

SACRIFICE OR PRIVILEGE? · GENUINE COURAGE · WHO SHOULD GO FORTH?

FrontLine

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July/August 2003 • \$3.95



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Thank you for the most helpful, well-written articles included in your last issue. The articles "Letting Your Pastor Lead" by Drew Conley and "The Critical Nature of Leadership" by Layton Talbert were outstanding. The spirit and insight apparent in Dr. Talbert's article is much needed in Fundamentalism. Young men who will follow the logic carefully can be greatly helped.

*Danny M. Sweatt, D.D.
Lilburn, Georgia*

As a born-again Baptist believer, it has been an enjoyable experience to read a truly Christian magazine. It is so enlightening to spend the time reading.

*Richard Drinkwater
Willow Grove,
Pennsylvania*

Thanks for putting out an outstanding magazine.

*Jill McCard
Jonesville, Wisconsin*

I just wanted you to know that every new family that joins our church is going to get a year's subscription to *FrontLine* magazine. The articles (in the leadership issue) were great, BTW! I really enjoyed them.

*Mike Sproul
Tempe, Arizona*

Our church has enclosed a gift for the *FrontLine* magazine. It may be used in whatever capacity is needed presently. *FrontLine* is a vital publication that we trust the Lord will continue to strengthen and bless.

*Frank Jones
Richmond, Virginia*

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We Have Charted the Course, Now Let's Keep To It

I have heard from many men over the last year about their appreciation for the message in the little booklet *Charting the Course*. There have been some good suggestions made and some questions raised that need to be answered. *Charting the Course* is under revision and will be reissued in a new edition in the near future. The new edition will include many of these suggestions plus changes reflected in these articles.

In our recent meeting in Concord, New Hampshire, one of the most blessed National Meetings we have ever had, some important things took place. The messages on Revival were right on target. Dr. Chuck Phelps and his people showed the kind of leadership and the spirit of servanthood that we have been calling for from everyone in *Charting the Course*. We passed just two resolutions this year, and one of those was a statement of appreciation for Dr. Phelps and the Trinity Baptist Church for hosting this meeting and doing an outstanding job.

The other resolution is the unanimous expression of the board of the FBFI and the membership in attendance. Resolution 03:01 "The Fellowship Principle" reads as follows:

The FBFI reaffirms its identity as a fellowship of individuals who hold to the Statement of Purpose and Statement of Faith in the FBFI constitution. We believe that this Fellowship is vital for the encouragement of godly men worldwide. As we move forward and face new battles it is essential for us to be guided by the Spirit and Scripture in correctly identifying both friend and foe. We urge the leadership of the FBFI, both now and in the future, to carefully seek God's

face in knowing what issues are essential to our movement and what issues are those on which godly men can agree to disagree. We must hold the concepts of unity and purity in dynamic tension. The spirit of our meetings must be gracious in areas where we legitimately disagree yet bold in the defense of those foundational doctrines that bind us together. Through the ministries of the FBFI we will always seek to encourage and strengthen the hands of God's faithful servants. We appreciate the example of our President, Dr. Rod Bell, as he has taught and modeled this "Fellowship Principle" and commit ourselves to upholding this standard as we face the challenges of the future holding a thoroughly biblical position with a thoroughly biblical disposition.

The Board agreed to this in our winter meeting, and the Resolutions Committee was charged with the responsibility of preparing a resolution on the Fellowship Principle. This short statement expresses clearly and succinctly what I have been trying to communicate in these articles. My heartbeat for this Fellowship is that even though we are separatists and must take firm stands against compromise and error, that we would not cross swords with our brothers over non-essentials.

We have labored long and hard to build a fellowship that offers a place of encouragement and edification for true Fundamental Baptists—

separatists who are earnestly contending for the faith without getting in the flesh. My time at the helm is coming to a close. All I have been trying to do in these articles is to challenge the crew to keep the ship off the rocks as it sails into the future, if the Lord tarries.

At the New Hampshire meeting the Executive Board unanimously elected Dr. John Vaughn to be the next President of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International. I have stated my confidence in Dr. Vaughn in both *Charting the Course* and in these articles. I firmly believe that God has brought him to the Fellowship to take the helm. As President-elect, he and I will continue to work closely together during a time of transition until he is inaugurated at the National Meeting to be held at his church, Faith Baptist, in June, 2005. He has my full support.

David ministered to his generation for 40 years, and rested with his fathers. I've ministered to my generation for 42 years, and one day I'll rest with my fathers. I believe that Dr. John Vaughn will take the Fellowship to greater heights, and God will use him in a great way into the twenty-first century. I want you to pray for our leaders; pray for Dr. Vaughn as he helps strengthen your hands. That's my heart. I thank God for the privilege it has been to serve you.

Through both this resolution on the Fellowship Principle, and the election of Dr. Vaughn as FBFI President, we have charted the course. Now, let's keep to it as we continue to encourage preachers and their people through the Fellowship meetings and *FrontLine* until our precious Lord returns.



DR. ROD BELL



SACRIFICE OR PRIVILEGE?

Mark Batory

When missionaries are mentioned, the image often evoked is that of men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice of family and friends and end up having to endure the toils of a difficult, lonely, deprived life in some remote corner of the world. Regrettably, many of today's Christians view missionary service in this way. They are guilty of linking two opposing ideas—"sacrifice" and "missionary service"—and erroneously making them one and the same. Is it any wonder, then, that our young men and women view missionary service as a "sacrifice" and recoil from heeding its call? The problem lies in over-emphasizing personal denial and not focusing properly on the overwhelming privilege and fulfillment of representing Christ in a gospel-forsaken land.

In Hebrews the author mentions that Christ's ultimate sacrifice was the "sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). Even though Christ left the comforts and glory of Heaven to descend to earth on man's behalf, the leaving of His home in Heaven was not the sacrifice. Leaving Heaven was merely the natural result of having put Himself on the altar of sacrifice. Paul in Romans 12:1 urges us to present our bodies as holy, acceptable sacrifices. Scripture uses the term "sacrifice" in reference to a heart attitude of surrender to God's will for our lives. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "for the joy that was set before him," Christ "endured the cross, despising the shame." The word used to

describe Christ's service is "joy."
The only true sacrifice that a believer is called upon to make is fully offered when he gives himself to God; when he lies down on the altar; when he allows himself, as Isaac did, to be willingly tied around the hands and legs by the ropes of submission and take his place on the woodpile of service. After that has taken place, joyful service amidst all of the demands of God's will is the natural outflow. Yet for those Christians whose hearts are deeply anchored in the material side of this world, anything that would call them to cut loose from it becomes a sacrifice they must regrettably make in order to serve. However, for the Christian whose affections are placed correctly on what God loves, any demand that God's call requires on his life and family is minimized and willingly exchanged for the wonderful pleasure and privilege that accompanies being a "living sacrifice." It is this spirit that strengthens his resolve and brings any true believer to make the most wonderful discovery—that truly nothing on this side of Heaven is better or more rewarding than knowing and serving the Savior.

The Lord's service often requires hard work and difficulties along the way. It may require leaving home, moving the family halfway around the world, and denying certain of this world's creature comforts and pleasures, but sacrifice it is not. When our Lord sent out the seventy

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in Luke chapter ten, He outlined the self-denial they would have to make. But only a few verses later, we read the testimony of the great joy they received during their mission.

The example of the apostle Paul also bears out this truth. He sought for few earthly delights. His life was spent in hard labor amid dangers and turmoil. The natural beauty and historic associations of the cities he visited in his travels seem to have given him no enjoyment. He had no great investments in the stock market, no retirement plan or savings account, no insurance, house, car, or boat. Many people wonder how anyone could be happy without these things, and yet Paul counted them as meaningless. His ultimate joy was preaching Christ crucified and seeing those who were once alienated from God now glorifying Him. Giving up this world and all of its comforts was not a sacrifice for Paul. His sacrifice had been made on the road to Damascus; all that followed was a joy. He declared, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19, 20).

When C. T. Studd and his colleagues enthusiastically left England for China in the late 1800s, all of England watched as these men and women "sacrificed" so much to minister in a hostile, heathen nation. Many claimed it to be a great loss and sorry waste of some of Britain's most talented young men. The critics were convinced that, once challenged by China's forbidding landscape, these young "idealists" would quickly discover that forsaking the life and comforts of their homeland was foolhardy. China's culture, food, language, and worldview would be so totally different that it was inconceivable to the critics how anyone could overcome all of the enormous obstacles. The critics were, in part, correct. Upon arrival in

China, Studd and his companions agonized under the struggle that accompanied the sudden change in surroundings. They suffered the frustration of learning a difficult new language and culture. Constantly present was the danger of discouragement, which could have compelled them to seek the shores of home. But to them, their service in a harsh land was no sacrifice. The sacrifice had been made years prior when they had willingly, one by one, laid their lives on the altar before their God and said, "Here am I, Lord, take and use me however You will." Once this was done, wherever or in whatever way God willed to use them became their sought-after privilege. They eventually engaged in a lifelong ministry that resulted in the salvation of thousands of wonderful Chinese people.

Years later, another Englishman enthusiastically wrote about these same missionaries: "Ah! Those lives were not lost to Britain who served on distant shores. The biography of one is the call to another. Their example is contagious and quickening." Instead of being overwhelmed by thoughts of home, the reverse was true for these missionaries: they were the ones who generated an infectious excitement in churches throughout all of England for the privilege of representing their Savior on the foreign mission field.

Some individuals will always believe that those who travel to distant shores to represent Christ must suffer a life of continual difficult personal sacrifices. Yet the Scriptures and history of God's servants firmly testify that when one's life is truly laid on the altar as his personal sacrifice to Christ, the going and serving become a source of lasting fulfillment and contentment—not sacrifice!

Alexander MacKay (1849–90)

was a pioneer missionary to Uganda who possessed the right focus when he said, "It is no sacrifice, as some think, to come here as pioneers of Christianity. I would not give up my position here for all the world. . . . Duty comes before pleasure they say, but my duty is a pleasure."

Dr. Mark Batory is executive director of Gospel Fellowship Association Missions and a former missionary to Mexico.

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A well-known college in the southeastern part of the country went about its mission of educating and equipping students to become the next generation of leaders in Christendom. The school was popular for its business teachings, for it had produced graduates who were well respected in the economic community—graduates who were making their way quite well. Training educators was one of the school’s specialties. The university was acclaimed as a center for conservative political influence. Many of its graduates would enter the military as commissioned officers. The university provided a variety of sports in which the students could be involved, and it had the best entertainment there was to offer: orchestras, operas, and art. It was truly a place that produced well-rounded graduates ready to influence the culture. This school took great pride in its most influential graduates, and rightly so.

There was a popular group of friends who were a part of the student body. William was from the family of a successful businessman and would hopefully someday be a faithful donor himself. Monty was known for his academic honors. The school would, no doubt, want to keep him. Dixon and Cecil were planning to become officers in the military. Art, Stan, and Charles were even more popular because of their athletic ability. Art’s father was in national political leadership. Stan’s dad was a surgeon, and Charles came from one of the wealthiest families around.

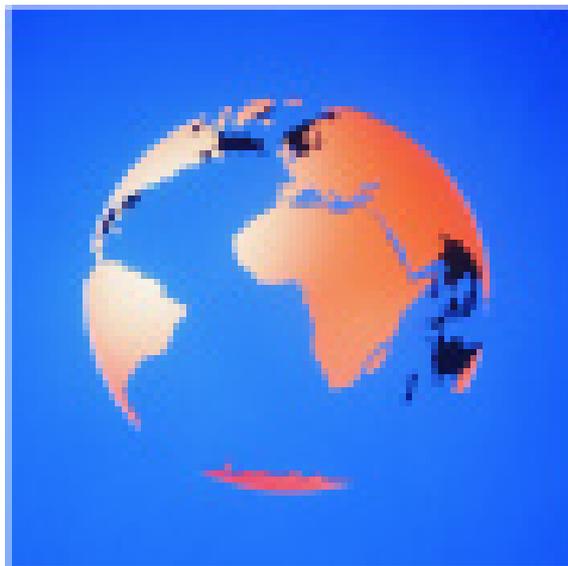
They all had great potential. They were the cream of the crop, moving ahead in preparation for the careers and pursuits that were expected of the best and the brightest.

God had other plans. The Spirit had something better for them than societal influence or material pursuits. They were to lead—not in the political arena but into the far reaches of the globe. They were to influence—not with their own charisma but with the message of the gospel. They were to become men of distinction—not for what they gained but for what they gave. These men, dubbed the “Cambridge Seven,” were the best and the brightest of 1880’s Cambridge University: William Cassels, Montagu Beauchamp, Dixon Edward Hoste, Arthur and Cecil Polhill-Turner, Stanley Smith, and Charles Thomas (C. T.) Studd. God broke the mold of what a “Cambridge Man”

was, took this group of students, changed the student culture of the entire region, and changed the hearts of many Chinese. Their team picture, clothed and styled as they were in Chinese garb, has become etched in missions’ memory. Their obedience inspired scores of other students to sacrifice the well-trodden, socially acceptable paths leading from college to career for one much more difficult, but much more rewarding.

God clearly did something special through these seven men. Were we to bring these men into our day, I think we

would find them to be very much like many of our typical Fundamental Baptist collegians: from an upper-middle class family, with yuppie experience and expectation, heavily into sports and conservative politics. The similarities are striking. These men had seen their parents succeed through a time of industrial prosperity in England, and our youth today have observed the Boomer fixation on material prosperity in economic good times. They had been relatively isolated from other discomfort-causing social strata, and so today our collegians are cocooned in their churches, Christian schools, and homes. They had enjoyed sports, a focus of the culture, but found it to have little eternal significance. Those students caught a vision of God, eternity, the world, and God’s heart for the souls of humanity. Is this too much to hope for in the current generation? Perhaps, but the evidence is indicat-



A NEW STUDENT MOVEMENT FOR WORLD EVANGELISM

Pearson L. Johnson III

ing a stirring of students for something bigger than themselves.

In 1999 Pastor David Doran was reading about D. L. Moody’s involvement in the early stages of the Student Volunteer Movement. Inspired by this account, Doran led Inter-City Baptist Church to host a Missions Conference for Fundamental college students in January of 2000. The purpose of the Mission 2000 conference was to educate, inspire, and network students for missions. Though expectations were kept in check, when the conference date arrived, nearly 500 students came! Another conference in 2002 brought even more students. Who would have expected this number of students to give up their vacation for a missions conference?

A significant group of men and women from

Fundamental churches is enthusiastically pursuing opportunities in missions. A third conference is planned for December of 2003. The interest in missions among students has given rise to Student Global Impact, a network of Fundamental student mission groups on college campuses. Mission groups have sprung up on some campuses. Others have revamped their approach for more effectiveness. It is an evident trend that interest in missions is growing again through the enthusiastic influence of college students.

What can God do through these college students? The possibilities are as endless as the places on the globe, but here are some of them. First, God can use these young people to replenish the Fundamental Baptist missionary force. Seeing their interest should remind and motivate us to pray for laborers for the harvest, and then expect God to provide.

Second, we need the passion and energy of the collegians to revitalize our missions programs in both churches and schools. The enthusiasm of college students interested in missions is contagious. To see them turning from the things that dazzle most of the youth culture and setting their affection on God's work is amazing.

Finally, we need their questions. For sure, college students today are skeptical and critical. We could feel defensive about this, or we could see their mindset as an opportunity to reevaluate our missions philosophy and its ensuing practice and strategy. Saying, "That's the way we've always done it!" is a sure way to lose credibility with them, unless we explain why—then it will build loyalty and conviction. They are listening and learning, and they need you to be involved in their journey.

Through campus visits and correspondence with hundreds of Fundamental college students the coordinator of Student Global Impact, has identified the top five concerns expressed by this generation. These issues should rise to the forefront of our discussions if we are to see this new student movement blossom. First, "What steps should I take to further my missions interest and involvement?" A former student mission group leader of Northland, observes, "In general, the students are willing, and often wanting, to be involved. However, they don't often express their willingness, and, unless challenged and presented with opportunities, their desires for involvement are overwhelmed by other issues of life in our culture." Students need challenging from those who know them best—their peers, parents, and pastors. Then the challenges need to be followed with practical guidance.

