out of the Temple, the king flew into a rage. Ironically it was the priests who should have been angry. Pride does that. It fills you up with yourself to the point that no one, including God, can be right.

Clearly you see the danger. Pride makes us angry when even God tells us to do something. We begin to believe we know more than God. We know better what we ought to do than God. How dangerous.

ILLUS. The story is told of a farm where two ducks and a frog were friends. As the hot summer days came, the pond began to dry up. Soon there was so little water that they all realized that they would have to move. The ducks could easily fly to another place, but what about their friend the frog? Finally they decided to put a stick in the bill of each duck. Then the frog would hang on to the stick with his mouth, and they would fly him to another

pond. As they were flying, a farmer out in his field looked up and saw them. The frog heard him remark, "Well, isn't that a clever idea! I wonder who thought of it!" The frog said, "I did. . . ." Pride was his undoing.

III. VERSES 19B-20 REVEAL THE UGLY IN UZZIAH'S LIFE

A. God responds by giving him leprosy. Few diseases are more disfiguring than leprosy. Now stop and think about it: if you are a proud person, what might draw you back to earth? One sure way is to have a disease that disfigures. Nothing else would humble a proud person quicker than to have leprosy break out on your face.

There is something about leprosy from that ancient culture that we need to remember: when you had it, you became a social outcast. When you walked the streets, the Law mandated that you issue a cry of warning. The words "unclean, unclean" signaled your approach. The people, hearing you shout those words, would walk on the opposite side of the street to avoid you. In short, you were avoided like the plague.

Leprosy was more than just a health concern. It guaranteed you would be a social outcast for the rest of your life. Suddenly, this popular and powerful king becomes an outcast for the remainder of his days.

B. Why would God do such a terrible thing? It was a matter of God giving Uzziah what he wanted. No, he didn't want leprosy. What did he want? He was so full of pride that he only wanted himself. In a strange twist of fate, God gave him his desires. Leprosy gave him a kingdom of one: himself. In that outcast kingdom of one, he ruled supremely. In his kingdom he was the most important person. God, in effect, was giving King Uzziah exactly what he wanted: a kingdom where he could be the greatest person in the kingdom. As he sat in his room, an outcast, he was master of all he surveyed. His life had turned ugly.

ILLUS. According to a news story, 18 "uglies" picketed an American Airlines ticket office. They were protesting alleged discrimination in hiring when they advertise for good-looking people. "We just want to be accepted for who we are instead of what we look like," said Danny McCoy, who is the president of Ugly Unlimited. He says up to 10 percent of the American public are widely considered to be ugly. Unfortunately the complaint goes on. This is because, according to lawyers, there is no standard definition of what constitutes ugly.

C. Unchecked spiritual pride eventually cuts you off from God. That's when you can easily define the word ugly. Pride makes you seem bigger and better than reality. As you get more important in your own eyes, it doesn't matter what anyone else says or thinks. As time goes by, you erect an altar to yourself. When you do that, you have crossed the line into idol worship, causing separation from God.

Here is the frightening thing: God often gives you what you want. If all you care about is yourself, then God will somehow arrange it so that you will get yourself and only yourself.

Hell is going to be a place of separation from God. It will be a place where you are stuck with yourself forever and forever.

Pride brings out the ugly in every person it touches.

CONCLUSION

There are lessons for everyone in the life of King Uzziah. There is the good to admire and to try to imitate. Try to be like him and seek God. Frequent the place of prayer. Learn about God and revere Him. Unfortunately, in his life there is also the bad to avoid. Make sure there is no spiritual pride in your life. Also, by all means do not allow pride to go unchecked. It will turn your life into something ugly. The most horrible thing in the world would be to end up isolated from God because you worshiped yourself.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- WE APPROACH THE TIME OF WORSHIP
 - Prelude "Majesty"
 - Announcements
- WE BEGIN OUR WORSHIP
 - Call to Worship
 - Responsive Reading "Worship the Lord" (Ps. 100)
 - Opening Prayer
- WE CELEBRATE OUR WORSHIP
 - Hymns "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty"
"Come, Thou Almighty King"
- WE TALK TO GOD ABOUT OUR WORSHIP
 - Pastoral Prayer
- WE RESPOND TO WORSHIP
 - Offering
 - Special Song "The Wonder of It All"
- WE FOCUS OUR WORSHIP
 - Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 26:1-20
 - Sermon "KING UZZIAH: THE GOOD, THE BAD,
AND THE UGLY"
- WE REFLECT UPON OUR WORSHIP
 - Chorus "Spirit of the Living God"
 - Prayer at the Altar
- WE CONCLUDE OUR WORSHIP
 - Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

- PASTORAL PRAYER**

Direct members of the congregation to pray for others. Do this by encouraging them to take a moment and pray for the person on their left, right, behind them, and in front of them. This actively involves the congregation in prayer and at the same time makes sure every person receives prayer.
- CALL TO WORSHIP**

"We are privileged to be here today to worship God Almighty. It is important to remind ourselves that as a congregation we are not spectators, and the platform people are not performers. Rather, God is the Spectator, and all who worship today are performers."
- BENEDICTION**

"Leave this place determined that you will leave behind the 'bad and the ugly' and cultivate the 'good' in your life that was begun by God!"

Making a Difference

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 27

INTRO

ILLUS. Years ago, evangelist Gypsy Smith spoke to the local Rotary Club. At the conclusion of his message he raised his Bible and asked, "How many of you men can recall a saintly mother and a godly father who loved this Book, read it, lived it, and seeded it into you?" Almost all who were present raised their hands as tears threatened to burst onto their cheeks. Then Gypsy followed with another question, "With all your influence today, how many of you are so living that your children will remember you for your faithfulness to this same Book?" God has called us to make a difference in our world.

Here is the question of the hour: "Why don't we make a difference in our world as we know God wants us to?"

In this chapter we meet King Jotham. He was a terrific king. Yet, verse 2 tells us that "the people . . . continued their corrupt practices." Jotham failed to be a change agent. From his life, we can learn why we fail to make the impact upon others that we ought to be making.

I. HIS REIGN MADE A DIFFERENCE IN HIS WORLD

A. He made a difference by building (vv. 3-4). One of the things any ruler wanted to accomplish during his reign was to build structures that would outlive him. In the years to come, people would ask, "Now, who was it that built that building?" So Jotham went on a building campaign and found success. History, to this day, records him as making a difference when it came to the area of building.

He also made a difference because he conquered (v. 5). Another way that a ruler could make a difference in his world was to become known as a mighty man of war. The Scripture says little about his military life, but clearly he is a man of war not to be trifled with because he conquered the Ammonites. Jotham makes his mark in history as one who knew how to win a war. In the area of military prowess, Jotham made a difference in his world.

The text reveals he also made a difference in his world because he became powerful (v. 6). He grew to be powerful as a king of the chosen people. Remember, he comes from a long line of kings, and not every king of Judah became powerful. But this king became powerful because he "walked steadfastly before the LORD."

B. There is something that resonates within all of us with a desire to make a difference in our world. We do not want to pass from this life without leaving our footprints. We are like King Jotham. We build, conquer, and become powerful. We struggle to leave our mark and influence upon our world.

Someone once said that before we climb a ladder, we better first make sure what building it is leaning against. As we look back over the life of King Jotham, we discover

that his life ladder was leaning against the wrong building.

II. HE FAILED IN HIS PRIMARY DUTY OF INFLUENCING PEOPLE FOR GOD

A. The last part of verse 2 tells us that the people continued in their sin. King Jotham did many things right but failed to influence his people for God. He failed in his God-given task of influencing others.

Admittedly, verse 2 does not tell us much. In 2 Kings 15:35, a parallel account, part of the mystery is revealed. This verse reveals that sacrifices to pagan gods still played a role in their worship. They had fallen back into the kind of sin that stirred God to anger.

Did you notice that the same verse talks about the sins of the people and the rebuilding efforts of Jotham? He was making a difference but not where it counted.

B. By all outward accounts, history would have given him high marks on his reign as king of the Southern Kingdom. He seems to have done all of the right things: he built, he conquered, and he became powerful. Undoubtedly the opinion polls of his day were very high. But he failed miserably where it counted most.

It is a study in contrasts. He conquered the Ammonites and brought peace between their countries, but the people were at war with God. He built great buildings, but the spiritual condition of his people lay in ruin. He became powerful, but his people suffered from spiritual poverty. As God looked at the bottom line of Jotham's life, He was disappointed that Jotham failed in the area that mattered most: he failed to impact his people for God.

C. This hits close to home. We get so busy climbing the ladder that we fail to stop and see what building it is leaning against. We pour our lives into building our career, saving money, getting our children through college. All of those things are good, but in the end what really matters is whether or not we have influenced others for Christ.

If we aren't careful, we will get down to the end of our life and see that our ladder was leaning against the wrong building. We will discover it was leaning against the same building that King Jotham's ladder was leaning: the building marked outward success. What a difference if we had made sure our ladder was leaning against the building marked "influencing others for Christ."