The second struggle involves identifying a call to missions. Unless a student has some sort of extraordinary charismatic experience, our young people are encouraged to pursue the American

dream. Pastors should determine to counsel with their young people about the call of God on their lives, and they should not be afraid to challenge them as well.

The third issue is more difficult to deal with. Many students are overwhelmed by the aggressive public relations savvy of New Evangelical missions. These organizations present themselves as strategic, intentional, and organized in fulfilling the Great Commission, while we often struggle to communicate a thoughtful strategy for mission endeavors. After all, this generation is full of comparison shoppers. Many students have honestly quipped that Fundamental Baptist missions appears to be opportunistic and haphazard in its approach to reaching the fields. We must work hard to re-communicate our distinctiveness, correct their misunderstandings, and invest time in developing and communicating a Biblical strategy for reaching the world.

Fourth, college students yearn to make a significant contribution to the mission, and the most exciting possibility to them is to become involved in pioneer missions. Students see people penetrating the unreached, closed cultures with creative missions opportunities. We need to evaluate these methods Biblically while aggressively pursuing the establishment of a gospel witness in these areas.

Finally, students are confused about their relationship to their local churches, schools, and mission boards. Pastors need to take the lead in guiding their college students, praying with them, and developing strategies for missions. Pastors should challenge their people to pray for laborers and then challenge them to be laborers. We pastors must not leave the task to the schools or mission agencies. We can, however, partner with them to accomplish the task.

A fresh movement of the Spirit is occurring among students. I have seen it. Pray for your students. Challenge them. Teach them. Send them on trips. Cast a vision of what God could do with them. Answer them. Support them. Most of all, consider joining them, as we seek to spread the gospel for the sake of His Name!

Pearson Johnson is an associate minister at Inter-City Baptist church in Allen Park, Michigan.

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Singing with a purpose

I sat in my usual spot on the left side of our little church meeting room, running my fingers along the smooth black vinyl of the chair. My Bible lay with my sister Jennifer's on the seat between us. She was rooting through her purse to find a pen, her blond hair falling in pretty waves on either side of her face.

She glanced up at me. "What time is it?" she asked softly. "I left my watch at home."

I checked my own watch. "Ten minutes until six," I told her. "Nearly time for the service."

We both looked around the neat, bright room, which could have seated forty people. In the row behind us sat my mother and younger brother. Behind them I saw the pleasant faces of Mr. and Mrs. Brown, while across the room my father stood talking to our song director and assistant pastor, Pastor Harvard. That was everyone; and it was only five minutes to six.

"Why?" I thought. "Why do some churches that do not even preach the gospel have hundreds of people while my Bible-preaching father has next to none?"

It was a question that I had often asked myself. After laboring for eight years in another town to collect a tiny group of believers, my father had seen his work crumble as people moved away or fell into sin. We had moved to this city two years ago, and though Father and Pastor Harvard toiled to bring people in to hear God's Word, only a handful had made an appearance. Nearly everyone who attended praised my father's excellent preaching, but few bothered to come regularly.

I knew that we were missionaries, but living in Canada, shopping at Wal-Mart, and eating at McDonalds seemed too prosaic for missionaries. I thought that *real* missionaries were those courageous heroes who stood up to pagan governments, defied cannibal tribes, and defeated Satan's forces by converting multitudes to Christ. My idea of courage was a

vague, glorious shadow mounted on a war-horse, raising high the gleaming Sword of the Spirit. It was an image excellent for poetry and song, perhaps, but not much good for reality.

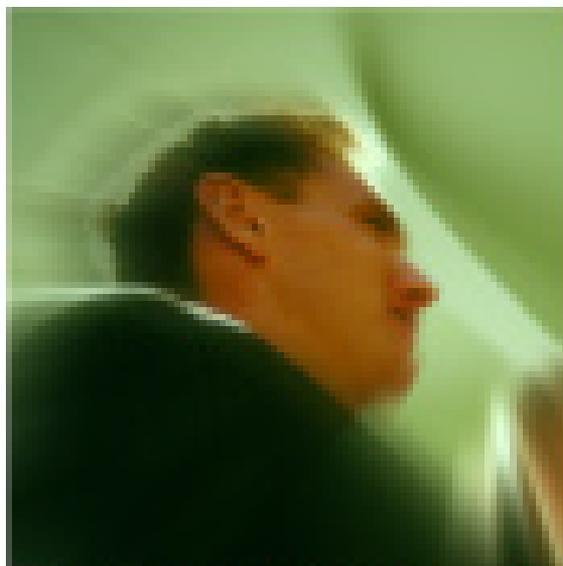
I suddenly realized that Pastor Harvard was announcing the first hymn, and I stood with the other seven people. As I had feared, there would be no great crowd that Sunday evening.

As we sang, I noticed that our voices did not have the strained, weak sound I had dreaded. They were full and clear, as if God were lending extra strength and life to them as we praised Him. I knew then that He was listening, and somehow our small numbers did not matter quite so much.

After the song, my father stood up, smiling, and greeted us cheerfully. I knew that he would preach tonight as he always did, as if there were a sanctuary packed with people before him, instead of that meager few. He was only my father, though. It did not enter my thoughts that he was as much a hero as that gallant equestrian, Courage, in my mind's eye.

We bowed our heads, and he prayed for the work in that city, for the entire country, for the work going on for Christ all over the world, and for other men standing behind pulpits that night. Listening to that prayer, I suddenly realized what God wanted me to learn. True courage was not that brilliant figure holding a

bright sword on a war horse. Courage was devotion to duty, perseverance in the face of discouragement, climbing on when the path was rough and rocky, and toiling when there were no visible results. Behind the pulpit, personified in my dedicated and godly father, stood an example of true courage.



GENUINE COURAGE

Rebecca Wright

Rebecca Wright is the teenage daughter of Pastor and Mrs. Perry Wright. Their family lives in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

PRAYING FOR MISSIONARIES

Roger Bergman

Player: "Say, Coach, who's supposed to jump ball?"

Coach: "Don't bother me with details, just play the game!"

Player: "But Coach, which offense should we run?"

Coach: "Forget about which offense; just get on with it and win the game!"

Win the game? If you were able to overhear such an exchange, you would be quick to discern that this team is going nowhere fast. Winning requires a game plan. There must be leadership. The details *are* important.

Although the mission of the Church is not a game, there are many excellent parallels between the discipline of good teamwork in a ball game and our Christian faith. For example, by considering the lessons we can learn from the ball, the coach, the players, and the goal, we believers can come to a better understanding of prayer in missions.

The Ball

Most sports include a ball of some size and shape. Some are soft; some are rock-hard. Some are big, and others are small. However, they *all* have one thing in common: they must be moved by human agency! In some cases, feet are not supposed to touch the ball; in others, only the feet should touch it. In still other sports, some sort of bat or stick must be used.

In the spiritual realm, the "ball" could be compared to prayer. Although at times the Spirit of God "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," we usually pray consciously for known needs. And like a good coach directs his players to perform specific actions in order to move the ball toward the goal, God gives us clear direction about prayer in missions.

When considering the ball, we must first understand that God chooses to use people to pray. When thinking about cross-cultural missionary service, it is possible that there are some missionaries who just are not gifted with a high proficiency in foreign languages. Other missionaries may tend toward depression and would struggle to continue laboring when the work progresses slowly, almost imperceptibly, perhaps not moving at all. But every Christian can, and should, pray. Isn't it amazing to consider that God has chosen to involve us in His plans in so many ways? For instance, in Spain, where we minister, the government is a constitutional monarchy. But the king of Spain has never once called to ask us for any-

thing! (If he did, we would do everything possible to fulfill his wishes.) Now consider how the King of kings doesn't just call us to ask us for something; He summons us to the throne room for a personal conference every day, many times a day. He wants to get the "ball" moving. He wants us to pray.

The Coach

The coach in the opening dialogue was uninterested and disoriented. Not so with the God of Heaven. He is also much more than a mere coach. He is the founder of the league. He makes the rules. He decides what the penalties will be for those who don't abide by the rules, and He enforces them. In Europe, athletic coaches typically do not enjoy great longevity. The elite teams do not exist just to draw fans to the stadium. They expect championships *now*. Fans expect the coach to produce victories, not to make excuses for defeats. This is obviously somewhat unfair, because a ball team is made up of more than just a coach. Factors such as the players, injuries, and inclement weather all influence the outcome of the game. But we must understand that in praying for missionaries, God directs, and we must follow His directions. He knows the opposition. He knows the conditions in which missionaries struggle for victory. He knows us who serve in His harvest fields, plus all our weaknesses. And He assures us in 1 John 5:14, 15 that "if we ask anything according to his will, he hear eth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

The Players

There are many "stars" in sports, but those who shine the brightest (such as Michael Jordan, Lance Armstrong, Tiger Woods, and the Williams sisters) stand out not only because they are gifted with natural talent; they also *work at* what they do. Nothing is left to chance. We believers must understand that, as God's chosen instruments for prayer, we must do our homework. We must study His Word in order to pray according to His will. We must also understand that prayer is not something extremely complicated, reserved for the intellectual theologian. God calls on the farmer, the housewife, the student, and the linesman to pray. He wants the policeman, the pastor, the teacher, and the street sweeper to pray—according to His will. Here are some simple examples of praying in the

realm of missions—according to God’s will—straight from the Bible:

Galatians 6:9—“God, strengthen missionary A not to give up, not to faint, despite his weariness.”

1 John 4:1—“Father, give missionary A discernment to ‘try the spirits’ of other spiritual teachers and leaders in order to identify the false prophets and thereby protect his young flock.”

Romans 10:12—“Lord, keep missionary A from any form of favoritism or prejudice in preaching Christ.”

1 John 4:18—“Dear God, give missionary A grace not to fear men as he preaches the gospel of your saving grace and love to them.”

Acts 1:4—“Lord, help missionary A to wait on You and Your promises; not to rush ahead of Your timing.”

2 Timothy 2:9—“Gracious God, as missionary A suffers, falsely accused of doing evil, don’t allow Your Word to be bound; free it to work in power!”

Jeremiah 38:13—“Oh God, lift up missionary A from his dungeon of despair and free him from the shackles that bind and depress him, to continue ministering for You.”

Proverbs 24:10—“Father, strengthen missionary A that he might not faint in the face of adversity!”

Psalms 1:3—“Dear Father, make missionary A to be like a tree, planted by rivers of water, that he might bring forth fruit in due season.”

Genesis 18:19—“Lord, make missionary A to be like Abraham: to teach and lead his family to follow You faithfully in Your ways.”

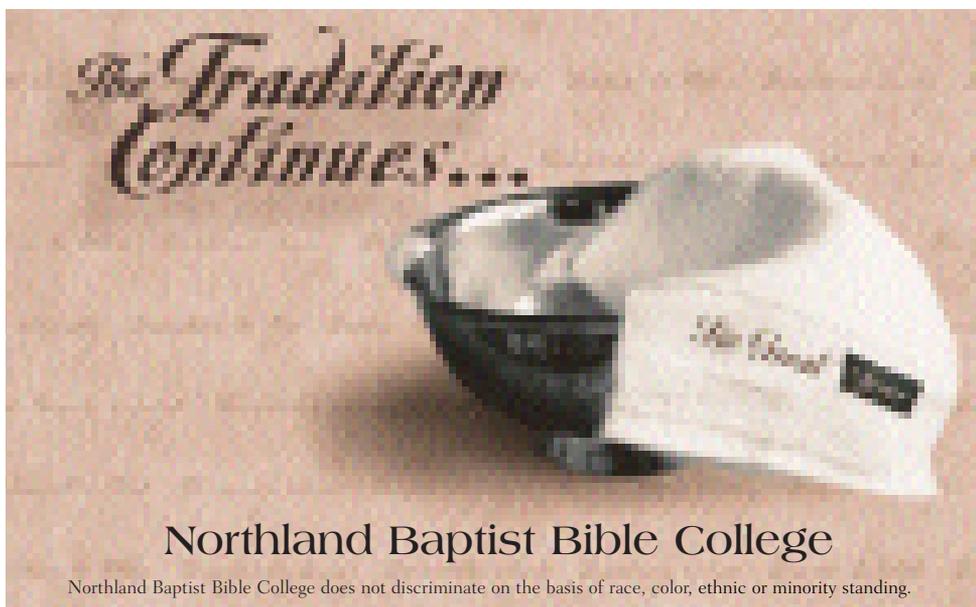
Missionaries A to Z need this kind of praying! Rather than rushing through a list of missionaries with an all-inclusive “bless them,” take some time to consider the specific requests they have sent to you or your church. If you are personally acquainted with one or two, write to them to inquire about any personal needs they would be willing to share with you, and pray for those needs. But above all, take all these requests before our Heavenly Father, praying according to His will, as revealed in His Word. The missionaries are not the only players. YOU have a major part in the game plan, and you are not just a statistician or a water boy! God has chosen to make your prayers count.

The Goal

What is the goal in the Christian life? Is it evangelism? A big church? Having strong families? While these values are good and are integral parts of the Christian experience, the goal of our lives as followers of Christ is to glorify God. As the simple answer to the catechism question teaches us, “I can glorify God by loving Him and doing what He commands.” We must understand that one of the goals God desires is dependence. He says, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38). He also says, “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). He commands us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). He gives us tremendous specific petitions for prayer when He says in Matthew 6:9, “After this manner therefore pray ye. . . .”

We all need to mature in our dependence to pray in the will of God as revealed in His Word. *You* need this kind of dependence for your own life. Your missionaries need it too. In truth, we *all* really need this kind of Biblical dependence and praying.

Roger and Mary Bergman are missionaries to Spain.



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As happens to many prospective missionaries, the rose-colored glasses I acquired while growing up in missions-minded churches and schools in the United States tinted my perspective on missions. I thought I knew what missions was all about. After all, I had attended countless missions conferences, knew many missionaries, and had spent four months traversing the country on deputation.

However, I was wrong.

After spending a year on the mission field in Africa and reflecting on what I did not know, to say that I have learned much would be an understatement. Those who train for a profession often realize they do not know as much as they thought after they actually begin the job. Missionaries face a learning curve as they deal with a new culture, language, people, and ministry.

Of the many things God is teaching me, one is the general lack of direction we as church leaders have in determining which missionary candidates to support. We cannot be judged for our lack of knowledge about cultures and nations all over the world, but we are often guilty of not prayerfully evaluating our missionary candidates. American churches spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year supporting missionaries, while failing in our stewardship of those resources. What kind of missionary candidates are we choosing to support? How do we know if a candidate will survive once he or she has left the shores of the richest nation on earth? Does this candidate have what it takes to minister effectively far away from godly supervision and accountability? What guidelines should church leaders use to answer these questions?

My continued experience on the mission field has persuaded me that we need to exercise more discernment in choosing our missionaries. How would we respond if we discovered that a missionary spends more time enjoying tourist attractions than doing his work, or that he scuba dives several times a week? Should we be concerned that a missionary is operating as a "lone ranger" and not working in coordination with others on the field, or that a missionary is enjoying a luxurious American lifestyle in a country where the average person makes a few hundred dollars a year? Unfortunately, these scenarios are sometimes more true than we would like to admit. This is not meant to disparage the many faithful, hardworking missionaries serv-

ing the Lord today, but none of us is beyond accountability.

As church leaders, we should work to prevent such abuses by employing spiritual discernment and common sense when considering a missionary candidate. We may assess a candidate's fitness for the mission field by evaluating several key areas.

First is the candidate's call to the mission field. A need on the mission field does not automatically mean that just any willing candidate is necessarily the right person for the job. The following might be appropriate questions to ask: Has God really called this candidate to missions? Has he or she been called to this specific mission field and ministry? Has this call been confirmed by other believers, including a local

church and a mission board? Has the candidate been to this field before? How do people respond to the candidate's ministry? Is the candidate suited for the cultural change he will have to face?

Second is the candidate's spiritual character. A candidate who would go to the mission field as a church planter should meet the pastoral qualifications of Scripture (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). Qualities to consider include the following: zeal to communicate the gospel, careful exegetical skills, spiritual insight, spiritual perseverance, ability to work well with others, emotional stability, spiritual maturity, a Spirit-controlled life, unconditional love for the unlovely, courage in the face of loneliness and conflict, Biblical discernment, a sense of divine purpose, Biblical philosophy of missions, and godly leadership abilities.

What about the candidate's educational background? A thorough understanding of

Scripture is crucial for any full-time minister. One of the great paradoxes of the church has been our willingness to entrust the souls of men to those who have received little training in how to treat them. We demand the highest standards of medical doctors, financial consultants, and lawyers, but we lower the bar for those who handle the souls of men. While education is not the key to successful ministry and can lead to pride and spiritual destruction, we must not diminish its ability to make a more effective servant of Christ. Is it a coincidence that the well-educated Paul wrote at least twelve New Testament books?

We should consider the potential missionary's professional training and real-life skills. At some point in their



WHO SHOULD GO FORTH?

Daniel Huffstutler

ministries, most missionaries will need to know how to fix a car, to unclog a sink, or to jury-rig a washing machine.

We should also consider a candidate's financial habits. Does he or she have a budget? Is he or she responsible with money? Sometimes missionaries with unknown fiscal responsibility and little accountability must handle thousands—sometimes even tens of thousands—of dollars. The love of money is still the root of all kinds of evil, and missionaries are not immune to this temptation.

Of great importance is a candidate's physical and emotional stamina. The mission field is no place for the faint-hearted. Working and living on the field can be drastically different from anything the missionary experienced in the United States. What about the candidate's health? Should a missionary who has serious medical needs be sent to a field that lacks basic medical services? On the other hand, we must keep in mind that many ailing missionaries, including Hudson Taylor and William Carey, were greatly used of the Lord. While health concerns should be considered, God often chooses to use missionaries who have physical needs.

Finally, let us consider the candidate's personality. Sometimes believers joke, "If you can't make it in America as a pastor, then go to the mission field." On the contrary, we should be sending our best ministers to the mission field. One important trait for a successful missionary is the ability to work well with others. Why would we send to the mission fields of the world individuals who have trouble relating to people in America? Here are some personality traits to watch for: strength of personal character,

willingness to serve, resistance to discouragement, ability to work, tact, reasonableness, common sense, and a strong sense of initiative. A candidate should demonstrate his ability to work well with different people and in new environments. He should possess a teachable spirit plus a willingness to serve joyfully in difficult situations.

After we accept a candidate for support, church leaders and the mission board should consider regular evaluations of the missionary's spiritual, educational, and physical capabilities for the mission field. Sometimes life-dominating sins gain a foothold in a missionary's life, and the missionary needs to return home to regain his spiritual footing. Periodic evaluations by supporting churches and the mission board may facilitate this level of accountability.

None of the things mentioned here can be evaluated in a short Wednesday night meeting in a local church. While many pastors must leave this work to a mission board or another pastor, greater evaluation of candidates and regular evaluation of current missionaries is warranted in our Fundamental circles. We are extremely blessed in this country and must not take our stewardship of such God-given resources lightly. Let us approach the responsibility of evaluating prospective and current missionaries with soberness as we pursue wise stewardship of our God-given resources. Moreover, may God bless the men and women on foreign fields with sanctifying and enabling grace.

Daniel Huffstutler is an assistant pastor serving under Pastor Juan Moreno at First Baptist Church in Lake Orion, Michigan. He served as a short-term missionary to Nairobi, Kenya.



spiritually led counsel, not micro-management

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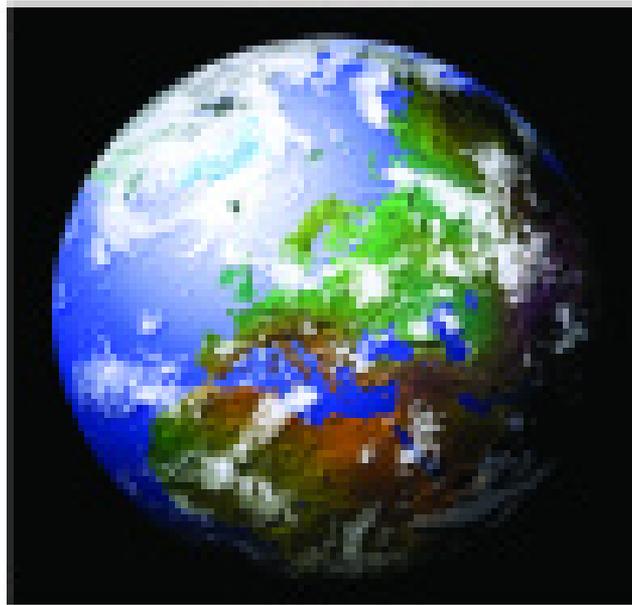
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Most organizations, businesses, and companies prepare a policy statement publishing their reason for existence and what they wish to accomplish. For example, my home church simply and eloquently expresses it thus: "Our purpose is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by bringing the saints into a closer fellowship with God and with one another through the study of His Word and obedience to its precepts and by seeking every opportunity to evangelize the lost both in the Greenville area and around the world."

Likewise, in the Bible God speaks expressly concerning His aims and purposes. The seed plot of God's plans appears in God's call to Abraham. In just a few words God's overall purpose is revealed: "In thee [Abraham] shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). In the Old Testament God prepared a nation that would ultimately produce a Savior through whom all families would be blessed.

So also our Lord Jesus Christ verbalized His goal in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church." Besides the work of redemption, Christ's greatest work was to prepare the apostles to be the foundation of the church. Simon Peter reiterated and brought God's purpose into clearer focus: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). These words also express God's grand design for the church age—separating unto Himself a redeemed people through the gospel.

For goals to be realized, plans are necessary. Before His ascension into glory, Christ gave His apostles a plan called the Great Commission, various forms of which appear in all four Gospels and Acts. The clearest and most comprehensive commission is given in Matthew 28:19, 20: "Go ye



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GREAT COMMISSION

Gene Gurganus

was given solely to the Twelve. Martin Luther and the Reformers held this interpretation. Since they did not believe the command was directed to them, the Reformers' ministries were sadly lacking in missionary zeal and outreach.

The second error goes too far in the other direction, asking us to believe that every Christian is literally morally and spiritually obligated to go into the entire world preaching the gospel. In other words, one is either a missionary or a backslider. As a result some have gone to foreign countries ill prepared, causing more harm than good.

The truth of the matter is that the task of sharing the gospel with all nations is laid squarely upon the local church. The failure to evangelize the world is due, among other things, to the church's lack of acceptance of this responsibility. Many local churches have transferred this God-given task to mission boards and individual missionaries.

Church programs often reflect a basic misunderstanding of the Great Commission. The Sunday school promotes Bible knowledge; the visitation program reaches out to the community; the Christian school educates the youth; and a missionary program sends missionaries to needy, unreached areas. Here's the question: "Is missions a program

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Although the Great Commission is quite familiar, seldom does one hear an exposition of it. Answering two simple questions will enhance our comprehension of God's plan to evangelize the world.

To whom was the Great Commission given? Two wrong answers need to be corrected. The first error says it

of the church; or is the program of the church, missions?" There is a difference. The church's missionary outreach must not be included as just another program of the church—not even a vital program. The missionary outreach is the very purpose of the church. Fulfilling the Great Commission is the church's *raison d'être*.

This, of course, is not to say that the aforementioned programs are nonessential or unimportant. However, no program should exist or function for its own benefit. Each one should be designed to further the great task of world evangelization.

Bible-believing, Christ-honoring churches do not have a range of options relative to program. The Head of the Church laid out His program very clearly: "Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations, . . . teaching all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). Unfortunately, many churches have not taken this commandment seriously. How does the average church obey the Great Commission? A ladies-only missionary society undertakes minor projects for the missionaries supported by their church. Ten or twenty percent of the budget supports missionary outreaches. I do not want to appear critical, unloving, or ungrateful, yet it must be said that too many churches are guilty of tokenism. In other words, churches have not geared their programs to fulfill the Great Commission but have been content to make a contribution. There are exceptions, for which we praise the Lord.

God's richest blessings are upon those churches filled with a vision, alive with a passion, and controlled by a purpose, i.e., obeying to the utmost the Great Commission. Certainly the various programs of the church will flourish in sublime unity if their goal, directly or indirectly, furthers world evangelization.

Just what is the Great Commission? As we read our English Bibles it seems there are a series of commands: to go; to teach; to baptize; and, again, to teach. But careful study of the text reveals that going (v. 19), baptizing (v. 19), and teaching (v. 20) are all participles. "Teach" in verse 19 (literally, "make disciples") is an imperative verb and is the bottom line. It includes going, baptizing, teaching, and all the other things necessary to accomplish its objective.

Please note five distinct activities that contribute to making disciples and thus fulfilling the Great Commission.

Evangelizing sinners—The world is lost, alienated, and in active rebellion against the Lord of Heaven. Yet we read that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begot-

ten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). To evangelize is to sound forth the good news that Jesus Christ is come to seek and save that which was lost. We must utilize every legitimate method to spread the message.

Edifying saints—"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice" (John 10:16). Whenever the gospel is preached, believers will be added to the Lord. Exhorting, encouraging, and grounding these new believers in the great doctrines of the faith occupies a key place in the Great Commission.

Establishing churches—The Lord Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). A study of the life of Missionary Paul gives insight into the Biblical plan of missions. The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas from an active ministry in the church at Antioch to a specific work. That work was church-planting evangelism, and scores of churches resulted from their ministry. They left functioning, or organized churches as they made their missionary journeys.

Equipping servants—Evangelizing the world can never be accomplished by a select group of "career" missionaries. To fulfill the task, an army of zealous, holy, dedicated, well-trained Christian witnesses must invade their local habitats with the life-giving gospel. Each local church should be a training center for Christian

workers. Beyond this, gifted and called men and women should hone their ministry skills at Bible colleges and seminaries.

Escalating world evangelism—Multiplication is the secret of world evangelism. The need of the hour is soul winners reproducing their burden and skill in others who in turn duplicate the process. What blessings would result if world-minded churches (not worldly-minded) mothered young churches that would catch the vision to plant still more missions-minded churches.

A great missions-minded church, in the process of losing the vision, was awakened to its sad plight in a strange way. Across the front of the church was a neon sign: "WHERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH." Vandals threw rocks at the sign and knocked out the "w." When the lights came on, the sign read "HERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH."

Dr. Gene Gurganus served as a pioneer church planter in Bangladesh from 1958 to 1975 and founded the Katalong Baptist Church. He also founded the Bible Correspondence School of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He served as a mission representative from 1975 to 1995. He is now retired and serves as director of Prayer Ministry and Men for Missions at Hampton Park Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

The truth of the matter is that the task of sharing the gospel with all nations is laid squarely upon the local church. . . . Many local churches have transferred this God-given task to mission boards and individual missionaries.

DOUBLING OUR EFFORTS

Dan Wokaty

When I was a missionary appointee preparing to serve at the Instituto Práctico Ebenezer in Hermosillo, Mexico, I sometimes received rejection letters stating something like this: “We are sorry, but our church supports only church planters.” Although I am involved in church planting, my main ministry focus is the Institute. Sadly, this misunderstanding of the dynamic relationship between church planting and institute training has prevented some congregations from supporting an exciting and vital ministry, a ministry through which churches have been planted in Hermosillo and many other parts of Mexico.

Unfortunately, the words “Bible institute” often bring to mind a “Bible study” or an advanced Sunday school for those who want to learn a little more than the average lay person. However, the Bible Institute in Hermosillo offers a formal, intense, and comprehensive study of the ministry so that the student can become “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,” gaining through Bible college and seminary training the assurance that he is “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Our institute is not unique in its endeavors; there are several quality seminaries and Bible institutes in countries such as Russia, India, and Puerto Rico, to name a few.

But how can Bible institute training be considered an effective means of missionary church planting? Consider the following scenario: An American missionary travels to a foreign field and starts a church. The Lord prospers that work, and the missionary is able to hand the church to a national after five years of labor. According to this scenario, in ten years two churches could be established. Thank God for faithful missionaries who plant churches in this manner, and praise Him for the countless souls converted and disciplined one by one.

Now consider another effective means of church planting. In this scenario, the missionary spends his time teaching seventy students in a Bible institute that is designed to train future Christian leaders of that country. Let’s say it takes six years for a trained national to plant a church. If only half the institute graduates were to go on to pastor national churches, at the end of ten years (four years of training plus six years to establish a church) that country

would see *thirty-five* new churches.

The advantages of the second scenario are vast. For one, the missionary does not have to look for the “point man,” a national within his congregation who has matured spiritually to the point of being competent to take over and serve as pastor. There is a cultural advantage as well in that the national pastor does not have to overcome the ramifications of an American passing the leadership to a national. In countries such as Mexico, where one’s status is greatly influenced by the color of his skin, people tend to prefer the leadership of an American rather than an indigenous pastor. This situation can make it difficult for the American missionary to hand over the

work to a national.

Not only does the Bible institute provide the missionary with an effective means of preparing a national to take over a ministry, but it also provides the national pastor with a means of training potential Christian workers for full-time service. With the benefit of institute training, an upcoming national pastor is adequately equipped to fill the shoes of the missionary pastor. Upon graduating, those who have been called to work in the church full-time are ready to return home and serve faithfully. Each student represents a pastor or missionary who has sent that young person to receive a sound Bible education so that he can return to the ministry ready to stand in the gap.

Because these national teachers and missionaries have such a sacred charge from the pastors and parents of these young students, they must base their philosophy of ministry on the Bible in order to keep from leading these young disciples astray. The philosophy of ministry of the Instituto Práctico Ebenezer has enabled the school for thirty years to prepare men and women to serve God, most of whom have remained faithful to the Lord and faithful to their calling.

Second Timothy 2:1 presents the Biblical basis for institute training. First we see the missionary’s motivation, or driving principle: “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the apostle Paul continues his instruction of Pastor Timothy, even after sending him out for the work of the gospel. Paul passionately urges Timothy to

Not only does the Bible institute provide the missionary with an effective means of preparing a national to take over a ministry, but it also provides the national pastor with a means of training potential Christian workers for full-time service.

find his strength “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul understood that such a task as he had given Timothy could not be accomplished in the strength of a mortal man, but only through the empowering of an omnipotent Savior. Likewise, when a missionary takes up the task of training future national pastors and Christian workers, he realizes that the task is simply impossible for him to do through his own limited strength. He must rely on God’s grace and wisdom as he participates in molding young lives for God’s glory.

The following verse also sets forth the missionary’s threefold mandate to learn, to teach, and to reproduce: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Paul first gives an implied command that the teacher must learn God’s truth (“the things that thou hast heard of me”). Timothy had been indoctrinated, or trained, by Paul, and he could verify by other sources (“many witnesses”) that Paul was teaching the truth. In a Bible institute, the Biblical training of a missionary is duplicated many times over in the lives of national students training for the ministry. In receiving instruction from many missionaries working together, the students gain the added advantage of learning from the diverse experiences and backgrounds of “many witnesses,” several of whom are experienced pastors themselves.

With a solid foundation in the truth of God’s Word, the missionary is now commanded to teach other “faithful men” and then to teach those students to reproduce their training in the lives of others. Paul told Timothy to win and disciple others, committing to them that which Paul had entrusted to him. Not only was Timothy to teach Biblical truth to these new disciples, but he was also to give them the responsibility of reproducing that truth in others. Nationals who have

been trained by missionaries (or by other nationals who have graduated from Bible institutes) will have the tools necessary to teach others what they have learned and will also pass the torch of Bible training to those whom they have won to Christ. This process of multiplication—disciples training others to train others—is a direct application of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19, 20.

In recent years, Mexico has seen countless people won to Christ and scores of new churches planted. These churches are thriving, and young people are being called into full-time ministry. Many of these young, new believers have answered God’s call to be missionaries in countries all over the world, and they are receiving their education in fine Bible institutes and seminaries such as the Instituto Práctico Ebenezer.