III. WHY DID JOTHAM FAIL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

A. He failed to make a difference because he really did not care about the spiritual condition of others. He was aware of the sin in which his people were involved. We cannot excuse the king on the grounds of ignorance. You can almost imagine the priests coming to him and telling him that the people are worshiping the pagan gods of their neighbors. Since he apparently does nothing about it, it seems logical to conclude that he doesn't care enough about their spiritual welfare.

We say we care about the sin of our neighbors and family members, but what do we do about it? Yes, we pray and that's good. We talk about being concerned. But

if we cared enough, wouldn't we become consumed about finding ways to impact their lives for Christ?

B. He failed to make a difference because he failed to exert his authority. He was the king and leader. He could have used his influence to impact his people in their spiritual lives, but he failed to exert his God-given authority.

We may not be kings, but we have a certain amount of authority, power, and influence. There are people over whom you exert a certain amount of influence. Use some of that authority and power to influence them for Christ. You might respond by saying, "But that's taking advantage of our friendship!" Of course. Use your advantage to impact others for Christ.

C. He failed to make a difference because he focused exclusively on good things instead of the best things. There was not one thing wrong with the things that he did. In fact, what he did was good. Certainly he ruled well. He lived a good life. But he never went on to do what was best. The best was to influence others for God. He allowed the sin to continue. He did not do what he could to help his people get rid of the sin in their life.

How easy for us to spend our life doing good things. However, we need to plunge ahead and do "best things." This means you will intentionally influence others for Christ.

CONCLUSION

ILLUS. I heard a story on the radio about a man who stopped by the house, trying to sell an old pair of drapes. The man of the house tried to get rid of him. God pricked his heart. He decided to go looking for the man and discovered that he had sold the drapes. He followed him into the grocery to see if he was going to waste his money. Surprisingly, he only bought the necessities of life. He talked to him and discovered that there was a genuine financial need. God impressed upon him to give the fellow \$10, which he promptly did. The man in financial need offered to do odd jobs. He came over to the house and cleaned the basement. They worked together in the basement and talked about spiritual things. The kindly man shared with the man in need how you could never out-give the Lord. Days later the man knocked on his door and shared that he had decided to pay tithe on his mowing jobs. Still later the man knocked on his door and shared with him that a wealthy man had contacted him and hired him to do \$400 worth of lawn work. He could hardly wait to tithe on that money to see what the Lord would do next. All of this happened because one man cared.

We need to keep on doing good things for God, but we had better not get caught up only in doing good. We need to get involved in doing best things. We dare not fail in our God-given task to make a difference in our world. This week find someone you can influence for Christ, and then go to it.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- WE APPROACH THE TIME OF WORSHIP
- Prelude "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go"
- Announcements
- WE BEGIN OUR WORSHIP
- Call to Worship
- Responsive Reading "A Charge to the Church"
(Matt. 9:35-38; John 4:35-36a; Matt. 28:19-20)
- Opening Prayer
- WE CELEBRATE OUR WORSHIP
- Hymns "Anywhere with Jesus"
"Give of Your Best to the Master"
- WE TALK TO GOD ABOUT OUR WORSHIP
- Pastoral Prayer
- WE RESPOND TO WORSHIP
- Offering
- Special Song "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken"
- WE FOCUS OUR WORSHIP
- Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 27:1-5
- Sermon "MAKING A DIFFERENCE"
- WE REFLECT UPON OUR WORSHIP
- Hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated"
- Prayer at the Altar
- WE CONCLUDE OUR WORSHIP
- Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

Several weeks prior to this service announce the subject of the message. Invite members of the congregation to submit in writing one special person who has made a difference in their spiritual lives. Publish those brief stories as an insert to the service bulletin.

CALL TO WORSHIP

"Today as we worship the Lord, we will be challenged to make a difference in our world. May we have an open heart as we receive this challenge."

BENEDICTION

"May your prayer be to make a difference this week in your corner of the world!"

Give Me Forty Acres

by Randall K. Hartman

2 Chron. 29

INTRO

For many years my father was a truck driver. Once in a while I would ride with him. On those trips I got a small glimpse into the life of a trucker. One of the things that many truckers will do is to sing songs as they drive down the road. I remember hearing my dad sing one line in a song over and over: "Give me 40 acres, and I'll turn this rig around." That line was saying that if the trucker had just 40 acres to farm, he'd slam on the brakes, turn the rig around, and get out of the trucking business.

Of course, turning the semi rig around is harder than it looks. It means finding a wide place in the road. It means waiting for the traffic to clear. It means going back home and trying to explain to your boss why you would give up the exciting life of a trucker for the exciting life of a farmer!

Turning the rig around and changing your life is harder than it looks. There are many people who would like to turn the rig around in their life. They're tired of going down the same road. They find life to be boring and want something better. Jesus offers them a mansion just over the hilltop instead of 40 acres of dirt. He offers them the joy of sins forgiven. They look at the Christian life and would like to get right with God, but how do they turn the rig around and get right with God?

The people in 2 Chron. 29 are struggling with trying to turn their lives around. For the past 16 years they have lived a life of sin. They had followed their diabolical leader, Ahaz. He is a king who actually sacrificed his own sons as a burnt offering to pagan gods. After the reign of Ahaz, his son Hezekiah became king. At 25 years of age he had decided that he was going to turn the rig around and lead his country in a different direction. The big question was, "How do you turn things around?"

Before even looking into the text, we need to realize that the place to begin in changing your life is to recognize you are going down the wrong path. No sermon can help you unless there is dissatisfaction in your life. There is no help for you until you are sick and tired of being sick and tired. When you are ready to change your life's direction, 2 Chron. 29 will show you how.

I. TO TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND, YOU MUST FIRST BRING YOURSELF INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD (V. 19)

A. Hezekiah has commissioned the priests to make the Temple defiled by his father fit for worship. They follow the strict ceremonial procedures to make it clean. They round up all of the defiled Temple articles and take them through the purification ritual. They cleanse them the best they know how. After completing the cleansing, they bring all of the worship items before the altar of the Lord.

Why did they take all of that stuff and lay it before the

altar? They took all of those defiled items and laid them before the altar because they knew they could only do so much. They bring them into the presence of the holy God because they know that in the final analysis it is only God who can change those things from defiled to holy. It was their way of saying, "Here we go, God; we've done all we can do, now You transform them by Your power!" By getting their place of worship in order, they were beginning to turn their country around.

B. If you really want to turn your life around, you must get yourself into the presence of God. Some will want to do it the Old Testament way. You will think it necessary to clean up your life first. You will want to get rid of some habits in your life. But here is a key point: you can only do so much on your own. You will be able to change a certain amount in your life. Through an act of the will you can clean up your life, but it will not be enough. You must bring yourself into the very presence of God. There are certain things about your life that only He can change. You can do some sprucing up in your life, but only God can transform your life.

ILLUS. In my freshman year at Olivet Nazarene University I met a student who had a hot new 1972 Suzuki 380, three-cylinder motorcycle. Immediately I went out and bought one just like it. Although it was the same model, it never seemed to have the pep of my friend's Suzuki. Nonetheless, I drove it on a 3,500-mile cycle trip. I washed it and waxed it and cared for it the best I knew how. Shortly after my trip it started making a horrible noise. I took it into the dealer for servicing, who discovered that one of the pistons had never fired. I took care of the bike the best I could, but it took a trained specialist to fix a major problem like a piston.

If you are not a Christian, you have a major problem. It will take more than willpower to transform your life. It will take the transforming power of God. That's why you must come into His presence.

C. That is exactly why we have an altar in our church. Yes, you can find God in nature. I can see Him in the wonder of the starry sky and the fiery sunsets. But you are much more likely to feel and experience the power of God here in a church service. Yes, you can find God just about anywhere you look; but there is nothing like coming into His sanctuary and moving forward to the altar, knowing God will meet you there. If you are going to turn your life around, plan on coming to this altar before you leave.

II. TO TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND, YOU NEED TO HAVE THE BLOOD APPLIED (VV. 20-24, 32-35)

A. When you look at these verses, you will see blood just about everywhere you look. Part of turning the nation around was the idea of bringing blood sacrifices to the altar. The Old Testament sacrificial system of worship demanded blood sacrifices for the atoning of their sins. This act showed God, and themselves, how serious they were about this matter of getting their lives turned around.

In verses 20-24 the city officials went up to the Temple. There they sacrificed 7 bulls, 7 rams, 7 lambs, and 7

goats. Now look at verse 33, where all of the people gather at the Temple. This time they kill 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep and goats. Imagine the blood. It must have flowed like a river down from the altar. It must have cascaded down the steps of the Temple Mount and on down the hillside into the Kidron Valley. What's going on? They were showing God how serious they were about turning things around. They were showing Him that there was no sacrifice too great for them to make if He would only take them back.