Today, workers all over Mexico are reaping the harvest sown thirty years ago in Hermosillo by missionaries who, working under Mexican Gospel Mission and the local church, opened a Bible institute to train the leaders of the future. God is greatly using this Bible institute in Mexico as missionaries and pastors work hand-in-hand to win people to the Lord, to train these converts in a quality Bible institute, and then to send them out to repeat the process of learning, teaching, and reproducing. The missionary who chooses to fulfill the Great Commission in this manner is one who sees a vision of the future with many churches planted and many serving the Lord, all laboring together in God’s great field to bring in a plentiful harvest.

Dan Wokaty is a missionary serving under Mexican Gospel Mission (Dr. Dick Mercado, Director). He serves as a teacher and financial administrator in the Instituto Práctico Ebenezer in Hermosillo, Sonora. Mexican Gospel Mission is a Fundamental Baptist mission board based in Phoenix, Arizona.

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“PLEASE BLESS ALL THE MISSIONARIES”

Marilyn Janke

Have you ever said that? I know I have. After all, there are so many missionaries, and how are you going to remember all their names, much less what they might need? Besides, it’s kind of boring to pray for people you have possibly never met. (Their 37-year-old picture is still on the wall at church!) Surely it wouldn’t take God more than a minute to dole out your blessings to each one, because what’s good for one missionary must be good for them all, right?

Do you feel a sermon coming on? Relax—put away your oxygen mask. Here are just a few creative ways in which you can “bless” those missionaries.

Pray—Okay, so you thought we just did that (see title). Wrong. First of all, you have to know who they are. Go to your nearest missionary board (though it might be more like a missionary *bored* if it hasn’t been recently updated). Pick two or three missionaries to pray for. Or better yet, pick just one. *Just one? That doesn’t sound very spiritual.* Well, neither does sending out prayers like mass e-mails: one press of the button, and *pr esto!* One generic prayer, multiplied throughout your spiritual address system, like so many loaves and fishes.

So let’s get practical. Take “your family,” or your family’s prayer card (usually on a table or missionary board) or a copy of their recent letter.

Now, back to praying. The prayer card is usually full of “fast facts”: ages, birthdates, anniversaries, place of service, etc. Just the knowledge alone that they have teenagers should give you a wealth of prayer opportunities!

Besides teenagers, what else can be prayed about? This is where you think about yourself for a minute. What would *your* needs be? What would *you* like people to remember about you?

a. Health—kids getting sick, poor medical care, chronic problems that might bring on discouragement, depression, etc. (*Wait—can missionaries actually become depressed?*)

b. Finances—needed support from churches, furlough travel expenses, kids in college.

c. Daily living experiences—washing machine breaking down, standing in long lines to buy food, computers crashing.

d. Red tape—getting in/out of the country, visas, receiving packages.

e. Safety—political unrest, children’s well-being, natural disasters.

f. Emotions—loneliness (away from family), frustration (slow growth, unfamiliarity with language).

Maybe you could write each of these on a piece of paper, put them in a jar, and pray for a different aspect of missionary life each day. Your kids may enjoy being the one to choose. Better yet, have the kids come up with the ideas of

how they would they pray for the MKs (lost pet; sick parents; afraid of the dark, of meeting new people, of saying goodbye to friends).

Give—What comes to mind here besides money? Missionaries are appreciative of monetary gifts, but you probably don’t have a large supply of money to send. Here are some other blessings you can give:

a. Encouragement—Who wouldn’t love this? Write a letter once a month (kids too!). Tell of your prayers on their behalf. Be specific—that way they know that you read their newsletters! Also, if you are a mother of small kids writing to a missionary mom with small kids (or a mom whose kids are grown, etc.), you are probably facing many of the same challenges. Share them: what works for you? What humorous things have happened to you?

b. Your time—helping with missions projects; writing to missionaries.

c. Your home—being willing to house or feed missionaries on furlough.

d. Picture(s) of your family—your missionary would be glad to know the folks back home. When they visit on furlough, it’s great to be able to recognize the people who have been praying for or corresponding with them.

e. Birthday/anniversary greetings—everyone likes to be remembered on his or her birthday. MKs especially enjoy finding a stick of gum or balloon in their car d.

Go—Okay, so maybe you can’t travel to a faraway place to be a missionary. Maybe you can’t even visit your missionary. But maybe you can go by

a. Visiting the country through pictures, articles, books—finding out all you can about it.

b. Attending missions conferences.

c. Praying that the Lord will call your children into a short/long-term ministry.

d. Praying for one person near you to whom you can minister.

But the greatest of these is prayer.

Most missionaries cannot begin to thank those who have blessed them over the years. Some they may never meet. But they can tell stories about the Lord working in ways that can be attributed only to your prayers. And they are honored to meet those who have faithfully interceded for them.

Don’t feel that praying is an insignificant ministry. It’s the most important gift you can give. Just pray as specifically and as knowledgeably as you can. You never know what great or small blessing the Lord might be waiting to give as a result of your pleas on their behalf.

Marilyn Janke and her husband David are missionary church planters in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. You can read more of Marilyn’s articles at www.ribtickler.org.

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Regional Meeting Reports

The Western Regional Meeting was held at the Grace Baptist Church, pastored by Wally Higgins. Keynote speakers were Dr. John Vaughn and Dr. Tom Nieman. The meeting was held March 3-4 and was the first meeting of the FBF held in Utah.

The North Central Regional meeting was held January 27-28 at the Beth Eden Baptist Church in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. Keynote speakers were Dr. John Vaughn, Pastor Matthew Recker, and Pastor Bacilio Alfaro. Over ninety pastors attended from seven different western states.

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Upcoming FBF Meetings

July 14-17, 2003
International Meeting
Pastor David Cortez Pena
Iglesia Bautista Puerta Abierta
Ave Quintana Roo Y Calle 12 #2111
Tijuana, Baja California Norte
011-52-664-684-7045

July 28-30, 2003
Alaska Regional Meeting
Pastor Earl Barnett
Soldotna Baptist Church
223 E. Redoubt Avenue
Soldotna, AK 99669
(908) 262-4618

October 6-7, 2003
Mid-America Regional Meeting
Pastor Brad Smith
Bethel Baptist Church
200 N. Roselle Road
Schaumburg, IL 60193
(847) 885-3230

October 20-21, 2003
South Central Regional Meeting
Pastor Larry Karsies
Harvest Hills Baptist Church
9713 N. County Line Road
Yukon, OK 73099
(405) 721-1920

October 23-24, 2003
Southwest Regional Meeting
Pastor Scott Snyder
Northwest Baptist Church
402 San Clemente NW
Albuquerque, NM 87107-3629
(505) 344-5544

November 3-7, 2003
Caribbean Regional Meeting
Pastor Rafael A. Rodriguez
Iglesia Bautista Christiana
Ave 27 de Debrero
#542 Mirador Norte
Santo Domingo, DR
(809) 537-5645

November 10-11, 2003
North Central Regional Meeting
Rev. Ted York
Green River Bible Baptist Church
800 Homestead
Green River, WY 82935
(307) 875-4405

November 10-11, 2003
Southern California Regional Meeting
Dr. Walt Brock
Ironwood Christian Camp
49191 Cherokee Road
Newberry Springs, CA 92365-9543
(760) 257-3503

November 11, 2003
Northeast Regional Meeting
Dr. Chuck Phelps
Trinity Baptist Church
80 Clinton Street
Concord, NH 03301
(603) 225-3999

November 13-14, 2003
Northern California Regional Meeting
Dr. John Mincy
Camp Lucerne
PO Box 487
Lucerne, CA 95458
(925) 757-5242

SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

Have a Laugh?

Washington Avenue Baptist Church (Johnson City, Illinois) has a section of its website labeled "Humor." It consists of "happiness is" quips on happiness including, "The occasional well-rendered belch is practically expected," or "Your underwear is \$8.95 for a three-pack," or "You almost never have strap problems in public." Others are, "You don't have to shave below your neck," and "Your belly usually hides your big hips."

River of Life Christian Fellowship, of Tolland, Connecticut, also has a website humor section, justified, it says, by Ecclesiastes 3:4 (There is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh"). Some of the jokes are supposedly derived from church bulletins about preaching: "The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water.' The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'" Another reads, "Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons." Still another goes, "At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice."

Then there's comedian Michael Joiner, a contributing writer for Jay Leno, who advertises himself as "God's Smart Aleck." Pastor Jim DelCampo (New Beginnings Community Church in Corona, California) recommends him highly: "We have had many Christian Comedians perform at our church, all very good, but Michael Joiner has BY FAR BEEN THE FUNNIEST!" A spokesperson for the Association of Baptist Churches in Jackson, North Carolina, claims that Joiner is "the FUNNIEST Comedian we've ever

heard! Over 300 came forward to ACCEPT CHRIST! All 3000 gave Michael a STANDING OVATION!"

These are not Christ-denying churches. Washington Avenue (which, by the way, is no church-growth upstart but a nearly 100-year-old ministry) carries Spurgeon's devotionals and other additional Scripture readings on its website. River of Life also posts Spurgeon's devotionals morning and evening and advertises itself as a "Christ-centered church." Its pastor prays that at his church "you will experience the joy that only comes from knowing Him and that your understanding and love for God will grow even stronger as we enter into worship and the study of God's word together."

New Beginnings, running over 1,000 in attendance, attractively presents Paul's testimony of salvation and the Romans Road on its website, complete with a sample sinner's prayer and a caution against measuring your security by feelings rather than faith.

So what you have here are gospel-preaching churches routinely serving up jokesmiths, buffoonery, slapstick comedy, and humor bordering on the distasteful and irreverent as ministry condiments. We can wave them aside with a dismissive, "What do you expect? Those are contemporary churches without standards." But the sad fact has been that there's hardly a single ministry fad from the last fifty years that hasn't, sooner or later, percolated down into Fundamental churches. What the innovators seem to succeed with today some of our people are likely to take a crack at tomorrow.

Better Take a Closer Look

What I'm trying to turn on here is a bright yellow, blinking caution light about the trifling "lightness" that so insidiously slips into ministry. Somebody has said that it's a pretty difficult transition from clown to prophet. Generally it's impossible.

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6)

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I'm not criticizing occasional touches of spontaneous humor. An irate woman once scolded Spurgeon for it. Spurgeon responded that if the good woman only knew how much humor he kept to himself she might be commending his self-control instead of condemning him. But I challenge anyone to find mere clowning anywhere in Spurgeon's sermons. In fact, W. Robertson Nicoll, who not only read them all but also heard him preach many times, said after the much-loved preacher's death, "Mr. Spurgeon is thought by those who do not know his sermons to have been a humorous preacher. As a matter of fact, there was no preacher whose tone was more uniformly earnest, reverent and solemn."

Frankly, there's nothing that makes us feel more accepted than people's approving laughter at something we've said. It's a wicked trap that seduces our pride and promises to relieve our insecurities. This is a great part of the problem, perhaps the greatest, that has crept into contemporary ministry. Ministers are thinking about themselves. They wouldn't see it that way. They would protest, "No! I'm thinking about the people. I'm focused on them." But that's self-deception. When before and all through the service a man's mind is thinking, "They'll get bored if we do that," "Wait till they hear this," "Hope they liked that," "They're gonna love this part," he's thinking about their response to himself.

There's Scripture that comes to mind here. It's sound doctrine to charge older men to be "grave," a word that means "dignified" (Titus 2:2). It isn't that they're supposed to take themselves seriously, but they are to take their testimony, their Christian life, and their influence seriously. Older women are to be reverent in behavior (Titus 2:3) and to teach younger women to be sober, that is, sensible. Young men too are to be sober (Titus 2:6). And elders are to portray gravity (dignity), and use sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:7, 8).

Foolish talking and jesting (Eph. 5:4) are forbidden outright for all Christians in all circumstances, not to mention the pulpit. That sounds like a verbal straitjacket. What are foolish talking and jesting? Neither of these words occurs in either the LXX or elsewhere in the NT. So we don't have cross references to help flesh out what God is prohibiting. But "foolish talking," has the root *moros* in it, from which we get the word "moron." It evidently refers to senseless talk, the talk of a moron. Aristotle (who knew Greek fairly well) spoke of the

word "jesting" as ridicule to get a laugh—a vice, he said, that characterized young people.

Maybe that's part of the problem. Ours is a youth culture; and American youth, even Christian youth, don't typically respond well to sobriety. What they do respond to is a laugh. And another . . . and then another and another and another. It's no wonder, considering the mindless, raunchy sitcoms that rank as favorite prime-time viewing even in many Christian homes. It's appalling to calculate the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours that many Christian teens have spent doing nothing but chortling at sordid TV comedy by the time they reach high school.

Our objective can't be to make ourselves and God's Word somehow more appealing to such a twisted generation by making the pulpit a platform for reeling off strings of nonsense. Especially jokes about Bible passages. Phillips Brooks once observed that there are "passages in the Bible which are soiled forever by the touches which the hands of ministers who delight in cheap and easy jokes have left upon them." Tragic!

Frankly, there's nothing that makes us feel more accepted than people's approving laughter at something we've said. It's a wicked trap that seduces our pride and promises to relieve our insecurities. This is a great part of the problem, perhaps the greatest, that has crept into contemporary ministry. Ministers are thinking about themselves. They wouldn't see it that way. They would protest, "No! I'm thinking about the people. I'm focused on them." But that's self-deception. When before and all through the service a man's mind is thinking, "They'll get bored if we do that," "Wait till they hear this," "Hope they liked that," "They're gonna love this part," he's thinking about their response to *himself*.

Please, don't dismiss what I'm saying now by running my examples to extremes. Of course we're sensitive to people's comfort and real needs. Temperature, reasonable seating, access to bathrooms, safe and bright nurseries, a display of overwhelming acceptance no matter who they are or how they look—these kinds of things must be given caring attention. But we're dead wrong to be projecting their notions—their look, their sound, their interests, their values—in order to get them to affirm us. We're supposed to be compelling them to face God! Insisting that they listen to what He wants to talk about!

As for young people and their needs, what they need is to be seriously challenged to obey God. Among other things that means repenting of foolish talking and jesting, not demanding it from the preacher before they will even give God a hearing. We must not pander to a twisted sense of what makes a good sermon or service. They don't know. Most of them can't know. They never will know unless we compel them to hear God.

Adults need to help them learn to be sober young men

and women. Good-natured, yes. Quick to smile, yes. A sense of humor, yes. But in general, sober and sensible. They need to learn to sit quietly and respectfully, not just while we're preaching, but all through the service. They need to learn to listen with humility. To bow their heads and close their eyes and worship when we pray together. In short, to meet with God. To that end let preachers walk and talk, especially in their pulpits, with the dignity that befits a man of God.

Charles Bridges wrote in his classic, *The Christian Ministry*,

Surely it is the highest dignity if not the greatest happiness, that human nature is capable of here in this vale below, to have the soul so far enlightened as to become the mirror, or conduit or conveyor of God's truth to others. . . . Let the remembrance of this sacred dignity give a deeper tone of decision to our ministrations. "A Pastor"—remarks Bishop Wilson—"should act with the dignity of a man, who acts by the authority of God." . . . The moment we permit ourselves to think lightly of the Christian Ministry, our right arm is withered; nothing but imbecility and relaxation remains.

Someone testified recently that he had visited a certain church in the expectation that he would feel at home because it advertised itself to be "Bible-believing." To his startled dismay the worship prelude turned out to be the theme song from a popular movie, *The Sting*, starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman. The song was titled (revealingly it seemed to him) "The Entertainer." What followed for a service was evidently a shocking travesty. Not only was there no genuine worship, but the most enthusiastic moments came during the announcements. As they were being given, the pastor snuck up from behind and used his fingers to protrude horns from the back of the unwitting announcer's head, then clowned and bowed for the delighted congregation. All I can think of are Bridges' words—a *withered right arm* and *imbecility*.

Take Them Up into the Presence

Here's a model that commends itself to everyone's conscience, penned discerningly by the beloved hymn writer William Cowper. Perhaps you're like me and generally skip past poetry. But this one's worth reading, even memorizing. Try reading it out loud.

Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul,
Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own—
Paul should himself direct me. I would trace
His master strokes, and draw from his design.
I would express him simple, grave, sincere:
In doctrine uncorrupt: in language plain,
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impressed
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds

May feel it too; affectionate in look
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men.

"Much impressed himself . . . and anxious mainly that the flock he feeds may feel it too." That puts the finger on both the need and the objective. The need? Much impressed himself. The objective? That the flock he feeds may feel it too.

As for young people and their needs, what they need is to be seriously challenged to obey God. Among other things that means repenting of foolish talking and jesting, not demanding it from the preacher before they will even give God a hearing. We must not pander to a twisted sense of what makes a good sermon or service. They don't know. Most of them can't know. They never will know unless we compel them to hear God.

An example of that model came to mind even as I was writing, something I read years ago concerning Alexander Maclaren. An English Baptist just a hundred years ago, Maclaren pastored Union Chapel in Manchester for forty-five years. Next to Spurgeon's, his expository sermons were the most widely read in his time. Republished today in seventeen volumes from Genesis to Revelation, they're still eagerly read and deeply appreciated. In spite of his popularity, Alexander Maclaren was a humble, modest man who soaked his soul in Scripture through a disciplined regimen of Bible reading, both in English and in the original languages. Here's a family member's description of how such a man, "much impressed himself," conducted public worship and made others feel it too.

Few people could for the first time join in a service conducted by him without feeling that they had undergone a new experience. . . . Punctual to a moment he himself quietly opened the vestry door and slowly mounted the pulpit steps. He never through his long life ceased to feel "the awfully conspicuous position of a pulpit." He felt that it was only the necessity of the preacher's being distinctly seen and heard that justified it.

He never stood during the singing of psalm or hymn (when the congregation sat). "I join in the praise, I do not lead it," he would say, "and I can do that best when least seen." He sometimes remarked

that ministers, and especially young ministers, could sing and take a survey of the congregation, too. "In all my life I never dared to do that." After a minute of silent prayer (no outward sign of devotion except closed eyes), he rose and in a clear ringing voice gave out the number of the hymn. It was not prefaced by "Let us worship God by singing."

Perhaps to many it was a disappointment that the service did not begin with prayer. That it did not was because he felt the extreme responsibility involved in leading the devotion of the congregation. By the hymns and lessons selected he sought to give the keynote to the whole service, and almost invariably the prayers, to begin with, were founded on the Scripture lesson which preceded them. The tone of mingled awe and tenderness in which "Let us pray" was said, told that the words "Our Gracious Father," with which he often began, represented to himself a blessed present reality.

In the volume of his Pulpit Prayers which, notwithstanding his "extreme reluctance," has been published, there is wonderfully little repetition of any one phrase, with one exception, "Take away any hindrance to recognizing Thy voice which may arise from the human medium through which it comes." Words to that effect, or, "May this not be a mere meeting of men to listen to a man, but the gathering of God's children to listen to a voice."

He once said, "I cannot understand 'preparing beforehand' as regards prayer. The hymn and the chapter read help me much, and then I try to remember nothing but that I am speaking to God for others and for myself and that He is listening." Those who can recall the tone of his voice as he prayed can believe that he did remember God was listening.

In reading the lessons (from Scripture) he gave a distinct impression to the most familiar words. Very often hearers said, "It was worthwhile to come only to hear him read the lessons." He never read any book, much less the Bible, without bringing his whole mind to bear upon it, and given a mind like his, so powerful to grasp a subject, so alive to beauty of expression, it is no wonder that when he read the Scripture, full to him of the most sacred associations and charged with lessons of eternal truth, his voice riveted the attention of his hearers.

As to the sermon. . . . His own idea as to what preaching should be is given very distinctly. . . . "I sometimes think that a verse in one of the psalms

carries the whole pith of homiletics—"While I was musing the fire burned, then spake I with my tongue." Patient meditation, resulting in kindled emotion and the flashing up of truth into warmth and light, and then—and not till then—the rush of speech "moved by the Holy Ghost"—these are the processes which will make sermons live things with hands and feet, as Luther's words were said to be.

Another who heard him preach related the experience: "The address created an atmosphere. The preacher lifted us into the region of the spiritual, into the presence of Jesus Christ."

Atmosphere. You can call it mood or whatever you like, but every preacher knows it's that intangible, indefinable, but irreplaceable sense of God's presence. It can be shattered irrecoverably by a baby's cry. Or a cell phone. Or loud coughing. And most of all, by a preacher's trifling flippancy. John Piper (who by his own admission is no Fundamentalist, but whose observation at this point is all the weightier because he's not) writes, "There actually seems to be a fear of approaching . . . blood-earnestness. I have seen a strange silence begin to come over a congregation and watched the preacher, seemingly intentionally, dispel it quickly with some light-hearted quip or the use of a pun or a witticism."

Charles Jefferson warned, "Moods . . . are the preacher's first concern. His earliest work is to bring his people into a Christian frame of mind. What men are willing to believe depends largely upon their mental mood. A preacher forgets this at his peril."

We all know that there's a great deal of truth to that. And what people, preachers, all of us, so desperately need, at least once every Lord's Day, is something unspoken bearing down upon us in the very atmosphere of our churches that insistently, irresistibly alters our mood! Alters it—from light and breezy, half in touch with God but more in touch with the newspaper (comics and all) and the afternoon's *NFL Today*—to subdued, earnest, humbled, and bowed in the presence of an awesome God!

The preacher's mood alone can compel people to square themselves right up with God. No turning the shoulder to Him at oblique angles. No squinting at Him out of the corner of one eye. But forced face-to-face with the glory of God in the countenance of Jesus Christ. *Pressed* by the preacher right into the Presence!

Who is sufficient for these things? To be . . . not light or cute or funny or glib, but sincerely affectionate, earnest, and much impressed ourselves with the solemn realities—that we will be to immortal souls, in that very hour and room, the savour of death unto death. Or of life unto life.

So, as the text literally reads, let us purpose in our hearts not to be as the many peddling the Word of God. Let us speak instead as (men) of sincerity, indeed as (men) of God down before God in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17). 



Dr. Mark Minnick is pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

Never before has the salvation of God been so mightily revealed in our land; never, we believe, has the truth made such rapid advances among the people; never have the skies “poured down righteousness” upon us as during the last few months. The highway of holiness has never before been trodden by so large a host of His ransomed ones at any period of the world’s history. In this visitation of mercy, our state has largely participated.

These words appeared in a religious periodical reporting the unusual visitation from God that was sweeping the entire country in the spring of 1858. By the time the awakening had abated, conservative estimates record over one million new converts added to Protestant denominations in America.

Surprisingly little is known about this major spiritual awakening in contrast to the awakenings of 1734, 1797, and 1830. In the awakening of 1857–58, God stirred the soul of a nation heading into the bloodiest conflict of her brief history. Out of the soil of this awakening grew the ministries of men such as D. L. Moody and Hudson Taylor and institutions such as the YMCA and the Sunday school movement. Hymns sprang up like wildflowers after a spring rain: Anna Warner’s “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know,” George Duffield’s “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,” and William Bradbury’s “He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought.” A sixteen-year-old boy converted during the revival described his conversion with these words: “My Jesus I love thee, I know thou art mine; for Thee, all the follies of sin, I resign.” An itinerant evangelist preaching during this time wrote: “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear; what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” Fanny Crosby, too, wrote many of her beloved hymns during this awakening, and Phillip Bliss composed “Whosoever Will May Come” and “Man of Sorrows” out of a heart stirred by this awakening.

Thankfully, a stirring account of this revival has been preserved in a carefully documented work by Richard Owen Roberts titled *The Event of the Century: The 1857–1858 Awakening* (International Awakening Press), a valuable resource for every serious student of revival. Roberts embarks on an informative and inspiring account of this great awakening from God. The awakening was not merely the result of desperate men turning to God after the famous Bank Panic of 1857. Instead, the fervent and ongoing prayer of godly Christians concerned over the moral apathy and general spiritual decline of the nation during the years leading up to the Panic of 1857 was the key to God’s visitation. Roberts provides a fascinating documentation of the spread of the revival from state to state until it had touched every part of the United States,

Canada, and the nearby Caribbean provinces. A very informative section on the impact of this awakening on the African slaves in the Southern states suggests that the revival prepared the souls of men who shortly would lose their lives in the Civil War. In addition, the spiritual effects of the revival made possible a smoother and gentler healing of the nation after the war than might have otherwise occurred.

Roberts fills up each section with fascinating details and personal testimonies. D. L. Moody was a young shoe salesman during this time and attended one of the many prayer meetings that sprang up during the awakening. He wrote his mother and said, “I go to meetings every night, and, oh, how I enjoy it. It seems as if God were here Himself. Mother, pray for me. Pray this work may go on, till every knee is bowed.” Moved by the needs around him, he began to consider what he could contribute as a layperson. Upon volunteering to help teach in the existing Sunday Scholars program, he was informed that there were not enough students to go around unless he could provide his own students. He came the following Sunday with seventeen street urchins he had persuaded to attend. Soon, his class had grown to over 1,500 students.

Roberts credits the revival to the prayers of God’s people and has an entire section describing the rise of the lay prayer movement and its spread across the nation. The revival was not the result of the work of a famous preacher or evangelist, but involved the leadership of laymen to a greater degree than previous awakenings. In addition, this awakening was unusually free from the emotionalism that had been associated with earlier revivals. There was no recorded evidence of charismatic gifts; instead, the gifts that accompanied this awakening were those of church planter, preacher, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. An unusual unity and cooperation among genuine believers within orthodox Protestant theology characterized this awakening.

After reading this account I found my heart rejoicing in what God has done in the past. I gained new appreciation and a fresh perspective on familiar hymns and practices (prayer meetings and Sunday school). As one reads the accounts of the prayer meetings, it is impossible to remain unmoved by the power of prayer to move the hand and heart of God. I closed the book with the prayer, “Lord, awaken my heart—and visit Your people afresh.” ☞

Dr. Sam Horn is Executive Vice President of Northland Baptist Bible College in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

The paradox regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility takes one of its most striking forms in Philippians 2:12, 13. In order to soften the *apparent* contradiction between Paul's imperative in Philippians 2:12 and the doctrine of justification, interpreters have sought to understand this passage in terms of the "sociology" of the church as opposed to the common "soteriology" of the believers at Philippi. Paul, however, is addressing that aspect of salvation known as progressive sanctification without which "no man will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The Believer's Responsibility (2:12)

Verse 12 begins, "So then, my beloved" (author's translation), recalling the tender relationship Paul had with these believers (1:8). Before Paul explicitly exhorts his readers, he commends them for their past obedience: "just as you have always obeyed." "Obeyed" has special reference to one's submission to Christ, the gospel, and apostolic teaching (Phil. 2:9-11; Rom. 1:5; 5:19; 6:16, 17; Heb. 5:9; 11:8).

Now to the main imperative of the passage: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Fundamental to Pauline theology is the idea that salvation is not by works (Rom. 4:5). Consequently, the indicative in verse 13 (stating that God works in believers "to will and to do") could render this imperative ("work out") meaningless. This tension between verses 12 and 13 constitutes an "extreme formulation of the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility" (Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, 135). The dilemma is remedied when one realizes that we are to "work out" by His grace what God has worked in. Paul's terminology in 2:12 is predicated on his prior use of "salvation" in 1:28: "which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God" (KJV). In Paul's writings "salvation" has a consistent reference to deliverance from the power and consequences of sin. He uses the verb "to save" 29 times (more than any other NT writer) and "salvation" including its cognates about 20 times.

What does Paul intend by the use of his present imperative "be working out"? The idea is "to bring about [or] produce" (BAGD, 422). James employs a similar nuance in 1:3, "the trying of your faith *worketh* patience" (KJV) or "*produces* endurance" (NASB). It means to "accomplish" something in the sense of "carrying it out" (Rom. 7:18). The context and grammar verify that the term has the theological equivalence of "obedience." The imperative ("work out") is the apodosis ("so then") of a comparative sentence whose protasis ("just as you have always obeyed") clarifies Paul's intent. Paul commands believers to participate in their response to divine grace

by developing salvation fruit now and in the future through the divine energy of the Holy Spirit. Their continuous action, elsewhere, is described as a pursuit, pressing on, a fight, and a race (Phil. 3:12; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 6:12). In no way does Paul deny that salvation is *wholly* the work of God.

**"Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth"
(2 Tim. 2:15)**

Salvation has many aspects. . . . Regeneration initiates the believer into a life with obligations. Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord obligates the believer to obey him. Hence, working out salvation does not mean "working for" salvation, but making salvation operational. Justification must be followed by the experiential aspects of sanctification, by which the new life in Christ is consciously appropriated and demonstrated (Homer Kent, "Philippians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 11:128).

Paul accents the seriousness of his command in two ways. First, they must obey God whether or not Paul is there to encourage them. Second, they must obey "with fear and trembling." This phrase in the Septuagint describes the dread that pagans experience at the presence of the living God (Ex. 15:16; Isa. 19:16; Deut. 2:25; 11:25). Even as all will bow and confess that Christ is LORD to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11), so believers should with holy fear pay homage to their Lord by getting on with the business of obedience. Paul asserts that the method of obedience coupled with the mood of reverent fear toward God is necessary in the persevering walk of all believers.

God's Sovereign Power (2:13)

"He who works in you" parallels 1:6, "He who began [a good work] in you." God who began the salvific work in them will surely bring it to completion. God is working in believers both to will and to act. The Christian does not work in a legalistic spirit to merit divine favor, but obeys God humbly, realizing that without Christ he can do nothing (John 15).

God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours. . . . But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us. . . . We have here . . . the incentive to our willing and working. . . . The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 148-49). ☞

Some years ago I received a note from a deacon of the church I served as pastor. This godly layman, an architect, was concerned about the Great Commission and the apparent lack of vision in so many churches for really reaching out to a lost world. In his note this dear brother, who is now in Heaven, said:

I'm interested in finding the life of the New Testament. We've got to find this because if we don't we're going to go out of business. By the year 2000 the population of the world is going to grow from two billion to about five billion. [This note was written in 1976. We are told the population now exceeds 6 billion.] All we have to do to go out of business as the Christian church is to stay in business as usual.

The local churches of the New Testament do give us a blueprint for corporate church life and ministry in our local churches today. My deacon friend was absolutely correct. If we are going to accomplish our God-given task of building Christians and reaching lost people in our generation, we must understand and copy the life of the New Testament churches that were so effective in spreading the gospel in their time.

The Thessalonica church is one of those models for us to copy. From Athens Paul wrote back to this young church and said of them:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:5-10).

This church had a wonderful testimony in its relationship to Paul, the Lord, other churches, and the gospel. The testimony of the Thessalonian assembly serves as a model, a blueprint for our present-day churches to follow as we obey the Great Commission

and proclaim the gospel to every creature.

A Testimony as Followers of the Man of God

In verse six of this passage, Paul says that these believers "became followers of us, and of the Lord." That word "followers" provides a dynamic picture of these believers. The Greek word is *mimetes*, from which our English words "mime," "imitator," "mimic," and "mimeograph" come. These believers, having heard the gospel and believed, grew in their faith by imitating the godly example of Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and the others who ministered to them.

In my mind's eye, I imagine new believers in a prayer meeting, learning to pray as the apostle and his workers prayed with them. They learned Bible truths from their teaching. They learned to win others to Christ by going with them. They learned a godly lifestyle by copying the practices of those on the missionary church-planting team. They learned what it meant to be a Christian, how to live the Christian life, how to serve the Lord, and how to conduct a local church ministry by imitating the life of Paul and his helpers.

The Holy Spirit uses this word several times to urge us to follow godliness and godly leaders. We are urged to follow God (Eph. 5:1), and that which is good (3 John 11). Scripture teaches us to follow good Christians (Heb. 6:12) and especially the man of God (1 Cor. 4:15, 16; 11:1; Heb. 13:7).