B. That was how they did it in the Old Testament, but we obviously live in the New Testament. The blood still needs to be applied if you are going to turn your life around, but there are some changes that have gone into effect since those days of 2 Chronicles. Since Mount Calvary, things have changed. Instead of the blood of animals it is the blood of Jesus that needs to be applied to your heart. The blood of animals just didn't do the trick. God knew He needed something more powerful than that, so He sent Jesus to die on the Cross for our sins. Instead of us showing how serious we are by bringing sacrifices, God shows us how serious He is by making the ultimate sacrifice: His Son. It is not that we bring sacrifices to Him. He has already made the sacrifice for us. Now we see how serious the matter is because He allowed His one and only Son to become the Sacrifice. If you want to turn your life around, you need to have the blood of Jesus applied to your heart.

ILLUS. There is a legend that while Martin Luther was very ill, Satan entered his bedroom. Satan, looking at him with a triumphant smile, unrolled a big scroll that he carried under his arm. He threw one end of it on the floor, and it unwound by itself. Luther read the long list of his condemning sins. Fear struck his troubled heart. Suddenly it flashed into his mind that there was really nothing written on the scroll. Luther cried out, "One thing you have forgotten. The rest is all true, but one thing you have forgotten: 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'" (1 John 1:9, *KJV*). As he said this, Satan and his scroll disappeared.

Let me encourage you to turn your life around by allowing the blood of Jesus to wash you whiter than snow. It is the only way. God made the ultimate sacrifice for you. Jesus died for you so that your life could be transformed through the power of His blood.

CONCLUSION

ILLUS. An explorer was crossing Africa and came into the region of the Barotsi people. He heard stories about the native king Lewanika. This king was inhumanely cruel. It was his great delight to discover and use new means of torture on his enemies. He was known by the nickname "human tiger." The explorer came to a station where Pastor Coillard was in charge. On Sunday the explorer, as a matter of politeness, went to church and sat

through the service. When he came out, he said, "Pastor, who was that striking man sitting next to me who listened so carefully?" The pastor replied, "That was King Lewanika, the 'human tiger.'" The explorer answered back, "Then if that is what Christ can do, I mean to be His."

Are you satisfied with the direction your life is going, or do you need to turn your life around? If you would like to turn your life around, you need to come to the altar and ask God to help you.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- WE APPROACH THE TIME OF WORSHIP
 - Prelude "Come, Every One Who Is Thirsty"
 - Announcements
- WE BEGIN OUR WORSHIP
 - Call to Worship
 - Responsive Reading "The New Birth"
(John 3:1-5, 7-8, 16; 2 Cor. 5:17)
 - Opening Prayer
- WE CELEBRATE OUR WORSHIP
 - Hymns "He Is Able to Deliver Thee"
"He's a Wonderful Savior to Me"
- WE TALK TO GOD ABOUT OUR WORSHIP
 - Pastoral Prayer
- WE RESPOND TO WORSHIP
 - Offering
 - Special Song "The Crystal Fountain"
- WE FOCUS OUR WORSHIP
 - Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 29:19-35
 - Sermon "GIVE ME 40 ACRES"
- WE REFLECT UPON OUR WORSHIP
 - Hymn "Are You Washed in the Blood?"
 - Prayer at the Altar
- WE CONCLUDE OUR WORSHIP
 - Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

- CALL TO WORSHIP**

"As we come into His presence today, may we remember that those who truly meet with Him will leave this place changed."
- ALTAR CALL**

Some seekers fear coming to the altar for prayer because well-intentioned people will crowd around them as they pray. As you invite people to come forward, designate one side of the altar for seekers who want prayer support and the other side for those who prefer to pray about their needs by themselves.
- BENEDICTION**

"Rejoice as you leave here today in the knowledge that God has done more than meet with us. He has changed us!"

The Secrets of Success

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 31:20-21

INTRO

ILLUS. His name was Cleo, and he was a legend. This legendary status could be found in the minds of at least two people: his own mind and the mind of my father. When I was growing up, he was my dad's fishing buddy. If no one else caught a fish, Cleo was sure to get one. He would always get the biggest and the best. My father once shared with me one of Cleo's top fishing secrets. He would stand up in the boat, take off his straw hat, and wave it at the fish. You can laugh or think I'm crazy, but when it came to fishing, Cleo was the man—a legend.

There are people who go fishing, and then there are people who *go fishing*. Both groups of people probably know enough to go where the fish are located. Both may use the right bait. Both know how to set the hook. But there are people who always seem to catch more fish than anyone else. How do they do it?

I am convinced that there are some secrets that successful people are reluctant to share with each other. Secrets that, if you or I would know them, would enable us to be successful. In fact, these secrets of success are universal laws that operate in many areas of our lives. Our concern today is to discover these secrets so we can become the Christian we always dreamed of becoming. Hezekiah reveals to us how to be a successful Christian.

Verse 21 opens with the words, "In everything that he undertook," and closes with these words, "he prospered." In other words, packed into that one verse we are shown the secrets of prospering at whatever we do. Let's look at these top secrets for success.

I. SECRET NO. 1 REVOLVES AROUND BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD

A. In all of Scripture, obedience is held up as the key to success and blessing. The Egyptian Pharaoh disobeyed God, and he was burned. The three men in the fiery furnace obeyed God, and they were not burned. The Israelites disobeyed God and were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Years later, their descendants obeyed God and were allowed entrance into the very same land. It was through obedience that the walls of Jericho came down and the multitudes were fed.

B. Here in the text we see obedience being modeled for us by Hezekiah. In chapter 29 Hezekiah becomes king of a sinful kingdom. The people of the kingdom have started worshiping other gods and defiled the sacred Temple of God. But when Hezekiah became king, he was obedient

to God and turned things around. The worship of pagan gods ceased, and the glory of the Temple was restored. It happened through his obedience to God. As a result of this a whole kingdom was saved from destruction and turned to God.

ILLUS. In the North Pacific lies the little island of Iwo Jima. The dry surface of the island is volcanic ash. Those who have been there say it reminds them of a landscape on the moon. It was this tiny island that the United States captured in World War II from Japan at the price of 21,000 casualties. The men who took it did not find the island to be admirable. They could have found a hundred other reasons seemingly more worthwhile to face gunfire than trying to secure that ugly island. They simply took it in obedience to a command. Once the island was secure, the war was closer to being over.

Obedience to God brings success simply because when we obey Him, we are following the best available course of action. He is the General who knows the big picture. It would be plain stupid to disobey one who has all of the power and knowledge in the universe. When we are obedient to Him, we are one step closer to being spiritually successful.

II. SECRET NO. 2 REVOLVES AROUND SEEKING GOD

A. The text reveals another secret to the success of Hezekiah: "sought his God." The word "sought" literally means to "frequent a place." Are there places you frequent? Many of you frequent a place called "work." Others frequent places called restaurants. To frequent a place means to hang out in a particular place. It is a familiar place where you feel comfortable. For Hezekiah, his place to hang out was the presence of God. It was the place where he felt comfortable. It was a place with which he was familiar.

B. When we think of the idea of "frequenting a place" and directing that idea toward God, we realize we are talking about prayer. Hezekiah hung out with God, and that meant he was a man of prayer. As he hung out with God, God gave him direction on how to rule his kingdom. It was God that gave him directions that made him such a great king. The people wondered where his good ideas came from. They wondered why he was able to rule so differently than the other kings. It all happened because he had a secret: he hung out with God in prayer.

C. If you want spiritual success, then you must "frequent the place" of prayer. If you wanted to become the best possible fisherman, you would jump at the chance to hang out with a fisherman who tours the country fishing in tournaments. Think of the tips he could give you. Imagine all you could learn from him about fishing. As you hang out with God, think of what you could learn from Him. Think of how much greater are your chances of success.

ILLUS. History tells us that George Washington found solace in prayer during the trying times he and his soldiers experienced at Valley Forge. One day a farmer approaching the camp heard an earnest voice. As he drew nearer, he saw George Washington on his knees praying to God, his cheeks wet with tears. The farmer rushed

home and said to his wife, "George Washington will succeed. We will secure our independence." "What makes you think so?" asked his wife. The farmer replied, "I heard him praying out in the woods today. The Lord will surely hear his prayer."

Prayer is one of the secrets of impacting your world. It is a simple but profound secret: hang out with God, and you will find success.

III. SECRET NO. 3 REVOLVES AROUND GIVING IT YOUR ALL

A. King Hezekiah knew this secret well. The text tells us that he worked wholeheartedly. He learned that success does not come easily. It would have been easy for Hezekiah, the king, to not give it his all. He could have sat on his throne and demanded to be entertained while others did all the work. After all, he was the king. Who would have argued with him if he had taken the easy way out? How refreshing to see one in such a high place of privilege giving it his all. The best at any vocation or avocation are those who give it their all.

ILLUS. An observation was made by the son of Arturo Toscanini, the famous musician. On the occasion of the famous musician's 80th birthday, the younger man was asked what he considered to be his father's greatest achievement. He replied, "From him there can be no such thing. Whatever he happens to be doing at any moment is the biggest undertaking of his life." There is a man who gives it all he's got.