Responsibility of Leadership

This truth, illustrated by this word, places a tremendous responsibility upon those in leadership. Paul, unashamedly exhorting the Corinthians to follow him, placed a strict qualification on his command. He said: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Believers are to follow the man of God as he follows Christ! That kind of a godly example is worthy of imitation. If the preacher fails to follow Christ, his followers are under no obligation to follow him! We in leadership must make sure we are imitating Christ so that those who depend on us may have a worthy example.

Goal of Leadership

Paul had no delusions of grandeur as he built this model for leadership. He was not an egocentric, look-

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

ing for self-fulfillment in the creation of little puppets who could not think for themselves. He was not seeking to develop robotlike followers. Rather, his report is that “ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thess. 1:6). His purpose in asking believers to follow him was to teach them to follow the Lord. This verse goes on to say that he grounded these new Christians in the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. True New Testament leaders are not trying to build an empire or power over men. They are using their God-given leadership to build spiritual people who follow the Lord, are grounded in His Word, and depend upon His Spirit. Any other kind of spiritual leadership is counterfeit by New Testament standards.

A Testimony as Examples to the People of God

Scripture uses another vivid illustration when it declares that these Thessalonian believers “were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (v. 7). This word “ensamples” is the Greek word *tupos*, which provides our English word “type.” This New Testament word speaks of “the effect of a blow, or the impress of a seal” (Liddell-Scott, *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* in Bible Windows [Cedar Hill, TX: Silver Mountain Software], 2001).

Occasionally I have done some rough carpentry work. I must confess that as a carpenter, I make a good preacher! I do not really drive nails into wood; I hit all around the nails and scare them in! Have you ever missed a nail and hit the wood beside it? You may have noticed that you left the perfect impression of the hammerhead in the wood. Or perhaps in the fall of the year you have seen the perfect impression of a leaf in the dried earth after rain. That impression is the picture of this word. Building on that picture, the Greek word came to be used of a “model,” “example,” or “archetype” (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* in Bible Windows [Cedar Hill, TX: Silver Mountain Software], 2001).

This Thessalonian church learned to follow Christ by following Paul. As they grew to maturity in Christ they became, in turn, examples to the people of God. They did not remain young Christians who depended upon others, but became a strong model church for others to follow. They became an example and an encouragement to others.

In our ministries we must determine not just to depend on other churches and leaders. Every local church has a sphere of influence. We must deter-

mine, by God’s grace, to imitate the Lord in such a way that other churches can learn from us and follow our example.

A Testimony as Propagators of the Gospel of God

Thessalonica was an important commercial center. People from all over the world passed through that city. As a result, this young church quickly reached many people for Christ. The effect was dramatic, for Paul reports that “from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (v. 8). God’s Word “sounded out,” or “rang out” across the Roman Empire from this church (*Analytical Lexicon* in Bible Windows [Cedar Hill, TX: Silver Mountain Software], 2001).

My wife and I live in Decatur, Alabama, a city with a population of about 60,000. Our home is a couple of miles from a high school football stadium. On Friday nights in the fall, if we are outside, we can occasionally hear the roar of the crowd or the beating of the drums at halftime. We cannot see the stadium, but the wind will carry the sounds from the arena across the city.

Perhaps you have attended a funeral where military honors were accorded. After the body is committed to the earth, the flag is folded and presented to the surviving family. Some distance away the guns fire the salute, and then, perhaps out of sight, the bugler sounds the strains of “Taps.” You may not be able to see him, but you hear the sound.

This was the testimony of the church at Thessalonica. People were saved there, and the gospel message rang out “in every place” as a result of their ministry.

Our churches today must have the same vision for spreading the gospel. The message of Christ must “ring out” across our respective cities and regions. We must have a vision for our own “Macedonia and Achaia.” For too long we have expected lost people to come into our buildings and be saved. We must get back in the business of “ringing out” the gospel to them. Beyond our immediate areas we must develop a world vision so that we help to spread the gospel “in every place.”

Conclusion

The church at Thessalonica established an enviable record in its spiritual growth and maturation. The testimony of the Thessalonian assembly serves as a pattern for our present-day churches. We must cultivate Biblical leadership that will in turn produce godly disciples. We must seek to encourage churches around us. We must reach out to our local areas and to the ends of the earth with the gospel. ☞

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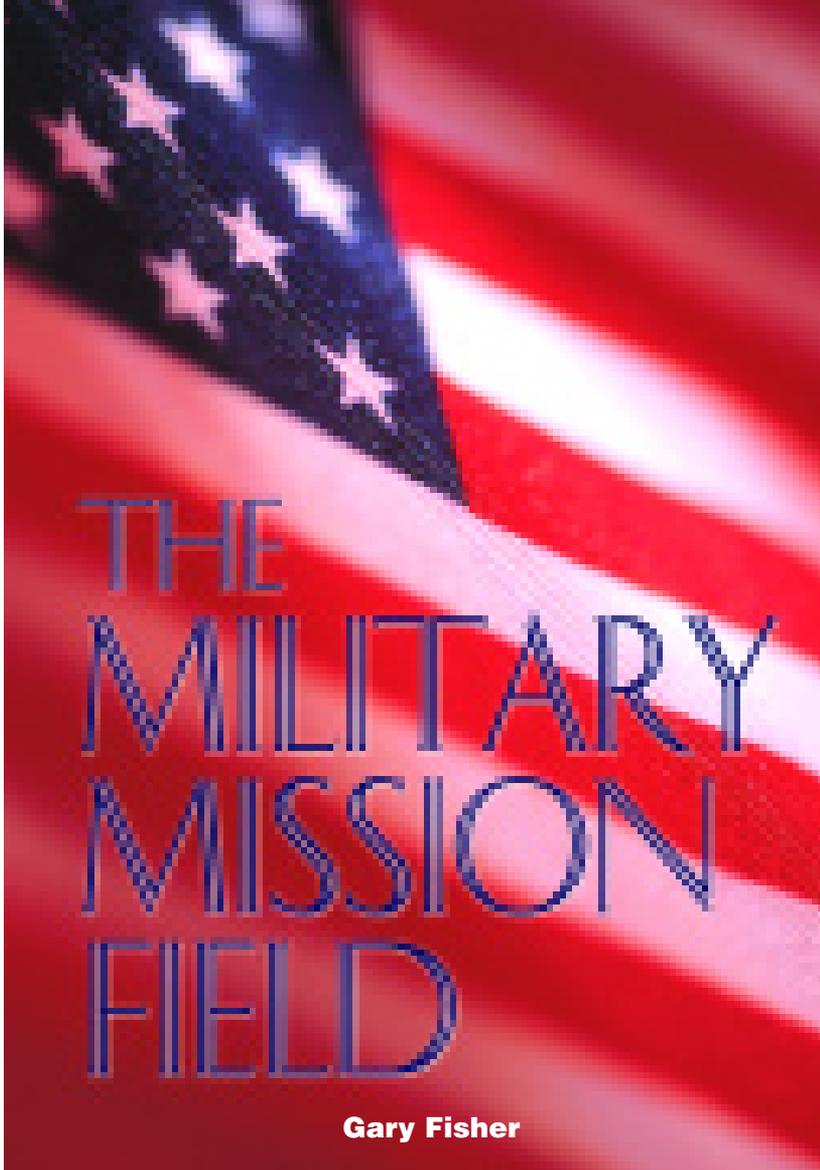
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THE MILITARY MISSION FIELD

Gary Fisher

I have a story that I think others may benefit from reading. It begins in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where I attended a religious school. I had attended this type of school since kindergarten. My teachers changed each year—and so

did their interpretation of the Bible. As time passed this became very confusing to me, as I had to change my opinion each year to communicate with and please the teacher. I found it very difficult to keep up with the changing religious views. Eventually I bowed out of religion because the situation just became too hard to understand.

I eventually graduated from high school with no spiritual direction. I joined the Army and started my career. I never gave my spirituality the time of day for fourteen years while I served in various units deploying to combat zones or areas that could become combat zones at any time. One day I received the worst news an Infantry Platoon Sergeant could get. . . I had been selected to be a Drill Sergeant.

This assignment caused me to question what I had done wrong. But I had no idea what it would do for my soul.

I reported to my unit after Drill Sergeant School and met my chain of command and my peers. I then started my new job, training civilians to become soldiers. I met the Battalion Chaplain one day on the qualification range. I spoke with him for a short period of time and afterward thought that he was really responsible only for the soldiers in training, not the cadre. Two months later my family had some problems that almost compromised

our marriage. My Commander, First Sergeant, and my Chaplain came to talk to me. It was a textbook reaction by a chain of command for situations like these. My Chaplain assisted my wife and me with our situation, and he became really popular with our family.

He would visit me from time to time at training or around the company area. It was a revelation to me that he knew so much about me. He was able to tell me when I was under a lot of stress and was too stressed out to realize it. He was the epitome of what I thought an Army Chaplain and a man of God should be. Little did I know I was just scratching the surface.

One day he approached me and told me that my soul was a priority to him. My wife had been saved for five years at that time, and she had tried to get me to even give the Lord a chance. It wasn't until those words came from my Chaplain that the seed was planted for a flower that I would soon see. Over the next couple of months he would talk to me and get a feel of where I was spiritually. I don't know when he made this decision, but he asked for help from a local pastor.

It was a Saturday afternoon when the doorbell rang. I opened the door to a man much taller than I. He introduced himself and asked whether he and his family could come in. We went through the normal introductions, and he wasted no time in asking me whether I knew where I would go if I were to die today. My reluctant answer was, "I don't know." He told me a lot of the same things my Chaplain had said, but he was a very large man with a

voice that commanded your full and undivided attention—which was what I needed. His visit came just prior to my leaving for my next assignment.

I was about to leave for the Ranger Orientation Program, a prerequisite for an assignment to the Ranger Regiment. He gave me some reading to do and told me to pray for guidance and peace. Peace was a necessity, as I had two weeks to prepare for a very difficult course. I would have to complete an APFT, a five-mile run, a twelve-mile road march, and various other physical events as well as mental evaluations. I was confident regarding every event, but I worried about the run. (I hadn't been required to run much with trainees.)

I went to ROP and started the events. The APFT went well, and, to my surprise, the five-mile run went great. The event I knew I had in the bag was the road march. I was ten miles into it when my legs cramped so badly that I could not complete the march. That was embarrassing and humiliating for a man who had done more than his share of walking. I thought for sure they would tell me to pack my stuff and go home. To my amazement they said that I could re-test. I had been brought to my knees and had only one place to turn—the Lord. I asked Him to at least let me save face and not look like an idiot. But the next day when we went for a run, I tore the ligaments in my left ankle.

This was not good. I was sure this was it for me. I was told there was no way I could heal up in time for the road

march re-test in five days, but I was given the option to try. There was no way I would go home without trying, so I did something I had never done before. I put my complete trust in God and told Him I realized that I would be selected to the Regiment if it were His will. I then asked for his help. My wife said that she would pray for me, and I spent the weekend reading the passages I was told to read and praying.

I showed up for my re-test and had no idea how the next three hours would go. Less than three hours later I crossed the finish line in a lot of pain—but within the prescribed time. I was so thankful for being able to try again but also to finish in time. The course came to a close, and it turned out that I was selected to be in the Ranger Regiment.

I returned to Ft. Jackson, went to church, and told my story to the pastor and my Chaplain. They recognized that the Lord was working inside me and set up a meeting at my house the next day. There I was saved by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

The experience was humbling and exhilarating. I have to thank the three most influential people in my life, Chaplain Fisher, Pastor Ledbetter, and Michele Nunweiler. They cultivated the ground for me and planted the seed. I am humbly thankful to Jesus Christ for germinating that seed.

Submitted by FBFI Chaplain Gary Fisher who is currently serving our Country and our Fellowship in Germany. Ray is a man who was saved under his care.

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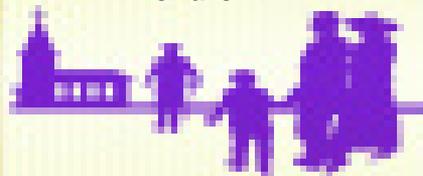
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The measure of the Church's successful missionary effort reveals the moral biography of her individual membership. —Anonymous

The reason some folks don't believe in missions is that the brand of religion they have isn't worth propagating. —Anonymous

The world has many religions; it has but one gospel. —George Owen

God sifted a whole nation that he might send choice grain over into this wilderness. —William Stoughton

If missions fail, the rest of us will have to shut up shop. —David Lloyd-George

Everything vital to the missionary enterprise hinges upon prayer. —John Raleigh Mott

A church without missions is a church without a mission. —Anonymous

If God calls you to be a missionary, don't stoop to be a king. —Jordan Grooms

Human happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected. —George Washington

All receive advice. Only the wise profit from it. —Cyrus

Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises. —Demosthenes

A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds. —Francis Bacon

Reputation is what you are perceived to be. Character is what you are. —John Wooden

Learn to say no. It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin. —Charles Haddon Spurgeon

I look upon the world as my parish. —John Wesley
Character is power. —Booker T. Washington

To see what is right and not to do it is cowardice. —Confucius

There is but one straight course, and that is to seek truth and pursue it steadily. —George Washington

Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses and avoids. —Aristotle

Genius is nothing but a great aptitude for patience. —Georges De Buffon

How far would Moses have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt? —Harry S. Truman

He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils. —Francis Bacon

The greatest act of faith is when man decides he is not God. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

There is no dignity quite so impressive, and no independence quite so important, as living within your means. —Calvin Coolidge

Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character. —Albert Einstein

Never explain. Your friends do not need it and your enemies will not believe it anyway. —Elbert Hubbard

Confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom; youth is the season of credulity. —William Pitt

For we that live to please must please to live. —Samuel Johnson

He that riseth late, must trot all day. —Benjamin Franklin



Wit and Wisdom is taken from various sources.

What's So Special about Her? A Look at Some Little-known Women

Carol Robbins

The books of the Chronicles have a well-known reputation. That's often where the good intentions of "reading through the Bible this year" dead-end with those long lists of so-and-so begat so-and-so, and so-and-so bore so-and-so. Our humanity needs a good dose of coffee, exercise, and a shower before tackling those Bible-reading days! But God's Word is holy and perfect, so there must be a reason for these genealogies . . . if only we could figure out why.

These long lists primarily contain men's names with just a few female names peppered throughout. Since I've been searching the Scripture for women in the Bible, I didn't want to let these few precious women get neglected. On the day I read through 1 Chronicles 7, I read about Bilhah, and an Aramite concubine, and Maachah; then there was Hammoleketh—remember her? Sherah is mentioned just a few verses later, followed by Serah and finally Shua. Chapter seven contains the names of no less than 125 men, but only these seven women. This thought consumed my mind for several days: Why did God include these ladies in His precious, eternal Word?

Most of the ladies are simply referred to as having born a son. Verse 24 says that Sherah "built Beth-horon the nether, and the upper, and Uzen-serah." Shua is the sister of three men in the list. So what? What makes these women so special? Why are they more important than other women that might have been included in the list?

As I meditated on these things, I suddenly realized that perhaps I was asking the wrong question. It's not whether these women were *more important* than any other women or had done anything *more special* than any other women. God simply shows us that women are important.

The chapter ends by proclaiming the men as "heads of their father's house, choice and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes . . . apt to the war and to battle" (v. 40). Certainly the kingdom of Israel

had grown in number and in strength.

But it wasn't *only* the men who built the kingdom. God reminds us here and there that the women in Israel were an integral part of the success of the kingdom. The role that these women played was important to God, though seemingly meager in the eyes of man. These women supported and met the needs of their husbands, bore and reared children, and helped to build the nation.

How easy it is for us to praise the man who comes home from the battle victorious. How easy it is for us to forget those who maintained the family, the home,

and the nation while the soldier was away. But God doesn't want us to forget these women. God wants to remind us that each of us, as a part of the family, can contribute to the success of the whole—no matter how small the role we may play.

Sometimes I think I haven't done much with my life. Sometimes I wish I had done more. In my youth I had dreams of leading many souls to Christ and helping those who have not heard to understand (Rom.

15:20, 21). But as I have followed the Lord's leading in my life, He hasn't put me out in the battle. I'm not on the front line. But I am back home—maintaining the family, the household, and the church. My little, seemingly insignificant contributions to the victory are important to God.

In my mid-twenties a young man approached me. He had been in elementary school when I was in high school and college. I hardly knew him. In fact, his appearance had changed so much that I didn't even recognize him. He thanked me for my godly example. He told me that he had watched me and because of my life, he had chosen to follow the Lord's leading into the ministry. I was dumbfounded. God had used me in a way that I wasn't even aware of. That young man is still in the ministry today.

Do you feel small? Do you feel unimportant? Do you feel insignificant—as though your life has been a

. . . wives must "think God's thoughts" on the subject. Second Corinthians 10:5 says, ". . . bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

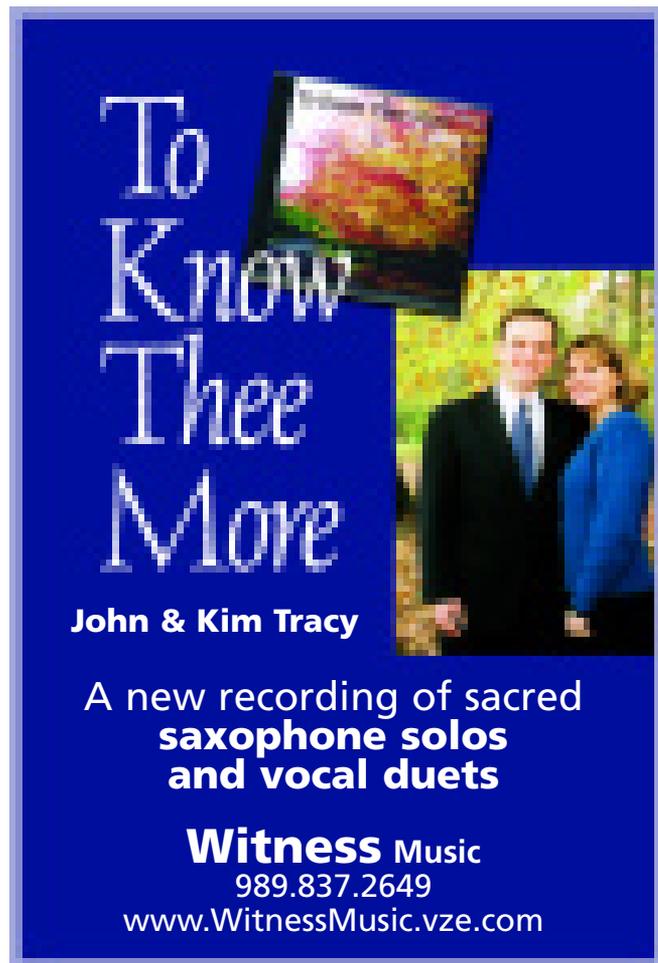
Continued on next page

Ladies' Circle (continued)

waste? Don't let your feelings cloud the truth. God has created each of us with a special purpose in His great plan. Whatever the role God has given you, remember—it is He who gave you that role—and it is He who will empower you to do what you need to do. Perhaps you are a mother at home with small children; perhaps you are elderly and your strength is small. Perhaps you are physically or mentally limited. Perhaps you're in a dead-end job. God still has a plan for you, and He considers you important. God raises up pastors and evangelists and teachers who are the leaders in the battle. God chooses foot soldiers to man the frontlines. And God also chooses those who need to stay back home and raise the children and meet the needs of the family and build the nation.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the talents. The man delivered unto his servants his goods. "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability" (v. 15). What are you doing with the talent God has given you? Are you burying it in the sand because it seems small and insignificant? Or are you investing it for Him? The women listed in 1 Chronicles 7 fulfilled the role that God had given them. They invested their talents for God. Let's invest ours, too, and follow God's plan for our own individual lives.

Carol Robbins is a freelance writer who lives in Greenville, South Carolina.



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The Pastor and the Evangelist

Jerry Sivnksty

The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples in Matthew 9:37, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few." With a growing world population, there will always be a need for more to labor in the harvest fields.

There is a need for individuals to plant the seed of the Word of God in the hearts of men. Others need to water the seed. Psalm 126:6 states, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." In 1 Corinthians 3:6 the apostle Paul declared, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

I firmly believe the Lord will still give the increase to those who labor in His fields, especially to those who labor together in this endeavor. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "For we are labourers together with God." We can see this in our local churches with the yoke upon the shoulder of the pastor coupled with the evangelist. Ephesians 4:11 says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." This passage clearly teaches that the Lord has given the office of the evangelist to the local church for the same purpose as He has given the pastor.

Why would a church neglect using this God-given office of the evangelist in the ministry of propagating the gospel? Someone might reply that it is because his church cannot afford an evangelist. I have two thoughts on this viewpoint. First, if an evangelist puts a price on his ministry and demands certain things before he comes, then a pastor should not invite such an individual. Most of the evangelists I know do not have such a philosophy of the ministry. When my wife and I started out in evangelism, we agreed that whatever came in through the love offering would be the exact amount the Lord wanted us to have. Pastors have asked me, "What do you average for a love offering?" I have told these pastors that I could never answer that question because I have never set an average. The psalmist said in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." An evangelist should not go to a church to see what he can get out of people; he should go to see what he can give to God's people. I believe this is the heart of many of the evangelists I know. Second, our churches cannot afford not to use the office of an evangelist. To use the excuse that this role is not for our present age and that there are too many charlatan evangelists is absolutely absurd. There are many God-called evangelists whose

hearts' desire is that of Ephesians 4:12: "the perfecting of the saints, . . . the work of the ministry, . . . the edifying of the body of Christ."

An evangelist who labors with the pastor in the local church should have a threefold emphasis in regard to this passage in Ephesians. First, his preaching, aided by the Holy Spirit, should rekindle the fire in the hearts of the Lord's people to godly living. Second Peter 1:3 declares, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." As the evangelist preaches the Word of God, his sermons should also confront individuals to deal with sin in their lives. In 2 Timothy 4:2 the apostle Paul said, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." An evangelist will not rail on God's people; however, he will lovingly denounce sin.

Second, the evangelist's message will herald a strong and stirring emphasis on reaching the lost for our Savior. The Scriptures state in 1 Timothy 2:3, 4, "God our Savior . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." The evangelist will boldly declare that a Christian is not to be like the Dead Sea, which is the richest body of water upon the earth. It is full of wealth because of its mineral content, but it is stagnant because it has no outlet. This is what becomes of God's people who take in the riches of God's Word and yet never give them out.

Third, the evangelist's message will strongly stress the importance for individuals to yield their lives to the call of the Lord for His service. In Isaiah 6:8 we read, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." Isaiah yielded to the call of the Lord. Most evangelists will endeavor to stress these three needs in their meetings.

Hearing the Word of God preached nightly during the week will grip the hearts of the Lord's people. It is worth the effort of time, organization, preparation and—most of all—prayer to see the eternal results: people saved and Christians being molded to be more like the Lord. I encourage pastors across the country to rise up and determine by the grace of God to use evangelists in their churches.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty has served the church for over twenty years. He and his family reside in Starr, South Carolina. You can reach him at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684, evangjsivn@aol.com.

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THE INSPIRATION AND

The last column commenced an exploration into what has been called the “black sheep” of the Bible. The Book of Ecclesiastes is often misunderstood and, consequently, hermeneutically mishandled and homiletically abused (or altogether ignored). To be sure, “the Preacher” penned his share of passages “hard to be understood.” As the previous column labored to show, however, there are better, more consistent, alternative ways of dealing with such problem passages without attributing them to erroneous human reasoning. Furthermore, there are reasons that Ecclesiastes is so uniquely hard to grasp. We will come to those reasons later. But first, I promised one last, best reason to approach Ecclesiastes with as much reverence for its revelation and as much conviction of its truthfulness as any other book of the Bible—its unparalleled claim to communicate reliable revelation from God.

An Irrefutable Textual Affirmation

One time-tested and reliable study Bible asserts that Ecclesiastes “makes no claim to revelation.” But this assertion is seriously at odds with one of the most explicit claims to divine inspiration, total reliability, and absolute authority to be found anywhere in the Bible—Ecclesiastes 12:10, 11.

Verse 10

The Preacher grants us a glimpse into his writing philosophy as well as an assurance as to its content.

- *sought to find out acceptable words*

This terminology refers to words of delight and pleasure. In other words, Solomon testifies that he, like any first-rate author, labored over his phraseology and crafted his word choices in order to construct a work of the highest literary quality.

- *and that which was written was upright*

In this English translation, “upright” sounds like an adjective describing the final written product, as though he selected “upright words” or the content of what he wrote was “upright.” In fact, the adjective form of this word is used to describe God’s words (Ps. 19:8; 119:137). However, the Hebrew word here translated “upright” is not an adjective at all, describing either the words or the content as a whole; it is an adverb, describing the writing process. What he wrote, he assures, he wrote “uprightly.” That is, Solomon affirms that what he penned was written in all sincerity, honesty, and integrity of heart. There is no deception, no double talk, no misleading of his readers.

- *even words of truth*

The Hebrew word for “truth” is a fascinating and, believe it or not, very familiar term. It is the word from which we get “amen” and denotes that which is *faithful, reliable, dependable, trustworthy*. It is frequently used elsewhere to describe God’s words as “very faithful” (Ps. 119:138) and “truth” (Ps. 119:142). Solomon is testifying that everything he has said in this book—from the content as a whole right down to the very words themselves—is accurate, reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. None of it is erroneous or disillusioned human philosophy; it is a reliable reflection of reality and a faithful representation of truth that leads to a trustworthy philosophy of life.

Verse 11

Solomon further affirms that the words of wise men are:

- *as goads*

The words of truly wise men are, like goads, *arresting directives*. A goad was a farm implement—a long pointed stick used (by a plowman, for example) to keep an animal moving in the right direction. Similarly, wise words are, as Derek Kidner puns, “teachings with a point” that “spur the will.” They are mental prods designed to provoke thought and prompt to action.

- *as fastened nails*

Like nails—another “pointed” image—the words of the wise “stick in the memory” (Kidner). But they are like *fastened, well-driven* nails—secure, sturdy, weight-bearing, dependable.

- *given from one Shepherd*

Small words often have large significance. Solomon asserts that the words of the wise—including those he offers in this book of Ecclesiastes—have been “given” to him. *Given?* By whom? “*By one Shepherd.*” This is not a reference to Solomon; he is one of the wise to whom this wisdom is “given.” “Shepherd” is a term applied to God in both the OT and NT (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1; 80:1; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Interestingly, Psalm 95 unites God’s role as both Creator (verse 6) and Shepherd (verse 7)—just as Solomon does here in Ecclesiastes 12, verses 1 (Creator) and 11 (Shepherd).

Verse 11 claims God’s inspiration for the Wisdom writers and hence is very important. It is their equivalent of “Thus saith the Lord.” There is some dispute over the precise translation but none over

AUTHORITY OF ECCLESIASTES

the basic claim. The wise draw their wisdom from the Shepherd of Israel, the one true God (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1, 80:1). Their wise teachings are to goad their readers to action and are to be seen as wholly dependable and worthy to be collected as Scripture. We can hardly read less into this verse (J. Stafford Wright, "Ecclesiastes" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 5:1196).

This is a reference to God Himself, "the Shepherd of Israel," as the source of wisdom, which He communicates through the wise and throughout this book. Ecclesiastes, by its own inspired assertion, is not errant human philosophy. It is God-given wisdom.

Let Us Hear the Conclusion of the Matter

These verses, which comprise what is surely one of the clearest, most unmistakable claims to inspiration of any book in the Bible, teach

- *the genuineness and integrity* ("written uprightly")
- *the reliability and trustworthiness* ("words of truth")
- *the profitability and certainty* ("like goads and fastened nails")
- *the divine source and authority* ("given by one Shepherd") of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Consequently, to insist on the inspired character and revelatory reliability of Ecclesiastes in its entirety is the most

- *consistent* (the negative view of Ecclesiastes is logically unnecessary and inconsistent with how we view all the rest of the Bible)
- *objective* (the negative view of Ecclesiastes opens the door to a highly subjective handling of God's Word both in and out of Ecclesiastes)
- *textually justified* (the negative view of Ecclesiastes ignores what is arguably the single most explicit claim anywhere in the Bible to the inspiration, revelation, and reliability of its contents)

approach to take in interpreting and applying the book of Ecclesiastes.

Given Ecclesiastes' express claim to inspiration, reliability and authority, we have no choice but to accept everything Ecclesiastes communicates—exegetically and contextually understood—as revelation from God through Solomon. If Ecclesiastes is approached with a hermeneutic that atomizes its contents into individual, isolated sayings without regard to the immediate context

or to the larger message and unique purpose of the book, the results will be confounding. But if we seek to understand its distinctive perspective, trace its recurring themes, grapple with its blunt theology and anthropology, and apply its principles, we will discover that the message of Ecclesiastes is stunningly modern, its diagnoses are timeless, its insights are arresting and pertinent, and its theology is refreshing and entirely consistent with the rest of both the OT and NT.

Much Study Is a Weariness

Why is Ecclesiastes so hard to understand? Whenever I teach on this book, I usually poll my audience to gauge their feelings towards Ecclesiastes. Few will admit that they honestly *enjoy* reading Ecclesiastes. Most see the book as basically downbeat and pessimistic. Perhaps it is precisely because of the difficult nature of this book that God saw fit to inspire the explicit and unmistakable claim to its divine source, inspiration, authority, and trustworthiness.

Here are several factors that contribute to the difficulty we encounter in understanding Ecclesiastes:

- **Language:** Hebrew.

Hebrew thought and syntax are hard enough to translate as it is. Much of Ecclesiastes is poetry, and Hebrew poetry is even harder to translate understandably.

- **Author:** Solomon.

How can we expect to read the work of such a surpassingly erudite, educated, and profound man—indeed, the wisest of mere men—and *not* encounter some measure of difficulty?

- **Content:** Philosophy.

Every significant civilized society produces its philosophers and philosophies. In the Biblical canon, Ecclesiastes is unique. It is the philosophy book of the Bible, of the ancient Hebrew culture, and of Biblical Judaism. Like any other philosophy, it grapples realistically, even brutally, with issues of life and death, meaning and purpose of existence, and the classic pursuit of the *summum bonum*, the greatest good—what is worth living for and why. It also confronts head-on the frustrating discontinuity between the way things ought to be in a moral universe and the way they often seem to turn out in this life "under the sun."

- **Structure:** Continuous Quest.

Ecclesiastes is structured as a seamless whole, a

Continued on next page

At a Glance

(Continued from page 31)

continuous narrative of a philosophical quest that alternately draws and drives the honest reader to its inexorable conclusions. It is not a collection of isolated musings like Proverbs. Any particular passage must be viewed in the context of this driving direction of the book. Perhaps in no other book of the Bible is context (immediate and overall) more crucial to proper interpretation and right understanding.

Rejoice in Your Labor

Contrary to popular perception, there is much about Ecclesiastes that is upbeat and optimistic. Solomon refuses to shrink back from a grim realism that faces unpleasant facts and events with cold, hard, unyielding honesty. He sugar coats nothing. But he is just as open and honest about the joys and opportunities of life as well. Walter Kaiser points to evidence that Ecclesiastes has been traditionally regarded as a "book in celebration of joy and God's good creation." In fact, "this book was read on the third day of the feast of tabernacles," not for its sobering effect (Tabernacles was intended to be a cheerful memorial festival; cf. Neh. 8:9, 10), but "for its encouragement to the levity and cheerfulness of that festival." Thus, "the mood of Ecclesiastes" frequently expresses "delight, with the prospect of living and enjoying all the goods of life once man has come to fear God and keep His commandments" and to trust Him for all the frustrations and enigmas of life.