ILLUS. Dwight L. Moody was one who learned to give it his all. Shortly after his conversion he wanted to teach Sunday School but was told he would have to form a class of his own. After praying for guidance, he went into the streets of Chicago, winning the hearts of boys and girls by giving them candy and showing them kindness. He also excited their imagination by promoting contests, and soon he organized many groups of youngsters throughout the city. Someone described him as "a huge, bearded pied piper" because the children followed him to Sunday School. Again and again you will see that those who really make a difference are those who give it their all.

B. This is not big news to you. We know that hard work pays off. Unfortunately, however, our world teaches us that we should try to get by doing as little as possible. That truth is evident when you say farewell to someone with the words "Don't work too hard," or "Take it easy." Go to work at some union factories, and you will soon learn that there is such a thing as working too fast. It is not at all unusual to be told to slow down at work. People with such attitudes rarely find success.

If you are in the category of just trying to get by, then to be successful in your spiritual life you need to learn the secret of giving it all you got. You need to crank up the volume.

CONCLUSION

There are fishermen, and then there are fishermen; which will you be? There are people who just survive, and then there are those who thrive. Will you be content to just get by, or will you take these secrets to heart and be the best you can be? May God help us all to do our best this week as we put these secrets into action: be obedient, hang out with God in prayer, and give it your best. When we have done that, the closing words of verse 21 will be applied us: "And so [they] prospered."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE APPROACH THE TIME OF WORSHIP

Prelude "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Announcements

WE BEGIN OUR WORSHIP

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading "Rejoicing in Him"
(Pss. 9:1-2, 7-11; 66:6)

Opening Prayer

WE CELEBRATE OUR WORSHIP

Hymns "Lead On, O King Eternal"
"Be Thou My Vision"

WE TALK TO GOD ABOUT OUR WORSHIP

Pastoral Prayer

WE RESPOND TO WORSHIP

Offering

Special Song "Something Beautiful"

WE FOCUS OUR WORSHIP

Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 31:20-21

Sermon "THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS"

WE REFLECT UPON OUR WORSHIP

Hymn "Lord, Be Glorified"

Prayer at the Altar

WE CONCLUDE OUR WORSHIP

Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

To add impact to the sermon, arrange to have a successful Christian businessperson share a brief testimony on what it means to be successful.

CALL TO WORSHIP

"Welcome to a place called 'sanctuary.' This place is a sanctuary because here we find ourselves in the presence of God. Let us worship Him today, knowing that we are in the sanctuary of His love!"

BENEDICTION

"As you prepare to leave this sanctuary, take with you these secrets of success. Determine to use them in such a way as will bring glory to the One from whom they came!"

When Things Are Going Well

by **Randall K. Hartman**

2 Chron. 32

INTRO

Have you ever gone through a period in your life when things seemed to be going along especially well?

ILLUS. Soon after my marriage things were going especially well. Marriage agreed with me. Soon I would receive my college degree. My part-time job paid well. But at three o'clock in the morning on the first Sunday night of April 1976, the phone rang, waking me out of a deep sleep. I staggered to the phone and heard my older brother's voice. He told me that our younger brother had just been killed in a traffic accident. Suddenly, in the midst of a wonderful life, all came crashing down. Have you ever had your life crumble unexpectedly at your feet?

When you read the context of this chapter, you will discover that things are going better for them than they have for many years. But suddenly, out of nowhere come the words of verse 1. The kingdom is about to be invaded. Look out. Here it comes. The rain is beginning to fall on the parade.

From this story in 2 Chron. 32 we can learn how to be prepared when the storms come.

I. WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL, YOU NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THE ENEMY IS STILL AT WORK (V. 1)

A. Jerusalem has long had a history of being at the center of the battle. Archaeology tells us that Jerusalem has been conquered 23 times throughout history. Enemies knew that if they could capture Jerusalem, all of the surrounding country would be theirs. In spite of this well-known fact, with things going well, King Hezekiah could have easily let down his guard and reduced the number of guards on the city walls. Fortunately, there is no indication that Hezekiah had allowed Jerusalem to be an easy target for the enemy. He did not fall into the trap of forgetting that even in good times the enemy is still at work.

B. We, too, need to remember that when things are going well, the enemy is still at work. It would be easy to get caught up in the blessings. As the blessings from God unfold, it would be easy to drop our guard against our enemy. We might ease up in our prayers. How easy it would be to turn on the spiritual cruise control. After all, things are going so well, we might as well kick back and relax.

We dare not, however, forget that the enemy is still at work in our lives and church. Satan will try to rain on the parade. We dare not let down our guard.

ILLUS. The *Titanic* was 4 city blocks long and 11 sto-

ries high. She was protected by the latest, most ingenious safety devices. She was considered unsinkable. On April 10, 1912, she sailed out of Southampton, England, on her maiden voyage to New York. Unfortunately, during the voyage, the crew let down their guard. When the sixth message, "Look out for icebergs," came in, the *Titanic's* operator wired back: "Shut up, I'm busy." Exactly 35 minutes later the great ship, whose captain had said, "God himself couldn't sink this ship," was sinking. In all, 1,515 passengers and crew were drowned.

Refuse to set your spiritual autopilot on cruise. When things are going well, you need to remember there is still an enemy at work.

II. WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL, YOU NEED TO BE PROACTIVE (VV. 2-5)

A. Yes, the enemy was threatening, but things were still going well for the people of God inside the city. They could have chosen to do nothing. After all, why not wait and see what the enemy will do? Perhaps the enemy just wanted to dialogue. Perhaps if they ignored them, they would just go away. But they didn't respond in that fashion. As you look at verses 2-5, do you see what they did? They became proactive. "Proactive" simply means that they are going to do something to get ready for the enemy before it is too late. They could wait until the enemy stormed the walls of the city and then respond by shooting arrows at them. Instead, they are proactive. They constructively respond before the situation becomes desperate. In verse 3 Hezekiah held a council of war to discuss what needed to be done. They made a crucial decision regarding their water supply, repaired crumbling sections of the wall, and made weapons. When things were going well, they knew they had better be proactive.

B. Stephen Covey has a book out called *First Things First*. Covey says we spend too much of our life dealing with things that are urgent but unimportant. "Urgent junk mail" would fall into this category. People who thrive on the unimportant urgent are the people who spend their life putting out fires. According to Covey, it is far better to spend time working in the area of the important but not urgent matters of life. This is simply another way to say that we ought to be proactive. As we spend time with the not urgent but important matters, we are spending time on what is really important. We spend time feeding our soul. We spend time deepening our spiritual roots. As we learn to live in the "not urgent," we will find that there are fewer times of "urgency." That is the essence of being proactive. When things are going well, we need to be proactive and refuse to sit by idly until our soul is under attack.

ILLUS. There's a device called Drive Alert designed to keep you awake at the wheel of your car. It is a small, one-ounce device aid that fits over the ear like a hearing aid. When your head nods, a buzzer sounds, jolting you wide awake from your sleep. People who have trouble staying awake as they drive at night ought to rush out and buy such a gadget. That is being proactive. Failure to do so could result in death or injury. For the time to purchase the Drive Alert is before you need it.

When things are going well, refuse to sit back and do nothing because the enemy is far from your door. Now, while it is not urgent, is the time to work on some of your spiritual weaknesses. Be proactive while things are going well, and shore up the walls of your heart. Now, during the spiritual calm, take away any foothold that Satan may have to get inside of your heart. While things are going well, learn to be proactive.

III. WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL, YOU NEED TO CONTINUE TO RELY UPON GOD (VV. 7-8)

A. Think for a moment about what is going on here in this passage. Things are at high tide for the Israelites. They have had a revival. They have prospered. God has blessed. But now the rain is starting to fall. Consequently, they gather together and start to be proactive. They plan ahead for what might happen. How easy it would be at this point to begin to rely on themselves. When things are going well, for some reason or another, we start to rely upon ourselves. We tend to shove God out of the picture. We rejoice in what has happened; but we have a tendency to forget that it came from the hand of God.

This, however, did not happen to the Israelites. King Hezekiah calls them together and reminds them that whatever is going to happen, they can be strong and courageous because it is God who is with them. It is God upon whom they are relying. They are not relying on their plans, although plans are important. They are not depending upon the weapons they have made, although they will need them. Even though they have all of that going for them, they are still depending upon God.

B. Even though things are going well for you, you must cling to your dependence upon Him. Cling to Him while your health is still good. Depend upon Him while the money from the job allows you to increase your bank account. While your family relationships are strong, rely upon Him. Hold on to God even if you are on the mountain of blessing.

When things are going well, we will be tempted to depend upon ourselves and forget that things are going well because we have trusted God. It is like some athletes who win the Olympic gold medal through years of hard work and training. Once they have the gold medal around their neck, they are tempted to relax. No longer do they train as hard as they once did.

Failure to rely upon Him when things are going well can be a fatal spiritual flaw.

ILLUS. A young Frenchman captured the world's attention by walking a tightrope between the towers of New York's World Trade Center. Imagine. There was only a thin wire and 1,350 feet of air between himself and certain death. He performed the feat with nerves of steel. He was at the top of his performance level. A few months later, however, he was practicing on a relatively low wire in St. Petersburg, Florida. He fell 30 feet and was injured. As he lay waiting for help, he reportedly beat his fist on

the ground, saying, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it. I never fall."

When things are going well for us, we must not become careless and rely upon ourselves. God makes the difference.

CONCLUSION

Someday the rain will fall on your parade. Do not be surprised when the storm comes. Instead, be prepared. Remember that the enemy is still at work. Be proactive. Continue to rely upon God. Keep these truths close by for the rainy day that will undoubtedly come. If you do, you will more than survive. You will thrive.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

WE APPROACH THE TIME OF WORSHIP

Prelude "Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"

Announcements

WE BEGIN OUR WORSHIP

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading "Courage"
(2 Tim. 1:7-9a; 2:1, 3-4, 11-13, 15)

Opening Prayer

WE CELEBRATE OUR WORSHIP

Hymns "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
"Surely Goodness and Mercy"

WE TALK TO GOD ABOUT OUR WORSHIP

Pastoral Prayer

WE RESPOND TO WORSHIP

Offering

Special Song "Haven of Rest"

WE FOCUS OUR WORSHIP

Scripture Reading 2 Chron. 32:1-8

Sermon "WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WEL"

WE REFLECT UPON OUR WORSHIP

Hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Prayer at the Altar

WE CONCLUDE OUR WORSHIP

Benediction

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

Consider having the teens in the church present a brief skit showing how quickly disaster can strike in the midst of things going well. If you have few teens, challenge the senior adults with this project.

CALL TO WORSHIP

"We have gathered here today from all across our community. Our purpose is to praise the name of our high and holy God. Let us begin this joyous task!"

BENEDICTION

"Rejoice when God blesses you this week and things go well in your life. But when things turn sour, remember the truths found here in 2 Chron. 32, and you will make it!"

Highpoint

Sunday Night Preaching Resources

*T*here never was a better time than now, never a better place than here." With that, Evangelist Norman Moore opened the altar on Sunday night during a revival crusade. I looked around the nearly full sanctuary, observing the impact of the preacher's words and the Spirit's promptings. The aisles were nearly choked with people streaming forward to meet God's saving, sanctifying grace. "Never . . . a better time . . . never a better place." Those words rang in my heart and mind, and I thought, "How true!"

Indeed, Sunday evenings at your church can be in that same spiritual time zone. Just imagine what God wants to do in terms of spiritual tune-up, restoration, and renewal across your congregation. Now that I no longer stand in the pulpit as a parish pastor, I often look around on Sunday nights at the church I attend. Do you know what I often observe? I frequently see people visibly gripped with the challenge of decision making. I can almost see the spiritual dialogue going on within. "Never . . . a better time . . . never a better place."

Sunday nights offer you special opportunities for delivering God's message to those whom He has entrusted in your spiritual care. If you believe *there never was a better time . . . never a better place*, use the sacred task of proclamation to press for spiritual decision making. Even those messages or sermons that focus on equipping believers often ring with the timbre of a call to spiritual improvement.

May the summer months here in North America prove to be positive months of spiritual improvement for those in your faith community. Central to this possibility, however, is the firm conviction, "*There never was a better time than now, never a better place than here.*"

Welcome to *Highpoint* Sunday Night Preaching Resources

Hot summer Sunday nights, long hours of daylight, weekends screaming for all kinds of recreational activity—these are just a few of the challenges of sermon preparation for Sunday evening services during the summer months. For this quarter, June, July, and August, a 13-week series on vision seems appropriate. The people of God who factor regular Sunday night church attendance into their weekly schedules always deserve our best, but especially so during the summer months. With this in mind, here is a sermon series on vision.

You will find this series follows a different format from the usual. Each sermon has three components. First comes an introduction that provides background, sidelights, and even suggestions for working with the story or context. A purpose section follows, which unpacks the scriptural story in ways that encourage the preacher to personalize each sermon. Every preacher approaches the biblical story differently. Each sermon in this series allows you to note elements that deserve attention. They offer opportunity for your personalization.

Each sermon ends with an action section. Because I have been seriously damaged by multiple higher educational systems, I tend to cast the action section along the lines of a learning ob-

jective. Look closely and you will note numerous verbs, invitations to critical thinking, and opportunities to extrapolate from scriptural story to everyday life.

Nurturing the people of God is essential. Those long, warm evenings of summer Sundays can provide opportunities to enrich the spiritual journeys of the faithful. This is a series that can help you get ready for autumn ministry emphasis. Each sermon lists a biblical background for additional reading. Examine it carefully; you may find even more grist for the mill of preparation.

PM

June
July
August
1999

DAVID J. FELTER
Highpoint Editor
KANSAS CITY



David J. Felter

David Felter is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. He has served as a parish pastor for over 20 years. For the last 13 years, Felter has been assigned to the International Headquarters of the Church of the Nazarene. He presently serves as Adult Ministries director and Continuing Lay Training/Lay Ministry coordinator within Sunday School Ministries Division.

Felter also serves as editor of *Resource* magazine and executive editor of SSM Division. As a member of the WordAction leadership group, he serves on the Adult Sunday School curriculum editorial team as well as training director for WordAction Publishing.

As a writer, Felter contributes regularly to the *Preacher's Magazine* as the editor of the *Highpoint* Sunday Evening Preaching resources. He is actively involved in script writing, educational consulting, and leadership training. He is the author of *In Search of Eden: Understanding New Age Thought*, published by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.

Felter holds a B.A. from Bartlesville Wesleyan College, an M.A. from Southern Nazarene University, and an M.S. from Indiana University in Bloomington. While at Indiana, he completed all course work for the Ph.D. in adult education.

David has made numerous presentations on the skills essential to recruiting, training, and motivating people in volunteer orga-

nizations. As a former parish pastor, he understands the critical mix of calling, discovery, and fulfillment essential to mission fulfillment, and the special challenge this presents to local churches, clergy, and lay leaders. As a student of culture, Felter often addresses issues impacting the local church inherent in the transition between traditional, modern, and postmodern perspectives.

Felter is married to Sandy, with whom he lives in Overland Park, Kansas, and is a member of College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe, Kansas. The Felters have two married sons and four granddaughters. He enjoys motorcycling and ham radio. **PM**

Sermons for Sunday Night

DAVID J. FELTER



HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Origins of Vision

Scripture: Gen. 13:1-15

Text: Gen. 13:14-15

Introduction:

- a. Most congregations think in terms of mission statements that describe purpose and objective.
- b. Vision statements frequently provide tangible elements that give feedback for ascertaining levels of progress toward missional achievement.
- c. Vision translates the complexity of goals and objectives into the everyday language of ordinary people.
- d. Prov. 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (קלן). The NRSV translates the verse this way: "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint." The prophetic word is the vision statement that provides clear-cut directions that the people can take on their corporate journey toward formation as the people of God.

Purpose: To examine the needs that give rise to vision, using the story of Abram and Lot.

1. The journey toward a vision requires worshipful obedience. V. 4
2. Even the best vision often requires modification. V. 6
3. No vision ever comes with its authority unchallenged. V. 7
4. The vision is malleable; one may "cho[o]se for himself." V. 11
5. The vision God calls us to see is not always discernible at first glance. Vv. 14-15
6. The divine vision requires response. Vv. 17-18

Action:

- Respond in dedication and consecration as preparation for obedience.
- Surrender every vision to the necessary modifications.
- Submit every vision to God's authority.

- Examine personal vision, checking its focus to see if it embodies more than personal agenda.
- Inspect your spiritual horizon. Is there evidence of the relief outlines of God's call and vision for your life?
- Determine your own progress in fulfilling the vision God has given you.

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A
METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Impact of Vision

Scripture: Dan. 10:1-20

Text: Dan. 10:7

Introduction:

- a. One of the finest features of community is its capacity to blend individual interests and needs into a mosaic that blesses every member. In other words, when the tide comes in, all the boats float.
- b. We believe our vision and mission must be shared vision and shared mission.
- c. Who initiates the vision process? Does the vision begin with one person who then articulates its dimensions, scope, and sequence?
- d. What does a person do with a vision?

Purpose: To examine the personal impact of vision.

1. Vision is often preceded by spiritual preparation. Vv. 2-3
2. Vision is not always readily or immediately perceived by those around us. V 7
3. Vision may represent a significant change, even to the point of unsettling the status quo. Vv. 8-9
4. Vision may require new understandings and insights that can be gained only through in-depth devotion and encounter with the wisdom of God. Vv. 11-12
5. Vision may bring intensifying awareness of one's own inner spiritual need. Vv. 15-17 (cf. Isa. 6:1-7)
6. Vision brings potential for added capacity through increased dependence on God. Vv. 18-19

Action:

- Is fresh vision needed?
- What spiritual preparations need to be taken?
- What needs to be done to facilitate broader acceptance and embracing of vision?
- What elements of the status quo are challenged by fresh vision?

- What steps can be taken to explore and tap divine resources needed for response to fresh vision?