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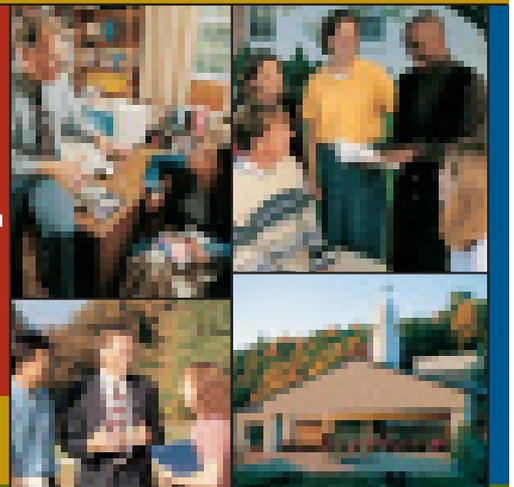
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Traditional or Contemporary? Why Choose?

College minister Kevin Twit thinks he has a solution to what many call the “worship wars.” Instead of arguing over traditional versus contemporary styles, Twit combines both and comes up with a new twist: A traditional hymn set to contemporary music—guitars and drums included. Twit says the music has so influenced his students at Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee, that many of them prefer these “new” hymns over contemporary music. “I want to challenge the idea that we have to lose the church’s tradition if we want to be relevant in our age,” he said. Twit said he once saw an antique store sign that summarized his position: “My grandmother saved it, my mother threw it away and now I’m buying it back.” (Baptist Press, 03/19/2003)

Boy Scouts Facing Challenge

One the nation’s largest Boy Scouts councils is openly defying the national organization’s policy on homosexual troop leaders and apparently could be booted if its policy remains unchanged. The board of the Philadelphia-based Cradle of Liberty Council recently voted to add the phrase “sexual orientation” to its policy of

nondiscrimination. Knowingly enlisting homosexual troop leaders would violate the policy of the Boy Scouts of America, which in 2000 won a Supreme Court case allowing it to bar homosexuals from becoming troop leaders. (Baptist Press, 05/30/03)

Congress Passes AIDS Bill

Congress has given final approval to President Bush’s global AIDS initiative, incorporating some measures important to pro-family groups in the process. The measure authorizes \$15 billion in United States aid during the next five years to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in countries devastated by the disease in Africa and the Caribbean. At the urging of pro-family and religious conservative organizations, Congress included a requirement that at least one-third of the funding go for abstinence-based programs and a conscience clause protecting faith-based groups from being required to distribute prophylactics in order to receive aid. Nearly 30 million people in sub-Saharan Africa—including three million people under the age of 15—are HIV positive or have AIDS. Worldwide, there are 42 million people who are HIV positive or have AIDS. (Baptist Press, 05/22/03)

Vermont’s Civil Union

Ripples are crashing into other states from Vermont, where a law in 2000 established a “civil union” category that is essentially marriage, complete with spousal rights, for same-sex partners. Now a judge in New York has ruled that a male homosexual can sue a hospital as the spouse of another man who died a year ago of medical complications following an auto accident. The pair had exchanged vows and rings in a civil ceremony in Vermont in late 2000. The ruling is the first in the nation to treat a same-sex couple joined in a Vermont civil union as a married couple. Courts in other states have refused to validate the Vermont law for same-sex couples in their jurisdictions, including in divorce cases. (*World magazine*, 05/03/03)

YWCA Hires Lesbian Feminist

The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) has just hired Patricia Ireland to become the chief executive officer of the girls’ organization. Ireland is the former leader of the National Organization for Women (NOW), a radical feminist group that is pro-abortion and pro-homosexual. She is also an admitted bisexual who has had a husband living in Florida and a partner in Washington,

DC. (*AFA Online*, 05/13/03)

Colorado Springs Stops Same-sex Benefits

A recent vote in Colorado against same-sex partner benefits demonstrates the strength Christians and pro-family groups have when involved in the political process. The Colorado Springs city council eliminated health benefits for partners of homosexual city employees April 22 by an 8–1 vote—just three weeks after an election that focused heavily on the issue produced sweeping change. During the election, six of the seven council members who won promised to eliminate the same-sex benefits. The council’s latest vote sparked a protest of about 80 people April 27. The lone council member who supports same-sex benefits, vice mayor Richard Skorman, addressed the crowd. (Baptist Press, 04/30/03)

Liberals Gain Unnoticed Victories

On April 9 while Baghdad became free, students at nearly 2,000 middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities across the United States observed a day of silence—not to thank God for His mercy, but to back gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals

who are purportedly unable to speak freely. It was the eighth annual national Day of Silence, with student organizers like Ryan Frazer of Conifer High School in Colorado telling journalists that he frequently heard at school homosexual slurs such as, "Oh, that homework assignment is so gay." Reports from across the country showed student activists holding up cards about their silence, and teachers overwhelmingly playing along. One Auburn student taped her mouth shut. A University of Texas sophomore who knew some sign language handcuffed her wrists to make sure she remained mute in every respect. All of this bears watching as we return from Iraq War tunnel vision and examine cultural terrorism here at home. (*World* magazine, 05/26/03)

Jaci Velasquez Movie Scenes

A new movie starring contemporary Christian music's Jaci Velasquez has received thumbs-down from two family-oriented websites for its moral content and the scenes in which the singer appears. Three scenes involving Velasquez, who plays "Patricia," have received the most criticism. In one scene, she and two other women appear in lingerie; in another, Ms. Velasquez's clothing is torn "to make . . . [her] look sexier for a dance number." In a third scene, "all three women sleep on the bed" with an unconscious man. (Baptist Press, 04/25/03)

NOTABLE QUOTES

Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as you ever can. —John Wesley

Take time to deliberate; but when the time for action arrives, stop thinking and go in. —Andrew Jackson

Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny. —Frank Outlaw

It is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time. —C. S. Lewis

As I was returning to earth, I realized that I was a servant—not a celebrity. So I am here as God's servant on planet Earth to share what I have experienced that others might know the glory of God. —Col. James Irwin, Astronaut

The best executive is one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it. —Theodore Roosevelt

Here in a nutshell is the classic modern-day misunderstanding of freedom: Freedom means not just the right to be free from government sanction, but also to be free from consequences. —David Hogberg

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.—General Omar Bradley

AIDS Tightens Grip on the South

The AIDS epidemic is "drastically and quickly" increasing in the South, which already faces a dire shortage of resources to combat the disease. "In essence, we're declaring a state of emergency in the South," said Dr. Gene Copello, co-chairman of the Southern AIDS Coalition, made up of health officials in 14 states. According to the report, while the South represents a little more than one-third of the U.S. population, it accounts for 40 percent of people who have AIDS and 46 percent of new cases. Southern cities represent 18 of the top 25 U.S. metropolitan areas hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic. Seven of the states with the 10 highest AIDS rates are located in the South. The South is more plagued by AIDS and HIV infections because of racial and economic differences and a conservative cultural attitude that interferes with attempts to halt the disease, the report says. More than half of the people with AIDS in the South are African-American, though only 20 percent of the region's population is black. HIV/AIDS rates also are much higher in communities in which poverty is high and adequate housing is lacking. The South, the report noted, has the highest rates for those maladies in the nation. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 04/25/03)

This news is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International.

A Local Church Strategy for the Unreached

Pearson Johnson

In Matthew 9:37, 38, Jesus instructed His disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” The Lord was pointing out to His disciples a harvest field ripe for reaping. There was fruit that was ready to be born, and the critical need for the field was a solid group of laborers to reap the harvest. How would this crew be recruited? Did Jesus advocate a want ad in the local Jerusalem *Journal*? How about painting a billboard on the Wailing Wall, or passing advertisements through the camel caravans? Perhaps a fiery prophet with emotional stories would elicit a response. We are conditioned by our culture to think promotion and pressure get results, aren’t we?

Jesus commanded all of His disciples to “Go . . . teach all nations” (Matt 28:19). This command applied to the original eleven, and it applies to the Christians of this age as well. We are all to be about the business of making disciples. Where are we to go, and how do we know where to go? Acts 13:2 gives us some insight: “The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” It seems that the Holy Spirit was active in calling laborers to different regions. Of course, He coordinated His individual call with His direction in their local churches to commission the workers.

The question still remains: when does the Holy Spirit call laborers and instruct churches in whom to send? Jesus revealed the secret: *the means which bring about the laborer’s call and the church’s decision to commission workers are His disciples’ recognition of the need of the harvest and commitment to praying that the Lord would send laborers.*

It sounds simple, doesn’t it? *Then why don’t we do it?* We don’t do it because we have not made it a matter of strategic commitment in our churches (and in our families) to become more informed about the harvest fields of the world and then to use that information to pray more fer-

vently for laborers. Jesus said the strategy will work. And it will.

The question still remains: when does the Holy Spirit call laborers and instruct churches in whom to send?

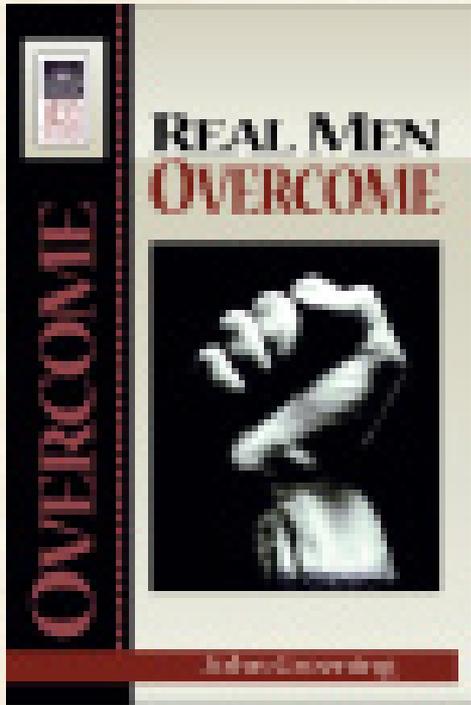
If the means to seeing more missionaries in the harvest is our prayers, then it stands to reason that we will be held to account for fields that remain without laborers. Prayer for laborers is serious business!

As we discovered in the last *Global Focus*, the mission fields that are in greatest need of the gospel lie in and around an area called the 10/40 Window. Within the Window there are about 35 countries which contain 95% of the people who have never heard the gospel. What will it take to see the gospel go forward in these countries? It will take laborers being called and churches who will commission them—churches that make it their strategic commitment to be informed and to be fervently praying.

In the issues to come, these nations will be divided into what is known to missiologists as “affinity blocs.” An affinity bloc is a grouping of peoples based upon similarities in language, culture, economy, and/or political ties. The cultural difference between people groups in the same affinity bloc is minimal compared to the cultural change an American missionary or someone from another bloc must undergo to minister there. As a goal, we should pray for laborers in each of these blocs to establish churches that will then take it upon themselves to plant churches within their bloc. The peoples of the 10/40 Window can be divided into twelve distinct affinity blocs. The task of praying for the unevangelized is much more manageable when approached in this manner.

Imagine, in ten years, seeing committed, Biblical churches established in the midst of minarets and ancestral shrines. Imagine a new generation of Baptist youth, committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. These visions will turn into reality when God’s people are dedicated to His means of praying for laborers. Let’s be about the earnest business of prayer for the gospel to go by this generation to this generation for the glory of God!

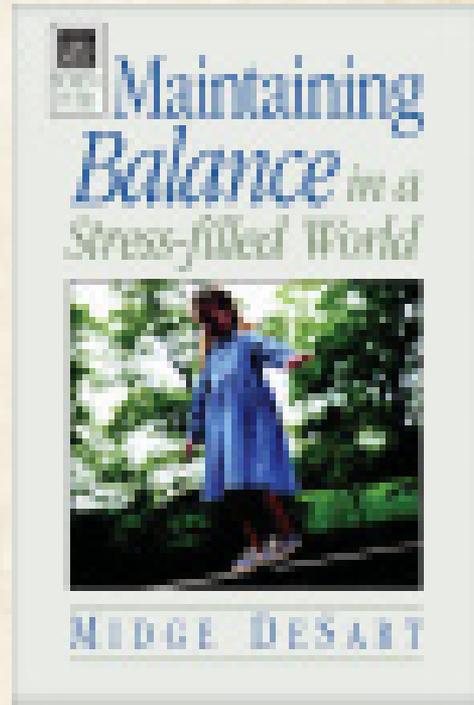
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Let's Hold the Course

Not that anyone is turning to this article first, but if you have not read Dr. Bell's article, *On the Front Lines*, you should stop right now and read it. Some of what I say here won't make much sense unless you have read what he has said. This is not a transitional issue of *FrontLine*, but we are in a time of transition. Over the next two years Dr. Bell and I will be involved in what we hope will be a seamless transition.

Some time before Dr. Frank Bumpus went to be with the Lord, he called me to suggest that we move the editorial office and production of *FrontLine* to Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, SC. Then, shortly after I became the Executive Vice President of the FBFI, we moved the home office here. As Dr. Bell stated in *On the Front Lines*, the board has asked me in the next two years to take the responsibility that Dr. Bell has shouldered for nearly thirty years as the President of our Fellowship.

Although I am honored and humbled at this responsibility, I am well aware that there will never be another Rod Bell. I am committed to the FBFI and will work hard to hold the course that Dr. Bell has set. I need the prayers and counsel of the Board and the membership. This is not a matter of personal ambition, but of unbending conviction that God has called this Fellowship into existence and that its mission is vital to Bible believing Christianity in these last days.

I was recently asked by one of our Regional Moderators what we could do

to get more of the young men that have graduated from our Fundamental colleges and seminaries involved in the FBFI. I replied that there were many things we could do, but there was something that some of them were going to have to do first, "They are going to have to decide if they are Fundamental Baptists." I'm serious. I attended FBFI meetings all over this country in the last year and met scores of young Fundamental Baptists that are deeply burdened for their peers. One young man told me, "Every one of my classmates is now a New Evangelical."

Dr. Bell has been sounding the alarm about this for years. Don't expect the alarm to be silenced any time soon.

I was counseled by older and wiser men when I was starting out in the ministry, and I have counseled younger men since then, "When you take the reins of a

ministry, don't be too quick to make changes." Change is inevitable and often necessary, but he is a wise leader who respects the leadership of the man who built something to turn over to another. In the history of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, Dr. Bell's leadership has been unique. The FBFI would not exist today if it were not for Dr. Bell.

My family and I recently enjoyed a Sunday dinner with a dear lady in our church who told my daughter Becky that when she goes to the grocery she puts Becky's tract¹ on the shelves. She asked with a twinkle in her eye that

denied her 94 years, "You don't mind being put on the shelf, do you Becky?" When this time of transition is complete in June, 2005, Dr. Bell will not be "put on the shelf." At my suggestion, the Board unanimously voted to make Dr. Bell "President Emeritus" for as long as he is involved with the FBFI.

The resolution that we passed in New Hampshire on the Fellowship Principle is not just Dr. Bell's heartbeat, it is now the heartbeat of the FBFI. It is my heartbeat. It is the God-given course set for us in the Bible truths we hold so dear. My challenge to every mature Fundamental Baptist is that you no longer stand aloof from your brethren if you are committed to the Statement of Faith and the Statement of Purpose on which the FBFI stands. My plea to the younger men who have been well trained in Fundamental Colleges and Seminaries is that you realize that those of us just ahead of you in years have gone through what you are going through.

If we hold to the Fundamentals, let's fellowship together. If we are separatists, let's separate from the things and the ones we should, but let's not avoid each other unnecessarily. Let's help each other as we stand together. Come to the meetings and bring a friend. Send us your articles for *FrontLine*, and read the ones that your

friends have sent. Let's be the men for this day that our founders were in the 1920s. Let's put our sails into the wind. Let's hold the course!

No one needs to be alone that knows the Lord.



DR. JOHN C. VAUGHN

¹Becky's testimony tract *Hidden Treasure* is available in English, Spanish, Japanese, and German. Over 800,000 copies have been distributed.

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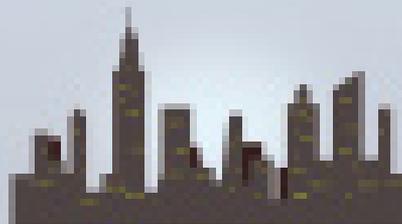
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