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A
METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Opening to Vision

Scripture: 2 Kings 6:1-23

Text: 2 Kings 6:17

Introduction:

- a. What do we see?
- b. Sometimes we see what we don't believe; other times we believe but can't see.
- c. Two stories in this chapter help us see how important it is to be open to new, fresh vision.
- d. The first story is about seeing what seems impossible. The second is about believing what cannot be seen.
- e. In both stories, vision occurs because God intervenes through the actions of His prophet.

Purpose: To discover ways we can open up to fresh vision.

1. Without an action response, a vision remains a dream. V. 1
2. Response to the inherent potential of a vision requires organization and mobilization. V. 2
3. Initializing vision fulfillment often requires the presence of those who possessed the initial vision as well as those whose personal spirituality can empower the required response. V. 3
4. No vision is ever achieved without apparent setback. Every vision is challenged. V. 5
5. Every challenge to vision is but an opportunity for God to intervene with His majesty, splendor, and power. Vv. 6-7

Action:

- List potential actions that need to be taken in order to make your vision more than a dream or wish list.
- Identify the steps necessary to give your vision the organization it deserves in order to mobilize it for your life.
- In order to access the Internet, a connection must be

first initialized, whether it is a modem in the computer or a local network. Are you enjoying a level of personal spiritual experience that will empower your efforts to initialize your vision?

- Perhaps your vision has been challenged. What have you learned from those challenges that might help as you restart your vision?

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Resolving the Challenge Through Vision

Scripture: Job 42:1-5

Text: Job 42:5

Introduction:

- a. Job had a dispute with God. It was one that is not unknown today. How do we explain what appear to be contradictions to biblical promises made to faithful believers?
- b. What do we do when we realize that our vision has been flawed by assumptions that do not bear up under the scrutiny and testing of tough realities?
- c. To whom do we turn when every facet of our personal spirituality is called into question?
- d. Are there safeguards that we can employ to keep us from investing personal vision with inappropriate expectations?

Purpose: To learn how to cast personal vision from biblically sound perspectives.

1. Personal vision must be created from biblically sound ingredients. It must conform to biblical understandings of God, His will, and our relationship to the divine purpose.
2. Personal vision must subordinate personal rights to divine rights. God has a prior claim upon us.
3. Personal vision must consider the immutable right of God to do whatever He desires to do, not because we understand or comprehend, but because He alone is Sovereign.
4. Personal vision must be considered in light of our limited understanding of God's overarching purpose and, therefore, must be dynamic in order to accommodate any progressive revelation of that purpose and plan.
5. Personal spiritual experience can bring one to an encounter with God. Such encounter transcends mere theories about God by allowing one to be addressed by Him.

6. Any vision that does not lead toward encounter with God will in the end prove less than satisfactory.

Action:

- Review your personal vision for accuracy and conformity to biblical principles.
- Review your personal spirituality, testing for completeness of surrender and consecration.
- List any so-called conflict with God you might have had, and see whether there is the remnant of confusion or disagreement over His response or unfolding will for your life.
- Test your personal vision to see whether it is flexible and dynamic enough for exposure to the sovereign will of God. If your vision has been rigid and unbending, what will you do if your encounter with God reveals a course of action for which He offers no immediate explanation?
- In what ways is your personal vision preparing you for encounter with God?

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: The Holy Spirit and Vision

Scripture: Joel 2:25-29

Text: Joel 2:28

Introduction:

- a. Living by the dimensions of personal vision should prompt the believer to ensure the quality of his or her relationship with God.
- b. The perspective of the prophet here is one of “perfect relationship between God and his people.”¹
- c. Vision is really about perspective transformation, and without perfect relation to God, any vision will have its aim too low.
- d. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s provision for our cleansing, equipping, and empowering.
- e. Even though personal vision often incorporates individual idiosyncrasies, two facts remain clear. First, all vision proceeds from the Spirit. Second, no vision ever isolates the believer from the faith community.

Purpose: To understand personal vision as the gift of the Spirit.

1. Vision comes as the by-product of the Spirit’s presence in our lives.
2. The element of inspiration in one’s life rises to the level of vision only as it is engendered, animated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
3. Vision is both reflective as well as anticipatory. In other words, both the past as well as the future intersect with the present.
4. Vision is never severed from factual reality, nor is it linked to fanciful speculation. Rather, vision is rooted in truth that engages both history as well as promise. (Read all of chapter 2 in order to gain insight into this important truth.)
5. Vision is for the whole faith community. “Only one person, the prophet Joel, had seen the situation

through God’s eyes; with God’s voice he had spoken of both judgment and hope. Now a whole nation of Joels is envisaged. Every sector of its society, young and old, male and female, slave and free, would share a prophet’s understanding of God.”²

Action:

- The King James Version translates Prov. 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Since vision is a by-product of the Spirit’s presence in one’s life, gauge the intensity of the Spirit’s presence in your own life by the fervor of your vision.
- Is the primary element of inspiration in your life worthy of being called *vision*? Does it qualify to be called vision?
- Vision can be rendered inoperative at worst and dysfunctional at best if it misunderstands the linkage between truth and speculation. Biblical vision does not stumble at God’s promises, nor does it neglect the lessons learned from the past. Is your vision personal speculation, bound together with a few proof texts, lacking roots into the length and breadth of God’s revelatory witness?
- Does your vision increase the level of connectivity between you and your faith community?

1. G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France, *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 789.

2. *Ibid.*

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Christ-centered Vision in a Postmodern Era

Scripture: Acts 7:54—8:1

Text: Acts 7:55

Introduction:

- a. This passage is more clearly understood from the commentators' notes: "Stephen was granted a vision which, like the opening of heaven and voice of God at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, was not only meant to give him courage for the task ahead, but was also God's endorsement of the crucial change that was taking place."*
- b. Central to our perspective on biblical vision is the understanding that God gives us fresh vision so that we can envision the change He wants to effect.
- c. A vision of humankind's relating to God in any way other than the sacrificial system was totally foreign to the people of Israel of Stephen's day. Yet this vision of God's glory in heaven and Jesus standing at God's right hand clearly signaled change. To this radical change, God was sending His endorsement via the vision He gave dying Stephen.
- d. While Stephen was the first Christian martyr, he is also the first layperson to confirm the apostolic message that God has initiated a radical change, and that from now on, humankind can come to God only through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Purpose:

1. We are in what many are calling the *postmodern era*. To say that crucial changes are taking place may be an understatement. But not all these changes are good.
2. The centrality of Christ in our proclamation and witness must never be abandoned, even though many postmoderns reject the claims of Christianity simply because we claim they are true.
3. The vision of the church must never be diluted or wa-

tered down by immersion into streams of popular culture.

4. In a postmodern culture, there is always the danger that we will be tempted to deconstruct the gospel. While some may lay claim to "Black theology," or "feminist theology," or whatever group-specific label may be attached, there is only one Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. In a postmodern culture, there is always the danger that we will reduce the gospel to emotionalism and fanaticism. Bill Crouse argues, "Experience and feeling are important, but the postmodern emphasis is to abandon truth and doctrine" (from a public address).
6. Leith Anderson writes, "We have a generation that is less interested in cerebral arguments, linear thinking, theological systems, and more interested in encountering the supernatural. Consequently, churchgoers operate with a different paradigm of spirituality. The old paradigm taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching" (*A Church for the Twenty-first Century*, 20-21).

Action:

- Are we learning how to communicate the Christian faith in a postmodern world? Identify ways in which you can bear witness "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, KJV).
- One's personal vision of Jesus may not include all the so-called supernatural bells and whistles, but it should be clear enough that the truth upon which your life is built is rooted in Him.
- While postmoderns prefer *story* and *narrative* to propositional, logically linear statements of faith, you can share the story of Jesus in your life and trust the Holy Spirit to communicate the truth to their hearts.

**New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1078.

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Replacing Old Visions

Scripture: Acts 10:1-17, 34-43

Text: Acts 10:3, 11, 17 and 34

Introduction:

- a. Just for fun, let's suppose that Cornelius represents a postmodern seeker. He is disillusioned with the cultural messages he's been hearing. He has turned to embrace a quest for spirituality, but lacks clear-cut information that can reliably lead him to truth.
- b. Let's suppose that Peter represents the Church attempting to discover its way in a changing environment. It simultaneously clings to the truth it has discovered in the past, yet it yearns to effectively bridge the gap between it and the people it is attempting to attract.
- c. Just for fun, let's use the stories in this passage to lead us to insight that might help us in our attempts to attract our generation.
- d. If this seems an unusual method, consider the story of the duck hunters:

Two would-be duck hunters headed off in a new Cherokee four-wheel drive with a dog, a gun, and a stick of dynamite. The idea was to blow a hole in the ice with the dynamite, wait for the ducks to land on the water, and then shoot them. So, after the Cherokee was parked on the solid ice, the ignited dynamite was tossed some 50 feet away. As soon as this happened, the hunting dog's true nature became evident. Something thrown was something to be retrieved. It dashed off after the dynamite. Now the first thing that a dog with a catch does is return to its owners. So, dynamite in jaws, it headed back to its owners. Seeing disaster about to unfold, the dog's owner took out his shotgun and started firing at the dog, which thought its owner had lost his mind. The dog, observing that it has assumed the status of a duck, heads for shelter.

The nearest shelter that could be found happened to be under the Cherokee. Now the good news in the story is that the hunters got their hole in the ice!

- e. This story represents a postmodern methodology quite nicely. Notice how the story does not automatically identify a core theme; rather, it explores every facet and nuance, not linearly, but circuitously.
- f. Postmodern thinkers prefer to tell a story rather than seek for logical precision. Using their own methodology, let's look again at our biblical story.

Purpose:

1. Cornelius may represent the postmodern in that, without too much of a stretch (remember, we're just having fun!) the following elements, which might be generalized from reflecting on his story, are present in our culture today:
 - a. The focus is on the existential moment.
 - b. If there is an acknowledgment of history, it is relativistic. Perspective is more important than fact, and context is more important than interpretation.
 - c. There is a hunger for community because humans are an extension of culture. They are socially determined.
2. Peter represents the Church, which has its roots in premodern constructs.
 - a. Truth is revealed, and it is not only true for the Community but also true for all people, in all places, in all time.
 - b. There is a universe, and we are part of that universe. Individualism, even its stories that carry claims of authenticity, cannot be trusted unless it conforms to the truth, which can be known and tested.
 - c. While the spiritual journeys of others may be appreciated, diversity is a sign of God's endless power, not the need for many perspectives.

Action:

- Spiritual hunger is a characteristic of our age. While it may sound like preaching to the choir, the Church must always resist the temptation to make its message politically correct by indulging prevailing trends accompanying postmodernism.
- On the other hand, the Church must recognize the necessity to be willing to let God shatter some of its prevailing assumptions, just as He did to the apostle Peter.

- For Peter, his tradition, built on Scripture, had become a symbolic order of which he was a part. It functioned similarly to ritual. Cornelius and Peter were separated by a gulf that Peter could not see.
- In what ways could you link your personal story to God's story (Scripture) in order to communicate truth to a postmodern seeker?
- How do you use your story to communicate truth about God and Christ to your world?
- What are some of the traditions that God has shattered along the way that make it possible for you to agree with Peter's assessment of God's working in His world?

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

God often embeds the details with special revelations of His purpose, power, and provision.

Action:

- What are the compelling forces in your life? List the primary elements of your life that truly motivate you to action.
- The level of commitment we endow our vision is in direct relationship to how compelling the vision is upon our everyday life.
- If your vision is not as compelling as it once might have been, review it, checking for changes that might have occurred over time that have diminished it.
- Review the passage again. Look for ways to identify God's purpose, power, and provision in your life as you review your own response to the vision He gave you.

Theme: When Vision Is Accompanied by Trouble

Scripture: Acts 16

Text: Acts 16:9

Introduction:

- a. The Bible background for this sermon reflects a period of relative tranquillity during which the emerging Christian Church experienced stabilization, growth, and a time of spiritual deepening.
- b. While there is opposition, it primarily focuses on the leaders. They sense the restrictive direction of the Holy Spirit, guiding them in their preaching mission travels.
- c. This awareness culminates in a mission-oriented vision, appealing for the apostolic team to travel into Macedonia to preach the gospel there.
- d. Paul, being the spiritually sensitive man that he was, immediately endeavors to respond. What transpires is rich in illustrative and inspirational metaphors.
- e. One central theme that plays out in the stories of chapter 16 is this: Pursuing a vision often entails a variety of challenges. Unless the vision is pursued, however, both challenge and blessing will be missed.

Purpose:

1. Pursuing a vision requires considerable commitment. One must believe in the legitimacy of the vision, or it will never become a compelling force producing the potential results inherent in the original vision.
2. God's call must be met with willing obedience, even if He subsequently does not remove the obstacles that may impede our progress.
3. When there is commitment to action, God arranges the contingencies of life in such a way as to provide for our needs, comfort, and security.
4. While we tend to focus on the accomplishment of the vision, enduring the details as only means to an end,

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Theme: Implementing and Aligning Vision

Scripture: Acts 26:12-23

Text: Acts 26:19

Introduction:

- a. The conversion story of Paul is remarkable. It is the watershed story of the New Testament having to do with our conviction that conversion can be instantaneous, transforming, and dramatic.
- b. As a substantiating statement to the theme of this series of sermons, it also reminds us of the practical elements of vision.
- c. Examination of Paul's life and ministry reveals a systematic and intentional response that involved him at every level of his being.

Purpose:

1. Saul did not anticipate his vision of Jesus while he was on the road to Damascus. He was in the pursuit of his mission to persecute and block the continued proclamation of Jesus as Messiah when the vision occurred.
2. It may seem obvious: vision involves seeing something or someone. V 13
3. Vision involves listening. V. 14
4. Vision involves response. V. 15
5. Vision involves action. V. 16
6. Vision focuses on mission. V. 16b
7. Vision commands faithfulness. V. 19

Action:

- There are two critical elements to effective vision: Implementation and Alignment.
- Implementing vision consists of the elements listed above.
 - a. Is that which is in the field of my spiritual eyesight a *compelling* force for change, new direction, and so on?

- b. Is that which I have heard with my spiritual ears *profound* enough to sustain my commitment and involvement?
 - c. Is the response I am being challenged to give *creative* enough to sustain my interest and activity?
 - d. Is the action I am prepared to take *larger* than my own capacity?
 - e. Is the mission described by this vision *important* enough to demand my sacrifice?
- Aligning vision is another crucial element. Paul understood this and elaborates both his faithful commitment to the achievement of his vision-rich mission and the faithfulness of God in sustaining and supporting him in his response. (See vv. 19, 22.)

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Theme: When Vision Fades

Scripture: Isa. 64

Text: Isa. 64:6b

Introduction:

- a. As always, Isaiah offers fertile ground for exploring the sacred concepts of vision, obedience, and devotion.
- b. But even the most devout commitment to vision is often tempered by times of doubt, difficulty, or even failure.
- c. What do we do when it seems as if God has left us to our own devices? What do we do when, in the secret chambers of our hearts, we grieve over God's seeming indifference to our problems and troubles?
- d. Worse yet, what do we do when our failures threaten to extinguish the flame of vision, replacing it with cold ashes, reminding us of what might have been?

Purpose:

1. A failure to recognize the awesome sovereignty of God may reduce our perception of His being to that of a cosmic servant.
2. God's love and compassion are enduring and steadfast. His integrity cannot be challenged, however, nor can His purpose be redirected according to the achievement of personal aims.
3. God may seem indifferent, even absent from our lives, but it is not because He is capricious or changeable.
4. Devotion will be tested. Sometimes the only remedy for flagging devotion or creeping discouragement is revival. What is revival? Note the description given in the first four verses of chapter 64:
 - a. Heaven opens and humankind encounters the awesome God!
 - b. The mountains quake. What seems impenetrable, impossible, immovable, suddenly appears insignificant.

- c. Passion is revived. As the fire boils water and kindles brushwood, so the fire of God ignites the dying ashes of passion.
5. Without revival, our vision is in danger of being set aside, neglected, even replaced. The compelling attraction of our vision fades, no longer evoking our sacrifice and obedience.

Action:

- The remedy for fading vision is illustrated by the writer's use of the potter metaphor.
 - a. Our vision is not the product of our own genius. It is born of God, animated, energized, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Like the pottery created by the potter, it remains the product and possession of the potter. He is free to reshape its design, to alter its purpose.
 - c. Our vision must be maintained by our dependence upon God.
- The vision must never become an idol.
 - a. There is an illustration from the world of postmodern literature that provides interesting insight into this problem.
 - b. The French thinker Jean Luc Marion points out the difference between an idol and an icon: "The idol consigns the divine to the measure of a human gaze. The icon appears only when it is overlooked. It is like seeing in the dark. Looking directly at the object one is trying to comprehend is much less useful than looking beyond it. In the dark we see better with peripheral vision."
 - c. It is often in the darkness that we see better. It is then that we learn not to trust the vision but God, who informs and infuses our vision with His grace.

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Theme: Living from Vision

Scripture: 1 Cor. 2:6-16

Text: 1 Cor. 2:14

Introduction:

- a. Paul provides a fascinating discussion regarding the perspective from which one lives. He speaks of the “wisdom of this age” and the “rulers of this age,” both of whom, he says, are “doomed to perish” (v. 6, NRSV).
- b. Vision is a revelation, perceived in the mind as well as the heart, and mediated by the living Spirit of God.
- c. In this discussion, Paul references the “human spirit” (v. 11, NRSV) as well as the “Holy Spirit” (vv. 13-14, TLB). The contrast between these cannot be missed. He states, “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God” (v. 11, NRSV).
- d. Clearly vision is something that any person can experience. The issue at hand, however, concerns both the origin as well as the source of animation of that vision.

Purpose:

1. Terry O’Connor of Indiana State University suggests, “People rely on personally constructed filters to orient their relationships toward the world.”¹
2. Paul speaks of orienting oneself to the world through a different filter than those usually associated with this phenomenon. The typical filters are *age, experience, internal psychodynamics, maturity, cognition, physiology, biochemistry*, and so forth. O’Connor goes on to state the summary of conventional wisdom: “In a very real sense, we create our own personal point of view.”²
3. Living from vision is described by Paul this way: “We speak of these things in words not taught by human

wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual” (v. 13, NRSV).

4. In the realm of the educator, *metacognition* is recognized as the level at which executive functioning occurs. Living from vision introduces something far more powerful than our typical human response of thinking and behaving. Paul states it this way: “Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they themselves are subject to no one else’s scrutiny” (v. 15, NRSV).

Action:

- We live by four very important elements: **facts**, **concepts**, **principles**, and **procedures**. Even our inner vision cannot escape these. But the way we orient ourselves to these elements characterizes us as living according to either the natural realm or the realm of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Review the **facts** by which you live. Are these facts derived from or enriched by God’s revelation of himself as mediated through Scripture, worship, prayer, and fellowship?
 - b. Review the **concepts** that undergird your life. Living from vision may disrupt concepts that are based on definitions or systems that exclude God or give Him only token acknowledgment.
 - c. Review the **principles** that govern your values. Principles are frequently *rules that guide action or explain change*. The presence of related rules often combines to form *rule systems*. Living from vision means accepting the *rule of the Spirit* as the source and basis for one’s principles for living.
 - d. Review the **procedures** that automate your life. A procedure may be loosely defined as *knowing how to proceed in specific situations*. Living from vision means allowing the Spirit to shape your behavior. This means storing the knowledge and wisdom of the Spirit in your life by accessing all the means of grace whenever possible.

1. Terry O’Connor, “Using Learning Styles to Adapt Technology for Higher Education” (paper posted on the web site: <<http://web.indstate.edu/ctl/styles/learning.html>>).

2. Ibid.

HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Enhancing Vision

Scripture: 1 Kings 3:3-9

Text: 1 Kings 3:9

Introduction:

- a. Solomon knew that if he were to succeed as king of Israel, it would take more than shrewdness to accomplish his task or to reach his goals.
- b. Solomon's vision was far-reaching in its scope and responsibility. Neighboring kings might rely on shrewdness and cunning, but he must be better equipped than this for his assignment.
- c. Great vision has often been lost or forfeited because its holder trusted in personal skills, charisma, and wisdom rather than seeking God's endowment.
- d. Nowhere in Scripture is there any indication that Solomon lacked self-confidence. Indeed, he is to be commended for recognizing that even one graced with such skill and blessing as he, could benefit from the additional dimension that only God could give to his leadership.

Purpose:

1. God is prepared to enhance one's personal vision through the gifts and graces He adds in response to our prayer and petition.
2. Solomon knew that he was God's servant assigned to lead God's people. He understood his role as that of steward. Great personal vision always leads its holder to recognize this important concept.
3. Great vision implies significant responsibility. By seeking in humility and submission the beneficence of God, the vision holder may receive those extraordinary blessings that give vision the extra dimension so essential to achieving one's calling or mission.
4. For Solomon, there were two added elements that if present, would enhance his vision: *judgment and jus-*

tice. * Without this enhancement, his vision may never have achieved all that it did.

Action:

- When we buy software for our computers, we realize that eventually an *upgrade* will come along, and we will have to purchase it in order to enhance our capability. We frequently upgrade memory, hard drive size, and speed of the CPU.
- Every vision can be enhanced. Bill Hybels has popularized the concept of servanthood through his understanding that the way up is often down. Vision enhancement is never for selfish reasons, but to extend capacity and capability, all for the glory of God.
- Why would judgment and justice be two elements that would enhance Solomon's vision?
- Judgment speaks of knowledge, discernment, and understanding. In what ways would you like God to increase your knowledge, discernment, or understanding?
- Justice speaks of fairness. It goes without saying that fairness is important. How would the issue of fairness intersect your personal vision?

*Wenham et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 342.

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 HIGHPOINT SERIES: *WITHOUT A
 METHOD, VISION BECOMES MYTH*

Theme: Lost Vision

Scripture: Matt. 16:1-4

Text: Matt. 16:3

Introduction:

- a. According to some Bible scholars, the passage forming our text may have not appeared in the original document. Rather, it may have been added later, taken from Luke 12:54-56. I prefer to believe it is reliable.
- b. There are three threads running through both Luke and Matthew's account of this confrontation.
- c. The first is **skepticism**. That the Pharisees and Sadducees would jointly come to Jesus to put Him to the test is remarkable. In the U.S.A., one might describe this as a *bipartisan* effort to discredit Jesus by providing a litmus test designed to fail the Master.
- d. The second thread is **resistance**. Sincere skepticism might be forgiven. Even Scripture admonishes, "Test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21). Resisting goes one step beyond a sincere desire to know the truth by investigating and corroborating the evidence.
- e. The third thread is **opposition**. The response of the crowds was enthusiastic. Why would the religious leaders succumb to an attitude of opposition?

Purpose:

1. In this narrative, by examining the words of Jesus and the description provided by the writer, we are able to extrapolate from the attitude and behaviors of Jesus' skeptics to a very real and potential danger for us today.
2. Vision may be lost by indulging a spirit of skepticism. Doubt is our worst enemy. Many have been entrusted with great vision. They have been motivated by its scope. Over time, however, the vision has faded and is in danger of being lost because the first element of this trilogy was permitted to gain a foothold in their thinking.

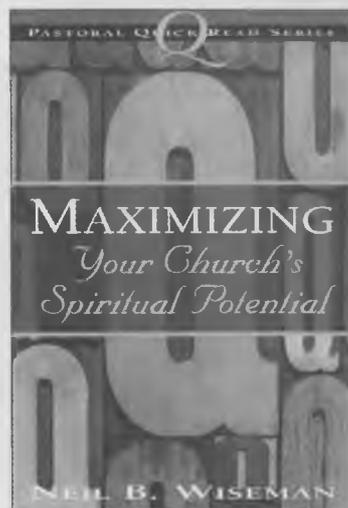
3. As mentioned above, these elements need to be seen as an unholy and inextricably linked trinity. Skepticism leads to resistance. Resistance is fueled by pride and spiritual arrogance. Resistance begins when humility is exchanged for unreasonable self-reliance. Resistance is born when the cold winds of skepticism target the flame of faith.
4. Open opposition follows resistance. Jesus understood the tragedy that was about to befall His people, but they were clueless. He likened them to people who could forecast the weather by watching the signs in the skies, but were ignorant of the signs of the times.
5. Opposition to God never begins without first being triggered by skepticism. It is always followed by resistance and then unfolds in open opposition.

Action:

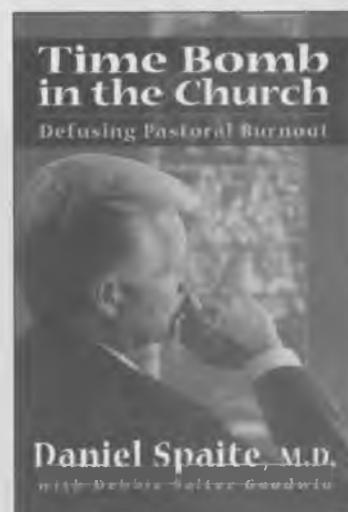
- Losing the vision is a terrible thing. No, it is worse—it is a tragedy! Why are so many believers living in spiritual blindness? Are they not aware of their blindness, or is it the result of slow, systematic loss of vision, until now they are blind but unable to do anything about it?
- Reality checks are always good for the soul. Check to see if there is any area of skepticism that you have permitted in your life. Test your faith to see if there is any area of your spiritual experience where the trust and certainty you once held has been replaced by "soft" skepticism.
- Resistance is good in the face of oppression. But in the case of Christian experience, no resistance to God's will, plan, or purpose can be tolerated in the life of the believer. Check for any area of resistance in your life.
- What more can be said about opposition to God? It may be underground today; tomorrow it will come out. Beware of the associations it may seek to forge. It may surprise you!

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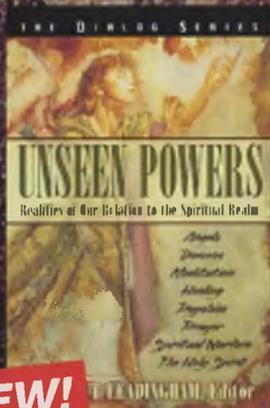
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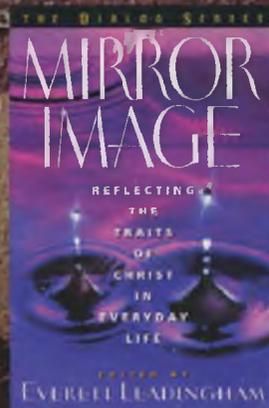
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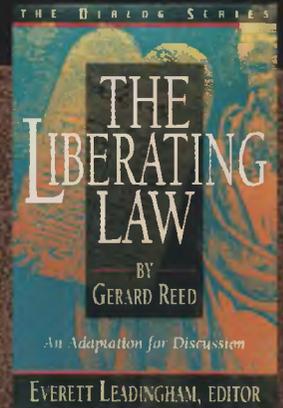
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